

Our business editor, Pete Mosley, has been working with the Crafts Council this year on the Injection business development scheme. His input initially focussed on diagnostic sessions with a couple of the participating makers, followed by a day long workshop looking at 'Routes to Market' with the whole cohort at Crafts Council HQ.

Here's Pete's report...

Cake for the Crafts Council



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Pete provides coaching and business advice to individual artists, makers and creative companies. He talks to a wide range of audiences about the business of creativity and is a consultant to creative industries projects across the UK. www.creativemusings.com
Pete works in partnership with Janet Currie to deliver sociable tailor made creative business training for small groups of artists and makers from their base in Loughborough www.therefectorytable.com
There's currently a Special Offer for Pete's best selling book, full details at: www.craftanddesign.net/books/pete-mosley/make-your-creativity-pay

Crafts Council subsequently invited Janet Currie, Creative Director of The Refectory Table, and me to host an awayday for the group. A crucial part of the Injection scheme is to foster strong and supportive links between the individuals across the cohort, cutting down the sense of isolation; encouraging the sharing of skills knowledge, business ambitions and networks, thereby ensuring more sustainable outcomes. The awayday was structured around one of the most popular Refectory Table courses: Tell Your Story.

The Refectory Table provides tailor made training for small groups of creative people within a more intimate setting than would normally be found in a corporate training environment, with the emphasis on the coming together of creative minds, well structured training and great hospitality. The quality of the hosting, food and setting are key, many people return and lasting creative friendships are brought to life at these events.

So, on the 27th of March seven makers, two Crafts Council Officers and a photographer arrived in Loughborough, accompanied by a sprinkling of snow, to get to grips with the subtleties of corporate storytelling.

The makers participating on Injection are encouraged to develop the skills to better articulate their business motivations so they can approach funders or investors with confidence, thereby embedding sustainability and resilience in their practice. The task in hand, therefore, was for each maker to think about themselves, their brand and products in detail with a view to figuring out how to create compelling messages that they could subsequently use across a range of media; spoken and written, traditional and web-based - to support the communication that is so critical to the success of their practice.

The presence of a photographer throughout added an interesting dimension. At times it was a little like being on a film set. Surprisingly, everyone soon got used to the clicking and whirring and was able to focus on pushing ideas around, not just coming up with useful words and phrases, but also thinking carefully about how the message needs to be subtly different for the many different platforms that are now so readily available for marketing and networking, both on and offline.

The makers had been invited to bring examples of their work along - and Janet was able to incorporate

Reiko Kaneko's wonderful ceramics, Michael Ruh's hand blown glassware and Lee Borthwick's textured wooden platters into the feast of a lunch that she had prepared for everyone. Our photographer for the day, Tas Kyprianou, captured these objects in use at the lunch table, whilst also doubling up as order taker for coffees and teas. He was clearly thrilled to be included at the table - obviously not a typical working day for him, either.

Lunch is a massively important part of any Refectory Table event - the combination of creative thinkers and good food always sparks really interesting conversation - and creates a layer of warmth and bonhomie that your average pork pie, sandwich and paper plate simply fail to ignite.

How did The Refectory Table come about? Janet explains:

"The Refectory Table name derives from the large oak table in our kitchen, the concept and brand were developed during a period of research I undertook into pop up events and the underground supper club movement.

I knew from previous experience just how tedious some training events could be - and how quickly the memory of the day can fade. It's easier to learn and explore ideas creatively if you are in a relaxed and interesting place - add in superb delivery, great food as a catalyst for a convivial atmosphere - and you give people a memorable and far longer lasting experience."

During the course of my involvement with Injection, I have been struck by the many comments made by the makers as to just how useful and effective the scheme has been for them. I'm looking forward to the next phase now - more mid-programme diagnostic reviews and some one-to-one mentoring with one of the participants.

The ethos of The Refectory Table is to provide an option for people who want to do things differently and this commission from Crafts Council is an example of just one of many new ideas being developed by Janet. We've run facilitated awaydays for groups of professional people, and she recently organised a Creative Business Awayday at the Water Tower in Northamptonshire - where we worked with a larger group of creatives in a fabulous atmospheric rural setting. She is currently organising further events for The Refectory Table 'on the road' creating similar experiences in some very special non-corporate environments.



Lunchtime

Pete and Samantha Bryan discuss social media



Sharing food served in work by Michael Ruh (glass) and Reiko Kaneko (ceramics)



Introductions around the table

"Wonderful relaxed setting allowing ideas, thoughts and creative developments to flourish and flow - uncriticised. A very gentle and pro-active workshop."
Lee Borthwick

Injection: Crafts Council's new pilot business development scheme

Injection is the Crafts Council's new business development scheme, currently being piloted with 12 makers running established craft practices. The scheme offers a bespoke programme of training, advice and support tailored to the individual business needs of a participant's practice and to develop a more informed understanding of the range of options to grow a business and access investment. As part of the programme is a series of networking events, Tell your Story with The Refectory Table provided a great opportunity for the makers to reflect on their individual stories encouraging sharing of experiences and enabling peer support. In this pilot year the Crafts Council is promotional partners with the Arts Council England's Creative Industry Finance programme. For email enquiries makerdev@craftscouncil.org.uk or for further details: www.craftscouncil.org.uk

Other makers who attended - Samantha Bryan, Linda Bloomfield, Yen Duong, Noorin Khamisani

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Photography Tas Kyprianou www.taskyprianou.com

Thanks to Helen Hallows for loaning work on the day www.helenhallows.com