

Art of Covid Chat – Podcast Series
Episode 3 – Ric Savage and Kaitlin Ferguson
June 2021

David Johnson: Hello, my name is David Johnson, and welcome to the Art of Covid Chat. We're talking with artists who work in the Fens region about the work and the challenges they face during the pandemic of 2020/21.

So we have two artists, one from the Fenland area and one from Norwich. So please welcome Ric Savage and Kaitlin Ferguson. So thank you for joining us today

Ric Savage: Thank you for inviting us!

David Johnson: We have two artists backgrounds, one is a fine artist and illustrator and the other one is an interdisciplinary artist. Is that – did I get that right?

Kaitlin Ferguson: Sounds a bit snazzy, doesn't it? Yeah, you got it right.

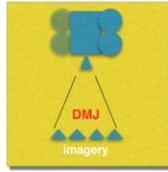
DJ: But today we're looking at their use of videos as part of art and connecting with the audiences. And so, Kaitlin, would you like to introduce yourself, please?

KF: So, hello there, my name's Kaitlin Ferguson. So like you say, I'm based in Norwich but I grew up in Peterborough and have worked across the Fens for many years. So as an artist, work across different disciplines, predominantly sculpture and public sculpture, printmaking, drawing and also participatory projects, working with people of all ages. And then across all of my projects, they have an environmental focus and trying to better our connection with nature.

DJ: Thank you. And same to you, Ric.

RS: Well, I'm an artist illustrator. I do all sorts of funny things, really. I suppose my background's really in fine art, oil painting, acrylics, watercolours. But over the years, I've sort of branched out into all sorts of different things. I kind of wandered into publishing book illustrations, and that's really the journey has taken me.

DJ: Do you have any artistic influences? People inspired you?



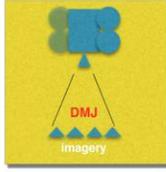
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KF: Many, really. I think it changes all the time. I'd say. I mean, my background is fine art, formal training as well. I did my undergraduate degree in Norwich and my masters in Edinburgh. And across both of those times, I really got influenced by a different set of artists. Originally I drew a lot of inspiration from the land art movement of the 1970s, which saw in America, artists like Nancy Hall, Robert Smithson, James Turrell, taking art from what was in the in the white cube gallery space and creating large scale outdoor art installations, which were open for people and completely reframed how the environment was shown within an art context. So I'd say that movement has really sort of continued to feed me over the years. And now I'm really inspired by artists in particular, Katie Patterson, who explores - a lot of my work is about deep time, and that basically means the planetary timescales of, say, 4.5 billion years of the earth and thinking about timescales in terms of the planet as opposed to, say, human centric time of - let's say if we're lucky, we get 100 year run - that sort of shifting society's viewpoint and thinking more about the planet and its whole cycles. And someone like Katie Patterson really explores work in an interesting way about deep time and also the cosmos. So, yeah, lots of influences.

DJ: And Ric, have you got any influences?

RS: Yeah, it tends to be light driven artists, people like Rembrandt, very, very influenced by Rembrandt's style. Also Joseph Wright of Derby. I just love the way they light the scene. Also very influenced by cartoon artists, people like Ian Gibson, who was one of the illustrators on a comic I used to read years and years ago, 2000 AD. He was doing characters like Judge Dredd, and it just really massively influenced me in the way I sort of launched into art. But I kind of pick up artists and I get a flavour of the month artist. They'll be the - I never really liked the Impressionists, but I as much as I didn't like them, I keep delving back into them. So there's obviously something there that I do like, but maybe I just don't want to admit it. I don't know.

KF: I think as artists, you end up collecting inspiration, not just from the arts -



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RS: Yeah, absolutely -

KF: You're a bit like a magpie, like you're saying, with the cartoons. I think you're always doing that sort of mental scrapbooking, aren't you? With everything that's going on in your world.

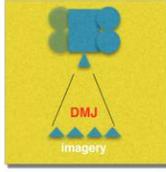
RS: Yeah, what a brilliant way of putting it!

DJ: It's very much like music as well as you may have particular styles. You may not like everything that an artist has done, but there are influences and certain periods within their life that you think that's good, I can capture that. I can use that in my work as well.

RS: Yeah, very much so.

DJ: How did your view of using video change in your last project? Was it something that you'd wanted to do before and hadn't really thought about it, or is it a case of you were asked to do it and you've forgotten – 'actually, this is quite an interesting medium, I'll maybe use this again.'

KF: I know for me it's been quite a journey over the last year. And initially before lockdown happened, I'd never made any videos or really incorporated any sort of video content or digital resources within my projects. And then at the beginning of lockdown, I think all of my projects were cancelled and postponed within the space of two days which is, you know, the actual living nightmare for a freelancer. But actually once the dust settled. I was like, oh, this allows me an opportunity to upskill myself and to teach myself all that technical skills, which I just would never be able to find the time for normally because I'm constantly spinning plates across projects. So I taught myself - I got ahead of the wave a bit - and taught myself the technology and in shooting and editing videos and taught myself a series of digital design packages. And there was a lot of, you know, slightly firmly frustrated YouTube searches trying to fix problems that I'd come across, but isn't that the best way to learn? And then, as I think the culturists,



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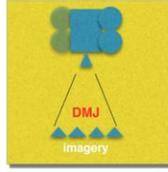
cultural sector, shifted and projects and commissions and open calls, and organisations who I had been working for then took that offering to online and asking artists to make videos and another blended types of digital delivery.

But I felt like I was, like I say, ahead of the curve of it. So when I got up and running, I was a little bit more comfortable with it. And now all of my projects I'm running simultaneously are either remote digital delivery or digital resources, or video content that I send out. So now I can't even remember not doing it - as is the way. But I think as artists, and often participatory artists, we're very used to being adaptive because you have to adapt to whoever comes in the room. You know, you have to always be on your toes and ready to go with people's interests and what's going on and the temperature of the room and what's happening. So I think our industry shifted quite quickly to adapt to the fact that delivery was going to be more remote. And now it feels like it's really ingrained in participatory arts and working with communities.

DJ: Yeah. I mean, I'll just say that as part of Marketplace, both artists were asked to create a series of exploratory videos about their subjects, or part of their subjects, their artistic skills. Ric did one on book covers, designed book covers and exploring the Fens, art within the Fens?

KF: Yeah, Art and the Fens, was the project.

RS: Yeah, it was a bit of a culture shock. It was not something I have ever aspired to do. I kind of actively – well no I was going to say, I actively avoided doing anything like that in the past. I mean, I have done one or two video projects over the years. I was part of a hospital television station back in the 80s. And when faced with the fact that you haven't got any work, you have to adapt pretty quickly. I didn't know anything about video editing or - I knew roughly the sort of thing. But there's is a massive leap from knowing a little bit about it to actually physically doing it. It was really very much a culture shock in a lot of ways. I did one or two Zoom workshops. I think the thing I found it really difficult to get over was the lack of interaction. They were wanting to record the very first one I did, to use it for other the other bits and pieces as well. So everybody else was on mute, so I had no feedback at all. So basically I was talking to myself for



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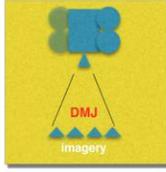
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two hours, which was quite daunting! But if you - I mean, Kaitlin, you know this, in front of a roomful of people, you can see them nodding off. If you're getting a little boring, the body language is there. You can pick up on that and you can either speed it up or chuck in a joke - something just to pep it up a little bit. But the only thing I could see on my Zoom screen was, periodically the person who was conducting it, their picture came up. The rest of the time I'm just looking at me. To stand staring at yourself for two hours is pretty daunting! So it was it was a culture shock for me. I did enjoy doing the Marketplace job, though, with the book covers. It made me look at things in a way – when it's your job, you just do it. But when you're explaining to other people how you do what you do – I'd never really looked at the - I know the reason why we have book covers, and the purpose of book covers, but I'd never really vocalised it. That was really quite interesting. And it helped me develop some of how I look at things now.

But with the videos, video one and two, was me preparing a script and reading it. Colin, thank goodness, was very, very kind and came across and filmed it. Because I tried to do it on the iPad first, and I was just doing it on the iPad and then editing it myself. I think Colin very kindly said, 'you're not doing yourself justice,' which I think is very Colin of saying it wasn't that clever! So he very kindly come across a videoed it for me, and did the editing and that was really very good of him to do. By the time I got to video number three, which he also filmed, it was my - the way I do things. It was showing me illustrate and putting a good book cover together from start to finish. And for me it felt an awful lot more natural because I was just talking about how I do my job. But it still feels very, very strange.

DJ: Yeah, I think we've all been dragged kicking and screaming into the video presenting age. I mean, I can think back years ago I would hate sitting in front of a camera and trying to talk. And it's not a natural thing, certainly with a certain generation, going back couple of generations, this is not natural to us. You know, we've had to learn how to be presenters and talk to video, whereas a lot of the new, the younger generation seem to lap it up, don't they?

RS: Well, they've been brought up with it.



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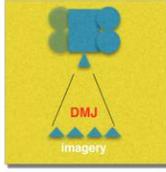
DJ: Yeah.

KF: Yeah.

DJ: Do you did you enjoy the - I know you said that you enjoyed the experience. Did you enjoy it overall? Is it something you would do again?

KF: It's ... I mean, I can't say it was all sunshine and roses all the way through. There were definitely times I think I found it sometimes hard. And because it was such a stark contrast from a matter of weeks ago, from that start of lockdown, teaching or working with people in person. And that shift happened so quickly. And I think probably where I've struggled with it and I've beginning to become a little bit more settled with it is without people being in the room, like you say Ric, it's just that you miss the energy and actually that magic and all those non-verbal signals. And also when you can see people having successes or if they're struggling, you're able to catch them in a moment because being creative is - and especially for people who perhaps aren't creative often - that can often mean that they're quite vulnerable. And when you're creating a creative space to make together, you've really got to support people during that time. And so being removed from them and having the barrier of the screen or whatever is in between really can hinder that personable moment. And so to begin with, I was like, well, am I just a content designer? Am I just creating stuff and putting it out into the ether without knowing if it's landing for people? And then as, like I say, as the various organisations caught up with what was going on, I think then it became a bit more connected with the audiences and the projects that I've worked on where you know how your audience is getting on, or if you've had feedback, or perhaps you're doing a video but you're also sending out physical pack, you know, so there's a connection, not just digital, but physical as well.

Getting feedback and knowing when that's been successful with people has really helped me realise that there's still a really important role for artists. And if we can use technology and when working with people, it can be a real benefit to actually connecting



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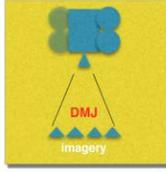
with a far wider potential audience than what we would be if we were in a room with people. So it's been up and down, but I would say I've settled on the positives of it now. And now, like I say, I just use it all the time so I don't probably bat an eyelid. I mean, it's mother is – what was it? Necessity is the mother of invention. Like you say Ric, when you're forced to you just -

RS: You just get in and do that. Yeah. I mean, I've done one or two Zoom workshops. I've been working with one family, and my technique has changed, has grown over the time I've been doing it with them. There's one or two bits and pieces that are kind of a show and tell moment. It's sort of like a 'Paint-along-Ric'. I do a bit of the painting and they do a bit of the painting. But all of it started off with me working with a young girl and her mother was just sort of in there as responsible adult. Not that I would be a responsible adult under any circumstances! But the mother enjoyed painting, so we had Mum joining in with the daughter and then her sister said, well, can I join in because I want to. So we're now as a family project. But then whereas I wouldn't normally - I normally go around and see people individually. But you need to create that on video or on the screen in a way that you would do in the room, but it isn't natural on the video. So we have what I call 'show and tell moments'. So we get them holding up their pictures to the camera, talking about what they like, what they don't like, if they've got any problems, what problems they have, and maybe we can look into it. And they were worried that their pictures didn't look necessarily like mine. But I make the point that they don't have to. If you get a dozen artists in a room, you're going to have a dozen different pictures. And that's ok and it's natural.

KF: It's like handwriting.

RS: Yeah, yeah, totally.

DJ: I mean, Ric, you talk about feedback. You can see that, and Kaitlin. How did you find with your videos, did you get an opportunity to get some kind of feedback or interaction with some of the people that have maybe watched videos?



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KF: Erm, it sort of depends really, across the various projects I've worked on. I know with the Art and the Fens videos, we worked to also connect with Fascinating Fens on Twitter, so that each week when we launched the video, we were also connecting to their network as a potential audience base. People who had a shared interest in the Fens and potentially would be interested in creating creative outputs and responses to the Fens in different ways through the videos. And it felt like the feedback that we got that it was positive and that they were hopefully small, accessible and tasks that people could do, that didn't rely on formal arts training. Like, you're so right, Ric, that it isn't like all that I do isn't - any time I've worked with people, it's never about the outcome, it's totally about the process. Like, it doesn't matter the thing you make, there's no such thing as perfect and, you know, good and whatever that is, it's about the process and being playful and experimenting with things. And so I hope that that sort of playfulness and relaxed experimentation, it comes across. And actually, I think that's the sort real benefit of artists doing it rather than, say, formal TV presenters, is it is a bit more personable, it's more of a chat between two to people in a room over a cup of tea in a much more relaxed way. So, yeah, hopefully that was how the videos were received.

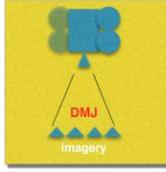
RS: That's certainly how they came across.

KF: Thank you. I'll give you that fiver later! [laughs]

DJ: I've watched both of them. And they were really good, really good videos that were very engaging. I have to ask Kaitlin, I was listening to another podcast, The Infinite Monkey Cage, and they had a lot of palaeontologists and geologists on. One of them was talking about that tasting rocks is an important part of deciding or identifying the rocks themselves, by the way the texture, the taste - is that something that you've done? [laughs]

KF: No, I can say that is not part of my sensory engagement in geology, but I'm always open to hearing interesting ways into exploring nature.

DJ: They could identify specific types of rocks by the taste and the texture -



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KF: Maybe it's like iron taste, that's the way I'd imagine it would be -

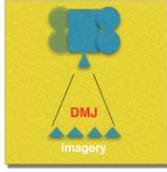
DJ: Yeah, yeah, or salty taste. I was just wondering if that was just right across the board or just – [laughs]

KF: That's a good tangent...[laughs]

DJ: OK, just, just moving away from the video side of it, and just a bit more about yourselves. We're now on the anniversary of the first lockdown, which is a surprising - you know, just how long has been or how quickly the year is gone in some respects. Asking yourself, is there something that you've either discovered about yourself or is there something that you've learned during this period?

RS: Oh, blimey. Straight at me! Oh, um, I don't know. I suppose that I really miss engaging with artists in real life, as it were, as opposed to on a screen. I can't wait - on the 12th, we get to open the studio again and I can't wait to get my artists back in here and work with them face to face. Even if their face is masked, I want to be back in there talking and interacting with people. So I suppose I've learned that I do miss people an awful lot when - it's ok to meet on the screen, but meeting in real life is very important to.

KF: Yeah, absolutely. Like, it's I feel like time has taken - I mean, a lot of my work's about time anyway - but time has taken on a completely different sensation. Sometimes it's expanded like, you know when you say it's been a year, it's a time of reflection, isn't it? And there's times when it's felt like this has been ten years and it's times where it's felt like it's five minutes. It's completely shifted our conception of time. And so, yeah, it's easy to look back on that, I think, just to remember how much we took for granted. Say, artists' conversation or just being in a room with, say, the people that you're working with. I think that is going to be so exciting and buzz-worthy when it happens. I think I've really taken away actual actually how resilient artists are. I mean, and the fact that we've had in our industry - and in particular freelancers and self-employed people who are



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vulnerable at the best of times - that vulnerability has really been exposed and heightened. And actually as a cultural sector, like I say, we've been so resilient to overcome the uncertainty, as a lot of industries have been. But I think it's been really encouraging to see cultural organisations and individual freelancers weathering this storm and still going and still creating really amazing content on platforms through ways that they had never done before. So I think that's really encouraging.

DJ: Yeah, I mean, trying not to get too political, but certainly the arts have borne the brunt of quite a lot over the last 12 months, and quite wrongly as well. This is - yeah, it's not a place to go at the moment.

KF: And I think also this is the time where we need the arts more than we've ever needed them

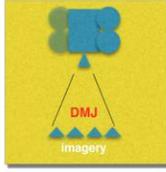
DJ: Yeah, you're right.

KF: For their therapeutic benefit, for children, as we watch it being slowly squeezed from curriculums. Arts and working creatively provides children and people of all ages really great skills, not just in creativity, but in problem-solving, of responding to a brief, of skills that you use across industries. And also, it's good for the soul. It's therapeutic, you know, it's so important to our – who we are, humans as a species. And I feel like we need it more than ever. So artists stand in a really important place, especially encouraging people to connect with creativity because it can have so many benefits.

RS: Also our mental health situation.

KF: Absolutely.

RS: We have been doing workshops and bits and pieces like that for groups with anxiety issues. And it sort of makes you think that, whereas we're doing them for other people, every now and again it's well worth taking that on board for ourselves. It's sort of like the cobbler's children are always the worst shod. Although we understand the



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therapeutic value of art, how often do we, as artists, sit back and think we really need to take that little bit of time for us and do art for art's own sake.

DJ: Yeah.

RS: And I think I think a lot of us really have had that little bit of time to look at that.

KF: To reflect, yeah, definitely.

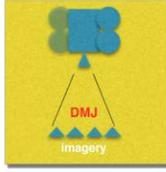
DJ: We like to do a challenge issued by the artists to give to the listeners, give them something to do from different types of arts, to encourage them to get in and explore. So Kaitlin, would you like to give us your challenge?

KF: Sure. So one of the aspects of lockdown that I've really enjoyed is going for walks, as many of us have been, and seeing nature change over the year. I know I've never been more excited to see spring than then I have this year. So my challenge would be to, a walk that you if you're able to go out and go on it often, find some different creative ways to record the changes of it. I know that I walk a similar route, but I've really noticed, for example, birds nesting now and I've noticed blossom coming out and little things like that. So whatever your creative medium is, maybe it's writing, maybe it's painting, maybe it's textiles or sculpture, whatever is perhaps on that walk, look out for changes and find ways to make creative responses to them in nature.

DJ: Go on, Ric, have you got one?

RS: Well, I mean, I wasn't really quite sure. When they were saying in the way of challenge, I wasn't quite sure what to ask people to do.

DJ: I mean, it could be just like a sketch or something that they can do and then they can put on social media and just show something of a particular type of -



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RS: OK, well, perhaps something... draw something that kind of comes from within your personality in a drawing. Try and put something of you onto the paper, the way you think, the way you want the world to see you maybe, or maybe what you *don't* want the world to see. Show what's actually inside. I think all of us are quite interested in doing something like that.

I was going to ask, as we were talking about video - maybe make this an additional challenge should you wish to. One of the hardest things I found was when you're when you're put onto a microphone, they ask you to say who you are and what you do. I would be very interested to throw that back at everybody else to see if you've got just one minute to talk about yourself and see what you say.

KF: An elevator pitch.

RS: Yeah!

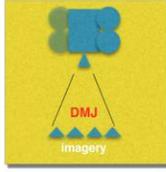
DJ: All right. So if you do decide to take up the challenge, you can put it on social media and we've got the hashtag #sharelocalarts. We'll have that on the screen as well, #sharelocalarts. And that's so you can then share on Twitter, Instagram or Facebook if you want.

KF: Since it's video, like you say, maybe you can video the changes on your walks if you feel that, like different types of art are a bit daunting, maybe just recording the changes in different ways. Maybe we should get people to use video, Ric, that's what we should do!

DJ: Yeah. Like a series of changes, like a short video of the changes that they've seen.

KF: Thinking on our feet!

DJ: Yeah, that's good. I like it.



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Take away. Something that the listeners can take away from this, a piece of advice that they can sort of encourage them to take up either using videos or just getting into art itself.

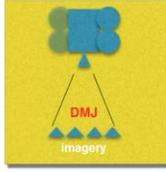
RS: Have fun, enjoy yourself, chill out, have fun and relax.

KF: I don't think I can cover more than that, that is exactly the best advice there is! But yeah, definitely that. I think when it comes to video, just to say that, though it can be frustrating, if I can teach myself it, anyone can teach themselves it. And there's so many great free resources out there, you know, for example, on YouTube, you can Google any question, technical stuff. And there's loads of free software out there, let alone you can just film on your smartphone and you can get great video editing software just on phones. So everybody can do it, whether it's so small scale or big scale.

And with creativity, just to go back to it again that it's not about making perfect, realistic things. I'm quite good at, say, drawing rocks, but I'm not very good at drawing people. That doesn't make me a bad artist, that just means I know what my visual language is. And just to remember to be playful and to enjoy it and to experiment. And I think the best bit of advice I ever was given by another artist, have artwork that perhaps you want to show to the world, but I also keep a sketchbook that I keep for myself that no one sees. And so that's a personal space for my drawings that aren't going to be shared anywhere, that it's just something for me. And actually that's really therapeutic, just making art for yourself for art's sake. So I'd say that is a good thing to have.

DJ: Do you do, like, drawings every day? Is it sort of you try and get into the habit of doing something every day?

KF: Oh, it's definitely a muscle. Like, it's the more that you do it, the more it kind of sparks it. Picasso said 'inspiration exists, but it has to find you working.' So even if you're staring at a white piece of paper and you're really daunted by that, you know, maybe it's doing it a bit of sewing or maybe it's a bit colouring in, or another creative activity, can also, once you kind of relax into that state of your brain, I think it's a lot easier to then switch over to other creative ideas. So sometimes you might need to be a



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bit tactical with yourself. But drawing challenges like that, like a little drawing a day, or sketch a day, that's an excellent way to just get that muscle memory going.

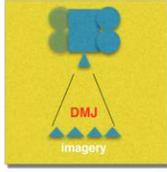
DJ: Do you find looking at other artists' styles or just looking at pictures, say, like on Pinterest or something, and just looking at a topic and seeing what sparks your interest and then using composites from lots of different things - is that a way in?

KF: Yeah, definitely. But I think with that is also not to be too daunted by other people's work. I definitely know, for example, social media, I have to limit how much I'm looking at other people's work because that inner saboteur instantly can start and can think, oh, I'm not as good as everybody else. So I think taking that in a set amount of time, looking at other people's work, but then remembering to kind of step away and do what you do best as your own visual language. What would you say Ric?

RS: Yeah, no, I totally agree. Also, you can, if you look at too many other people's works, you tend to pick up their voice in your work rather than keeping to your own voice. I think doing your own thing ... I also like the whole concept of doodling just sitting there while watching the TV, and I've usually got a pad somewhere next to me and I'll be doodling something or other while watching the TV. Or usually doing something along those lines. And I think it is that muscle memory, the whole just keeping yourself being creative. It doesn't necessarily have to be drawing or painting, using photography or anything, really just keeping the whole creativity thing going.

DJ: Well, I think we're going to bring this to a close. Thank you for joining us today. It's been wonderful listening to your experiences. And hopefully people can take, listeners can take something away from this.

I would like to thank our two guests today, Ric Savage and Kaitlin Ferguson. And I'd like to thank Marketplace for supporting the show and join us next time when we are going to be looking at tech and music, inspirations from tech and music next time. So until then, take care and see you soon.



Art of Covid Chat – Podcast Series
Episode 3 – Ric Savage and Kaitlin Ferguson

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[🎵 MUSIC]

Thanks for joining me David Johnson and my guests today. The Art of Covid Chat podcast is a DMJ Imagery Production working with Fenland Films Initiative and commissioned by MarketPlace: A Creative People and Places project celebrating creative communities across Fenland and West Suffolk. Developed by Arts Council England and supported by National Lottery funding. For more details visit cppmarketplace.co.uk

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