

→ management company Veolia, "nice mix of tenants" paying a proper rent.

Elsewhere are the offices given for minimal rent to arts organisations – the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the London Sinfonietta are resident ensembles at the Southbank, but their offices are here, along with those of the smaller, more experimental musical groups like Aurora. Others hot desk on short-term deals. Down the escalator are the art gallery and the concert halls (450 and 200 seats respectively). Outside, where you can take your coffee beside the canal, half a dozen kids are sitting round a table drawing the Lynn Chadwick sculptures that Pangolin are exhibiting there.

On the way in we've passed the Pangolin Gallery on York Way, set up in partnership with Millican. They go back. When he was building Central Square, which opened in 2005, he commissioned a piece of sculpture for it from Eduardo Paolozzi, whose proviso was that it should be made in the Pangolin Foundry Rungwe Kingdon runs in Gloucestershire. Millican persuaded Kingdon to open his first gallery – "the worst time, when the market was flat on its back" – and it has been a gathering success. The Chadwicks have since been replaced by new William Pye water sculptures, and in the gallery is David Bailey, photographs and sculpture.

There is no artistic director for Kings Place, just Millican's Kings

Place Music Foundation and series of curators who programme the concerts and the rest of the entertainment – Thursday night comedy, Monday night literature, and the music is not just classical but jazz, folk and even opera.

We've just had the Kings Place Festival, an annual event of four days which is a giddy mixture of stuff from *the Guardian* editor talking about whatever piano-playing editors talk about to concert hall audiences, to the legendary Carthy/Swarbrick folk team reunited and the London Sinfonietta with Thomas Adès chamber music. And that was just the first day.

"Getting the programme right is a balance between putting on stuff that one is pretty sure will sell and things that are intellectually interesting" Millican says, and after a predictably slow start the box office is moving, with tickets going at a very respectable 30,000 a year.

What was highlighted by reviewers at the opening was that this is a private development, with no public funding, subsidy or lottery money whatever. Actually, the enterprise depends heavily on the subsidised sector, because most of the UK-based performers are Arts Council funded in one way or another.

It is an example of how the "mixed arts economy" can work, the private and public sectors folding together, and is a contradiction of the notion, born out of the difficulty in getting corporate funding for the heavily subsidised and lottery funded Royal Festival

Hall refurbishment, that the two don't mix. Are there lessons for the subsidised sector?

"Funding the arts is an impossible task, to be honest" is how he responds. "I think there's a lot of art that wouldn't work without subsidy. We're small, to try and scale it up to do something like the Royal Opera House without subsidy I can't imagine being able to do. What probably works best is to have a mix, and to have some of the arts subsidised in the way it is, and some peripheral bits privately funded". Which should be music to the government's ears, although to his knowledge Jeremy Hunt has ever crossed the threshold, and although Ed Vaizey has "had a look around and seemed quite impressed", he hasn't asked for Millican's advice. "Got enough people giving him that, I think".

"I think we can say it's a success" Millican cautiously allows. "The first two years have been incredibly hard, but it's OK now. One of the tricks seems to be making space work hard – we run conferences during the day and have quite a fast turn around with concerts in the evening. The music is still not at break even; that could take up to five years, but the gap is narrowing."

He would change nothing, he says. None of the white knuckle decisions made before the credit crunch, the recession, the art subsidy cut, would be different. So what is the next project? "This is it" he says. "This is what I've done, this is what I'm doing."



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How we are made

An ambitious new initiative is popping up around the country devised to show how our crafts are influencing and describing who we are now, and how diverse. Craftspace is the managing agency of the programme, described overleaf by its director, **Deirdre Figueiredo**.

The Shape of Things (TSOT) is a national initiative developing over several years. Through a series of exhibitions and professional development events, it seeks to explore the distinctive contribution artists working in craft media are making to influence or reflect national identity, the intercultural nature of British society and its connection with global cultures.

The Creative and Cultural Skills Council Craft Blueprint indicates a marked lack of diversity in the craft sector, with 94% of the workforce being white. "Craft talent is not currently being developed across the whole of society. This is a loss both for talented individuals and for the development of the sector – and its capacity for innovation – as a whole."

TSOT brings an opportunity for a fresh stimulus, a conscious intercultural platform or space in which to debate, contest, configure and re-imagine the shifting territory of identity, nationality and the role of craft within culture and society.

The nine artists – Alinah Azadeh, Halima Cassell, Chien-Wei Chang, Tanvi Kant, Seiko Kinoshita, Taslim Martin, Rosa Nguyen, Maggie Scott and Rezia Wahid – were selected through a wide call out process that was also valuable in bringing to attention many who were not known

to the curators. Following the shortlisting process, gallery and museum partners and artists spent a day pitching a context for partnership to each other.

If our collective cultural capital is represented by public collections of contemporary craft, and if we look to these to try and understand how it has been impacted and enriched by the flow of migration, one wonders if that story can be told? Collections are educative and can be used to promote social cohesion and TSOT is targeting curators and collectors to give exposure to and raise awareness of the range of artists out there and the content of their work.

TSOT will generate responses to questions: How is identity and authorship located within creative practice in the 21st century? How are artists' voices heard, and how is voice affected if mediated through the curator as interpreter? How is the contribution of ethnically diverse artists made manifest?

Certainly in popular culture, particularly fashion and music, the influence has been profound and tangible. Are the characteristics particularly urban because post war migration was largely focused in our cities? The artists Thukral and Tagra based in India speak of the contemporary contexts in which they work as having a "rootless

cosmopolitanism". How are the artists in TSOT shaping the way we consider, produce and experience the contemporary crafts in Britain? What informs their aesthetic and production values? The hybridisation of the English language – hinglish (Hindi with English, binglish (the bingo language of the internet), chinglish (English and Chinese), desi (relating to South East Asia) – has some parallels. How is hybridity and fusion reflected in the language of making? The range of artists and their diasporic connections will provide insights into pluralistic cultural referencing. How does the work of these artists speak to us about notions of belonging in a contemporary British society?

The work of an artist is a manifestation of lived experience and of tacit knowledge particular to an individual or a community, so how does the work of this collective of artists contribute to the process and idea of place making?

Contemporary craft has an important contribution to make to these debates. Of all the things that form connections in our world, craft – through its materials, processes, function and symbolism, domestic and social history – is a familiar touchstone. Making goes to the heart and root of all cultures.

In an otherwise fragmented sector,

where many makers work as sole traders in relative isolation, this strategic project brings together a group of artists and curators whose collaboration results in unique knowledge production to be shared and applied. The reading of that work by audiences and therefore the role of exhibition in provoking thought is at the core of achieving the ambitions for The Shape of Things. It is an aspiration that audiences will engage in a way that enhances their intercultural competency and encourages a more sophisticated grasp of diversity in Britain today.

The significant bodies of work produced by these nine artists and shown by the museums and galleries that are part of TSOT form a part of our cultural capital, and their role is to embody as well as to raise questions about our times and in a way to hold a mirror up to society. Through what they create artists often do take a position which leads to change.

These major initiatives can be risky, but the most important thing is that they happen. Mahatma Gandhi said: "You may never know what results come of your action, but if you do nothing there will be no result".

To find out more about The Shape of Things to come and related exhibitions and events, go to www.theshapeofthings.co.uk



Above: Finished pieces and work in progress, Tanvi Kant's studio
Photo, Tas Kyprianou

Left to right: Rezia Wahid at work at her loom
Photo, David Westwood

A Walk in the Rain by Seiko Kinoshita
Photo, Chris Smart of Silva Productions

Alinah Azadeh working on Mother Tongue
Photo, Xavier Young

Rosa Nguyen's glass forms for Altar
Photo, Xavier Young

Previous page: Running by Taslim Martin
Photo, Taslim Martin