

# How Can Plein Sight Establish Itself as a Feasible Business?

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## Part 1 Intro

It is evident that those in creative fields are being devalued and replaced. The visual artists, musicians, dancers and every creative in between need and deserve a platform to feel secure in. My business, 'Plein Sight' aims to target one of these creative practices, to craft a community and spark conversations around how society can shift its perception to value the arts again. The business will operate through a series of guided Plein Air sketching sessions: bring people into the open outdoors and entrusting their creativity to explore their environment. This will crescendo into a community installation which aims to symbolise literally and conceptually the creative power behind community engaged practices.

During the inception of the business, there are three main topics of which required further research and study into; Compensation for speculative work; Communicating effectively the core values of the business; And testing out the project strands to investigate its application as a business convention. These topics followed an already rigorous exploration of existing businesses, precedents and historical movements which then informed these areas to query. Thus, the following essay will detail the research conducted to resolve the functionality of '*Plein Sight*' as a Creative Practice.

## Part 2 Compensation

A moral dilemma which arose during the development of the business's programme is how to compensate people who participate in contests. Are these contests there is often only 1 to a handful of successful entrants who receive a reward however the remaining entries which are often eclipse the number of winners does not receive any compensation. This description closely aligns with speculative work, which is seeing an increasing trend of creatives declining such speculative work.

While many attempts have been made to regulate spec work, Marina Vishmidt writes that these omit the fact that the industry does not self-regulate and it is at the expense of the bottom of the administrative hierarchy that art institutions would rather benefit than support those at the bottom. (Vishmidt, 2012) Charlotte Overgaard also argues that companies will introduce volunteer work as a way to '*plug gaps*' as substitutes for actual paid staff, when under financial pressure. (Overgaard, 2019) What both Vishmidt and Overgaard highlight in their texts is that the people doing the speculative work are susceptible to being taken advantage of or undervalued, especially when working for institutions where capital is paramount. This is the main set back of including speculative work as it can suggest to working creatives that you take on these values of more labour for less pay. Even if the business operates under good intentions, there will be less participation

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due to the implied consequences of speculative work. Thus, Plein Air may benefit by introducing fairly paid and compensated work.

Although many negative opinions of speculative work have formed over the years due to malpractice from institutions, volunteering is inherently a positive thing. As John Wilson and Marc Musick puts in *'the effects of volunteering on the volunteer,'* that cause, and effect is hard to define as the act of doing so is "*intrinsically motivated.*" (Wilson & Musick, 1999) In other words, the willingness of volunteering comes from the person themselves as rarely is anyone forced to do so. Thus, it can be interpreted that people who are naturally charitable will be drawn to volunteering. Furthermore, it can be argued that many of these people would be unqualified or lacks the necessary skills for a particular job, which is why they are doing it for free. However, Helen Kennedy argues against amateur economies that any reduction in quality is not due to the skill of workers, but by the malpractice of the company. (Kennedy) This is backed up by Yochai Benkler as they suggest that "*producing cultures makes people better,*" professional producers. (Kennedy, 2013) (Benkler, 2006) Through this lens, it can thus be said that having open work opportunities will attract people in that relevant skill or trade, or people who want to get into a particular practice. What this informs about Plein Sight is that having a variety of opportunities will attract likeminded individuals into participating.

To close out the analysis into speculative work, and the theoretical research that has been explored, there is another perspective to free labour that is often overlooked in the present digital age. Kennedy mentions in her critique into amateur economies that a more "*troubling example of free labour.*" takes the form of *'likes'* on Facebook product posts. (Kennedy, 2013) While Kennedy views this as a bad thing there is evidence that this is just another way to incorporate passive behaviours that people do in their own free time. Laura Mitchell writes about her time as part of the LARP community, (Live-Action Role Playing) which she recalls sharing facilities such as transport, equipment and tickets, enabling them to volunteer for the LARPs. (Mitchell, 2016) What this reveals is that people are willing to sacrifice things to benefit a community that aligns with them. Whether it is on online spaces, such as liking posts on Facebook, a hobby community or, in this instance, a plein air art network, if enough people seem to benefit from everyone's sacrifice, then it would be worth the pursuit.

### Part 3 Communication

While pitching the business to several parties, both internal and external, a frequent issue that would occur is people not understanding the programme well enough due to the many strands that make up the business. As a result of the reduction in speculative work and the restructuring of the programme, the business will look client and market research feedback to communicate Plein Sight's feasibility.

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To lead the direction of addressing the feedback, some research was done into how people respond to a space or location. Jacqueline C. Vischer writes about conducting theory-based research on the built environment and suggests several principles on interpreting a response: By focusing on a singular type of environment, we begin "*anchoring down who the users are, how time is defined,*" and their experiences existing within the built environment. (Vischer, 2008) By making clear what precisely is being measured, we get more focused answers that the user themselves responds to, rather than what they generally think the space represents. With this method of purposing feedback as research, Plein Sight can begin to reformulate its feasible programme to respond to user experience.

One survey question that should be explored asks the person, what is your favourite way of interacting with the built environment? In summary, most of the answers include references to the history and heritage of the location, in addition to the physical act of walking. To make sense of this answer, Vischer also puts that a person's behaviour and experience of a built environment can be used to inform how a space can be designed to have an intended impact on people. (Vischer, 2008) This could frame the responses of the survey as the desires of how a person interacts with the space. In terms of Plein Sight, this is useful in deciding how a participant's drawing of a location can influence the design process of the community lead aspect of the programme.

Shifting towards business values, the survey participants were asked: Why do you think it is difficult to shift public perception? The popular answer suggests that people are stubborn and resistant to change. In an article written by Ben Carlson, he puts forward the example of Red Bull being unmarketable to consumers as everything from its taste and quantity is not preferred by the public. Despite this, Red Bull went on to be a largely popular product, which Carlson has narrowed down to several reasons. The placebo effect explains how something that just tastes different can hold enough merit to warrant more value, and under a smaller, restricted packaging would lead people to purchase more. (Carlson, 2019) What he also explains comes from radio podcast Freakonomics which alludes to the absurdity of a business or product being its selling point. (Carlson, 2019) (Dubner, 2019) The main take away for Plein Sight is to have confidence in its aim to challenge perception for positive change. Contradictory to the feedback, often the opinions of the audience can be uncorrelated to the actual behaviour and needs that they exhibit.

## Part 4 Convention

In addition to developing the programme, the convention of practical art needs to be explored. Through personal explorations of plein air and still life drawing, a lot of pragmatic experience has been formed which can then help position what is the practically viable for people.

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For the most part, drawing and sketching have taken the form of ten to twenty-minute life observation drawings in pen and notebook. Rarely has any watercolour or painting forms have been exercised through the initiation of the task. As this was a purely personal goal set, a lax and non-strict approach was taken as other commitments and tasks would take priority over this. What this has revealed about drawing within a public and casual setting is that it is most enjoyable when practised in short quantifiable sessions. It is much easier to gain satisfaction from several quick drawings than to focus on one and feel unsatisfied with the outcome. As this is taken from primary experience, more experimentation can be done on external parties to gain a multifaceted answer to how Plein Sight should operate.

### Part 6 Conclusion

The steps required for Plein Sight to become a feasible business has been made resolute from the research conducted. The business must respect workers, participants and volunteers as human beings. As they give their time, interest and professional expertise, the same level of compensation must be delivered to a satisfactory level, which can only be attained through transparency. For a successful business, it must communicate its objectives and values to those who align. Effectively responding to feedback, as shown pragmatically through this essay, on top of trusting in its core beliefs to grow a network. Finally, the conventions of the business must be accessible when considering who is impacted the most from taking part. This is not the novice artists or the professionals, but the public who is not experienced within the arts. It is imperative that these are the ones that are influenced the most by the business if it wishes to achieve its ethics and values. And it is this metric of success that the business should go by when evaluating its feasibility.

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