

we are a group of people composed of who we are

23 June - 9 September 2023

*we are a group of people composed of who we are*¹ traces artistic, cultural and social collective work that took place in Hackney between 1971 and 1986. Bringing together new commissions, existing artwork, literature, film and archival material, the exhibition and accompanying events programme explores the radical, influential and often entwined histories of cooperative and collective work in the borough. Examining how social and political commitments were supported by an engagement with art, literature and culture, the exhibition focuses on the complexities of collective work, and questions how we might learn from the past in order to reimagine our futures.

Taking 1971 as a starting point, the year that Centerprise cooperative opened in Dalston, and ending in 1986, the year the Greater London Council (GLC) was dissolved, the exhibition maps a moment in time when collective work was being tested. Aiming to combat oppression and inequality, this work was often led by Hackney's migrant communities, artists, socialists, and working-class East Londoners.

Centerprise's long-term home was on Kingsland Rd in Dalston, but its origins came from Hoxton Café Project, a youth project and cafe located just a stone's throw away from Peer's home on Hoxton Street. When Hoxton Café Project closed in 1969, two ex-employees, Margaret Gosley and Glenn Thompson, envisioned a new space to support and sustain self-determined access to learning, culture and services for working-class people in the area. In 1971 Centerprise was founded on the principle that "the arts, youth and community work, social work and education itself, are not separate entities invariably requiring separate institutions. They are related and interdependent". Alongside a bookshop and café, the space ran various youth activities such as chess clubs, drama and art classes, a reading and writing project, as well as legal advice and childcare facilities.

we are a group of people composed of who we are includes archival material relating to Centerprise's early years, alongside material from various associated local initiatives such as the Lenthall Road Workshop, Free Form, Hackney People's Press, Hackney Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, Hackney Writers Workshop, Hackney Under Fives Zine, Hackney Gutter Press, East London Anti-Fascist and Anti-Racist News and Hackney Unemployed Media Scheme, all displayed in custom-made tables that act as sites for congregation and conversation, as well as study. Works included in the exhibition by artists such as Ingrid Pollard,

Neil Martinson, Jo Spence and the Hackney Flashers, Dan Jones and Maggie Murray, have been developed both collaboratively and individually, and their work is also represented in the ephemera included in the exhibition's vitrines.

Playing on continuous loop on the hour is the tape-slide compilation, *One Day (off) in Hackney* (1980), produced by the Rio Community Cinema. For this project, slide films were given to anyone in the borough who wanted to participate, including members of the Rio Tape/Slide Newsreel group, which worked with unemployed young people to explore photography and sound recording skills, alongside politicians, residents and artists including Ingrid Pollard. In this film, we see everyday life in Hackney edited together with a soundtrack of poetry and storytelling.

Ron Orders's documentary, *Somewhere in Hackney* (1980), maps an interconnected web of collaborations between artists, writers, and community organisers, many of which are also represented in the ephemera included in the exhibition's vitrines. Alongside Centerprise, the documentary includes the work of Free Form, a community arts organisation founded in 1973 that produced murals, plays, festivals and urban planning projects that addressed social concerns and encouraged community engagement. Peer's neighbours, Hoxton Hall, are also featured, following a group producing a play and a pensioners' lunch club held at the venue.

Lenthall Road Workshop, a feminist print workshop that was founded in Haggerston in 1975, are included in Order's film. Posters produced by the collective line the vitrines and walls. *Women Reclaim The Night! Sweep Men Off the Streets!* (1980) silk-screened poster and Pollard's authored poster, *Black Lesbian* (1984) are shown alongside an anti-Nazi league campaign poster printed at Lenthall Road Workshop by artist Neil Martinson and artist, educator and human rights campaigner, Dan Jones.

Jones' painting, *Brick Lane* (1978), further explores the history of anti-racist and anti-fascist organising in East London. Throughout the 1970s the National Front maintained a strong presence in Hoxton, Shoreditch and Tower Hamlets, but as Jones' painting shows, the resistance to it was diverse and collective. Bringing the legacy of political mural making to the foreground, Jones' paintings offer a colourful portrait of communal life that links Hackney to Tower Hamlets, including panoramic scenes of protest, play and community congregation.

Material related to the work of photo documentary collective Hackney Flashers and their campaign, *Who's Holding the Baby*

¹ This exhibition title is taken from the original 'mission statement' for Centerprise, as explained by founder Margaret Gosley when interviewed for 'The Lime Green Mystery: An oral history of the Centerprise co-operative', R. Schling, *On the Record*, (2017)

(1978) denounces the lack of childcare provision available at the time, looking to the cooperatively run Market Nursery in Brough Market as a positive example of change. In their *Women and Work* series, the group set out to record through photography the working conditions of women in Hackney across a wide range of occupations, from manufacturing to clerical work.

A series of self-published books by Centerprise Publishing Project are shown in the vitrines, including a collection of poetry by 12-year-old Vivian Usherwood (1972). Usherwood's raw and honest poems sold thousands of copies, and before his untimely death in his late teens, he was invited by the BBC to read his poetry on television. *Working Lives: A People's Autobiography of Hackney, East London, Volume One, 1905 – 1945* (1976) and *Volume Two* (1977), are shown alongside photographs by contributing artists Neil Martinson and Jo Spence. Original photographs by Martinson document the lives of Hackney residents in the 1970s, including activist and book publisher, Jessica Huntley at The Newton Rose Campaign, led by the Black Parents Movement, and protests for better wages for Hackney's nurses and teachers.

New commissions by artists Jacob V Joyce and Rudy Loewe occupy both the outside and inside of the gallery. Building on their research on civic space as a site for storytelling and activism, Joyce's mural uses the motif of a stained-glass window to bring a sharp focus to narratives, people and imagery related to the exhibition. In the exhibition space, Loewe visually traces the interdependencies and solidarities between some of the collectives, campaigns and artists included in the exhibition, disrupting a linear reading of history and personal experience.

By no means exhaustive, this exhibition aims to chart some of the collectively made and politically driven work that was taking place in the borough between 1971 and 1986. Using artistic expression as a tool for social change, the materials share a desire for access to better education, cultural production, childcare, housing, welfare and working conditions, alongside a commitment to anti-fascist organising and resistance to police corruption and brutality. Developed during the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as the brutal effects of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative governments, many artists and collectives included in this exhibition were able to develop their work because of the support given by the GLC until its abolition by central government in 1986, which provided material and resources for self-organised cultural production.

we are a group of people composed of who we are explores the conditions for grassroots cultural and collective work from a diverse range of generations and backgrounds.

In doing so, it asks: what can be learnt from these examples? and what does this history say about the conditions for collective and community-led cultural practice now?

we are a group of people composed of who we are is part of Peer's programme for 2023, which explores themes of collective work, interdependency, and place, comprising exhibitions and new commissions by artists Tanoa Sasraku, Iris Touliatou and Leah Clements.

List of works outside the gallery:

Jacob V Joyce
Centreprise Community Window, (2023)
Mercenary and acrylic paint on wall
Commissioned and produced by Peer

List of works on walls, gallery 1, from left to right:

Rudy Loewe
The Power of Community Systems, (2023)
Mercenary and acrylic paint on wall
Commissioned and produced by Peer

Neil Martinson
Newton Rose Protest, (1982)
Reproduced black and white photograph onto Hahnemühle Pearl
Courtesy of the artist

Neil Martinson
Newton Rose Protest, (1982)
Reproduced black and white photograph onto Hahnemühle Pearl
Courtesy of the artist

Neil Martinson
Hackney Poll Tax Demo, (1983)
Reproduced black and white photograph onto Hahnemühle Pearl
Courtesy of the artist

Neil Martinson
Nurses Strike Hackney, (1982)
Reproduced black and white photograph onto Hahnemühle Pearl
Courtesy of the artist

Neil Martinson
Brian Simons, Hackney Teacher, (1976)
Reproduced black and white photograph onto Hahnemühle Pearl
Courtesy of the artist

Neil Martinson
Ken Jacobs on his round in Chatsworth Road, Hackney, (1981)
Reproduced black and white photograph onto Hahnemühle Pearl
Courtesy of the artist

Neil Martinson
Vivian Usherwood, (1975)
Reproduced black and white photograph onto Hahnemühle Pearl
Courtesy of the artist

Jo Spence and the Hackney Flashers
Untitled (From 'Who's still holding the baby?'), (1978)
Black and white photograph
Courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Jo Spence and the Hackney Flashers
Untitled (From 'Who's still holding the baby?'), (1978)
Label on verso
Black and white photograph
Courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Jo Spence and the Hackney Flashers
Untitled (From 'Who's still holding the baby?'), (1978)
Black and white photograph
Courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

Jo Spence and the Hackney Flashers
Untitled (From 'Women and Work'), (1975)
6 black and white photographs mounted on card

Jo Spence and the Hackney Flashers
Women... Work in Hackney. An Exhibition of Photographs, (1975)
Collaged black and white photograph mounted on board
Courtesy of Richard Saltoun Gallery, London and Rome

List of works on walls, gallery 2, from left to right:

Dan Jones
Brick Lane, (1978)
Courtesy of the artist

Dan Jones
E1 Festival, (1975)
Courtesy of the artist

Hackney Chile Solidarity Festival Poster, (1973)
Courtesy of Neil Martinson

Anti-Nazi League Public Meeting Poster, (1979)
Courtesy of the Lenthall Road Workshop

Screening room:

One Day (off) In Hackney, (1980)
The Rio Tape/Slide Newsgroup, 9.41mins

Somewhere in Hackney, (1980)
Ron Orders, 50.03 mins

Talks, Events and Workshops:

A series of public events and workshops take place throughout the exhibition. To book, please talk to a member of staff or visit Peer's website.

Thursday 29 June, 10.30am - 12.30pm

Hackney based artist Aya Haidar leads a workshop for Hackney Circle members that responds to Peer's exhibition. Hackney Circle is a membership community for older residents of Hackney interested in creative and cultural events and activities. Please ask a member of staff for more information.

Friday 7 July, 7pm

A listening event curated by a group of MA Curating and Collections students at Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London. Produced in response to *we are a group of people composed of who we are* the students have developed a sound-based experimental research project comprising audio essays taken from interviews with various political organisers who are actively campaigning for a more just society. This event is made possible through a partnership between Peer and MA Curating and Collections at Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London.

Thursday 13 July, 9.30am - 11am

Join us for a local community coffee morning and curator tour of the exhibition by Ellen Greig, Director of Peer.

Monday 17 July, 6.30pm

Daring to Hope, a conversation between Sheila Rowbotham and Ken Worpole

Writer and social historian Ken Worpole and historian and writer Sheila Rowbotham discuss radical social action in the 1970's, focusing on Shelia's book, *Daring to Hope: My Life in the 1970s* (Verso Books, 2021)

Wednesday 25 July, 10.30am - 12.30pm

Hackney based artist Aya Haidar leads a workshop for Hackney Circle members that responds to Peer's exhibition. Hackney Circle is a membership community for older residents of Hackney interested in creative and cultural events and activities. Please ask a member of staff for more information.

Thursday 3 August, 6.30pm

Writer and academic, Adam Elliott-Cooper responds to the exhibition focusing on the history of Black resistance to state racism and racial violence in London. Adam's first monograph, *Black Resistance to British Policing*, was published by Manchester University Press in May 2021 and he is co-author of *Empire's Endgame: Racism and the British State* (Pluto Press, 2021).

Saturday 12 August, 1pm - 4pm

As part of Hoxton Street Summer Fair join On the Record as part of the *Grow Your Own* oral history project for an interactive, zine making workshop exploring the history of community action for childcare in Hackney. In the 1970s campaigners demanded better childcare and created nurseries and children's centres for everyone to use. Discover what we can learn from this history to help us tackle the childcare crisis we face today. The workshop is suitable for ages 6+ with drop-in sessions running between 1pm – 4pm.

Thursday 31 August, 10.30am - 12.30pm

Hackney based artist Aya Haidar leads a workshop for Hackney Circle members that responds to Peer's exhibition programme. Hackney Circle is a membership community for older residents of Hackney interested in creative and cultural events and activities. If you want to find out more please ask a member of staff for more information.

Wednesday 6 September, 6.30pm

Rio Cinema, 107 Kingsland High St, London, E8 2PB

Breaking Ground is an evening of film and discussion with film director, Michelle Deignan and special guests focusing on the radical feminist connections, struggles and politics that constellated around Centerprise, the Rio Cinema, Lenthall Road Workshop and the London Irish Women's Centre in the 1980s. This event is taking place offsite at Rio Cinema and is programmed in partnership with Rio Cinema and Club des Femmes. This event is ticketed, to book please contact Rio Cinema.

Artist and contributor's bios:

Dan Jones is a British artist, collector of children's playground songs and human rights campaigner. Dan has worked at Amnesty International for the last 30 years. In 2001, he was awarded an MBE for services to international human rights. Dan has produced paintings, murals, political posters, banners and published books including *Blood on the Streets*, *Who Killed Michael Ferreira* and *Brick Lane '78* for trade unions and local causes. He also illustrated nursery rhyme books *Inky Pinky Ponky* and *Mother Goose Comes to Cable Street*. Much of his art captures the culture and history of London's East End over the past 50 years. His many paintings include political demonstrations from the Poplar Rates Rebellion of 1921, the Grunwick Strike, Trade Union marches and the Blair Peach funeral march, to the 60th anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street in 1996. A retrospective of Dan's artwork was shown at Bancroft Road History Library in 2014.

Rudy Loewe lives and works in London, UK. They hold a BA in Illustration from the University of Brighton, UK (2010), an MFA in Visual Communication from Konstfack, Stockholm, SE (2018) and are currently working towards a PhD at the University of the Arts London. Loewe has exhibited internationally in institutions and galleries including: Humber Street Gallery, Hull, UK; South London Gallery, London, UK; New Art Exchange, Nottingham, UK; Botkyrka Konsthall, Stockholm, SE; Royal Academy, London, UK; Regart Centre D'Artistes En Art Actuel, Lévis, CA; 198 Contemporary Arts and Learning, London, UK; Staffordshire St, London, UK. They have had public commissions including: *LDN WMMN* billboard commissioned by Tate and the Mayor of London, London, UK; *Becontree Forever* schools project, commissioned by Barking & Dagenham council, London, UK; *The Depths of Our History*, Contemporary Art Space Project commissioned by Iniva and RSA Academies, UK. Residencies include: Early Years Artists in Residence, Serpentine Gallery, London, UK (2020); Distributed Identities residency, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Canada (2019); We Dey, X Space, AU (2019). Recent exhibitions include solo shows at VITRINE Fitzrovia, London, UK, Orleans House Gallery, Twickenham, UK and a public sculpture presentation in the Liverpool Biennial 2023, UK.

Jacob V Joyce's work ranges from afro-futurist world-building workshops to mural painting, comic books and performance art. They are currently a doctoral candidate researching the history of Black British arts education at Westminster University. Joyce has self-published several zines and illustrated international human rights campaigns for Out Proud African LGBTI, Amnesty International, Global Justice Now and had their comics in national newspapers. TFL Arts Grant awardee and former artist in residence at Gasworks, Serpentine, Nottingham Cotemporary and Tate Galleries Education department,

Joyce is a non-binary artist amplifying historical and nourishing new queer and decolonial narratives.

Neil Martinson started taking photographs when he was 17 and at Hackney Downs School. It was trips to Stoke Newington library that first aroused his interest in photography, leaving through garish colour photography annuals of a world outside of Hackney. Staring into the shop window of North London Cameras he saved enough money from a Saturday job to buy the Russian made Zenit E that was built like a tank. A member of the Peoples Autobiography of Hackney he was, and is, passionate about recording the lives of working people and those whose lives have been overlooked by the history books. In the 70s and 80s he was an activist photographer working with many campaigns for social justice. He was involved in the production of Hackney Peoples Press and worked at Centerprise. With Jo Spence he founded Hackney Flashers, was on the Management Committee and Editorial Board of Camerawork and worked at Blackfriars Photography Project co-creating work with local people. He is currently documenting life in Hackney. He said: "Documentary photography is about bearing witness and telling stories that matter. They may be individual or collective stories but they should illuminate or question the human condition and what shapes it."

Jo Spence (15 June 1934, London – 24 June 1992, Camden) was a British photographer, a writer, cultural worker, and a photo therapist. She began her career in the field of commercial photography but soon started her own agency which specialised in family portraits, and wedding photos. In 1973 she started working in documentary photography, (some of her work from the period was re-produced in Spare Rib magazine). At this time, she met photographer Terry Dennett and founded the Photography Workshop, an independent research, publishing and resource project. Out of the Photography Workshop emerged a collective of socialist and feminist documentary photographers, Hackney Flashers. A politicized approach to her art form continued throughout her life, with socialist and feminist themes revisited throughout her career. Self-portraits about her own fight with breast cancer, depicting various stages of her breast cancer to subvert the notion of an idealised female form, inspired projects in 'photo therapy', a means of using the medium to work on psychological health. Diagnosed with Leukemia in 1990/1, Jo lost the battle with cancer and died in 1992.

And a special thank you to:

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Forthcoming programme:

Iris Touliatou

5 October - 16 December 2023

A new commission and first solo exhibition in a UK institution by Athens-based artist Iris Touliatou (b. 1981, Athens, GR). Often working in response to a specific context, Touliatou works across various disciplines that are necessary for each intervention. Manifesting in sculpture, drawing, sound, scent and language, her work creates transient forms and shared experiences to comment on labour, affective economies and states of being. Examining infrastructures and function, attachment and desires, the public and private, Touliatou's work raises questions on the conditions of artistic production and the institutional framework in which it exists.

Peer Ambassador and Notices Programme

Ongoing

The Peer Ambassador programme is a rolling six-month, creative programme designed for, and led by, young people aged 17-25 from underrepresented and lower socio-economic backgrounds based in Peer's local area. The programme offers paid work experience at our street-facing gallery, alongside a free professional development and learning programme. The Ambassadors are working closely with Ambassador Artist in Residence, Meera Shakti Osborne throughout 2023-24 on a new ambitious public commission.

We will be recruiting a new cohort of Ambassadors in August 2023, if you or anyone you know might be interested in the programme please get in touch with max@peer.org

Leah Clements

Ongoing

Throughout 2023 Peer will be working with London-based artist Leah Clements (b.1989, London, UK) on a new commission that will be presented in early 2024. Working with film, sound, performance, writing and installation, Clements' research is concerned with the relationship between psychological, emotional, and physical states, often exploring personal accounts of hard-to-articulate experiences while critically and practically exploring issues relating to sickness, crimpness and disability in art.

About us:

Peer is a not-for-profit neighbourhood space for contemporary art, located in Hoxton, East London. We place artists and local communities at the heart of our internationally recognised programmes of public exhibitions, collaborative projects, talks, events and offsite commissions.

Located in a converted shopfront in Arden Estate on Hoxton Street, Peer overlooks and maintains Khadija's Garden. Peer has a critically acclaimed 24-year history as one of London's most experimental spaces for contemporary art and has worked with artists including Chris Ofili, Mike Nelson, Bob & Roberta Smith, Danh Võ, Fiona Banner, Emma Hart, Jimmy Robert, Jadé Fadojutimi, Lubna Chowdhary and Moi Tran, among many others. To support and encourage dialogue between visitors, artists and their work, a programme of event-based activity takes place throughout each exhibition.

Much of our programme is produced in partnership with national and international collaborators, as well as residents, local community organisers, educators, service providers, schools, libraries and charities.

Peer is a registered charity and part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio. Peer is supported by Hackney Council through a Voluntary Community Sector Lease.

All of our exhibitions and the majority of events are free and open to all.

Support us:

Peer supporters play a crucial role in sustaining our critically acclaimed programme, from commissioning artists to make new work presented as exhibitions and public art works, to an events programme that brings communities together, and supporting local young people in their professional and creative development.

There are many ways that you can support Peer's work and build a closer relationship with our organisation and our programmes with the knowledge that your support will help make a major impact on Peer's future success.

If you would like to get involved and support Peer, please contact Rosa Harvest at patrons@peeruk.org or visit our website peeruk.org/support

Let us know about your visit:

We are currently gathering feedback surveys relating to our current exhibition *we are a group of people composed of who we are* to help us learn more about our audiences and how we can give them the best possible experience.

The survey should take around three minutes to complete, and can be accessed via the QR code below.

Anything you tell us will be kept confidential, is anonymous and will only be used for evaluation and research purposes. The information you provide will be held by Peer and Arts Council England who are running the survey on our behalf.

We appreciate you taking the time to complete this survey. Every response helps us to better understand your experiences of Peer and demonstrate our value to funders and supporters.



we are a group of people composed of who we are is made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund, thanks to National Lottery players. The exhibition is also supported by Cockayne Grants for the Arts, a donor advised fund held at The London Community Foundation and the Untold Stories programme part of the Mayor of London's Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm.

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