

Commercial galleries Market United Kingdom

Strength in numbers for small galleries

Non-profit spaces in innovative shared programming and fundraising project

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Studio Voltaire has a solo show of Ella Kruglyanskaya

Three of London's most respected non-profit galleries are marking the first year of an ambitious shared programming and fundraising initiative by launching shows in their respective venues.

Solo exhibitions of Ella Kruglyanskaya at Studio Voltaire (until 8 June), Gerry Bibby at The Showroom (30 April-21 June), and Céline Condorelli at Chisenhale Gallery (2 May-22 June) were all commissioned under the umbrella of "How To Work Together", a three-year project supported by a £210,000 grant from Arts Council England (ACE).

Peter Heslip, the director of visual arts at ACE, says the trio's joint application for the second round of the £30m Catalyst scheme for "capacity building and match funding" was no mere "marriage of convenience". The galleries had a strong track record of collaborating as members of the Common Practice network, which they founded in 2009 with six other organisations campaigning for London's small-scale contemporary visual arts sector.

"How To Work Together" was a bid to tackle a shared fundraising challenge, says Polly Staple, the director of Chisenhale. "We focused this project on attracting new, particularly corporate, sponsorship, which we couldn't reach on our own. As a group we had a more interesting offer."

The strategy seems to be working. The 2014 commissions received funding from Outset Contemporary Art Fund and Bloomberg, with matched funding from ACE. The Jerwood Charitable Foundation is supporting the "How To Work Together" Think Tank, the project's growing website of research by artists and writers exploring the theme from different perspectives.

This approach to collaboration appealed to ACE. "They had thought beyond back-office sharing," Heslip says. Emily Pethick, the director of The Showroom, says that for all three galleries the initiative was not about "emulating what the bigger institutions are doing", but instead presenting their "intimacy with artists and audiences" as a strength to prospective supporters. "You can get so wrapped up in the battle to survive as an organisation," she says, "[but] you always have to keep true to your core values".