



“The art world is our world”

AMIE K

Having benefitted from mentoring and coaching provided by **Arts Emergency** in the UK, **Amie Kirby** is now a member of the organisation’s **Youth Collective**, building community relationships and coordinating cultural projects.

How did you become involved with Arts Emergency?

I was completing my master’s degree in art gallery and museum studies when a friend posted the call for mentees in a creatives’ group chat. I applied on a whim and was interviewed soon after. From then, I knew I was beginning a special journey!

My mentor was Laura Crossley, who is absolutely phenomenal. At the time, she was working at the National Football Museum and was instrumental in linking me with other museum professionals who could give me advice. She is currently a freelance heritage consultant, and we’ve worked together on several projects. It’s really special to grow your relationship from mentor-mentee to peer-to-peer... to friends. I owe a lot to Laura.

What did you gain from the mentoring?

A great deal of confidence and a clearer sense of self. Laura helped me to think about what I was doing and why, and to map out next steps and opportunities. She was also a brilliant support when I was completing my master’s. In a broader sense, the mentoring helped me to get to know Arts Emergency as an organisation – and to realise I wanted to be more involved.

What did the Arts Emergency coaching programme involve?

The coaching programme was much more focused and concentrated than the



mentoring programme. While mentoring happens over a year, coaching was over 10 weeks. This was really helpful for me because, at this point, I’d developed my creative practice since my mentee days and had a more specific goal in mind. I was able to lead the coaching focus, as opposed to being ‘taught’; I told my coach what I wanted to achieve and mapped out different topics we could explore to get there. My coach was Stella Toonen, who was completing her PhD with the Tate Galleries. I had a very specific focus of developing my skills in community-embedded and co-productive practice, so Stella was the perfect person to help me.

What motivated you to join the Youth Collective, and what is your role in it?

After taking part in the mentoring programme, I knew that Arts Emergency was special, and I wanted to find active ways to stay involved. I saw the Youth Collective as a unique and fresh way to unite young people around a specific goal.

As one of two Community Reps for the North of the UK – the other being my right-hand man, filmmaker Sam Oddie –, I am responsible for finding ways to bring members of the young community together. One of Arts Emergency’s strengths is its regional

approach, which enables young creatives to make connections and networks with those closest to them. In 2023, my role was focused on organising our 10th Birthday Festival at the Contact Theatre in Manchester. I recruited and liaised with creatives and guest speakers for the day, and took part in a panel discussion.

What was the process for formulating the Youth Collective Manifesto?

The manifesto came together through a series of events and conversations. The first was a meeting with Neil Griffiths (see page 04), where we discussed ideas we cared about. We were then fortunate to have a workshop with Tracey Waller, Head of the Visual Communications MA at the Royal College of Arts (RCA) and some RCA students, who helped us visualise our manifesto points. I painted 'the art world is OUR world' on a piece of paper – and we decided this would be a central part. We then narrowed down nine other points to form the 10-point manifesto.

Which parts of the manifesto resonate with you the most, and why?

What is lovely about the manifesto is that it was produced collectively, so all the points resonate. I'm proud of having coined 'the art world is our world', but I also love 'everyone has a part to play when the revolution comes'. As a community organiser, my core interests are finding innovative ways to use arts, culture, heritage and, most recently, archives to explore political movement building and community relationships.

How is the Youth Collective putting its manifesto into practice?

We've had two key outputs so far. One was a panel discussion on 'taking up space', which brought together curator Korantema Anyimadu, journalist Yomi Adegoke, literary agent Sile Edwards, and writer Jonathan Wakeham. I was fortunate enough to chair that conversation, which covered imposter syndrome, representation in the creative sector, and much more. We also put together a callout

for work responding to the manifesto, and created a zine, *Art is Joy*.

Individually, we're also working on our own creative practice which embodies the manifesto. I'm coordinating a project at the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, for working class 16-25 year olds. We'll be kicking off on 28th September, 2024, so if any readers want to be involved, please get in touch at amie.kirby@wcml.org.uk, or check out our socials [@wcmlibrary!](https://www.instagram.com/wcmlibrary/)

What have been the highlights of your work with Arts Emergency and the Youth Collective so far?

This is hard! I have achieved so much both for myself and with others. I think my top three are:

1. Putting together the festival in 2023 and being able to take ownership of our work.
2. Cultivating relationships with my mentor and coach.
3. Exploring my creative interests and finding out how broad they actually are. I've written articles, led workshops, and even co-ran a radio show with Sam!

What is your advice for students keen to pursue the arts?

Never let yourself be told that you can't do

it! When I was doing my GCSEs, I'd opted for art but was automatically enrolled onto triple science – I was assertive in speaking to my head of year, and my courses were switched. If there's something you want to do – whether it's the arts or not – find out the steps you need to take, and work your way towards them.

And, never do it alone. This world is big and wide, and can be daunting. It can be easy to think we can't seek help from others, but it's imperative that we do. There are support networks, communities, societies and social media platforms – you just need to find out what works for you. Everyone needs that one person who's willing to help them get their foot in the door. It's my hope that we all find that person and then become that person for someone else.

Connect with Amie and the Youth Collective:

www.arts-emergency.org/young-people/youth-collective

[The Making of a Manifesto 2023 – www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaVS6sVTa_g&t=35s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HaVS6sVTa_g&t=35s)

