

THE IRREGULAR ART SCHOOL

Project Space
School of Fine Art,
History of Art & Cultural Studies
University of Leeds
3-24 February 2023

**NATURE IS IRREGULAR. LIFE IS IRREGULAR.
PEOPLE ARE IRREGULAR.**

welcome to the Irregular Art School

Over the past year a group of artists, students, care professionals, and academics with and without learning disabilities have been working together to explore new methods and collaborations to better support learning disabled and neurodivergent artists in Leeds.

This exhibition showcases artworks about their experiences as well outcomes of new and experimental collaborations.

Importantly, it is also an *imaginarium** for the creative possibilities that can open up for everyone when we break down the barriers faced by learning disabled and neurodivergent people.

This booklet contains the story of the exhibition including transcripts of the audios. Watch the video in the entrance to get to know the people and organisations behind the exhibition.

*A place devoted to stimulating and cultivating the imagination.

A person wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans is holding a large white speech bubble in front of their face. The speech bubble contains text. The person's hands are visible at the edges of the bubble.

The Barriers Map was the starting point for our research. It visualises the various systems and challenges encountered by Pyramid artists in their careers. Below the original is a new map, reflecting the ways our research has developed.

Surfacing the Barriers

James Hill · Liam Hirst and Katie Graham

Barrier Maps

These Barrier Maps were created in 2018 and 2023 by DI – Liam Hirst and James Hill working with Dr Katie Graham and in consultation with artists, strategic thinkers and care professionals. The first map details the idealised life and development of an artist, highlighting many opportunities which are not available to artists with learning disabilities and autism. Since doing the map Pyramid has designed and run several projects in partnership aimed at addressing these barriers, including the Irregular Art School.

The second map zooms in on one of the barriers on the first map around a fear of losing benefits. We explored the questions, confusions, and anxieties that artists with learning disabilities and autism face when they begin to potentially earn money from their artwork or their involvement in the arts sector. It is a subjective map that hopefully captures some of the confusion that people feel when faced with a range of different agencies, and the lack of a 'safe space' to ask questions that might affect their benefits, support plans or tax status.

Please take a pen and add to this map if you have further queries, or even solutions! The map addresses barriers – but producing it was actually a really positive experience because we realised that, with every barrier, however large, there was something that we could do to improve the situation.

We really hope that the Irregular Art School is taking a huge step towards addressing and disrupting a huge barrier!



Scan to listen to their story

victor

Genres Part 1 & 2

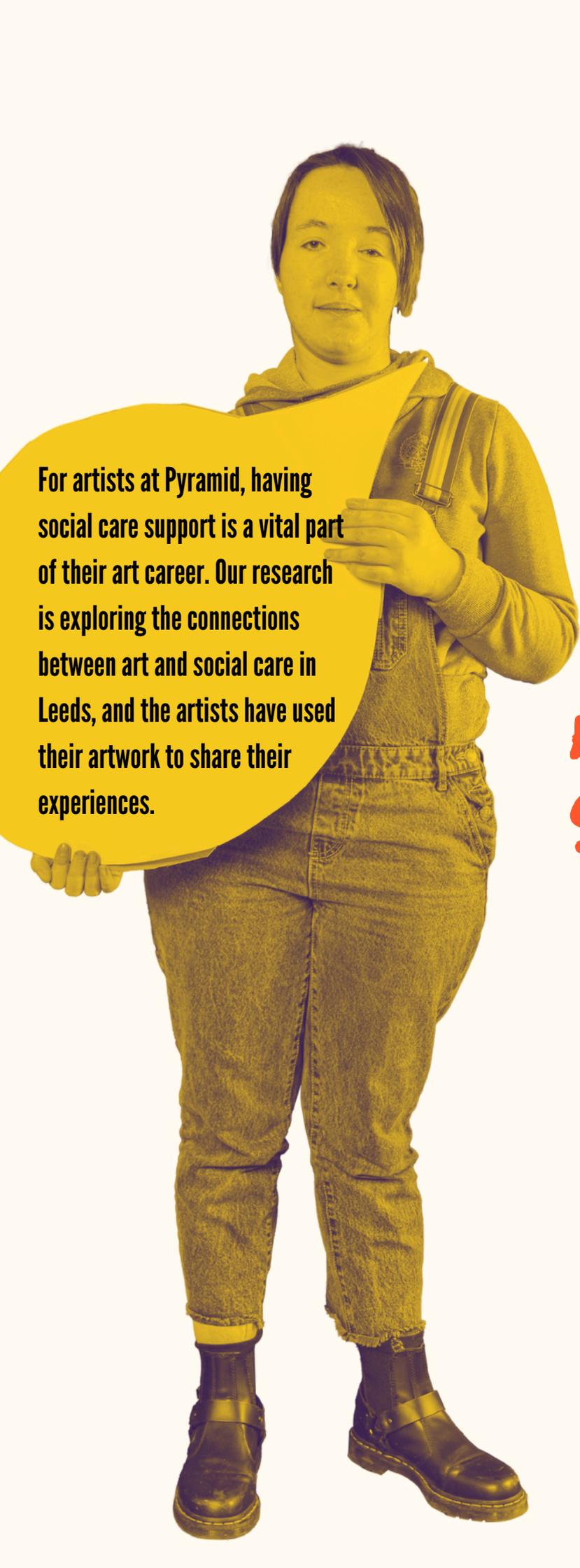
1128 musical genres with 748 musical instruments. I was exploring these ideas such as art movements and art genres, and I thought... expand on that to show how varied it could be. But when I checked on Wikipedia it had many, but it doesn't cover everything. Funny enough there's country rap which is unusual for some people and then we got cow punk as well. There's so many electronic music it just blows my mind – how is that even possible? I thought of the list because... so people can see the extent of it and acknowledge something that they did not know. So I figure, I explore these things and hope for the best in what you do.

What's next? I think trying to give you some samples of what each music genres are like would be my next steps. So, I thought of 10 different music genres hardly anyone has heard of. I want people to not just explore music but create their own music within these boundaries but also explore beyond that.

[What have you enjoyed most about Irregular Art Schools?] That it would have an effect on society that gives change for people who need access and availability. I hope it helps them but also helps to empower them to succeed in their interests and find... what the word?...their wellbeing and their livelihood.



Scan to listen to victor's story

A woman with short dark hair, wearing a grey hoodie and denim overalls, stands against a white background. She is holding a large, yellow, speech-bubble-shaped graphic that contains text. The text is in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

For artists at Pyramid, having social care support is a vital part of their art career. Our research is exploring the connections between art and social care in Leeds, and the artists have used their artwork to share their experiences.

A Game of Social Care

ALsie FOX

Genres Part 1 & 2

My name is Alfie Fox. I am 23 and an artist. I do photography, screen printing, and a lot of different art. I focus a lot on access or how things are not accessible. It asks people to think about access and I did the photography for the standees. I do artwork on access because I have campaigned a lot for access. I was a scope for change ambassador, and I am on the youth Arts Council England board. [What have you enjoyed about the Irregular Art School?] Finding out how we can change things like access to education and working with a lot of different artists.



Scan to listen to ALsie's Story

Ria

The Decider

Being involved in the Irregular Art School project has got me thinking more about the kinds of choices I am given as a person living in what I, and many other people, refer to as 'The System'. When I personally talk about The System I am looking at it through the point of view of a care experienced young person who has a learning disability. People can enter into the system in lots of different ways, usually from a situation that they have no control over, some are even born into it. During our time spent with artists at Assembly House I had lots of interesting chats with Kevin Devonport. He is an artist who makes work about his lived experiences of living in the prison system. At first it seemed like a very different kind of system to what I have experienced but actually a lot of things were very similar... We both felt like The System makes us feel stuck, trapped and confused as there is no clear way out. Inside The System we are not given clear choices and options about how we can change our lives for the better and when we are given them it doesn't always feel like people listen. It makes us feel out of control of control and frustrated. We want ownership over our own lives. When you are in The System it can make your world like a game that you have to try and escape out of, but can never quite make it to the other side!

ASK ME

WHAT

I WANT

For this exhibition I created an interactive art work. Although The System tries to look like it's giving you choices and options for you to choose from and make about the future of your life, when it comes to it there's always 'A Decider' (represented by the dice in my art work) who actually makes the final decisions and holds the power. This is often people higher up in The System who don't know us personally, they just read about what other people have written about us on a file. Often when we speak up about the unfairness of the system we are labelled as trouble makers and having bad behaviours by the deciders higher up. They are trying to silence our voices! Using the printing studio at the Uni was a really important part of developing my own creative practice throughout the project. I have always wanted to explore screen printing but there aren't the facilities at Pyramid.

Step 1: Read through the prints and choose a statement that you feel is most important to the support you need in your life at the moment. You can only pick one so make the right choice!

Step 2: Flip a big dice to find the number that corresponds with your chosen statement .

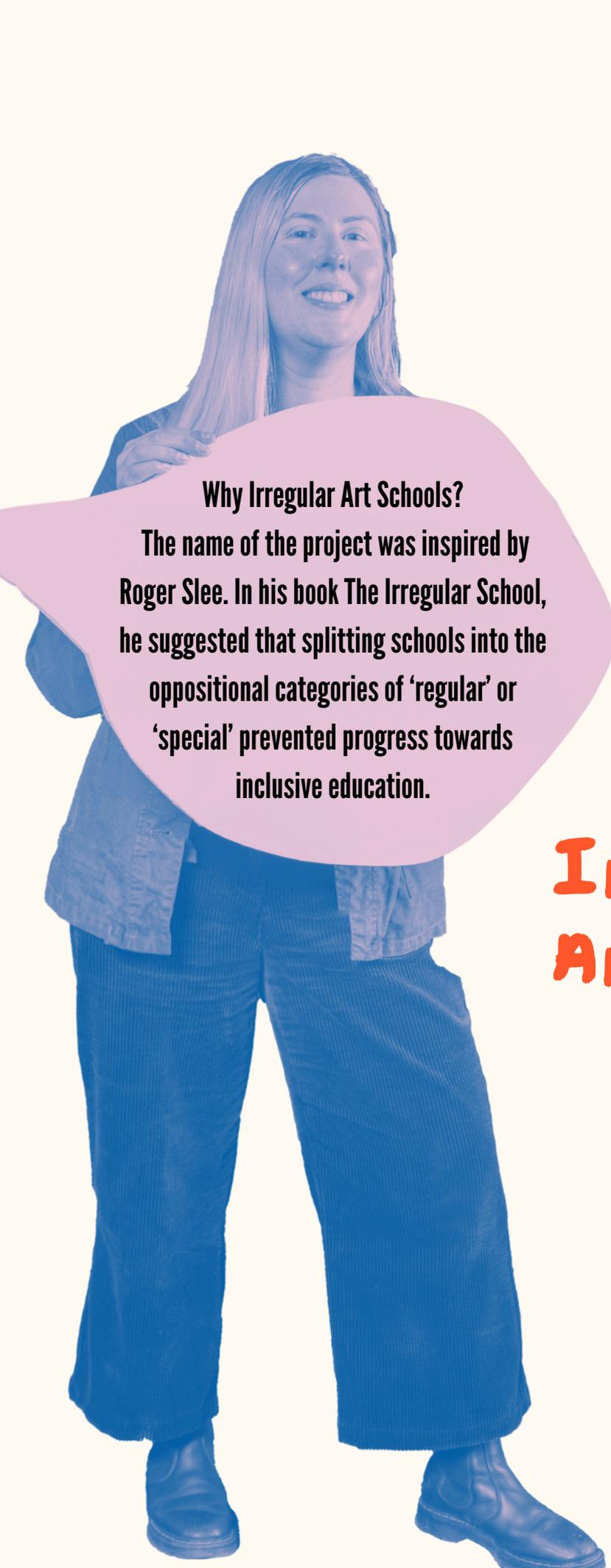
Step 3: Take a seat on this number, make sure you're comfy.

Step 4: Congratulations, you're stuck with this choice for the rest of your life. Stay where you are and don't try to move any further.

With the instructions I wanted to try and bring the viewer into my position during a social care plan meeting, where I feel like I can only make one demand about how I want to be treated in my life at a time as it can be seen as 'bad behaviour'. I also want people to understand how frustrating it is to feel like I don't have the final say over my life choices and how when I do make choices it's then often really hard to change something about your life further down the line as support plans are difficult to get updated and changed!



Scan to Listen to Ria's Story



Why Irregular Art Schools?

The name of the project was inspired by Roger Slee. In his book *The Irregular School*, he suggested that splitting schools into the oppositional categories of 'regular' or 'special' prevented progress towards inclusive education.

Irregular Art Schools

MOLLY newham

The University Should Be...

My artwork in the exhibition is called 'university should be...' I was inspired by my time spent taking part in irregular art schools, meeting the artists and our discussions on how art school could be different. I did a map like illustration that has helped me understand my own feelings about uni, especially for me as I am the first in my family to go to university and have a working-class heritage. The grids, arrows and roads are symbols that share how it feels navigating the environment. I think this illustration is also a bit like a board game, where no one quite knows the rules. I was inspired by the work of Bob and Roberta Smith and their use of language and typography, and it was something we discussed through irregular art schools meeting. I chose to use charcoal and graphite and draw some of my favourite buildings on campus



Scan to listen to Molly's Story

nicole GUILLIAM

A Comfortable Creation

My name is Nicole and I am a fine art student at the University of Leeds who is currently on a work placement with Pyramid. I am an autistic student with a passion for improving opportunities for artists of different backgrounds and abilities. During my time at Pyramid I worked with the Ribbleshead group on a project that involved making dioramas. Working with Pyramid inspired my piece for the Irregular Art School project. Using my own experiences of working in art spaces made by for neurotypicals; I wanted to create a space that would be more accessible and comfortable for me as an autistic student. I have enjoyed working on the Irregular Art School project as it feels like a free and space space to talk about experiences and come up with ideas/solutions to real problems that disabled artists face. So let's make some noise!



Scan to listen to Nicole's Story

Shanelle Bateman

A message from the exhibition curator

Nature is irregular. Life is irregular. People are irregular. It's time that higher education fits the people who use it and not the status quo. If higher education remains closed off to the many who cannot access it or do not feel welcome within it, then there will always be pools and pools of untapped creativity. Working on this project has, first and foremost, been an opportunity to work with vibrant and talented artists and be exposed to the rainbow of out-of-the-box thinking that they bring to the table. I have learned that making an art education more accessible for people with disabilities can actually help everyone, not just those who live with impairments. Who doesn't want to feel more welcomed and understood? To feel that their individual needs and interests are respected and fulfilled? To feel that their potential has been supported and unlocked through the higher education process, instead of stifled and limited...? Irregular Art Schools is a vision of what that could look like. All of us stand to lose out if we keep excluding those who don't easily fit into the boxes those who came before us created and this research and the accompanying exhibition is proof of that.



Scan to listen to Shanelle's Story

A man with glasses and a beard, wearing a blue zip-up hoodie and blue jeans, stands on the left side of the image. He is pointing his right hand towards a large blue speech bubble on the right. The speech bubble contains white text.

During our research we've with many different people to think about artist development including staff and students in this school. These paintings are a part of an extra-curricular painting project where students aren't assessed on their artwork, instead, it's about exploration.

**Individuals
but together**

AT TIME
I DISABL-
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MY SELF

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GOOD!

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Liam Hirst

I'm Not Leaving

My name is Liam Hirst I am a 28 year old disabled artist. I work for equal opportunities for disabled artists in the arts. I am also the vice chair of the board of trustees for Pyramid, I help with fundraising and strategic planning for Pyramid and I am also a member of the Irregular Art School. The art I make is 2D and 3D work about my own experiences of my own life. I mostly help with fundraising and strategic planning with Pyramid so I rarely make my own art and practice which I know I should do more of! The art I am showing are quotes of things and statements of letting people with disabilities down. I am shining a light on them to hope and change and more equal opportunities for disabled people in the future. The inspiration of my work came from my own struggles in life and the lack of support and development there is out there for disabled people like me to develop and make a career for themselves in the arts. I have enjoyed doing active research to overcome the challenges faced by people with a disability. I have also enjoyed developing my own art practice. Collaborative engagement and practice will be great and both beneficial for the university and artists with a disability but also without a disability because it develops a co-working space and challenges what's best – what we perceive as best art.



Scan to listen to Liam's Story

Level One Fine Art Students

Do You Already Think You Know What Painting Is?

This exhibition by first year Fine Art students and Irregular Art School artists and is the result of a Christmas painting project. We received 10 instructions to produce 10 paintings from our tutors. This experimental project gave us the freedom to stretch our ideas about what painting is or could be.

THESE ARE THE INSTRUCTIONS:

Make these 10 paintings at any scale and in any way:

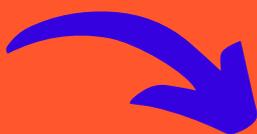
- a painting visibly including letters, words, numbers or instructions
- a painting made on a non-art surface (not paper, wood or canvas)
- a painting that is ephemeral
- a painting of an ending
- a painting made with more than one visual language or style
- a painting made of two or more separate components or surfaces
- a painting made with a glitch or interference
- a painting made using one or more non-art substances with at least one object attached to it.
- a painting made with pressure
- a painting made in which the frame or framing device plays an integral role and is non-rectangular

Look around you and see if you can identify these instructions in our paintings. Challenge yourself to rethink what painting could be, not what you already think it is.



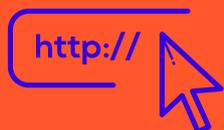
Scan to listen to their story

Visit our website



The Irregular Art School website is a live archive of the project. It platforms all of the films, articles, reflections and research documentation as well as information about the artists.

Visit: <https://irregularartschools.org/> or scan the QR code.



Scan ↑