

**Metroland  
Cultures**

**2023**

**in**

**Review**

**[metrolandcultures.com](https://metrolandcultures.com)**

“Metroland is absolutely there in the community, making community voices heard and I just don’t see anybody else who is doing that. It is world-leading and that’s why I wanted to work with Metroland”.

– Stephanie Post.  
International Cultural Broker.



Metroland Young Associates.

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## In 2023...

- 20 local young people started and completed the Metroland Young Associates programme.
- 14 artists were supported with year-long residencies at Metroland Studios.
- A new international curatorial residency was piloted by Metroland Cultures.
- Collective Rhythms festival achieved cumulative online and physical audience of 130,000 and created 93 paid-opportunities for Brent-connected artists and creative practitioners.
- Metroland Cultures cross-promoted 12 music and sound events with organisations across the borough.
- 5 Brent Biennial 2022 artists and organisations achieved new exposure and recognition.
- Major new commission by Sean Roy Parker launched with Sufra Food Bank and Kitchen after 18-month community collaboration.
- 6 local cultural organisations are now based at Metroland Studios.
- Landmark exhibition by local artist Bill Daggs, commissioned for Collective Rhythms, took over Metroland Studios.





Amanda Camenisch and Therese Westin exhibition,  
photo: Nathaniel Télémaque.



Yasmin Nicholas ‘Sometimes I live in a shell’ exhibition.



Metroland Young Associates.



Yasmin Nicholas ‘Sometimes I live in a shell’ exhibition.



## 1. Introduction.

It has been another busy year for Metroland Cultures. The Metroland Young Associates programme had its second cycle. Peer-to-Peer 2022, a programme supporting emerging Brent-based artists, was extended and a second version of the programme (Peer-to-Peer 2023/4) was launched. Metroland Studios provided a home to 14 artists, 6 cultural organisations and 20 public exhibitions and events. The ‘Collective Rhythms’ programme — an exploration of sound and music across Brent — provided a thematic context for the year framing Metroland Cultures’ work with young people, three signature commissions and a summer festival of multiple cross-promotions and partnerships with other organisations across the borough.

On November 4th Metroland Cultures launched the *With Us All* glasshouse at St Raphael’s Edible Garden. This was a major new work, resulting from an 18-month, in-depth collaboration between Sufra Foodbank and Kitchen, Metroland Cultures and the artist Sean Roy Parker, with community involvement from conception to launch. Perhaps more than anything else in 2023, the launch symbolised where the organisation wants to operate in Brent’s cultural landscape: at the point where art and community intersect. It also happened a year to the day since Metroland Cultures discovered that it would not be added to Arts Council England’s list of continuously funded organisations.



With Us All glasshouse, photo: Ollie Hammick.

Although this has been a busy year, it has also been a little pared-down compared to what it might have been with that funding. It has also been conducted during the cost of living crisis which has made it harder for all small arts organisations to operate. The original ambition of the summer’s Music Biennial had to be scaled back and some full-time posts became part-time. But although Metroland Cultures did less, what it did do was with the same sense of purpose and commitment to communities shown in previous years. And because of this, the organisation has continued to learn, refine its programmes and grow.

This year Metroland Cultures has had three assets to work with.

First, the Metroland Studios building which functions as a venue, an office for Metroland Cultures and a studio space provider to 14 artists and eight small arts organisations. It physically anchors the organisation in Kilburn and symbolically grounds it in the borough’s communities.

Metroland Cultures also has a growing network. This includes former staff, mentors, participants, collaborators and friends, stretching from grassroots organisations to national arts institutions and employers.

Lastly, Metroland Cultures also has its Biennial which, every 2-3 years, galvanises the efforts of the organisation to situate visual art in every-day spaces across Brent and injects the organisation with the energy it needs to sustain itself in the years between. The next Biennial will be in 2025.

The energy from last year's Biennial, the health of Metroland Cultures' networks and an unexpected extension of the organisation's lease for Metroland Studios enabled it to continue all its programmes in 2023 and to do this in partnership.

Having Metroland Studios meant 2022's Peer-to-Peer programme could metamorphosise into a series of long-term studio residencies. The ongoing growth of Metroland Cultures' networks enriched the Metroland Young Associates programme, providing new mentors and placing alumni in staff roles. Those networks also created the scope for the numerous partnerships that sustained the Collective Rhythms programme.

This continuity has brought the constituencies Metroland Cultures works with into sharper focus:

1. Metroland Cultures supports young people to find their place in London's creative economy, predominantly through its Metroland Young Associates (MYA) programme.

2. Metroland Cultures supports artists to work with community organisations in the borough - this is an organisational ethos and a specific methodology used for community commissions.
3. Metroland Cultures elevates emerging and established Brent-connected artists, through its Peer-to-Peer programme, gallery shows, studio support and Biennial commissions.
4. Metroland Cultures supports the health of cultural organisations across the borough by working in partnership and collaboration with them.

This activity is all about building relationships - working at the intersection of art and community rests on this. In this report, as well as sharing data collected through the year, we also give space to the voices of thirteen people connected to Metroland Cultures, to give a sense of the relationships it develops with the people it employs, supports and partners.

As one studio resident told us, *'this is still a young organisation learning year by year.'*

When Metroland Cultures developed its theory of change in 2021 it had none of the assets or programmes it has now. In this report we have adjusted it to reflect the constituencies it currently works with and this clarified categorisation provides the main organising sections in this report. It is, nonetheless, a broad range of activity and it may be that in 2024 Metroland Cultures needs to narrow the focus further. The next year will probably be one when Metroland Cultures needs to decide which of its well-honed areas of activity make the most valuable contribution to building, sharing and supporting art and culture in Brent.



2. Theory of Change.

*Vision:*

Brent is known globally for art and the communities who make it.

*Mission:*

To build, share and support art and culture in Brent.

*Activities and associated outcomes:*

*Activity A.*

*Nurturing Brent’s young creative minds.*



MYA sound recording field trip to Dungeness, 2023

- Establish paid work-experience opportunities for 18-24 year olds in Metroland Cultures.
- Operate a learning and development programme for young people in Brent.
- Support youth-led showcases, exhibitions and events.
- Keep the young Metroland Cultures ‘alumni’ connected to each other.

*Outcomes.*

- Young people supported by Metroland Cultures have more ‘work-readiness’.
- Young people are more able to find work in the creative industries.
- There are more entry-level jobs filled by young people in Metroland Cultures.
- Metroland Cultures’ programming includes Brent’s youth culture.

Activity B.

Connecting community organisations with artists.



Artist Priya Jay at With Us All 'Digging Up Words' workshop.

- Commission artists with a commitment to community collaboration.
- Broker partnerships between community groups and artists.
- Exchange best-practice with other arts organisations doing this work.
- Make Metroland Cultures’ facilities and resources available to community groups.

Outcomes.

- More opportunities for Brent artists to work with communities they know.
- Art informed by needs of Brent community groups is publicly exhibited.
- Community groups can make good relationships with artists for themselves.
- Metroland Cultures’ is better known within and beyond the UK for work in this area.

Activity C.

Elevating Brent-connected artists.



Bill Daggs Allegorhythms show, photo: Tom Coles.

- Operate a support programme for emerging Brent-connected artists.
- New commissions in Brent for more established Brent-connected artists.
- Making workspace available to Brent-connected artists.
- Promoting the work of Brent-connected artists.

Outcomes.

- Brent creativity has more national and international recognition.
- Exhibitions and events are informed by locally relevant themes.
- Support for an online and physical community of Brent-connected artists.
- Represent Brent-connected artists in Metroland Cultures’ governance.



Activity D.

Supporting cultural organisations in Brent.



K2K DJ in action in their new studio.

- Provide workspace to Brent-based cultural organisations in need.
- Create events and exhibitions with Brent-based cultural organisations.
- Use new space for art and music across Brent.
- Promote the work of other cultural organisations in the borough.

Outcomes.

- Brent-based cultural organisations attract new audiences.
- Precarious Brent-based cultural organisations better supported.
- New places in Brent are used for art and culture.

Long Term Outcomes.

LT Outcome 1: There is More Brent Pride.

- New audiences in Brent are attracted to art and culture.
- People working for and with Metroland Cultures’ are proud of the organisation.
- Brent creativity has more recognition in London, nationally and internationally.
- Brent’s heritage and history is better known and recognised.

LT Outcome 2: Brent’s Platform for culture is bigger.

- Stronger cultural organisations throughout Brent.
- Local people have a greater understanding of what is available in Brent.
- More venues and places for culture to take place.
- Artists, musicians and creatives drawn to work in Brent.

LT Outcome 3: Brent People are creatively progressing.

- Artists from Brent are recognised by galleries and arts institutions.
- Young people from Brent are progressing in creative industries careers.
- New forms of music, art and literature originate in Brent.
- New cultural organisations are started by people from Brent.



3. Collective Rhythms -  
Metroland Cultures in 2023.

In the following four sections we will look at how Metroland Cultures has used its assets to engage in the four areas of activity detailed in the current iteration of the theory of change. The material in these sections draws on Metroland Cultures’ internal monitoring processes, counting and capturing data. This has been supplemented with 14 in-depth interviews with people working with and supported by Metroland Cultures, from which the portraits in this report were drawn. There were also seven shorter interviews with Metroland Studios residents which in places we have quoted anonymously to add colour to the narrative.



2023 MYAs meet their mentors

Activity A:  
Nurturing Brent’s young creative minds.

*“I’m insanely grateful for the influential and supportive mentorship I’ve received throughout these two meetings with Edward. Our discussions on future career opportunities and storytelling in the exhibit and community contexts have been invaluable, broadening my perspectives and fueling my professional growth.”*  
Carmen, Metroland Young Associate 2023.

*“It was interesting to be on both sides of the field - to go from being on the programme to being a part of running the programme.”*  
Santos, MYA 2022, MYA Facilitator 2023.

*“I clapped and applauded when I found out who I had been paired with - I struck gold!”*  
Alexandru, MYA 2023, (and Toddla T’s mentee).



2023 MYA Alexandru meets his mentor, Toddla T.



- 20 young people started and completed the Metroland Young Associates programme.
- 75% of young people experienced greater confidence and understanding of the arts.
- 75% say they now have a professional network and knowledge of creative industries.
- 3 months after the programme, all participants interviewed are in touch with their MYA peers.
- 50% completed Arts Award Bronze or silver.
- 320 local residents attended 'We are here' final MYA showcase.
- 4 paid part-time and freelance Metroland Cultures roles have been filled by MYA alumni.

The Metroland Cultures team have been working with young people since Brent applied to be London Borough of Culture in the autumn of 2017. A growing proportion of Metroland Cultures' staff, freelancers, exhibited artists and collaborators first came into contact with the organisation through its youth work. In 2023-24 four significant paid part-time and freelance roles were filled by MYA alumni.

In 2023 the focus of Metroland's work with young people was the second iteration of the Metroland Young Associates programme. The programme retained many of the same features of the previous year's programme (skills workshops, mentoring, off-site visits) but built in more time for planning the final showcase. As in its the first year the programme took its thematic cue from Metroland's programming. This year 'Collective Rhythms' gave it a music and sound focus.

The programme received four applications for every available place - a 300% increase on the first year. This enabled the organisers to select a group for better synchronicity and connection and possibly because of this the programme achieved higher attendance levels than in year one.

The second iteration of the programme benefited from people involved in the first year: several mentors returned for a second year, two previous MYAs facilitated parts of the programme. Although there was no Biennial in 2023, Metroland Cultures found new opportunities for the MYAs - three joined Punchdrunk Enrichment's street team, another assisted Sean Roy Parker on his Sufra commission. One joined the Metroland team on a permanent basis.

Participant surveys, one-to-one interviews and in-programme feedback all suggest — whether the MYAs are continuing to study, moving into employment or continuing in work — that the programme has made them more effective in what they are doing and what lies ahead.

Most interviewed participants repeated the criticism of the programme made last year - namely that there was not enough time to plan the final showcase. This year the MYAs found out about the final showcase earlier in the process and had more opportunities to plan. It is unclear whether, despite these changes, their frustration with the process reflects a correctable flaw in the programme or just their lack of experience in working 'in the real world' where (unlike a university or school) many factors affect success and there often isn't enough time to complete a task.

### **In Focus.**

#### ***MYA Programme 2023: 'Collective Rhythms'.***

The 2023 Metroland Young Associates Programme 'Collective Rhythms' took place on 12 Saturdays between May-August 2023. It was open to 18-24 year olds and attracted a broad spread of school-leavers, university students, recent graduates and people working part-time or on short-term contracts. Each session was

facilitated by one of two lead artists, Shepherd Manyika and Jesse Lawson, and was themed around the idea of ‘developing a future soundtrack for Brent’. Each participant received a mentor and a bursary paid in instalments over the course of the programme. Among other places, the MYAs visited: The Willesden Trades Hall (a music venue and previously labour movement meeting place), The May Day Rooms (an activist archive on Fleet Street), The Institute of Contemporary Musical Performance and The Institute of Contemporary Arts. They also went on a day-trip to Dungeness to explore the art of field-recording. Most MYAs were also separately taken on trips by their mentors. The climax of the programme was ‘We Were Here’ - an interactive sound exhibition at Metroland Studios organised by, and featuring the work of, the MYAs.



MYA 2023, session 1 at Metroland Studios

## Experiences.

*Najma Ali.*

*Metroland Young Associate, 2023.*

*“It was a bit overwhelming, at first, as everybody was older than me. There were only a couple of 18-year olds.”*  
Najma fitted being an MYA around revising for her A-levels. She achieved good grades, but is retaking to improve them further and open up the possibility of a degree level apprenticeship . *“I know I can do better. Why would I put myself into a course I’m not 100% into - it does cost alot of money.”*

Najma writes poetry, plays instruments and thought the programme might be a way to explore her creativity, but it was encounters with people she remembers most. Like the evening the MYA’s met their mentors and listened to them explaining their work. Most had jobs in the Creative Industries - curators, exhibition producers, account managers, record producers - jobs you don’t really understand until you’ve met someone who does them. *“I feel like from school I’ve learnt there’s doctors, there’s lawyers but I have never heard of these jobs - it was mind-blowing to know there are more things in the world that are available.”*

She says that the bursary made it easier for her to be an MYA but it wasn’t the thing that made the programme rewarding. By the end of the programme, when she invigilated the MYA’s ‘We were here’ exhibition she felt quite different to how she did at the start. *“I wasn’t really nervous. I was excited to explain to people what I’ve been doing for the last four months. Speaking to strangers wasn’t a nerve racking thing anymore.”*



*Ann Lac.*  
Metroland Young Associate, 2023.

Ann Lac came to London two years ago to study illustration at the University of Westminster in Harrow. It was there, in March, that a tutor posted a digital-flyer for the Metroland Young Associates on a student bulletin board.

Being an MYA helped Ann get to know London's lesser known corners. Since the programme ended they have been reading about the history of the Willesden Trades Hall. Ann's mentor took them to a queer poetry night in Leytonstone. *"It was very eye-opening,"* they remember.

*"My practice is very observational - I work in mixed media, so seeing what's around you and what people are talking about is very important."* They don't think that a programme about sound was a contradictory choice for someone studying illustration. *"Thinking about sound helps you pay attention to your surroundings and how they change as you walk through Kilburn High Street or a park. Being an MYA was less about my practice directly and more about me as a person and how I take things in."* Listening hard can also mean losing yourself. On their first ever visit to the ICA, Ann got so absorbed in the bookshop afterwards they lost the rest of the group and had to travel home separately. *"It was my first time there - it was very, very good!"*

At the showcase Ann worked on the 'zine team' designing totes bags, leaflets and posters. But they wish the group had been given more time to accommodate all MYA's ideas for the showcase event. *"It would have done us wonders,"* they explain.

Several months on from the end of the programme Ann is still in touch with a few other former MYAs. *"I now have leads into industries I could have never known before. Seeing other creative trajectories has helped me consider mine."*

*Helayna Lagos.*  
Metroland Young Associate, 2023.

Helayna is 23 and found her way to the Metroland Young Associates programme in the disorienting transition between the predictable structure of a university course, studying illustration and the more fluid and unknown world of work. *"I wasn't really sure what I wanted - I was applying for anything in the industry. I just knew I didn't want to be a freelance illustrator."*

Her mentor Ricky, an assistant producer at the Barbican, made her feel more secure. *"He would reassure me that I wasn't doing anything wrong and there wasn't any more I could be doing. Chatting to him enabled me to establish roles in my head. Hearing his own experiences was really helpful and grounding - it made me realise I wasn't going insane. I've realised that I want to go into more of a production role."*

She fitted being an MYA around a job as production assistant at D&AD, a body representing the advertising and design industries known globally for its annual award ceremonies marking commercial creativity. While being an MYA she was given a permanent role as an R&D assistant, but being an MYA has already made her think about what might be next. *"In a roundabout way it definitely helped get the role I have, but it also made me see there's no harm in applying for everything and just trying things out."*

Helayna says that she's found a valuable group of people in her local area that she identifies with. *"Growing up I didn't feel that there was an arts scene in Brent. We've got a group chat and we arrange to see each other as much as we can. I didn't really have a creative community in Brent, so it's a major thing for me."*

*Amelia Martin.*

*Programme Organiser for Young People, 2022-23.*

*"Oh my God, we'll never go to Dungeness again."*

Amelia came to Metroland Cultures in 2022 after seven years of working at the nearby Camden Arts Centre where she developed artist residencies in primary schools and engagement programmes for children with special educational needs.

She coordinated the Metroland Young Associate programme for two cycles, before moving on to the ICA in Autumn 2023. Amelia devised the MYA programme, oversaw all the sessions and was at the end of a Whatsapp group for all the MYAs when they needed her. She also had to push a broken-down bus during a field-trip to Dungeness to make field-recordings with the MYAs this summer.

All publically funded galleries and museums are required to demonstrate their 'accessibility' to people who might not automatically visit them. Explaining this work in funding applications, job titles and department means mastering lots of specialist terminology - 'engagement', 'protected characteristics', 'communities', 'need' and so on.

*"Working with audiences is its own bubble!"* says Amelia. *"I felt so free and liberated (at Metroland Cultures) - you could arrive at a different way of working quicker than*

*you could in an institution. I felt I was getting more of an understanding of young people and how to build arts programmes around where they were at. It was more porous. I've been thinking about the idea of 'reverse mentoring' - the idea that I learn from young people, rather than the other way round - it's harder to do that in an institution."*

She now works at the ICA in a role that enables her to 'centre ways of working with communities in the public programme'. She has used Metroland Studios as a venue and has been working with Metroland Studio's residents Turab and Arwa (Other Cinemas) to devise the cinema strand of the ICA's Young Creatives programme. *"At Metroland there was just space to really focus on the needs of communities - it afforded that closeness."*



Activity B:

Connecting community organisations with artists.

*“Metroland is absolutely there in the community, making community voices heard and I just don’t see anybody else who is doing that. It is world leading and that’s why I wanted to work with Metroland.”*

Stephanie Post, International Cultural Broker.

*“It might be a bit of a spring-off from their practice but as [Metroland Studios] artists we really need to do things that connect with the community as this is a community resource.”*

Studio Resident 1, 2023.

*“Outside I feel there needs to be more ways of bringing people in so they can come and visit. when you see the work with K2K it’s amazing. A lot of the community are starting to come through. But there needs to be more. We are hidden behind this market and alot of people are only just finding out their only studio is around here.”*

Studio Resident 2, 2023.

*“At a time like this a cultural hub in the area is one of the best things that can happen - more and more people are accessing it than they were when it opened - it’s just going from strength to strength.”*

Metroland Commissioned Artist, 2023.



Sean Roy Parker, Photo: Jelizateva Kuznetsova.

- Major partnership between Sufra Foodbank and Kitchen and Sean Roy Parker completed.
- Metroland Studios used as a venue by 12 community organisations.
- First international residency on collaborative practice successfully piloted.
- Legacy of Asian Women’s Resource Centre Biennial commission continues.
- Support for 15 artists actively committed to community collaboration.

Metroland Cultures operates where art and communities intersect. It sets out to produce artworks and artistic projects which express the desires of Brent communities and directly address their practical and organisational needs. There is no formula for this work, Metroland Cultures is engaged in an ongoing process of finding new ways to undertake it.

This is partly about fostering an organisational ethos. Metroland Cultures’ staff are all committed to socially engaged practice and many have a background in the borough. Likewise all of the artists Metroland Studios

hosts are from local communities and their practice is connected to local heritage and culture. The Brent Biennial tries to avoid galleries and exhibits work in places people encounter in their day-to-day life.

Over the last year, Metroland Studios has become more porous to the community surrounding the building. It hosts the Kilburn Streets Kitchen who use it as a base for their work providing food and support to homeless people in the local area. Metroland Cultures has also started a series of conversations with the Kilburn Square Housing Cooperative (the Tenant Management Organisation of the Kilburn Square housing estate that surrounds Metroland Studios) exploring the desires and aspirations of residents with a view to developing a project with them in 2024. Of the ten studio residents interviewed for this report, eight answered an open-ended question about what Metroland Cultures should be doing next year, by saying that artists in the building should be finding ways to work more closely with people living around it.

As well as developing an ethos, over the past 18 months Metroland Cultures has also been refining a model for partnerships between artists and community organisations. These were originally conceived as ‘community commissions’ for the Brent Biennial - but they have been allowed to float-free from the Biennial, affording community organisations the time and flexibility they need to develop work with artists.

One way Metroland Cultures shares this activity is through an international residency. Its first iteration took place between April and June this year. The residency - available to a mid-career curator interested in testing and developing new approaches to collaborative practice bridging artists and communities - was awarded to James Tapsell-Kururangi (Te Arawa, Tainui, Ngāti Porou)

from Aotearoa New Zealand. It was delivered with the Delfina Foundation and supported by Kent Gardner and the British Council Aotearoa New Zealand and Pacific. Funding has recently been secured for another residency in 2024.

### In Focus:

#### *Community Commissions in 2023.*

The 2022 Brent Biennial featured three ‘community commissions’. In each case a community organisation was supported, in a workshop series, to choose an artist to work on a project together: Mosaic LGBT+ Young Person’s Trust’ worked with Ed Webb-Ingall; Asian Womens’ Resource Centre (AWRC) worked with Amanda Camenisch and Theresa Westin; and Sufra Food Bank worked with Sean Roy Parker.

The last of these three partnerships predominantly took place this year. Roy constructed a glasshouse from recycled wood and windows at St Raphael’s Edible Garden after a workshop series with Sufra’s staff, volunteers and residents. It is filled with second-hand tools and provides a new way for visitors and users of the garden to connect with the natural world. This reflects Sufra’s desire to play a greater role in the local community as a place for learning and sharing.

Amanda Camenisch and Theresa Westin’s project was mostly completed last year and resulted in a series of collaborative artworks that double as musical instruments which are now stationed in the AWRC safe house. The artists subsequently secured funding from Arts Council England to continue developing work with women from the centre. Metroland Cultures continues to support this work by providing studio and exhibition space to the artists and Metroland Studios is used as a venue for



workshops between the artists and AWRC users. Some of these workshops are also open to women from the surrounding estate.



Amanda Camenisch and Therese Westin 'Making the Room Sing' Installation, Photo: Thierry Bal.

## Experiences.

*Nina Parmar.*  
Sufra NW London.

*"The consultation process was very abstract - we wrote poetry and gathered the sites, sounds and colours of the garden and thought really creatively about what the commission could be."* Nina is the Food Aid and Volunteer Manager at Sufra NW London, a Community Hub supporting nearly 1,000 people every week across Brent. For the last 18 months they have been working with Metroland Cultures on a commission for their edible community garden on the St Raphael's estate. It has been a long process.

*"It was kind of ambitious in the beginning when they said this artwork can be anything. It can be interior design for your building, it can be a way of decorating all the planters, it can be a structure. We were sure that we wanted something for the garden, and for it to be community-led. With a scope that wide it was always going to be quite a big undertaking, but I think it has been worth it in the end. There has been lots of community consultation along the way, lots of input. So the final product really embodies the spirit of the garden."*

The process enabled Sufra to choose a project proposed by the artist Sean Roy Parker to build a glasshouse from recycled materials, which houses a library of donated tools - binoculars, magnifying glasses, baskets gathered from the local community.

*"The idea is that it isn't a static space. You get the tools from the inside and are able to explore the garden better. There's lists of birds you can go out and spot. It's essentially there as a tool to help you discover the rest of the garden. It's very fitting for the garden (and for an organisation partly addressing food waste), that it's completely made from recycled materials."*

Nina imagines that Roy will stay in touch after the Glasshouse opens in November. *"He doesn't want to build it, leave it there and forget about it."* And for Sufra, after a long process of conceiving and constructing the project, there is much to look forward to. *"The beauty of it is that we get it now, so maybe this is the best bit where we see how we can use it and integrate it into our projects and have different classes who use it. So the best bit is yet to come."*

*Stephanie Post.*  
*International Cultural Broke.*

*“We were looking for a partnership where a curator would get experience with artists working outside traditional gallery spaces.”* Stephanie Post is a New Zealand-based, ‘cultural broker’ who speaks passionately about her work establishing international residencies supporting socially-engaged practice. In 2023, with support she gathered from Kent Gardner and the British Council Aotearoa New Zealand and Pacific, working alongside Te Tuhi, she initiated a residency for a New Zealand Curator at Metroland Cultures. James Tapsell-Kururangi, a Māori curator, was selected for the post.

He split his time between working 2-days a week at Metroland Cultures and pursuing his own research in the Delfina Foundation’s Spring residency programme.

*“I think Metroland Cultures are cutting their own way,” says Stephanie. “There are a lot of really really good outreach programmes - Chisenhale, Gasworks, Studio Voltaire, The Showroom - they’re all doing fantastic work engaging communities who don’t come into the gallery. However, their ‘core business’ is running a gallery space. Metroland comes at it from the other direction - rather than saying ‘we’ve got a gallery, what can we do for our community?’ it’s more saying - ‘what does the community need and how can we deliver it?’”*

James makes and curates moving image works. While at Metroland Cultures he organised a screening of film works by Māori artists, with Metroland Studios residents’ Other Cinemas. While on his residency James also interviewed Peer-to-Peer artists and helped Sean Roy Parker with his community commission. He attended internal meetings and the organisation’s away day at Open School East in Margate.

Stephanie views this first year as a prototype - a first version that successfully created a caring environment but could have been more of a two-way exchange. For her though, this is just part of the process of designing a residency that works in a specific context. Next time she hopes there will be a budget for the resident to add to Metroland Cultures programme in some way. In any case, she says, *“If you really want programmes like this to have benefits you have to run them for five years, minimum.”*

*Izzy Milenkovic.*  
*Metroland Young Associate 2023.*  
*Metroland Marketing Assistant 2023-*

As Izzy remembers, *“It was strange”*. Despite living around the corner from Metroland Studios she only came across the organisation and its MYA programme while browsing for local arts opportunities on Roundhouse’s website. She left the programme with the things it was designed to give her - a mentor, friends on a similar path, better knowledge of the creative industries and some confidence-building experiences.

Since being a 2023 Metroland Young Associate, Izzy has been working as a part-time marketing assistant at Metroland Cultures. Apart from a brief stint working in a pottery studio and some freelance animation work this has been her first consistent arts job. She manages the day-to-day running of the website, social media accounts and is promoting an exhibition series showcasing work of studio residents and the 2024 pre-biennial programme. She recently recorded a video interview with Amanda Camenisch, Therese Westin - two artists with a long-standing association with Metroland Cultures.



Izzy grew up in Brondesbury and has recently returned to the area. As a baby, she had her check-ups in Metroland Studios when it was a doctor’s surgery. She explains, “for me, personally, it only works because I’m from Brent. I don’t feel like I’m ‘muscling in’ on anything - I’m the target audience if you like. I can bring my personal history of the borough.”

Izzy balances her work at Metroland Cultures with studying for a Masters at St Martins. It’s been quite a turnaround on where she was last year. “I was between things - just working a day job to get by. I’m so grateful to the MYA programme and Metroland - I wouldn’t have had this job and all the opportunities that the MYA programme granted me.”

Activity C:  
Supporting Brent’s Cultural Organisations.

“It’s really good for us to be in the heart of Kilburn and to be on an estate which feels really connected. It’s great to have a space we can use for our events and our training. We have breathing space and it felt like the right decision.”

Caren Owen, Founder K2K Radio and Metroland Studio Resident.

“For us it’s been a real game changer. We were very nomadic before. It feels like more than a studio space. It feels like we are part of a community.”

Other Cinemas Co-Founder and Metroland Studios Resident.



K2K welcoming guests to their Collective Rhythms event at Metroland Studios.

- 17 events delivered in partnership for Collective Rhythms Festival.
- Four new cultural organisations residing in Metroland Studios.
- Cross-promotion of 12 events in the local community.
- Online and in-person audience of 130,000 for Collective Rhythms Festival.

Metroland Cultures' mission to build, share and support art and culture in Brent requires the organisation to work in partnership with venues, grassroots cultural organisations and community arts groups across the borough. Metroland Cultures does not view itself as a sole-provider of culture but rather as a connector, partner and supporter strengthening organisations and spaces for culture across Brent.

In 2023 Metroland Studios provided studio space to: K2K Radio - a community radio station; Other Cinemas - a project supporting black and non-white film-makers; and OOMK, a DIY community publishing collective. Each organisation benefits from the community Metroland Studios provides and Metroland Cultures' collective network.

The Collective Rhythms programme provided multiple ways for Metroland Cultures to work with cultural organisations across the borough and to drive attention to events across it. The previous year's Brent Biennial predominantly featured exhibitions in the Borough's south so 'Collective Rhythms' consciously promoted more events in the North. As well as creating events in partnership with local organisations, Collective Rhythms also opened a window in which Metroland Cultures could cross-promote 12 other thematically related events in the borough. It also made use of Metroland Studios as a venue space, capitalising on audiences developed for the previous two Brent Biennials.

### In Focus:

#### *Collective Rhythms.*

Collective Rhythms was a programme of 21 exhibitions, performances, family-events and screenings billed as a 'festival of music, sound and healing' which took place between July and September. Among others, Metroland Cultures worked in partnership with The Lexi Cinema, Brent Music Service, K2K radio and Shubbak Festival.

#### *Highlights included:*

- Metroland Studios hosting Shubbak Festival, a day of workshops for children and families attracting 300 people over the day and bringing a Middle Eastern audience to the space. The day included childcare from a registered childcare provider, a feast for families, and had theatre, dance and art workshops throughout the day exploring Middle Eastern heritage.
- Cross-promotion of Navratri, a festival that aims to provide a sense of belonging and pride to second and third generation British Gujaratis, as well as simultaneously educating them about their culture.
- A walking tour of the Willesden Trades Hall, a venue with a proud history as a meeting place for the labour movement and as one of Brent's longest running venues for reggae music - The Apollo Club.
- Allegorhythms, a major Metroland Cultures commission and 2-week exhibition for former Peer-to-Peer 2022 artist Bill Daggs, enabling him to take over the Metroland Studios' spaces in a series of sound sculptures, rhythmic paintings, sonic compositions and moving image works.
- A K2K community day with food, children's activities and music inviting members of the Kilburn and Kensal community into the radio station and the studio building. Participants could learn how to make a radio show, go live on air and listen to the DJ's and MC's that were performing.



***In total***, Collective Rhythms created 93 paid opportunities for artists, community members and participants. It supported 11 in-kind partnerships developed to deliver the programme. £132k was invested back into Brent and it leveraged £67k into the borough in in-kind support.



Wemba's Dream from the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, part of Collective Rhythms.

## Experiences.

**Caren Owen.**  
Metroland Studios Resident, 2023.

*“We don’t say no to anyone. If you’ve got an idea for something you want to do - let’s go!”* Caren Owen co-founded K2K Radio, a community-powered radio station 11 years ago as a legacy project for South Kilburn Studios. It later relocated to The Granville.

After some years away from K2K, Caren returned in the spring when the organisation was on the brink of potentially closing for good. In her own words it *‘had the shit-kicked out of it’* by the pandemic. To make matters

worse, its booth in the Granville had been flooded, it was almost leaderless and in rent arrears. Caren made a pact with four long-term presenters to keep K2K going.

Since the spring the organisation has been based in Metroland Studios. For an organisation that relies heavily on volunteers, the goodwill of regular presenters and a committed network of 30 DJs, not paying rent was an obvious advantage but there were other factors that encouraged Caren to move too. *“It’s really good for us to be in the heart of Kilburn and to be on an estate which feels connected and great to have a communal space we can use for our events and our training. We have breathing space and it felt like the right decision to come to Metroland.”*

Caren and other volunteers have been working on a business plan and what she jokingly calls her MAKKGA strategy (Make K2K Radio Great Again). As part of Collective Rhythms festival K2K staged a pre-Carnival event outside Metroland studios. *“We got to tell people that we were back and it was a way to spread the word. We’ve not even started in terms of what we could do here. We can take a moment to recover, refresh our vision and build community again - it feels alot more like home.”*

**Charles Hardie.**  
Willesden Trades Hall.

*“I used to think, ‘that could be the finest venue in Northwest London.’”* Charles Hardie, an experimental music promoter and architectural designer, used to regularly pass the rundown Willesden Trades Hall. His speculative knocks on the door usually went unanswered, until one day after lockdown, it finally opened. Since then he has become involved in bringing the building back into use. He is now one of 8 directors of a company Willesden

Trades Hall Ltd which has just received funding from the HLF to support a process of finding a new use for the building with the local community.

Metroland Cultures promoted a walking tour of the Hall as a part of the Collective Rhythms programme. Also, in July the Metroland Young Associates visited the venue and took part in a workshop exploring the history of the building as an important meeting place for the labour movement and the Afro-Caribbean community. The Grunwick strikers met there and the building still hosts the Apollo nightclub, which has hosted reggae nights since the 1970s. For Charles, engaging with the MYA’s was an important way of bringing young voices into the process of imagining the building’s future. *“It was an amazing, well run event. The feedback we got from the kids was really sensitive and politically aware and so it was a great event for us.”*

The development of the Willesden Trades Hall as a space for visual art, music or community activity could be important for the borough and something Metroland Cultures would be eager to support. But while the priority is to establish consensus within the local community - Charles won’t be drawn on the future of the building or how it could be used or if it might be a venue for the 2025 Brent Biennial. *“Of course there is the possibility we could collaborate with Metroland in the future but it’s early days and I can’t say ‘this is what it’s going to be’...my dream is that we do a consultation with the community and come up with three options with the community and that decides what to do with the building.”*

**Activity D:**  
*Elevating Brent-connected artists.*

*“I wouldn’t be able to have a studio space of my own in London right now if I had to pay for it, or I would not have enough time to use it because I would be working so much. That’s the conundrum.”*

*Metroland Studios Resident 3 2023.*

*“It’s just a real vibe, It’s full of really nice people, really friendly people. It’s given me the space to be a proper full-time artist for two months. You feel like a community there - places I’ve been before you hardly talk to anyone.”*

*Metroland Commissioned Artist, 2023.*

*“Most of the studios I’ve come across are in South London, or in Hackney. To have something that’s 10 minutes away is brilliant. To have your own space, of this size, is incredible.”*

*Studios Resident 4, 2023.*

*“It really expanded our practice to move into the art world which in many ways is down to Metroland, so we are very pleased with that.”*

*Co-founder, Metroland Studios resident arts organisation.*



Visitors exploring the Peer-to-Peer group show.



- 6 artists featured in the 2022 Brent Biennial have achieved significant new exhibitions and commissions in 2023.
- 8 studio residencies for members of the Peer-to-Peer programme.
- 3 commissions to Brent-connected artists for Collective Rhythms.
- 93 paid opportunities have been created between June and September and 90% have been to Brent-based or connected artists and practitioners.

Metroland Cultures is strongly committed to promoting emerging and established artists who grew-up in, live in or work in Brent - artists who are 'Brent-connected'. In recent decades young artists have tended to gravitate towards East and South London to progress their careers. This has a detrimental effect on culture in the borough - those who might have given voice to the concerns of people in Brent and created music, words and images that convey their lives - are lost to other parts of London. Those who stay have to make their livelihoods without the scaffolding of galleries, arts spaces, studios and venues that might be in the borough if others had stayed.

Metroland Cultures' main way to support Brent-connected artists has been the Brent Biennial - which in two cycles has platformed artists with a connection to the borough. In the last year several artists have moved on with their careers: Mohammed. Z Rahman is now represented by Phillida Reid Gallery and is showing in Los Angeles; Rashid Araeen's 'From zero to Infinity' (exhibited in the Brent Biennial) was shown in the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall; Harlesden High Street gallery was featured in an in-depth series on London's galleries for Frieze magazine; Shenece Oretha was awarded her first Art on the Underground Commission; and Adam Farah-Saad won the Focus Stand Prize 2023 at the Frieze Art Fair.

Last year Metroland Cultures launched 'Peer-to-Peer' which supported 10 emerging artists with mentoring, a bursary, workshops and a commission. In 2023 the artists were offered studio residencies in the building. For most of the Peer-to-Peer artists this is the first time that they have had a studio to work from and the first time that they have been able to work in this way in Brent. The artists have also had the opportunity to stage an exhibition in the Metroland Studios gallery space.

### Experiences.

*Kes-tchaas Eccleston.*  
Metroland Studio Resident.

*"My journey as an artist and my journey with Metroland is very much 'hand-in-hand'." Kes, 23, is a photographer and a film-maker. In 2019 he joined the Blueprint Collective - a group of 16-25 year-olds from Brent, who conceived, produced and starred in many of the projects that took place as a part of Brent's year as London Borough of Culture. For the last two years he has had a studio at Metroland.*

There he has developed his practice as a photographer, independently making the daunting transition from university study to freelance livelihood. Metroland was where he sent his first invoice, won his first award and had his first exhibition. *"It's just been about building my confidence and being around other artists who are also freelance and living off their artwork - it made that the norm."*

He was particularly grateful for Metroland during the pandemic, when Brent 2020 continued a threadbare programme and Metroland Studios stayed partially open. *"This was a beautiful way to find community*

*engagement which we were all missing at that time.”* It is still a community that Kes feels a part of. In the last year, with some help from Turab and Arwa of Other Cinemas, Kes has expanded his practice and made a short film. He is currently in New York (extending a trip to see family) meeting other photographers, gallerists and film-makers.

He wonders a bit now if some things he did for the Blueprint Collective were really in young people’s interests. *“I’ve grown up a bit in terms of how I see myself involved with institutions.”* He’d like it if Metroland could be a bit less fussy and could find ways to be a bit more open to the messiness of Kilburn and people who don’t naturally feel at ease in an ‘art’ space’. *“We should thrive off the local environment’s imperfections,”* he suggests.

*Santos da Silva.*  
Music Producer, MYA 2022,  
MYA Assistant Producer 2023.

*“It was interesting to be on both sides of the field,”* says Santos, who took his experience of being an MYA last year into the role of being an assistant producer of the programme this summer. As well as helping with logistics of trips, buying materials for workshops and booking lunches, Santos could use his experience of the programme to suggest adjustments to Amelia, the programme organiser.

As a younger, more relatable, member of the team he became a role-model which sometimes felt strange, especially when it came to presenting himself. *“I don’t even know why, I can’t even tell you why... but I was nervous. I had never done something like that before. Sitting in front of a group of young people and telling them about what I’ve done.”*

For nearly four years Santos has had a relationship with Metroland Cultures. It began when he became a presenter on Brent 2020’s ‘Vent’ podcast collaboration with Vice. Meanwhile he has balanced 9-5 work to pay the bills with a creative life as a sound engineer and a music producer, recording acts in a local studio. Working with Metroland Cultures helped Santos understand the value of what he had learnt through music. *“Metroland gave me a way to work on those traits from my music work more with different environments and different people.”*



Santos and colleagues working on the Vice podcast.

*Becky Lyon.*  
Peer-to-Peer 2022, Metroland Studios Resident 2023.

In 2017, Becky Lyon quit her full-time career at a creative agency and went to St. Martins to study an MA in Art & Science. She followed it up two years later with an MA in Art and Ecology at Goldsmiths. Making art was great but as a mature student and having come from a professional background, the poorly paid (scarce) opportunities and the idea of the ‘star solo artist’ as the only legitimate form



of success in the art world didn't appeal. *"I just thought - there must be another way of inhabiting this thing we call the 'art world'."*

It was in this thought that she was drawn to Metroland's Peer-to-Peer programme.

*"The day of the first (Peer-to-Peer) session was also one of the worst days I had at university, I felt particularly depleted that day. I walked into the Metroland Studios and the aura was different, the people I was alongside were from similar backgrounds but all expressed 'artisthood' in different ways. The way Kit (Edwards) and Eliel (Jones) held the space for us was incredible. I realised there are other ways!"*

Becky makes installation-based work which draws on North West London's waterways, forests and urban ecologies. She is Barnet's London National Park City ranger and uses art to help people 're-body back into the ecology of their surroundings'. The studio residency that came at the end of Peer-to-Peer has given her work a new freedom. *"A studio means I am able to rehearse ideas, leave something there and come back to it. It sounds really simple but it's transformative and such a privilege to have that physical and mental space and time."*

She'll miss having a studio in Metroland when the Peer-to-Peer residencies wind up in the Spring. *"It will be difficult to find an organisation that shares the same values and has been so generous as Metroland. Of course nothing is perfect but they are always learning and I genuinely believe they are trying to do things differently."*

## 4. Metroland in 2024.

The interviews gathered for this report clearly show Metroland Cultures is refining its methods, adding to its networks and making more effective use of its studio building. The review also points to several organisational trends which stem from this success and could shape how the organisation continues to grow in the forthcoming year.

**First, in 2024 studio residents will seek a deeper connection with those living within the immediate surroundings of Metroland Studios.**

Almost universally, without being asked directly, all studio residents - especially those who have been in the studios longest - have expressed a desire to deepen the connection between the building and its surrounding community. Many recognise that this might require stepping outside their artistic practice, but see it as part of what being in Metroland Studios is about. They think that a clearer sense of how long Metroland Cultures' use of the building will last would give them the security to build those relationships.

**Second, in 2024 the Metroland Young Associates will come to be understood as a community, as well as an annual programme.**

The fact that: the last cohort are still in touch with one another now; that MYAs are finding roles within Metroland Cultures and on the programme; and that the mentoring relationships have informally continued, suggests that the MYAs continue to experience the practical legacy of the programme, long after it has finished. As an organisation, Metroland Cultures may need to find new ways of lightly supporting this expanding community of young people as it aids their transitions between school, university, work and a career.

Third, in 2024 Metroland Cultures will become more connected in the art world.

Even though most of Metroland Cultures’ energy is directed at finding ways to work in Brent, the profile of the organisation is growing in a national and global network of galleries, curators and commentators. Although it is hard to attribute cause and effect, many of the Brent-connected artists featured in 2022’s Biennial have advanced their careers in the system in 2023. It seems plausible that this will become increasingly accessible to 2022 Peer-to-Peer artists via the Biennial in 2025. This would make a very direct connection between Brent and the art world, forming a practical realisation of the organisational vision for Brent to be, ‘known globally for art and communities who make it’.

Fourth, in 2024 Metroland Cultures will become newly able to articulate its long-term outcomes.

Metroland Cultures is currently able to evaluate what it delivers and the immediate results. As it grows older it will become easier for it to articulate its longer-term contribution to culture in Brent, both as the delivery organisation for Brent 2020 and as the organisation that emerged from the lockdown in 2021. In the last 12 months, culture in Brent has been on the up: Raheem Sterling’s Foundation have worked with the National Portrait Gallery, Zadie Smith’s play *The Wife of Willesden* opened in New York, Punchdrunk Enrichment relocated to Wembley and Arts Council England tripled the number of organisations it regularly funds in Brent. Metroland Cultures could legitimately claim - either directly or indirectly - to have made these outcomes more likely. As it continues to build enduring relationships with young people, community organisations, emerging and established artists, it will become better equipped to explain how it has made an enduring contribution to culture in Brent and the life of its many cultures.

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