

# Towards Mutual Benefit: Reflecting on Artist Residencies as a Method for Collaboration in DIS

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## ABSTRACT

While cross-disciplinary collaboration continues to be a cornerstone of inventive work in interactive design, the infrastructures of academia, as well as barriers to participation imposed by our professional organizations, make collaboration between particular groups difficult. In this workshop, we will focus specifically on how artist residencies are addressing (or not addressing) the challenges that artists, craftspeople, and/or independent designers face when collaborating with researchers affiliated with DIS. By focusing on the question “what is mutual benefit?”, this workshop seeks to combine the perspectives of artists and academic researchers who collaborate with artists (through residencies or other forms of sustained collaboration) to (1) reflect on benefits or deficiencies in what the residency research model is currently doing and (2) generate resources for our community to effectively structure and evaluate our methods of collaboration with artists. Our hope is to provide recognition of the research contributions of artists and

pathways for equitable inclusion of artists as a first step towards broader infrastructural change.

## CCS CONCEPTS

• **Social and professional topics;**

## KEYWORDS

collaboration, mutual benefit, art, craft, design

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

While the DIS community has long worked to draw connections between artistic practice and design research, the recent artistic or material turns in human-computer interaction and design research have led to a series of studies that have explored collaboration with artists to generate research artifacts and insights. In some cases, a collaboration is forged between a researcher and an artist [1, 2]. In others, artists are brought in to provide feedback on a research

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product as “expert users” [3, 4]. In recognition of the unequal power dynamics between research affiliated with engineering (a field that is generally well-resourced), and artists (who historically have less access to resources in comparison to engineers), as well as the infrastructural challenges for practitioner collaboration in academia, the model of the artist residency has emerged as a possible approach to DIS-artist collaboration. Collectively, such residencies simultaneously aim to recognize the value artists bring to engineering research and support mutual benefit for artists and researchers.

We, as organizers, have either hosted residencies or other forms of sustained collaboration within our research labs or have participated in research residencies as an artist collaborator. While varying in domain and duration (between 1-12 weeks) our collaborations have all centered on projects that emerge between the interests of the parties involved. Our goal in convening this workshop is (1) to share our collective experiences and struggles with these collaborative residency models and (2) engage the broader community of DIS researchers in identifying the next steps for recognizing and supporting the inclusion of artists in the research we perform.

In recognition of the breadth of terrain that artist residencies cover, as well as the fluidity of associations between research and artist, we focus our one-day workshop specifically on the topic of “mutual benefit”. Our objective is to examine the range of incentives and outcomes that may be supported through residencies from the perspective of multiple stakeholders and to identify strategies for reflecting on and evaluating our work through the lens of mutual benefit. The key themes and ideas will emerge through the day from the voices of the DIS researchers, residency organizers, and artists who participate in residencies (and we acknowledge that one person can wear many of these hats). We also seek to work towards the creation of actionable approaches for the broader DIS community to support artists inclusion in research. To this end, we will build on sharing and discussing our individual experiences to an activity that concretizes our conversations in forms of imagery and text that can be more widely disseminated. What those forms will be, and how they come about, will emerge through the conversations and needs identified during the workshop. Ultimately, by convening and discussing in structured and unstructured ways, we aim to build community and support networks for like-minded DIS researchers; identify our strengths and shortcomings; and bring attention to the residency format to Design Research and DIS communities more broadly.

## 2 TOWARDS MUTUAL BENEFIT

Mutual benefit offers itself as the ideal outcome of a collaboration, yet it must be enacted in various configurations depending on the parties involved in the collaboration. A keyword more than a metric, mutual benefit is an elusive and shifting target that each of us attends to in our residencies. Through conversation and activities, we will begin to walk the terrain of considerations that one must take into account when considering mutual benefit within the context of an artist residency.

We invite participants interested in joining this workshop to submit a diagram representing the factors that shape mutual benefit in their art-DIS collaborative practices alongside texts describing the collaborations in more detail. Figure 1 represents one such diagram

created from perspectives that emerged through the development of this proposal. These diagrams will form a starting point for our discussions because they surface the key considerations that have shaped what counts as “benefit” in our various projects. For example, in the process of constructing this proposal, we already began to identify the factors that shape “benefit” for both ourselves as well as the artists with whom we collaborate. Our preliminary conversations highlighted how “artists” cannot be lumped into a monolithic category and how many of our residencies focus on supporting artists who bring a strong material/craft ethic to their work. We recognized that benefits might take fundamentally different forms for artists who may lead their own businesses versus artists who primarily seek to exhibit work and/or catalyze new forms of aesthetic experiences that cannot be easily monetized. We noted how artists already have been present and influential within DIS research, but their contributions are less traceable than, say, links between citations in papers. Furthermore, each of us brings unique motivations for hosting residencies, ranging from interest in recruiting from new challenges, supporting diversity and equity in computing, advocating for art as a form of research, or exchanging skill sets between researchers and artists.

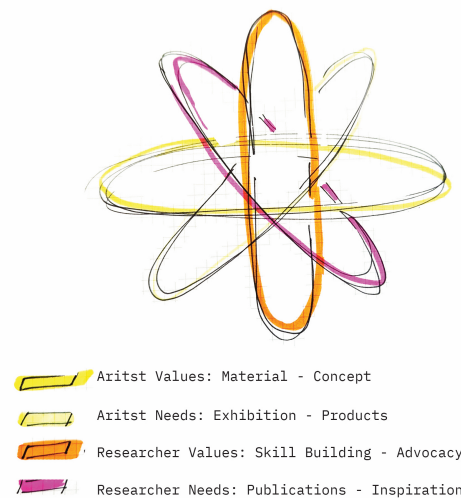
## 3 THE GROWTH OF THE ARTIST RESIDENCY WITHIN DESIGN RESEARCH

Artists and design researchers are mutually influenced by each other. We in DIS may look to the arts for inspiration, new visions, critical perspectives, and techniques. In return, DIS offers to art our own set of techniques, concepts, and ideas, often with the arena of “interaction” figuring into our practices in some dimension. Despite the value of the exchange, the venues of art and engineering research tend to be separate in society as well as in our academic institutions where they often exist as distinct and siloed departments with very different access to resources. Despite barriers, collaboration has taken place in various capacities, for instance, by using artists as “expert users” of new computational tools [4], studying artistic practices to the modes of engagement they offer DIS, and collaborations within artist studios to develop new approaches to embody interactivity (e.g. [5]). These projects show the slippage between categories of DIS researcher and artist and also suggest benefits to be gleaned by developing formal infrastructures for arts-research collaborations. The artist-in-residence model, whereby an artist is paid a wage to work in collaboration with a research lab, not only aims to create such infrastructure but also argues for the recognition of arts as having equal value (in terms of compensation) to other science/engineering/design-aligned researchers. While examples of this form of collaboration mark computing histories, with E.A.T supported by Bell Labs or the Xerox PARC artist-in-residence program, current iterations of such models can also be located within major technology companies such as Microsoft, Autodesk, Google, and Facebook.

## 4 ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Collaborations require a substantial amount of organization within our respective academic institutions, fundraising, as well as developing broader community networks within which to distribute residency calls. These collaborations have also directly contributed

Factors to Consider when Assessing Mutual Benefit in Art/DIS Collaborations



**Figure 1: One possible representation of the factors that affect mutual benefit in artist residencies. The diagram above represents factors about an artist and researchers values and goals as intersecting orbiting paths to show that the considerations are not binaries, but varying configurations of the concerns listed in the key**

research insights to the DIS community. We envision the outcomes of the day to include printed and/or digital texts and imagery to support a broader community in reflecting up and enacting new residency/artist-collaboration models that also hold ‘mutual benefit’ as a core value. These outcomes will be featured alongside workshop submissions on a public-facing web page while we seek other venues for furthering the conversation in the form of magazine articles and/or special issue articles.

## 5 CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

In this workshop, we’ll focus specifically on how artists residencies are addressing (or not) the challenges that artists face when collaborating with researchers affiliated with DIS. While focusing on the question “what is mutual benefit”, this workshop seeks to combine the perspectives of artists, researchers, and artist-researchers participating in collaborations and residencies to: (1) reflect on benefits or deficiencies in what we are currently doing (2) discuss the unexpected benefits and/or challenges learned through collaborations (3) generate resources for the DIS community to effectively structure and evaluate its methods of collaboration with artists. We encourage people and groups who have participated in or are organizing art-DIS collaborations to submit 2-4 page short papers that include the following: a description of the specific collaboration model that the authors have participated in, are developing, or would like to develop; a personality statement describing their identification as an artist/researcher and their role in the collaboration they will present; and a diagram that attempts to represent the factors and relationships that determine “mutual benefit” in their collaboration. While we prefer participants to join in person, we will offer support for virtual attendance. In an attempt to include the voices of artists in our discussion while limiting the formal costs incurred to do so,

we will also recruit artists and former artists-in-residence within our programs to share their insights through a panel

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