

Big Village - Digital

A Manifesto For Action



This manifesto has emerged from *Big Village – Digital: An exchange between 6 companies led by Global Majority creatives that work primarily with the body, in populist artforms like Circus and Cabaret.*

We have come together as a movement of shared experience, rather than to claim a shared identity. To try and lump artists together based on their ethnicity or cultural heritage, without looking at the art we are creating, does not give enough credit to our work. Instead, we recognise that creating space to understand and articulate our experiences empowers us to speak to and address the shared challenges related to ethnic and cultural identity we experience both in the UK and Australia.

We use the term Global Majority not to eradicate our specific ethnic and cultural identities; but to connect and amplify our voices and de-centre whiteness in the articulation of our shared space. Global Majority artists are no different from other artists. We want the same opportunities to create and present our work; to be given space for authentic expression and to be able to do this with the minimum emotional stress.

This document has been created to share our thoughts on how people working in arts and cultural institutions can better support Global Majority-led companies and create genuine long-term collaborative working.

Acknowledgement

We have emerged from cultures that have rich histories and creative wealth. Our Ancestors have made significant contributions to the world and our Global Majority peers have made significant contributions to the creative sector. We encourage the cultural sector in the UK and Australia to embrace and articulate an acknowledgment of this, rather than acknowledgements that simply highlight the harm that colonialism has created. We ask you to counter the erasure of the contribution of our peers and Ancestors. It supports the reframing of ideas of who belongs in cultural spaces and who doesn't, affirming our collective contributions to the world.

Authenticity and Self-Determination

We allow our identities to manifest themselves in our work in whatever way we choose. Our bodies are the material and site of our work, we celebrate bold populist forms that sit outside of the literary canon that dominates the subsidised performing arts in the UK and Australia. We have all experienced moments when an arts organisation or Cultural Institution has made demands on us to present ourselves in inauthentic ways (both within our creative practice and in relation to identity). This is mostly due to a lack of nuanced understanding of the forms we work with or the intersectional identities that exist in each of us. This is separate from the idea of critique. We welcome robust critique and are frustrated by the idea that a different 'bar' might be set for our work. Our most successful creative relationships have been in spaces where we have been trusted, supported to build the necessary cultural care around our practice, and had open critical dialogue with our hosts to be able to reflect honestly on the cultural lenses at play. Trust and open dialogue are the key to relationships.

Community

We have all worked to define our own creative spaces in different ways, setting up independent companies has seemed like a mechanism of survival. Many of us continue a

commitment to building community and creating safer spaces in which Global Majority people can control our narratives. This is real WORK, and necessary to the creation of our art. We often find ourselves working with organisations that benefit from this community building without directly supporting it. As a Sector, how do we work to ensure that inclusion is not left to isolated agents of change? Or that at least how can we support those agents of change in their work?

Care

We are not fragile, but we are committed to cultural care. This means that we build resources for care into our creative process, even in challenging times. We put in place policies and strategies to make our place of work safer and welcoming for Global Majority creatives and allocate budget lines to this work and it is WORK. It is incredibly harmful to invite us into your space if you are not willing to share that work. We all have negative experience of being in situations in majority-white spaces where the desire to work with us was there, but the time, processes and resources for care were not in place.

What are you in it for?

Since the murder of George Floyd in 2020 there has been renewed energy around working with Global Majority Artists. For many of us this has come with a weight of expectation to fill the vacuum created by all the missing voices. Most of us have found ourselves in situations where this need has overtaken individual identity and shifted our value from being artists and creatives to being 'representatives', ignoring that even though we may speak TO wider communities we cannot speak FOR them. The work is not done by getting one company through the door. An example of this is being told you are programmed in preference to other Global Majority artists even though their work is completely different, or being programmed and held responsible for bringing in new audiences. Of course, visible representation has an effect, but what are you asking an artist to do? Offer our art or do audience development? We have found our names included in funding proposals without consultation or been asked to offer our networks, expertise and ideas as a service to the community...

...Hell Yes, or no.

So, if you are reaching out to Global Majority creatives, please ask yourself - Are you encouraging people through 'ring-fenced' opportunities? Are you expecting us to do other work, like audience development, you would not expect a white-led organisation to do? Do you expect us to offer you diversity consultation? If you are not excited by the artistic partnership, you are not ready, you have not done the institutional groundwork needed to ensure that we, your collaborators feel safe, supported and cared for and you need to really ask yourself why that is.

This manifesto has been written by Vicki Dela Amedume as an amalgamation of the collective dialogue held by the *Big Village – Digital* participating artists: Vicki Dela Amedume, *Upswing*; Natano Fa'anana, *Casus Circus*; Cassie Leon, *The Cocoa Butter Club*; Harley Mann, *Na Djinang Circus*; Lucie Maisha N'Duhirahe, *Collectif and then...*; Ella Ganza, *House of Alexander*

To show support, we are asking venues, programmers and other Global Majority artists to read the manifesto and to share it with colleagues, peers and through their networks, social media channels and newsletters.