

Title: Dance and COVID-19: using a pause as a choreographed move
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On 11 March 2020, the virtual conference held by the World Health Organisation (WHO) confirmed our fears and COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. The impact of what became our reality for the next 12 months was unprecedented. Government imposed lockdowns, travel was shut down and economies were brought to a halt. It changed our inner planning systems permanently - the way to move, create and connect.

In May 2020, the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in USA, escalated the Black Lives Matter movement on a global scale. As if this was planned, the lockdown had set the scene for the whole world to watch the televised incident. The crises we were experiencing suddenly tripled adding deteriorating race relations to a global health pandemic and failing economies. For the creative, it was good ground for testing the viability and tenacity on many levels.

This is a short narrative of how we entered the crises and how we turned the uncertain times to positive manifestations. It is also a call to action for policy makers, influencers and funders to reflect on, intervene and take more risks and provide the readiness and sustainability required for the arts to continue to impact lives globally.

I set up Kauma Arts in August 2019, which was my way of contributing to the global arts scene and to help fill the gaps that are still prevalent in the systems. As the founding Director with other hats on in the creative industries, it was a way to connect my worlds and a network of people with endless creativity and imagination, still invisible to many.

In November 2019, with my previous role as Head of Dance of the African Diaspora at One Dance UK, I partnered with other key Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD) sector leaders to deliver the biennial international conference titled *Re:generations*. It brings together academia and practice to share research and performances, to dialogue and debate with a goal to shape future practice for dance of the African Diaspora (DAD). The theme of the conference was '*Dance and the digital space*' which was yet another unknown preparation for what was ahead of us as creatives. The conference was also a public launchpad for the Report that resulted from a DAD Mapping Survey and Research I led with regional programmers and sector collaborators.

In January 2020, Kauma Arts was commissioned by the Royal Borough of Greenwich Council to project manage and provide creative direction for a new dance programme. The programme was to connect communities and develop a dance programme and festival for Black and ethnically diverse grassroots communities that were not appropriately represented in the borough's current events. In March 2020, the project plans and delivery were put on hold due to the pandemic. This was a devastating period for us as we were excited and just starting to roll out our new initiative. We had to reflect, review plans and embrace the necessary change required for the organisation to stay afloat and keep our vision and mission. We took a pause and we kept it organic, rooted, creative and connected.

Kauma Arts is a small but mighty team of creative consultants working to connect communities globally and to provide platforms that celebrate creatives and art forms with African roots. Kauma Arts works in three ways to provide,


- A digital hub platform with events to spotlight, connect creatives, link, and develop work that is international, intergenerational and across art forms.

- A consultancy that works in partnership with individuals, key organisations, and institutions to offer strategic creative direction and project management.
- A charitable arm that offers creatives a chance to 'give back' to their communities, support infrastructures and build legacies globally.

We adapted a strategy to shift our programme delivery to be more online and we built a digital profile, and presence with our strong brand. We created a communications strategy and campaign that would help us through the pause. We were successful in our application to Arts Council England for project funds to run a pilot for a year from November 2020.

We have so far managed to keep active, and we are piloting a couple of programmes that have gained popularity and fast becoming household names for our members and followers, thanks to our funders, partners, donors, and sponsors.


- **Meet the Tribe** is a featured spotlight programme highlighting the wealth of artistry in the hub using Instagram platform. Every month we focus on a different member or group/collective, providing them with a platform to showcase and share their process and work. To date 9 individuals and 2 collectives across cities in Kenya, Nigeria, United Kingdom and Canada have been featured on our digital platforms.




SAM TEBANDEKE

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What is **most important** for us to achieve as Africans and people of the African Diaspora to see a **step-change in the arts**; in the short-term, mid-term and long-term?




KENNETH UPHOPHO




NICK MAKOHA

CAROLYN LILLY




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How do we **embrace the richness of our cultures** to **build communities** through creative exchange?



SANDRA GOLDING




AFRO VAN CONNECT

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HOW DO WE SUPPORT AND COLLABORATE WITH YOUNG LEADERS TO CONNECT INTERNATIONALLY, INTERGENERATIONALLY, AND ACROSS ART FORMS?

WIVDRAWN



- **Kauma Brief Encounters (KBEs)** bring together creatives in public physical and digital spaces to exchange ideas, cultivate collaborations in a safe space and deepen the artistic value for artforms within the African Diaspora and Africa. We use the zoom platform for

these events. The primary aim is to provide platforms that spotlight the work of creatives registered with Kauma Arts to intentionally facilitate their connection with other creatives. By November 2021 we will have featured 10 individuals, and some are already bonding and exchanging work at various levels.

Our consultancy work is built on trust, close collaboration and understanding of the process of creative journeys with clients, allowing for room to adapt to necessary detours. It has been evident particularly over the past year that there is no one way of doing things. We combine our individual expertise as a team of professionals and creatives in our own right to ensure that what we provide is of quality, to the brief provided but also specific to our unique Kauma Arts brand. We have connected with true allies from different communities and races that we have not had before.

Additionally, through speaking engagements commissioned by national and international organisations, the role of agency and advocacy is significantly reflected by the skill and expertise we bring to the global conversations around the tables.

Our work of connecting communities in a shared space and profiling individuals with a global focus has brought a sense of belonging and achievement to many creatives. It has been a moment of reflection, recalibrating and flexing with shifting paradigms with peers.

Lending my platform and voice to those who need it is important to me and in return this period has enabled me to be heard more. For instance, it is as important for a creative to have this space when not creating as it is for them when creating in a studio or workshop. Artists are always working in isolation and this has been particularly so in the past year.

However, we realise that this support is not always readily available. We are concerned about the uncertainty of continuing this important platform for 'pause' that we have created out of adversity and managed to provide so far. Lack of continuity and connectedness will be a real impact and experience for many like us and it will be like switching off a life support for many small arts organisations and individual creatives.

This is a wake-up call for governments to review the exposed short comings of systems and to look at HUMANITY above PROFITS. Below are a few points for consideration:

- Partnerships, collaborations, influencing and connectivity with a global reach is crucial to keep the passion for creativity. The impact is gradual but consistent.
- We need to bridge the gap between policy makers and the public and working with companies on grassroots level is one of the ways forward.
- We urge policy makers and funders to be more open in their provision and scrutiny of the creative processes, particularly with forms that are not as evident in the mainstream.
- With new models emerging in the digital sphere, attention should be on checking how these spaces are afforded to shift data in an equitable and sustainable way to ensure that all levels of creativity benefits.
- Supporting programmes that bring creatives and academics/researchers to collaborate together could help to construct narratives that policy makers can understand better to appreciate the support required at all levels.

We have only scratched the surface and aim to build on the past 18 months to create a strong and sustainable infrastructure to keep the momentum. However, we cannot do this without intervention across the globe.

To join the Tribe, visit www.kaumaarts.com and register.