

—The Editors—

This issue comes to you as packed full of luxury as a hamper full of feminine hygiene products, and in time to give yourself a festive treat - if you're eagle-eyed and fleet of foot. If not it'll perk you up in the New Year, so it's win-win all the way.

But, as we're celebrating the creative process, in all of its divers beautiful manifestations, we can hear the sound of axes being sharpened and scythes cutting swathes through the public funding that gives much of this activity its backbone. As we go to print, Cardiff Council is preparing to hack up their arts budget in a breath-taking act of short-termism. If councillors have their way then we'll be saying goodbye to the very excellent biennial Cardiff Contemporary, along with a host of long-running organisations, who have supported the more innovative and exciting projects in the Welsh capital for decades. If not killed, they'll certainly be hobbled to a shuffling standstill.

Oddly, the arts community has always shown itself more than capable of thinking creatively when it comes to hunting down the cash to make things happen. Ivor Davies' exhibition is a case in point, made possible through significant funding from the Academic Higher Research Council and the good offices of Professor Heike Roms, who recast Davis' fascinating survey show as a research project. It is usually the case that every pound of arts funding levers out many more from other sources for the benefit of the economy. Of course, local authorities are between the proverbial rock and hard place as they, in turn, are squeezed by a government intent on splashing the cash on weaponry, but not the arts (which of course encourage people to think – dangerous stuff) or a lot of the basics like welfare and health care. Just because we're an arts magazine, doesn't mean we don't see the bigger picture.

In 2016, we'll be looking at some canny artist-led organisations, who more than prove their worth to the local and wider economy, and we look forward to hearing from you about how you're tackling the big squeeze. In the meantime, a happy, peaceful and creative 2016 to you all, with my usual teary thanks to the fabulous CCQ team, who have spread this issues arty feast before you, and to you for reading.

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So why are arts budgets being slashed so enthusiastically? Because expenditure on art is not seen as being as crucial as expenditure on defence, education or health; art is considered a luxury. Ironically, if art was not thought of as a luxury commodity, but instead recategorised as dangerous and disruptive, budgets might be cut even faster. At the height of Stalin's purges artists and intellectuals were among those he sent to become zeks in the labour camps of the Gulag Archipelago. He did not banish them to alleviate the burden on the public purse, but because he was very much afraid of their knack for looking behind sham-political veils and then communicating to others what they had seen. In the West we do not have this respect for artists and philosophers, because, for the last 150 years, we have listened to absinthe-addled romantics shouting 'art for art's sake'. Or as Edgar Allan Poe writes in his 1850 essay *The Poetic Principle* '...[there] neither exists nor can exist any work more thoroughly dignified, more supremely noble... [than] this poem written solely for the poem's sake.' If these 19th century flower children were right, then the artistic endeavour is no more than masturbation and window-dressing.

As I write this, Assemble have just won the Turner Prize, for working with residents to regenerate housing in Toxteth. Can this work be described as art, let alone 'art for art's sake'? There is an incorrect presupposition bound up in the question, that there exists a single distillable essence, which something must possess for it to be categorised as 'art'. The question presupposes that art must have a pure and separate Platonic soul. The art to be found in Assemble's efforts resides not in any one of its parts but in its whole; it lies in the processes of communication, the transactions that the collective have engendered and into which the related objects and actions are immersed. Art is in the spaces between. I would encourage those who believe that art exists just for its own sake to experience Chim↑Pom's emotive responses to Hiroshima and Fukushima, or to spend a happy evening making out at one of Quinlan & Hasting's queer reading groups. Art exists not for itself but for others. Let us hope the government does not catch on to this. As the scottish politician Andrew Fletcher wrote in 1703: "Let me make the songs of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws."

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—Cover Image—



Cover image: *The History of Humans*, (installation/performance view), Chim ↑ Pom, 2015. Photo: Gástor van Mulders for CCQ.