

Empower artists to get Britain back on its feet

One of your correspondents observes of the education system that “there have [always] been plenty of fresh ideas” (Letters, 9 January). That is equally true of the arts, discussed in your editorial (The arts, though dealt a terrible shock, will help Britain recover, 9 January), and the problem is also the same: the reluctance of the establishment to acknowledge and respond to them.

The arts are defined these days not by artists themselves, but by those who fund or promote them, or use them to other purpose - a commodity subject to managerialism, rather than vision and imagination. All who work in “the cultural sector” are blandly called “creatives”; the contribution to the cultural ecology of creative artists especially is misunderstood or undervalued: they are primary producers, and without their input cultural institutions would have nothing new to offer.

However, during the pandemic, unlike most major organisations (which are tending to fall back on recycling old material), individual artists and small companies have continued to deliver imaginative new work. With low overheads,

no buildings to maintain, few if any permanent staff, and core artists who are self-employed, they are uniquely adaptable, generally radical, and above all absolutely committed to shared artistic principles and practice.

Creative artists and artist-led companies are thus very well placed to help develop a strategy for cultural regeneration. At a time when, as you say, the nation needs the arts more than ever, supporting them and harnessing their experience would pay huge dividends in releasing an abundance of fresh ideas.

Tony Haynes
Grand Union Orchestra

● Your leader is right to say that the arts will help Britain recover, but they cannot do it without wholehearted government support. There should be partnerships with local authorities, not necessarily involving large sums of money. It needs to be in three prongs: the £1.57bn culture recovery fund undoubtedly prevented disaster - without it theatres, concert halls and museums would not just have closed, they would have gone out

of business - but beyond rescue there has to be a completely new structure to sustain the arts based on long-term, low-interest loans, and therefore investment that encourages the ingenuity and entrepreneurship already admirably demonstrated rather than simple subsidy grants.

There also needs to be a comprehensive visa system negotiated that allows our creative industries to operate freely in Europe. Given that 70% of the arts sector’s workforce is freelance, and that these workers are largely unsupported in circumstances such as these, we must have a safety net to prevent any more of them leaving.

Simon Tait
London

● Your editorial on the future for the arts is welcome, but once again misses an important argument, which is the contribution the arts make to the UK economy. In 2018 our creative industries generated over £111bn, employed more than 2 million people, and grew five times as fast as the economy as a whole.

So long as the current focus for support seems to be restricted to elite sport, retail and hospitality, an essential sector that provides so many benefits to the whole of our society, and has made us the envy of the world, is in danger of withering on the vine.

Katie Beardsworth
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