**LEARNING RESOURCE | DISTRIBUTION**
**December 2020.**

We are pleased to announce the publication of the second in a new series of SUPERLUX online resources. These resources aim to provide an overview and demystify some of the structures of the art and film worlds that artists working with moving image navigate.

As part of our SUPERLUX programme we offer regular advice sessions for artists. During lockdown we held these on a weekly basis, with each member of our team meeting with one artist for one hour to discuss any aspect of their practice and career. Over time and after many great conversations with our SUPERLUX members, we decided to create some new, written learning resources to share with all of our 850 members across Scotland.

These new resources will be published on the SUPERLUX members' website. For the second topic in the series, we focus here on 'distribution'. We invited curator **Maria Palacios Cruz**, artist **Morgan Quaintance** and artist **Rhea Storr** to respond to five set questions on the subject, sharing their experiences and knowledge about distribution with you in writing.

The series will continue over the coming months, with contributions from more artists, curators and programmers within our networks both within and beyond Scotland. By inviting three people to answer questions on each subject, we aim to offer our SUPERLUX members a range of subjective views and experiences of each topic.

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**Maria Palacios Cruz** is a London-based film curator, co-founder of The Visible Press. She is the course leader for the Film Curating programme at Elias Querejeta Zine Eskola (San Sebastian) and has previously taught at Kingston University, Central Saint Martins, École de Recherche Graphique and Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts de Bruxelles. From 2015–2020 she was Deputy Director at LUX and is a programmer for the Punto de Vista and Courtisane festivals.

**Morgan Quaintance** is a London-based artist and writer. His moving image work has been shown and exhibited widely with presentations in 2020 including: Curtas Vila Do Conje, Portugal, at which he received the Best Experimental Film award and CPH: DOX at which he received the New Vision Award both for the film South (2020).

**Rhea Storr** is an artist filmmaker born in Leeds, UK with a focus on the representation of Black diaspora cultures. She is co-director of not nowhere artist's workers co-operative and is a programmer for Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival 2020 and 2021.

## Through which networks do you encounter artists' work?

**Maria Palacios Cruz:** I primarily encounter artists' moving image work through film festivals — festivals that I attend in person but also, and more importantly, festivals that I am not able to attend but whose programmes I'm interested in. I work as a programmer for two festivals (Punto de Vista in Spain and Courtisane in Belgium) which means I actively follow what other festivals are showing and request screeners from artists and distributors. I also get to see a lot of work that is sent in — Punto de Vista has an open call — that I would otherwise not come across.

I teach on a number of courses and I am often invited to degree shows at film/art schools. I try whenever possible to show work by students as I am aware of how important those early opportunities are for young artists.

Artists often send me their work — artists whose work I have already shown in the past, but also artists who know artists whose work I have shown previously. Recommendations from other colleagues in the field (curators, programmers, critics, distributors) are also very important — and reading about a film might also trigger the desire to watch it and find out more about the artist.

**Morgan Quaintance:** I usually encounter other artists' works through friendship and professional networks. In some ways these are interchangeable. For example, I might meet artists on the professional film festival circuit, then we'll strike up a friendship and share projects and ideas when we've returned to our respective homes. So it's really a kind of back and forth dynamic between the film festival circuit where I see new things (off or online now) and between existing and new artist friends who will share new and pre-existing work with me. The other thing is that my films are distributed by LUX in London and I'm always looking at their new acquisitions and trawling through their collection for things. Lastly, I'd probably mention seeing things in galleries, but I don't know if I'd identify them as a network per se.

**Rhea Storr:** I encounter artists' work through film festivals which embrace more experimental practices, galleries which favour moving image, friends' recommendations, degree shows, through programming for Alchemy Film and Media Arts Festival and through collective organising at the artist workers' co-operative *not nowhere*. Sometimes, if I've had an initial conversation with a filmmaker and was unable to see their work in person, I will ask for a link to the film (and vice versa). In this case I like it to be an exchange, a good way to maintain a dialogue and get feedback on your own work too.

However, first and foremost I engage with artists' work through festival programmes and curated screenings, especially those which engage with themes that chime with my own interests. These sorts of short film screenings allow me to see where my work could fit in a wider discourse and helps shape an understanding of the way in which I might talk about my own work.

It's also important to understand how your films relate beyond a contemporary moment. Archives too, can be considered a means of engaging with other artists' work. For instance, I am interested in the early *Project One* films of the LA Rebellion, some of them held freely online at UCLA's film archive. Programming archival material with contemporary works also creates a dialogue which often would be impossible to have with all the filmmakers present.

## How can artists find the best routes for the distribution of their work and feel in control of how their work is seen?

**Maria Palacios Cruz:** Distribution involves relinquishing some control, so it is important that artists feel comfortable and confident that their work can 'travel' without them and be shown without them being able to personally ensure that the ideal conditions are completely met. A distributor — such as LUX — ensures that the right conditions for a work are made known to the institution/individual hiring it — but it cannot send someone over to check each installation. It is a matter of trust but also one of adaptability. Certain works might be more 'distributable' than others — they might have a greater capacity to adapt to different presentation contexts and to stand on their own. Film festivals give a lot of visibility to moving image works but showing work in a festival involves accepting a pre-given setting (the film theatre where the work is shown and the equipment that it's shown with) as well as a curatorial situation that cannot be controlled nor possibly influenced by the artist. On the other hand, the artist may also embrace the possibilities offered by that situation: seeing their work within a film context/discourse, on a gigantic screen and much better technical conditions than most galleries, etc.

**Morgan Quaintance:** That's a difficult question to answer I think, because it's really a person-specific thing. With that in mind, I'd probably say that the best thing that artists could do is to get to know as much about the professional field as possible. By professional field I'm thinking of distribution organisations, film festivals, peer groups, co-operatives if you can find some (local, national and international) and individuals like other artists and curators who are doing dynamic things. So, get to know as much as you can about that as you can. This is so you can get an idea of where you see your work belonging and where you would like to place it, if you had the chance. By doing that you'll be able to develop relationships that are natural and based on enthusiasm, and hopefully mutual appreciation. I think this is the most important thing. People always talk about the importance of networking, but they rarely discuss exactly what they mean by it. For some I think it means hanging out at a load of private views and asking for favours. For me it's just about forging friendships. I think once you develop some solid friendships and also a solid understanding of the field, then you'll be in the right position to determine the best routes for the distribution of your work by yourself.

**Rhea Storr:** Funding (visual arts or otherwise) is often tied to the distribution of artists moving image. So the route for distribution is often already set by the means of production. Personally, I like to produce work with funding that gives as much autonomy as possible and seek a mode of distribution which first looks to festivals, starting with

those which are most discerning about premiere status. Q&As and talks allow you to give more insight and greater control over the narrative of your work, especially for less accessible work. In terms of gallery screenings and exhibitions, understand what the work will be shown alongside and how it will be displayed. (In my own work this is especially important when I am making a statement about race or identity). Be as clear as possible about your terms of display and be prepared to either compromise or walk away.

A distribution route is individual and subjective, depending on the type of work you make. Find other artists' work that is formally similar or addresses a similar theme. Copy them! Look at where those filmmakers show their work through finding CVs or information on their website. Look beyond your own country and context as there may be people working in a similar way to you further afield.

## What impact are new online contexts having on the distribution of artists' moving image?

**Maria Palacios Cruz:** It has been very encouraging to see how online contexts (existing ones and others that have been developed in response to the current situation of COVID-19) have kept the culture around artists' moving image very much alive in 2020. Films that risked being shelved away and forgotten have in some cases had a wider exposure than they would have had in 'in-person' festivals as moving online has allowed festivals and other institutions to reach beyond geographical borders and their usual audiences. A problem however is that this move online (in particular the art world's move towards online viewing rooms during the pandemic) is working against a long-fought battle by experimental filmmakers and moving image artists to get paid to show their work (see Hollis Frampton's *For Love and Honor*). It is important that as the presentation of artists' moving image migrates online (not only because of the current situation) there is a continued expectation to pay artists, as well as for the viewer to pay to see artists' moving image work online.

Whilst previously an artist could have used online as a way to promote their work — now online has become the context where their work is shown. There is no longer a distinction between the 'screener' and the actual screening, which makes it more complicated for artists to promote their work by sharing it online if they also want to be featured in festivals and exhibitions.

**Morgan Quaintance:** Well they're making it loads easier for work to kind of travel around the world, and I suppose they're allowing more people to see that work as well and see it in the comfort of their own homes so to speak. My hope is that this ease of distribution will be accompanied by a rise in commissions and travel for people once the pandemic begins to die down (if it ever does). That will be the real test of all this online showing activity. It's great having people pay for geo-blocked screenings, but really, I'm kind of dying for a new commission so I can continue to make and progress with my work.

**Rhea Storr:** It's a brilliant time to learn about the way you want your films to be distributed — to understand the tone or particular biases of film festivals by accessing their programmes online, or at the very least perusing their festival programmes. It's wise not to allow complete access to your work online as festivals are less likely to want to programme it. Instead host excerpts on your website. There's still a certain backwards exclusivity to some festival screenings, which geo-block their films to be seen only in the host country or provide a limited number of online tickets to screenings in order to generate prestige.

However, there are lots of panels, discussion groups and screening programmes to access and often it's about finding your niche, geographically it's just as easy to programme your work online as somebody locally — organisations are generally more willing to host conversations online that wouldn't have happened otherwise. Sometimes you have to accept that the online platform cannot replicate a cinema screen or gallery display, especially for particularly visceral or immersive films. Nevertheless, I have found galleries have shown greater interest in producing online moving image programmes and where moving image wasn't privileged before it's now become incredibly important. Understand the value of your work to the overall programme when it comes to negotiating a fee.

## How might artists work together to support the distribution of their work?

**Maria Palacios Cruz:** *'L'union fait la force'*— there is strength in unity. Artists can come together to create new distribution platforms (see what's happened in Belgium with production/distribution collectives such as Auguste Orts, Jubilee, Escautville, Messidor or Elephy) — structures that fit their unique needs in between the film industry and the art world. They can also create contexts for the presentation of their work, and even more importantly, for the presentation of each other's work — by organising screenings, exhibitions and new festivals. They can share suggestions of festivals, interesting venues and calls for work among themselves. They can make introductions — and send work by peer artists to curators and programmers that they have worked with. They can be generous with their networks and contacts and support one another. They can also be transparent and always request remuneration for the presentation of their work so that other artists can also be remunerated for the presentation of theirs.

**Morgan Quaintance:** I'd refer to the first answer I gave above, I think. I think this has to come from a base of mutual appreciation. I'm not really interested in joining a group that's about distributing artists' work for the sake of it. But, if I like someone's work, then that sort of happens naturally, because I can't help but talk about their work with everyone that I meet, or recommend their work for film festivals, or try to get them screened in different places. Maybe something that was more formalised beyond that would maybe just end up being another distribution organisation.

**Rhea Storr:** Engage in an exchange with a few trusted but critical filmmaker-allies who can give feedback on your work and suggest avenues for the screening of your film. You can also advocate for each other; it is much easier to advocate for someone else's work than your own. Share festival lists, exhibition opportunities and review applications together. Filmmakers are often also occasional programmers, get used to talking about your work with each other and take some time to review other artists' distribution materials, a synopsis, biography, stills etc.

Through my own membership of *not nowhere*, a co-operative with a focus on analogue filmmaking, I get to share my ideas and potential screening contexts with other members. There's a long history of co-operative organising as a means of alternative moving image production and distribution, which is easy to engage with through the history of the London Filmmakers' Co-operative. In reality co-operative working takes a considerable amount of time and resources, start small if you are self-organising or engage with existing schemes — attend or programme crits, advice sessions, DIY or smaller screenings where you are able to have useful and generative conversations with other filmmakers.
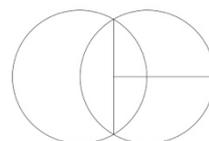
## How can work best move between the gallery system and film festival circuits?

**Maria Palacios Cruz:** Some work requires conventional 'film' viewing conditions (to be watched from start to finish, without interruptions, in the dark and ideally with other people), other work is best seen in a gallery situation (on a loop, etc.) but that doesn't mean that the same work cannot be shown in both film and art contexts. It does need to have a capacity for adaptation — if a linear work is shown in a gallery, then the artist will have to accept that perhaps it's not going to be watched in its entirety and that spectators might walk in at any moment. If starting at the beginning is essential, then the artist might want to recreate a cinema-like situation inside the gallery space. A multi-screen installation or live performance work might also exist as a single-channel piece that can travel to festivals. It is important to understand what the specific viewing conditions of each situation are and whether the work can be adapted to fit it. Unlike in the gallery, where a situation (installation) is built around a work, in the cinema context the situation is given and always the same and so the work needs to be able to adapt to it. Moving image artists can embrace double identities: as filmmakers in the film festival circuit and artists in the gallery system. These can become almost separate careers, or they can also be in dialogue with one another. The film festival world is increasingly interested in moving image work by artists that expands traditional film language and forms.

**Morgan Quaintance:** I think it would be good if there was some kind of universal rule that gallery shows didn't interfere with film festival exclusivity clauses. So far in my experience, there hasn't been much interference, but I think that the larger and more public the show the more difficult this could be, which is understandable. A huge one-person exhibition at a large, well-attended public gallery would definitely mean more people might see the film than at a small film festival screening, but I don't think the

majority of filmmaker are working with galleries this size. I don't think I can come up with a better suggestion than the informal agreement that seems to run at the moment. Maybe that will change once I start to have mega shows or something. That said, I think one thing that could change is the exclusivity rule for films at different film festivals, especially with artists' moving image. I can understand the rule with big budget movie exclusives, but what does it matter if my film shows at two festivals in two separate countries that both insist on exclusivity. The chances are that for both audiences it'll be a new experience.

**Rhea Storr:** In my experience, film festivals place a greater emphasis on the premiere of a film and showing the newest artists' moving image work for that year. Galleries will programme older work if it fits a general theme. Screenings can lead to other screenings, whether it be in the gallery or an invitation to submit to another festival. Single screen works with a clear progression or narrative arc move most freely between galleries and festivals. Think about how you want the work to circulate, some works simply just don't translate across contexts. I make quite rhythmical work for instance, which translates more readily across different languages than a film which is only dialogue heavy. If the work is utterly dependant on a specific means of installation, then consider festivals which have an installation programme. Think about how you want people to engage with the work, if the film has no specific start or end point, then it might not be appropriate for a festival screening. Can the work be reformulated or reconfigured in a way which will allow its movement between the two and potentially engage a new audience?