



Artistic residencies in the workplace: towards a relational ecology



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Foreword

JEAN-MARIE SONGY

Director of Le Palc and Furies

It was an ambitious undertaking; placing the notion of work at the core of both artistic creation and research. To start from the idea that we are all, in some way, engaged in work – and that perhaps it is possible to share its passions and its know-how!

What you will read here are encounters recounted with extreme modesty; humility stands as an essential prerequisite to approach and enter into relation with the "monster" that is work.

To try and say that artistic expression is also a form of work – that was far from a given. We moved forward with caution, with quiet steps. Each artist, immersed in the companies we had proposed, committed themselves with simplicity, at the heart of workplaces defined by manual craftsmanship and marked ecological concerns.

We perceived that social ecology was naturally present in these manufacturers, carried by each individual's awareness of the effects—positive or negative—that their activity had through the many transformations of natural materials.

They were also aware of the social impact generated by environmental preservation within their firms—conscious of the economic effort it required, but also of the psychological effort required to feel genuinely concerned and to be moved by the social solidarity expressed through these gestures of environmental care.

With the aim of building bridges between distant professional worlds, these encounters were made possible through various small precautions and thoughtful explanations of our intention to enter the companies—doing so with full transparency, and with the art of conversation we must renew every day to remain true to our concerns: those of a world to be transformed—a world of social ecology, fair and equitable for all!

About Hand to hand and the immersion residencies in private firms

Hand to hand is a **cooperation project** and a **circus-based exploration** (2023 -2025) **across Europe**. It is composed of **experiments**, learning spaces, and encounters **with various professional sectors to collectively question the concept of social ecology**.

Le Palc, **National Center** of circus of Châlons-en-Champagne (FR) has led the project in partnership with **Bússola** (Portugal), **Helsingør Teater** (Denmark), and **ROOM 100** (Croatia) over a period of two and a half years.

Through a journey of four exploration times and immersion residencies, Hand to hand had offered experimentation spaces through a cross-sectoral collaboration. The project brought together cultural and creative industries, researchers in ecology and art, mentors, as well as private firms that reflect the unique character of local territories in each of the four European countries.

These research phases have enabled eight selected artists to explore new artistic approaches in public space while integrating ecological thinking into their practices. Each of these eight artists collaborated with a private firm during an immersive ten-day residency, engaging with and observing the daily activities of workers at sites including the Joseph Perrier Champagne House and the Fila Arches fine art paper mill in France; the salt marshes of Ston in Croatia; a maritime wooden boat restoration workshop and a professional fisherman, a boat building education in Helsingør, Denmark; and a cod processing plant at the port of Ílhavo, Portugal.

This period was dedicated to be immersed in one activity sector, discover and meet the private firm and their workers, to be fed with everything that makes up the techniques of the body at work - be inspired by the repetitive gestures and the traditional, the manual know-how of the workers and translate the material collected inside the company into a common/public space around the company or in a place that resonates. The end of the residency was also an opportunity to present and transmit to the company's personnel the artistic work and/or integrate them in the artistic process.

Throughout their time in the private firm, the artists were supported by external guidance: a local referent with in-depth knowledge of the company's specific context and its surrounding territory, as well as occasional visits from an artistic mentor and one of the two researchers in art and ecology who accompanied the project and supported the artists. Local scientific researchers or other assistance could have been reached also for any potential support.

Each residency led to the creation of an artistic prototype – a work-in-progress inspired by their experience within the respective sector. This creative process culminated in public presentations of the projects at the festivals hosted by the four partner organizations.

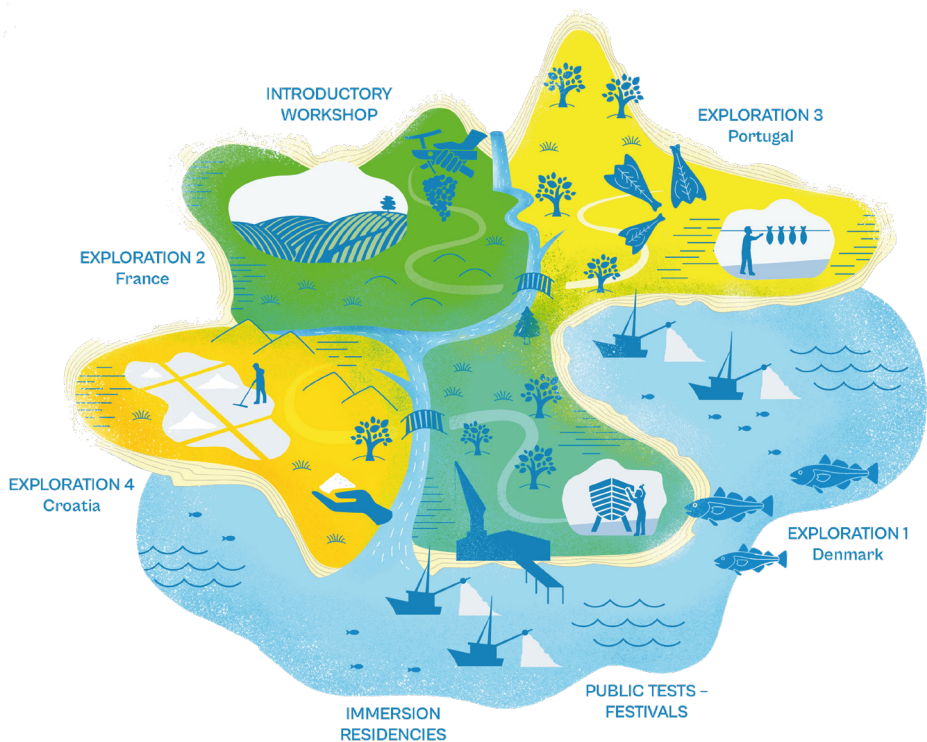


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Introduction

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When a workplace becomes a space for artistic creation, what are the best practices for establishing a cross-sector collaboration—such as an artistic residency in a private firm?

FANNY BORDIER

European manager of the Hand to hand project

The ecological and environmental mutations all over Europe request from us to think about our carbon footprint and more deeply to rethink our ways of living, our choices of development. They force us to (re)connect ourselves in a different and urgent way to spaces which we inhabit and to people who live there. Social ecology, used as a synonym for human ecology, responds to this need to transform our relationship with living beings and with the Other—alterity—through a constructive, ecological, and ethical approach to society.

The hypothesis chosen for Hand to hand, is to create **new cooperation** (with other activity sectors) and **new modes of understanding contemporary issues** through social ecology where art -more specifically contemporary circus- in public space- can contribute to the transition of the cultural sector, transforming its artistic and methodological practices.

Cross-sector collaboration is already a well-established dynamic within the performing arts field, particularly through partnerships with the social, educational, and healthcare sectors. It takes shape when actors from distinct professional fields come together around shared challenges, pooling their skills, resources, knowledge, and methodologies.

However, this form of collaboration remains largely marginal when it takes the shape of **immersive artistic residencies** within private companies. The *Hand to hand* project has made it possible an opportunity to explore these under investigated fields, offering circus artists new spaces for research, creation, and relationship with the Other.

These production sites became the framework for a dialogue between artistic practices and professional realities, questioning the conditions of transmission, creation, and social and ecological transformation.

These immersive residencies do not aim to illustrate the world of work, but rather to inhabit it differently – through listening, presence, and experimentation. This guide is born from a simple yet demanding hypothesis: that an artistic residency in a private company can create a shared space where artistic creation, technical know-how, new narratives, ecological issues, and social realities converge.

Developed as an extension of the European project *Hand to hand*, this guide is intended for cultural organizations, private companies, artists, and local stakeholders seeking to co-imagine new forms of cooperation between the performing art, the world of work, and today's ecological issues.

Without claiming to offer a single model, this guide brings together insights from residencies carried out in Portugal, France, Denmark, and Croatia. It provides concrete frameworks, lines of thoughts, case studies, and practical advice to support the implementation of artistic residencies in private firms.

It outlines a framework for understanding the challenges and potential of cross-sector collaboration.

The first section offers a step-by-step, field-informed guide for designing an artistic residency within a private firm.

The second section presents a series of case studies drawn from situated experiences, with insights from artists, partners, and businesses directly involved.

Throughout its pages, this guide also explores what such hybrid formats can bring to light:

- A different way of approaching work and artistic creation.
- A renewed attentiveness to human and material ecosystems.
- A culture of relationship, movement, and reciprocity.

This guide has been designed as both a practical and inspiring resource, to be explored freely—either continuously or by theme, depending on the context or questions at hand.

Conceived as a toolkit to activate according to need, it serves as a support for those wishing to experiment, document, or strengthen artistic residencies in private firms. It can support an initial exploration into this practice, or help deepen an approach already underway.

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Amir Guetta-Immersion time // www.instagram.com/guettasrodiao

Inhabiting the gap:

the artistic residency as a space of translation

“Any residency is an experimental endeavour of a profoundly relational nature. This invites us to consider, on the same conceptual plane, all of the contextual, social, technical, historical and economical factors at play.”

BÉNÉDICTE CHEVALLIER
Director of Mécènes du Sud Arles-Aix-Marseille

What company doesn't dream of anticipating change, of "being ahead of the times"? What artist doesn't strive to create something new, to reinvent themselves? What society doesn't aspire to foster social cohesion, and to sustain an ability to adapt itself? How can it hope to build a sustainable future, and overcome obstacles, if it doesn't foster a collective spirit? These are each immense challenges that condition our future and our ability to coexist.

Art empowers us, if not to overcome, then at least to face them. Creativity springs from an existential need, one that consists in finding meaning. A work of art is an expression of an artist's vision. It is

open to many readings. This polysemy allows each of us to be moved and to give ourselves permission to create our own interpretations. Art makes us mobile.

A residency is a period in which to research or create "in motion". The same can be said of the Hand to hand European cooperation project, which hinges on the desire to experiment, learn, and meet with different fields of work so as to collectively question notions of social ecology and sustainability. The artistic explorations and residencies in the workplace were led by diverse teams in four foreign countries.

The classical framework of a residency was supplemented by its being

grounded in an industrial, sectoral or artisanal economic activity: salt marshes in Croatia, cod packing and processing industry in Portugal, Champagne vineyards in France, the maritime sector in Denmark. By adding this cross-sectoral dimension, and with the presence of researchers in the fields of social sciences and the arts, these experiences grew into "augmented" experiences.

This "augmented" experience framework implies a network of actors and objects. It would be mistaken to represent the artist as someone who, from a heightened perspective, offers a broad overarching view. Sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher Bruno Latour insisted that objects, instruments and even the human and non-human actors of an experiment, play a mediating role. Hence, knowledge is not built in isolation, but through ongoing interactions with an environment in which each element, influenced by the next, influences them in return. This coexistence of different entities produces dynamic relationships, in the form of interrelations that shape our reality accordingly.

Any residency is an experimental endeavour of a profoundly relational nature. This invites us to consider, on the same conceptual plane, all of the contextual, social, technical, historical and economical factors at play. The voice of each of the actors (artists, researchers, companies, employees, residency sponsors, financiers), the economic context, the language, the applicable skills, technology, and standards, the process, the machines,

the material conditions, all make up the parameters of the residency experience.

Whether the research takes the form of a visual/plastic artwork, or a performance, the artist acts as a translator. Each of them transforms their immersive experience into a formal reality. But is this reality that of the artist alone or a shared reality?

Are the protagonists of the residency aware they are participants in the experiment? What disposition are they in? What is their degree of availability, the condition of their presence and attention? Did the residency lessen the feeling of coming from different worlds?

The notion of symmetry, placing those involved in the residency on equal footing, is one of the conditions of a residency's ethics and of its success. The artist is not the one that knows more or better. Neither is art an occupational hobby. The duration of the residency is a period of work. It must provide an opportunity to combat the deeply-rooted, romantic stereotype of an artist removed from reality, that possesses a gift rather than a profession.

What sets artists apart is their steadfast search for solutions, for workarounds, for other ways. They assimilate prohibitions and objections, they reach beyond expectations. The process is a nectar that can only be appreciated if we accept to experience a degree of uncertainty, not so much in the project's outcomes as in its formalisation. To accompany a residency is to protect its ability to re-articulate and renegotiate itself.

It is because a residency is not a matter of imperious necessity, in a vital sense—because it is liable to fail, because it is risky, because it dares to complexify—that at heart it carries the possibility of innovation and thus of a renewed comprehension of our society. Indeed, can an artist remain silent amidst the world's uproar?

By inviting reflection, challenging preconceptions, as well as in their search for meaning, artists do not content themselves with any given certitude. They set out to restore a more authentic relationship with reality, steering clear of ossifying it, namely by allowing space for audience interpretation. What at times plunges our societies into crisis, whether these crises be social, economic or political, is precisely an absence of awareness: a lack of awareness of the risks, a denial of reality. In a post-truth age, could artist residencies possibly be an antidote ?

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Biography of Bénédicte Chevallier

Bénédicte Chevallier is the director of the Mécènes du Sud Arles-Aix-Marseille collective. A graduate of Audencia Business School (Nantes), she previously worked as a production administrator at Vidéochroniques (Marseille) and co-directed the artist-run space RLBQ from 2000 to 2005. She developed the cultural programme of the Goethe-Institut Rabat/Casablanca and coordinated training programmes in graphic design, exhibition scenography, and digital publishing between 1995 and 2000. During this period, she also supported artist Mounir Fatmi at the launch of his international career.

Since 2006, within Mécènes du Sud—a collective of economic stakeholders committed to supporting contemporary art—she has led the mentoring of awarded artists, introduced patrons to contemporary creation, and developed artist residencies in private-sector companies.

Mécènes du Sud

Founded in 2003 in Aix-Marseille, Mécènes du Sud was born from a shared desire among local businesses to engage with and support contemporary artistic creation. Its members, drawn from the business world, believed that contact with the arts could help them move beyond the conventional frameworks of their activities. Each year, they co-produce artworks, projects, and events. Through the sensitive relationships that art fosters, they create fertile interactions with their environments, employees, and territories.

In 2007, the ambition to deepen the relationship between artists (financially supported by Mécènes du Sud) and corporate sponsors led to the establishment of the first residencies. These offered artists the opportunity to work in spaces provided by companies and fostered experimentation in unfamiliar contexts. Developed intuitively with artists from music, performing arts, and visual arts, these early residencies confirmed the mutual interest of both companies and artists in such exchanges.

In 2015, Mécènes du Sud published a practical guide entitled *How to Host an Artist Residency in Your Company*, which was updated and included in a publication commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture in 2019 on the same topic.

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Part 1 | Practical Guide:

Five key steps to developing an artistic residency in a private company

1. Opening the door: How to engage a private firm in hosting an artistic residency

2. Laying the foundations: How to prepare a successful cross-sector artistic residency intersectorielle

3. Clarifying the purpose: Defining the final outcome and balancing two realities

4. Establishing a reciprocal commitment: Building a meaningful and balanced partnership

5. Best practices for private companies: a practical Q&A for hosting an artistic residency



1. Opening the door: how to engage a private company for an artistic residency

«The first steps towards launching an artistic residency inside a private firm are delicate – and decisive.» It is not enough to propose a good idea: it must resonate, align with the company's values, and spark a shared curiosity. In *Hand to hand*, establishing a relationship of trust from the very first exchanges was the essential foundation for success.

1.0 How to identify the company?

Identifying a private company can begin with the search for a distinctive work environment – one shaped by strong professional gestures, specific technical, manual, or scientific know-how, or a deep connection to the territory or physical materials. When these elements resonate with an artistic practice, they create fertile ground for meaningful collaboration.

Beyond personal networks, various intermediaries can facilitate connection: chambers of commerce, regional development agencies, clusters of socially engaged firms, locally rooted cultural institutions, or events that intersect artistic creation and economic

dynamics. These are all contexts where initial conversations can naturally take shape.

INSIGHTS FROM THE HAND TO HAND EXPERIENCE

In Portugal and Croatia, the partners targeted sectors emblematic of their regions – the codfish industry and the salt marshes – and approached previously unknown companies, accepting delays, silences, and the need for patient follow-ups before any commitment could be secured.

1.1. Translating an artistic project into a shared opportunity

Approaching a company for an artistic residency is not a matter of patronage, but a proposal for collaboration – an opportunity for innovation and mutual engagement. The encounter is built through dialogue, a shared understanding of the artistic approach, and a climate of trust. Establishing a shared objective from the outset creates the conditions to highlight and

share valuable skills, know-how, and move beyond the idea simply hosting an artistic presence. The cultural operator or artist does not arrive with a turnkey project, but with the desire to co-create a bespoke experience.

Key principles

- The residency is part of a collaborative process, not an event imposed from the outside.
- It contributes to strengthening the company's human, cultural, and creative capital.
- It opens up new narrative perspectives to explore issues of sustainability, transmission, and transformation from a different angle.

INSIGHTS FROM THE HAND TO HAND EXPERIENCE

At the Grupeixe codpacking firm, in the salt marshes of Ston, or at the Joseph Perrier Champagne House, partner companies were reassured to discover that the residency was conceived as a space for highlighting collective identity – not as a disruption to their daily operations.

1.2. Finding Common ground: values first, form second

Before addressing the practical modalities of an artistic residency, it is essential to ground the exchange in shared values.

Too often, misunderstandings arise when the conversation begins with the form – a performance, an intervention, an "animation" – whereas the true entry point lies elsewhere: in the intention, the posture, or the commitment.

The artistic gesture needs a fertile ground – not a brief. The connection takes root in the gaps, the tensions, the unexpected resonances.

The Hand to hand experience showed that the most fruitful encounters often emerge from tangible concerns: attention to gestures, to embodied know-how, to workers' narratives, the material, the perception of time, and to the collective memory of a place or a profession.

How to identify shared values ?

Identifying these common anchor points in:

- What the company expresses publicly (communication, imagery, brand identity)
- What is transmitted through its practices (attachment to tradition, unresolved tensions, environmental responsibility, etc.);
- Position the residency not as an external addition, but as a way to enrich these values, question them, and make them visible through a new lens.

INSIGHTS FROM THE HAND TO HAND EXPERIENCE

At the Arches paper mill, it wasn't an ideological alignment that facilitated the meeting, but a resonance: the care taken to gestures, to material, and to the rhythm of the work.

It's a culture of doing that's matched by that of the artistic eye - without the need for an instruction manual.

1.3. Creating the conditions for commitment

Clearly expressing expectations—what the artist's presence concretely entails and how the collaboration fits within the context of the other—often helps anchor the project in a mutually understood reality.

Three practical levers to foster engagement:

- Anticipate the company's concrete concerns (productivity, safety, image, confidentiality)
- Refer to successful examples of past residencies or inspiring partnerships.
- Demonstrate a genuine understanding of the company's rhythm, constraints, and priorities.

INSIGHTS FROM THE HAND TO HAND EXPERIENCE

The most fruitful collaborations often began with informal, no-pressure meetings, where the residency was presented as a flexible, low-risk experiment. It wasn't the arguments, but the quality of the relationship that made the difference. Artists and cultural operators who approached companies not as supplicants, but as potential partners, found doors opened more easily. Sincerity, clarity, and mutual respect were what truly mattered.



Visit at Knud E. Hansen Denmark © Helsingør Teater

Key Guidelines

Five entry points for initiating collaboration with a private company

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1. From Interest to Real Commitment

Agreement in principle is not enough. Commitment is measured when a concrete decision is taken. To achieve this, trust, clarity and a flexible framework encourage action.

2. Identify the right Internal contacts

The initiative doesn't always come from top management. Key figures may include a team leader, a curious technician, or an assistant who shares information. These profiles can play a central role in the project's adoption and implementation.

3. Start from a concrete reality

A collaboration often emerges from a clearly expressed need or a specific challenge the company is facing; team restructuring, a desire for transmission, or a search for meaning.

4. Integrate the Company's Logic

Any artistic proposal is read through the company's own concerns: time, productivity, safety, communication. Taking these into account reinforces the project's credibility without diminishing its ambition.

5. Prioritise direct meetings

A site visit, a small-group meeting, or an informal exchange can spark interest more effectively than a written document. Trust is built through presence, dialogue, and listening.



Ludia Heege Torres - Petralatons - Furies 2025 ©Vincent Mureau

2. Laying the foundations: how to prepare a successful cross- sector artistic residency

An artistic residency within a company cannot be reduced to a set of administrative arrangements. It is at once relational, strategic, and sensitive. It creates the conditions for a shared experiment—free from tension or misunderstanding. This framework acts as a common ground from which to cohabit, negotiate, and adapt over time. The Hand to hand project—developed in contexts as diverse as an art paper mill, salt marshes, or a Champagne house—demonstrated that when this framework is clearly established from the start, the artistic project can evolve with more accuracy and freedom.

2.1. Defining a framework: creating the conditions for shared freedom

Establishing a clear framework between the company and the cultural operator or artist quickly proves essential. It is not a **checklist**, but a flexible structure that offers visibility to both parties and provides a foundation for ongoing dialogue.

In the *Hand to hand* project, every residency confirmed the importance of this minimal structure: duration, points of contact, locations, rhythm... While this framework was often adjusted along the way, its initial presence allowed both artist and company to engage with confidence.

Why is this framework essential?

- It provides the artists with a **clearly defined space of freedom**, where they can navigate without facing last-minute constraints or refusals.
- It helps the company understand its role, commitments, and the contours of the project in terms of time and space.
- It establishes the **basis for ongoing dialogue**, rather than imposing a rigid set of requirements.

In *Hand to hand*, we worked rigorously to establish the following foundations:

A defined duration

Each residency followed a ten-day consecutive format. This limited time frame allowed for an initial immersion without disrupting the company's internal operations. It enabled the artist's presence to become part of the company's daily rhythm, while

remaining manageable from a logistical standpoint. However, the short duration limited the opportunity to build deeper relationships with teams or to foster a lasting collaborative dynamic.

A dedicated workspace

The use of space was a subject of negotiation with each company. A clearly designated area for rehearsals and research is essential for the artist in residence—whether a workshop, a sheltered outdoor site, or a studio. In many cases, artists had to adapt to unconventional settings, including public spaces or semi-industrial environments such as ports.

Most private firms were able to provide a rehearsal space (such as the cellars of a champagne house, a room at Fila Arches, or an area in a shipbuilding workshop in Denmark). However, this was not always possible due to logistical constraints or

because the available locations were not suited to the needs of the artist—as was the case in the cod-processing industry in Portugal. In these instances, partners arranged for alternative venues so that artists could rehearse and create in more appropriate conditions (such as a shaded room in Croatia or a dedicated rehearsal studio in Portugal).

A budget

A transparent and realistic budget was a fundamental condition: artist fees, travel, accommodation, and production costs were covered by the lead cultural operator in each country hosting the residency. The allocated resources enabled a clear and coherent commitment in line with the project's principles—particularly regarding environmental responsibility (sustainable mobility, local purchasing, low-impact accommodation).





Level of interaction with employees

The question of employee involvement was present across all residencies. Each partner engaged in dialogue with the host companies.

Some firms welcomed the artists with great openness—site visits, spontaneous conversations, and sharing moments with the artists (such as daily discussions with salt marsh workers)—which fostered a gradual immersion. In other cases, more structured forms of interaction had to be arranged (visites, interviews, shared working time in spaces such as the champagne cellars.) These moments helped gather narratives from employees and allowed the artists to learn specific techniques—such as vine lifting or traditional salt harvesting in the marshes.

Except in Portugal, a public presentation concluded each residency, with a

particular focus on employees. These moments offered them an opportunity to discover the work developed and to perceive the reciprocity of the exchange between the artist and those who had "given" their time.

Since the project was designed to be shared, it was essential to allow employees to express their curiosity and to engage in dialogue with the artist in return.

A referent

The role of mediation has been essential in each of the four countries involved. The mediator's task was to decrypt what was unfolding during the residency – both for the artist and for the company. They also handled the logistical preparation beforehand, helping the artist access the necessary people, resources, and spaces.



Exploration time IlhaVooJoão Verso Poltão



Mille Lurdt - In the vineyards Joseph Perrier Châlons en Champagne © Sébastien Rousseau

Key questions for co-constructing a framework

- How many days are available for the artist ? Are they consecutive or spread out?
- Is the artist's presence compatible with the company's rhythm (quiet or peak periods)?
- Where can the artist work? Is there a designated space they can use to settle in, create, and return to?
- Which areas are accessible or off-limits (for safety or confidentiality reasons)?
- What type of interaction is expected with employees – spontaneous, structured, occasional?
- Are internal contacts identified to help facilitate the connection (team leader, HR representative, etc.)?
- Does the budget cover actual costs (artist fees, transportation, materials, accommodation)?
- Who is in charge of logistical coordination (welcoming, materials, contacts)?
- Are there specific requirements regarding confidentiality, image rights, or documentation?
- Are there any particular points of attention (safety, hygiene, industrial confidentiality)?

2.2. Understanding the terrain: navigate the realities of private sector life

Immersing oneself in a company means entering an ecosystem shaped by both explicit rules (safety, production) and implicit ones (hierarchies, silences, rhythms). This context is not an obstacle to be bypassed, but a framework to be observed, interpreted, and integrated. In Hand to hand, these constraints became points of leverage: they shifted initial intentions – often towards greater accuracy and relevance.

Confidentiality: What cannot be shown can still be translated

Confidentiality is a central issue – not only in legal terms, but also symbolically. In several residencies, artists were not allowed to record, photograph, or even describe certain gestures or spaces. Companies carefully protect their processes, products, and innovations. In places such as Fila Arches and the Joseph Perrier Champagne House, artists were only permitted to observe selected stages of production to avoid disclosing trade secrets.

These limitations led the artists to develop more sensitive, fragmentary, and sometimes abstract forms of expression.

At Fila Arches (FR): Lucia Heege Torres had to adapt her work to strict movement regulations within the company. She was not granted free access to all production areas, which led her to focus on the unwinding

room, observing the paper, its textures, and developing a partially fictional narrative around pollution* (*a stain on the paper).

At Grupeixe (PT): Juana Ortega Kippes and Amir Guetta were not permitted to film or photograph inside the factory. This led them also to work outside the production site, in public space and a studio, developing a more poetic and abstract language based on sound, remembered gestures, and objects.

Safety & hygiene: bodies at a distance

Regulations often shaped the physical presence of the artists, defining narrow margins of movement – yet these constraints sometimes became fertile ground for creative adaptation.

At Grupeixe (PT), the very low temperatures and strict hygiene conditions restricted access, prompting the artists to work off-site and at a distance.

In salt marshes in Ston (HR), weather conditions dictated the pace and timing of the artistic immersion.

Productivity: Fragmented Time

Work in private companies follows a logic of productivity that rarely includes "available time" for art. The residencies had to adapt to segmented rhythms and divided attention.

In Ston (HR), the salt harvest depended not only on natural cycles but also on the availability of labour. The artists chose to be present

during both the intense work periods and the slower moments – times of transition, waiting, and suspension.

In Arches (FR), the production schedule fragmented the artist's time on site. Each gesture followed a precise order, part of a centuries-old technical chain, yet constantly challenged by modern demands. The artist could not engage in long conversations with workers during their shifts and had to work with brief, often informal, encounters between two tasks. This constraint deeply shaped the project: instead of trying to capture or stage the gestures, the artist focused on their rhythm, their resonance, their silent materiality – the vibrations of the paper, recurring sounds, traces on the walls. The creative process became a subtle extension of the production chain.

2.3. adapt and create: transform constraints into artistic content

An artistic residency within a company is not simply a frame that “hosts” an existing project – it is a context that transforms it. This doesn't mean diluting the artistic intention or “making do,” but acknowledging that adapting the project can become a creative driver.

In *Hand to hand*, every artist had to renegotiate elements of their initial vision : the space, the timeline, the format of the outcome, and their relational stance within the company.

Three types of adaptation observed across the residencies

1. Spatial adaptation: working with non-artistic spaces

At Grupeixe (PT), the artist was not allowed to create within the factory itself. She shifted her creative process into nearby public spaces. This displacement became a source of inspiration : the project explored the boundary between the factory and its surroundings, between the visible and the unseen.

2. Temporal adaptation: fragmenting, slowing down, circumvent

At Arches (FR), the residency unfolded through short but regular sessions, fitted around the production cycles. This gave rise to a fragmented yet in-depth artistic process.

At Ston (HR), natural rhythms—heat, storms delaying salt collection—dictated the pace of the residency. The artist chose to wait, to remain available. She shifted from a choreographed performance to an improvisation inspired by the rhythmic gestures of salt workers under the scorching sun.

3. Relational adaptation: redefining the artist's role

At Grupeixe in Ílhavo (PT), the artist took on a discreet observational stance—without camera or notebook. The connection was built slowly, through shared daily gestures

and conversations. The final work emerged from this gradual build-up of trust.

At the Maritime Workshop in Helsingør (DK), the artists developed a relationship of mutual curiosity and trust with the boat owners. Some of them shared deeply personal stories related to the sea and navigation – these narratives became central to their artistic project.

Adjustment strategies rather than concessions

Far from being compromises, these adaptations allowed some projects to become genuinely site-specific, rooted in the social and material context. They also helped avoid superficial effects or spectacular forms disconnected from the environment.

What this means in terms of support

For cultural operators and project partners, this implies:

- Building flexibility into the initial framework (regarding time, space, budget, and outcomes);
- Supporting artists through these adjustments without isolating or patronizing them;
- Accepting that the "outcome" may not fit conventional expectations for artistic presentation.

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Mille Lundt - in the vineyards Joseph Perrier-Chalons-en-Champagne © Sébastien Rousseau

3. Clarifying the intention behind the final outcome and balancing two realities

A cross-sector artistic residency is a dynamic process of encounter, negotiation, and transformation. In Hand to hand, this stage helped establish the trust needed for artists and companies to take creative risks together.

3.1. Clarifying the nature and visibility of the final outcome

Clarifying intention also means setting realistic expectations about what the residency will produce:

- Will there be a final presentation? If so, in what form: a public showing, an internal sharing, or a documentary format?
- Will the project be shared beyond the company (through festivals, publications, or communication platforms)?
- How will both parties be acknowledged (logos, credits, interviews, co-signatures)?

INSIGHTS FROM THE HAND TO HAND EXPERIENCE

The seven prototypes that emerged from these residencies were presented at international festivals (PASSAGE, LEME, Peculiar Families festival, FURIES) in a wide variety of settings and performance spaces – ports, beaches, boat renovation workshop, industrial wastelands – while remaining true to the realities that had originally inspired them.

Key principles

The quality of an artistic outcome is not defined by its level of polish, but by the depth and accuracy of the connection it creates with the people and places it engages.

3.2. Finding balance between artistic freedom and organisational reality

This is perhaps where the greatest challenge – and the greatest potential – lies. The artist needs a space for free, intuitive exploration. The company must feel that its organisational structure and working environment are respected.

How to balance this tension?

- Encourage regular, informal conversations beyond official check-ins.
- Allow room for on-the-fly adjustments.
- View the unexpected not as a disruption, but as an opportunity to collectively revisit and reshape the project framework.

INSIGHTS FROM THE HAND TO HAND EXPERIENCE

In the salt marshes or the vineyards, weather conditions, production schedules, and human rhythms often shaped the course of the residency. Instead of clinging to fixed plans, partners learned to adapt – like a choreography adjusting to a living space.



Exploration time Croatia ©Glorija Lizde

4. Establishing a reciprocal commitment: building a partnership

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An artistic residency can only thrive over time if it is conceived from the outset as a reciprocal relationship. It is neither a service nor an intrusion, but rather a meeting between two worlds – each offering the other a valuable form of knowledge, experience, or perspective.

4.1. Clarifying what each side brings – and what each receives

To avoid misunderstandings, both parties must clearly articulate what they bring to the table and what they expect in return:

- **From the company:** providing a work space, time for exchanges with employees, sharing of know-how, operational flexibility, and sometimes material or financial support.
- **From the artist:** a creative presence, artistic contributions, cultural visibility, and new perspectives that enrich the everyday work environment.

INSIGHTS FROM THE HAND TO HAND EXPERIENCE

Some companies were surprised by the intangible effects of the residency: workers rediscovered the value of forgotten gestures;

employees regained a sense of pride in their know-how through the artist's perspective—and simply came together around a shared artistic project.

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4.2. Fostering employee involvement

Employees often embody the living identity of a company. Their participation can deeply enrich a residency project – provided it is approached with sensitivity.

- Offer multiple entry points: open rehearsals, informal conversations, knowledge-sharing moments.
- Respect boundaries: participation cannot be forced.
- Value every contribution, no matter how small: even a brief exchange can nourish the creative process.

INSIGHTS FROM THE HAND TO HAND EXPERIENCE

At Solana Ston (HR), simple exchanges – such as demonstrating traditional salt raking techniques—became profound artistic material when approached with respect and wonder.



Darya Elmat et Nathalie Roy - Porze Public test ©Nicolaï Perleesi

5. Best practices for private firms: a practical Q&A for hosting an artistic residency

Hosting an artist-in-residence within a company may, at first glance, seem unusual. It often raises legitimate questions – and sometimes uncertainty.

The following section draws on the *Hand to hand* project to address the most frequently expressed concerns from firms and offers concrete approaches for building smooth and constructive collaborations.

5.1. How can we prevent the residency from disrupting our workflow?

Careful planning beforehand allows the residency to integrate smoothly into the company's routine. Before the residency is starting, it's important to define together:

- Working hours that suit both parties.
- Spaces where creative work can take place without disrupting production.
- Clear moments when employee interaction is encouraged – and times when it should be avoided.

In *Hand to hand*, artists adjusted their schedules to match the working rhythms

of vineyards, champagne cellars, salt marshes, or the boat renovation workshop. Some rehearsals were held outside of core hours or in peripheral spaces to ensure that daily operations remained undisturbed. .

Key principles

A successful residency aligns with the company's tempo without disrupting its flow.

5.2. How to handle confidentiality and industrial secrets?

This question should be addressed from the outset. It's important to clarify together:

- Which spaces, gestures, or types of information are considered sensitive.
- If necessary, sign a non-disclosure agreement with the artist
- That any recordings (photos, videos, audio) must be submitted for approval beforehand.

These guidelines help prevent misunderstandings. In *Hand to hand*, companies such as Joseph Perrier and the Arches Paper Mill clearly defined

their boundaries—enabling a smooth and trust-based collaboration.

Key principles

Clear rules build mutual trust.

5.3. What if employees don't want to get involved ?

Participation can't be imposed. Some employees are naturally curious; others may prefer to observe from a distance. To foster an open atmosphere:

- Arrange informal moments (e.g., coffee breaks, open rehearsals) where employees can engage if they wish;
 - Offer very accessible activities - short interactions that do not demand artistic skills ;
 - Present the artist clearly before the start of the residency, explaining their presence and purpose.
- In *Hand to hand*, simple moments - such as shared lunches or casual conversations - often proved more effective than formal presentations.

Key principles

Engagement grows often organically through exchanges, not through an obligation.

5.4. What kind of support does the artist expect from the company?

The most important support is occasional but well-structured:

- A dedicated space, even a modest one;

- A designated point of contact within the company;

- Easy access to certain resources (information, materials).

Hand to hand artists were trained to work independently and to respect the constraints of each setting. Their presence did not require constant support or supervision.

Key principles

A clear framework and a few internal contacts are often enough for the artist to move forward independently.

5.5. What if something unexpected happens?

Uncertainty is part of any creative process. What matters is how it is managed:

- Keep communication open throughout the residency;
- Plan regular check-ins, even informal ones;
- Address any difficulties early and collaboratively.

The Hand to hand experience showed that flexibility and active listening help defuse tensions before they become real obstacles.

Key principles

Unexpected events become creative resources when space for dialogue is preserved.

This flexible and pragmatic approach enabled a wide variety of companies – from a codfish cannery to a champagne house – to welcome artistic creation without compromising their operational reality.



Exploration time Ilhavo ©JoãoVersosRoldão



Pamela Blaz, 'Squat Down', Saltmarshes Croatia ©Glorija Lizde

Part 2: Case studies

based on Hand to hand

Each case study highlights the specific context of a collaboration with a company in one of the participating countries, **the challenges encountered, the transformative effects, and the insights gained** from the Hand to Hand project - through the perspectives of artists, companies, and partners.

- **Partner perspective:** Antonia Kuzmanic, Director of ROOM 100, on an immersive residency in the Ston salt marshes (**Croatia**).

- **Artist perspectives:** Darya Efrat (DE/IL) and Mathilde Roy (FR), reflecting on their residency at a wooden boat restoration workshop and boatbuilding school in Helsingør, in collaboration with partner Helsingør Teater (**Denmark**).

- **Company perspective:** Marie-Claire Michel, Marketing Manager at Fila Arches (**France**).

- **Artist perspectives:** Juana Ortega Kippes (ES/AR) and Amir Guetta (FR/IL), on their immersive residency at Grupeixe, a cod processing and distribution company in Ílhavo, in collaboration with partner Bússola (**Portugal**).

1. Labor, Art, and the Workers of Ston

“Contemporary circus and performing arts thrive when we challenge norms, embrace experimentation, and forge unexpected collaborations.”

ANTONIA KUZMANIĆ
Room 100 - Croatia

In July 2024, ROOM 100 collective organized a residency in the salt marshes of Ston, Croatia. Here, artists Clara Cortés Soler (Spain), Perrine Budan (France) and me, ROOM 100's director, spent ten days laboring alongside local workers, knee-deep in mud, under the same conditions that have defined this work for 4,000 years.

This was not a romanticized artist retreat. It was a confrontation—with labor, with cultural neglect, and with **the widening gap between contemporary art and the people it claims to represent.**

Salt is not just a mineral; it is a historical commodity of power, traded as currency, taxed by empires, and now, in the age of climate collapse, a vanishing practice. The choice to center this residency on salt production was deliberate: **to**

expose the disconnect between the art world's performative "sustainability" and the actual, unglamorous labor behind it. While Europe funds "green" performances, the workers in Ston—who depend on the whims of weather—receive no such support.

Why we went to Ston? Croatia's has three saltmarshes in total. Pag's salt is mass-produced under artificial conditions. Nin's is eco-certified—meaning access is restricted, only for workers. Ston, the oldest, survives on tradition alone...

The six salt harvesters we worked with ranged from 16 to 62 years old—some high school dropouts, others with university degrees, their political views spanning from "Tito was a criminal" to "Tito was a saint." None had ever seen contemporary circus. None had been to a performance that wasn't a local fiesta

or a concert of a popular musician "that everybody loves".

They were curious but wary. "If we go to the theater," one said, "we know the rules : sit quietly, clap at the end. But what are the rules when art happens in our place of work?" Their hesitation wasn't indifference—it was the result of systemic neglect regarding education towards culture and arts...

The salt company initially took our project as a whimsical idea, treating July 2024 as an abstract future they couldn't plan for. When the residency approached, a couple of months before, we learned the annual summer camp—where we were supposed to work—had been canceled. Due to the climate change and the impossibility of predicting accurately when the salt harvesting is going to start, they didn't have the budget to accommodate volunteers and feed them if they are there and the harvesting has not started yet.

So we adapted. When three of us first arrived at the saltmarshes, the six workers couldn't believe their eyes that three female artists came to work with them at 6am. For free. Between doing the hard physical work of cleaning the pools from mud that is blocking the natural flow of sea water, sharing a breakfast (and the beer) at 10am, we have learnt that this tradition of salt harvesting has been passed down for years, thousands of them, and since then, salt has been produced in the same way, only with the help of the sea, sun, and wind. The saltmarshes have 58 pools, which are

divided into five groups, because the entire process has five phases and the final phase – crystallization - takes one to two months, depending on the weather. They taught us that one summer storm could erase a year's labor.

But what did they gain from us? Awareness? A sense of being "seen"? The real question is whether projects like this is solidarity or just another form of extraction—where artists take inspiration from labor they'll never have to depend on, while the workers return to their underpaid, climate-threatened jobs. If contemporary circus, if any art, wants to claim relevance, it must ask harder questions. Who is culture for? Who gets to define "participation"? And what happens when the workers who sustain our metaphors (salt, sea, sweat) are left out of the conversation entirely?

A message to our colleagues or artists considering doing something similar?

In a time when artistic depth often feels diluted, dare to push boundaries. Contemporary circus and performing arts thrive when we challenge norms, embrace experimentation, and forge unexpected collaborations. This kind of exploratory work isn't just a creative risk—it's a vital spark for inspiration, attracting new audiences and revitalising the art form. If you're hesitating at the edge of what's possible: leap. The world needs bold, authentic voices now more than ever.

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Darya Efrat and Mathilde Roy - UNORD and Maritim Workshop Hall 16 © Caroline Pejtersi

2. Helsingør – Immersion in the Maritime Environment

“Remember you are a guest in this space-coming to listen to the people, space, surroundings, rather than imposing something from the outside. Be grateful to those you meet along the way.”

DARYA EFRAT & MATHILDE ROY

Helsingør Teater - DENMARK

In May 2024, artists **Mathilde Roy** (FR) and **Darya Efrat** (DE/IL) carried out their immersion residency in **Helsingør**, Denmark, as part of the *Hand to hand* project, coordinated locally by **Helsingør Teater**.

Helsingør is the Danish city that has invested most significantly in culture, particularly in its harbor area. In addition to Hamlet's famous castle, Kronborg, the port district now hosts a large, newly built cultural center, a maritime museum, and the Øresund Aquarium—a research institution affiliated with the University of Copenhagen, focused on the marine ecosystems surrounding Helsingør.

The harbor is also home to a range of traditional boatbuilding crafts, now housed in the old shipyard halls that once belonged to the now-defunct Helsingør Shipyard.

The residency explored the **links between traditional craftsmanship, sustainability, and maritime culture**. It was based primarily in Maritime Workshop Hall 16, an emblematic site of Danish maritime heritage, where the knowledge of wooden boat restoration is still transmitted today. The surrounding area, steeped in a maritime atmosphere, became an extended field of observation and inspiration.

The Maritime Workshop is a unique

space in Denmark, open to the public, where often century-old wooden boats are restored using traditional techniques. A living heritage site, the workshop combines ancestral crafts with contemporary conservation practices. Among the vessels restored are major pieces from Denmark's 20th-century naval heritage. The space welcomes not only professional boatbuilders but also passionate amateurs and curious visitors who come to witness the delicate craft of wood and time.

Rather than being asked to "work alongside" the craftsmen, the artists were invited to immerse themselves in a world of gestures, materials, and sounds: planing, sanding, assembling, maintaining, repairing. This active workshop is animated by a culture of making, of precision, and of memory.

The residency also involved exchanges with Søren Jacobsen, the last professional fisherman in the municipality. His stories of the sea, of fishing quotas, of navigation and daily fish auctions, offered a sensitive **counterpoint—evoking the rhythms, solitude, and personal commitments of the trade.** However, due to unfavorable weather conditions, going out to sea was ultimately not possible.

Thanks to flexible coordination, the artists redirected their immersion toward two essential anchors: the Maritime Workshop and the U/NORD boatbuilding school, Denmark's national training center for marine carpentry. There, they engaged with students, instructors, artisans, and enthusiasts, adapting their

artistic process to this new context.

Darya Efrat and Mathilde Roy worked in what they described as "comfortable working conditions" and felt they "benefited from complete freedom, as well as constant support from the team, who provided solutions for all their technical needs."

"We met the people with whom we were able to collaborate in two contexts. The first was the boat-building school, and in particular a student who taught us a traditional method of constructing sailor's bags, and provided us with the scraps we needed to make the 30 bags we use today for the public. The other people who helped us were the boat owners who welcomed us and entrusted us with their personal stories relating to the sea and boats, which became the subject of the show."

These diverse exchanges nourished **a reflection on gestures, materials, learning, and collective memory. Far from a fixed program, the residency made room for the unexpected and for adaptation,** fostering a dynamic of listening and exchange. Many of the people encountered during the process even attended the public presentations at the end of the residency, demonstrating the connection that had been built.

According to **Jens Frimann Hansen**, director of Helsingør Teater, "The greatest surprise was to see how productive the meeting between the artists and the craftsmen was, was very great with us. The resilience on both sides of the fence was striking, and

only confirms that when such **different worlds and people meet, we have an inherent mechanism in us to succeed.**

The meeting was most difficult in the more theoretical, engineering-oriented world, otherwise a meeting where knowledge was generously shared, but where the worlds in the long run turned out to be too different.

The biggest challenges thus also lay in the planning of the project. To get all the participants to believe that it could be a meaning-creating project, even though the meetings were associated with a risk and that the circus world and the many different types of worlds the artists had to meet were in many cases far apart.

Passage Festival has no facilities or fixed practices for residencies. Each residency is defined each time anew in a collaboration between the artists and the festival. The artists appreciated the joint lunch every day at 12 noon, where they met all the festival's employees and also other artists. This aspect strengthened well-being, presence and commitment. Hand to hand ended up showing in every way that **art could also play an important role in the maritime field and there are related areas, especially around sustainability.**

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**Words by Darya & Mathilde
collected by Jens Frimann
Hansen**

What was transformative and unexpected

"What surprised and interested us was the relationship with the freedom of a boat and the idea of navigation. Here we met people attached to a form of translation, who sailed and looked after traditional sailing boats using noble materials like wood.

These people were linked to the sea and had a respectful relationship with navigation.

We had the opportunity to climb aboard one woman's sailboat, with a crew of three; three women and sail with them. We were able to taste the rhythm and silence and the sense of freedom that the people we interviewed spoke of.

We experienced it physically and hope that it can be felt in *Porøs*. We weren't expecting anything in particular, but we wanted to be open and porous to the people and landscapes we met."

Challenges and adaptations

"The most challenging moments were those linked to the creation process and the questions that arose during it. **How to translate, recreate and transmit the emotions and encounters we experienced during the immersion residency to our audience?** How to relate this or that feeling, and doubting what the audience would receive. For us, the challenges were also linked to demanding specifications by HTH, sometimes too demanding in our opinion: being in touch with the workers, with the environment and talking about social ecology while doing circus- in hindsight, we find this quite limiting to the creative process.

Additional limitations arose also in the adaptation of the work to each festival. Most locations worked with our initial requirements and proposition of the work- that it be performed at dawn or dusk, and that the route include water. But in other locations this wasn't possible- causing some frustration and limiting to our ability to perform *Porøs* as we envisioned it.

Lastly, as this was the first time working together as a duo- we too had to go through a learning process in order to understand each other better and build trust."

Advice for future projects

If we had to give one piece of advice to another cultural operator or artist considering doing this, it would be..."to try to anticipate your needs as far in advance as possible. Take margins on what you need to allow yourself some flexibility.

- Remember you are a guest in this space
- coming to listen to the people, space, surroundings, rather than imposing something from the outside.
- Be grateful to those you meet along the way.
- Be patient and open to observe the things unfold in their own".

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Mathilde Roy - UNORD and Marilijn Worksh... 16©Caroline Perjesi



Darya Efrat and Mathilde Roy - Pores - Funes 2025 @Philippe Cibille



Lucia Heege Torres / Arches résidence Châlons-en-Champagne ©ImagesEnBate

3- Immersion at Arches in an historic art paper manufacturing company

“Hosting an artist in an industrial site is no small feat. It’s a mutual challenge: between the strict constraints of production, branding, and safety, and an artistic process that is, by nature, open, exploratory, and unpredictable.”

FANNY BORDIER
European manager of the Hand to hand project

Le Palc-Pôle National Cirque
Châlons-en-Champagne - FRANCE

In June 2024, Lucia Heege Torres (ES) undertook an immersive residency at the **Arches Paper Mill** in the Vosges region (Grand Est, France), as part of the Hand to Hand project, coordinated by **Le PALC – Pôle National Cirque** Grand Est.

This emblematic production site, founded in 1492 and now a subsidiary of the Italian group F.I.L.A., is internationally renowned for the exceptional quality of its mould-made fine art papers. Recognized as a “Living Heritage Company,” Fila Arches represents a centuries-old expertise

that blends artisanal precision with sustainable innovation.

Located in the town of Arches – a historic papermaking hub – the mill benefits from a unique regional know-how, passed down through generations. The Arches Paper Mill uses pure mineral water, essential for the paper's quality. Abundant in the Vosges, this water comes from the site's natural groundwater sources. It cannot be chemically treated and is only filtered to remove any impurities. The papermakers affectionately refer to it as “belle eau” (“beautiful water”).

In this highly structured company, marked by technical constraints, strict workflows, and a strong culture of precision, the residency aimed to open a space of encounter between the artistic and industrial worlds.

With support from the paper mill teams and the Hand to hand project coordinator, Lucia Heege Torres spent ten days in the company, focusing especially on the women working in the unwinding room*, where each individual sheet of paper is examined and checked to ensure it meets the highest quality standards.

The residency was built around a sensitive process of observation, listening, and site-specific creation. Lucia alternated between exploring the nearby Vosges forest – seen as a poetic counterpoint to the production environment – and immersing herself daily in the workshops of the firm. She shared meals with employees, observed technical gestures, recorded work narratives, and began sketching the outlines of a dramaturgy based on collected sounds, drawings, movements, and voices.

The process was supported remotely by artistic mentor Delphine Lanson and, on site, by researcher Magali Sizorn, who engaged in dialogue around themes such as sustainability, invisible gestures, and situated practices.

Hosting an artist in an industrial site like Fila Arches is no small feat. It's a mutual challenge: between the strict constraints of production, branding, and safety, and an artistic process that is, by nature, open, exploratory, and unpredictable. Yet it was precisely within this tension that the most powerful dimensions of the residency emerged.

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Interview conducted by Fanny Bordier with Marie Claire Michel, Head of Marketing at Fila Arches.

What was transformative and unexpected

One of the most striking moments occurred at the very end of the residency, two days before Lucia's artistic presentation to the employees. Lucia had built her project around interviews conducted with several of the plant's operators. However, upon review, it became clear that some of the recordings contained sensitive content – comments that could potentially harm the company's image. It then became necessary to inform her that these excerpts could not be used.

This decision was difficult to communicate: I took the time to explain the reasons behind it, and then we listened to all the material together in

* At the end of the production process, the sheets are cut and meticulously inspected – visually and by touch – by a mostly female team. Each paper roll is unwound, and the sheets are hand-torn to preserve their distinctive four deckle edges. Every sheet is carefully reviewed on a light table. Any sheet containing even the slightest defect is eliminated and recycled.

order to select what could be retained. What deeply impressed me was the way Lucia responded. In a very short time, she managed to rethink her project and find a new creative direction.

What also surprised me, was the nature of the confidences shared by some of the operators. They spoke, at times spontaneously, about not only their professional struggles but also personal difficulties—an unexpected level of intimacy in the factory setting. On her side, Lucia was unsettled by what she perceived as a lack of enthusiasm or passion from some of them. These gaps in perception raised important questions about how people experience their work, about projected expectations, and about the place an artist can occupy in a production environment.

Challenges and Adjustments

There were many challenges. **Hosting an artist in an industrial site like Fila Arches required numerous adjustments.** Several constraints had to be taken into account from the very beginning:

- **The protection of manufacturing secrets**, which prohibited any filming or visual recording on-site,
- **Safeguarding the company's image** and complying with its external communication policy,
- **Strict safety regulations**, which made free movement through the factory impossible,
- **And, finally, the absolute necessity of respecting workshop schedules and production rhythms**, with a strict adherence to the pre-agreed timetable.

It was also necessary to reconcile the industrial pace—with its non-negotiable schedules and work cycles—with the more flexible timeframe of the artistic process. **An additional last-minute constraint** arose: the location for the final presentation, originally planned with the company's employees, had to be changed urgently at the request of the plant's Safety Manager. This unexpected constraint required a rapid reorganization on our end, which Lucia integrated with great professionalism.

But perhaps the greatest challenge was the **mediation**. Explaining to Lucia why some contents could not be used—without breaking trust or stifling artistic momentum—required constant communication. It was through this dialogue that the fragile yet fruitful balance of this collaboration was built.

Advices for Future Projects

It is essential to take the time—well in advance—to fully understand the goals of the artistic project and to assess its potential impacts.

It is equally important to clearly establish the company's internal rules from the outset, particularly concerning safety, communication, and confidentiality. Throughout the residency, regular check-ins between the artist and an internal point of contact are crucial to ensure the process remains aligned with the company's values and the positioning of its products—since certain tensions may arise, even without any conscious intent from the artist.

Ongoing dialogue is precisely what allows for anticipation, adjustment, and the building of a truly meaningful and productive encounter.

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Lucia Heege Torres - Petralains France ©ImagesEnBoite



Lucia Heege Torres - Petralains France ©ImagesEnBoite



Lucia Heege Jones - Petal in France © ImagesElBoite



Juana Ortega Kippes - Amphibian Matter - Furies 2025 ©Vincent Murteau

4. Immersion in the Codfish Industry of Ílhavo, Portugal

“It took me time to learn how to be there without making them feel I was there. I was curious - and they carried on, as if poetry and repetition were one and the same.”

JUANA ORTEGA KIPPES

Bússola - PORTUGAL

In 2024, Juana Ortega Kippes (FR/AR) and Amir Guetta (FR/IL) undertook a ten-day artistic immersion inside the industrial universe of Grupeixe, a codfish processing and export company based in Gafanha da Nazaré, Ílhavo - a coastal region shaped by Portugal's deep maritime legacy and the enduring symbolism of the codfish. The residency has been developed and coordinated locally by Bússola, in partnership with 23 Milhas / Municipality of Ílhavo.

Grupeixe, a family-rooted business deeply embedded in the local economy, offered a space rarely accessed by outsiders - a place where industrial repetition meets ancestral knowledge, and where the flow of raw materials is as

constant as the salt in the air. This wasn't a symbolic venue, but a real, functioning environment: fluorescent-lit, cold, humid, and alive with the rhythm of production. Within this context, the artists were invited not to perform, but to observe, absorb, and inhabit - to approach the factory not as a backdrop, but as a living, social and sensorial landscape.

The codfish industry, with its links to Portuguese identity, global trade, and environmental transformation, became a gateway to reflect on more-than-human connections, invisible labour, and bodily knowledge. The artists were hosted directly in the production space and encouraged **to attune themselves to the gestures, sounds, conversations, and patterns of the workers - most of whom were women** - engaged daily

in the transformation of cod into a marketable product.

With no prior script or rigid objective, the residency proposed **a form of situated artistic research, where immersion was not a means to an end, but a method in itself.** Juana and Amir worked both individually and collaboratively, exchanging insights as they developed distinct yet resonant approaches to the environment that surrounded them. Rather than extract a narrative, they allowed the rhythms of the place to shape their process.

Despite the short duration, the experience revealed a dense poetic universe within the codfish industry - one shaped by repetition, tactility, silence, and shared endurance. It demanded **a translation of non-visible narratives into public space**, while dealing with layered complexities such as production cycles, invisibilised labour, environmental impact, and gendered physicality. In this demanding yet generous context, it was the company's openness, the artists' sensitive positioning, and the careful curatorial mentorship that made the residency possible - not as an artistic intervention, but as a practice of attention and care.

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Words collected by Bruno Costa from Juana Ortega Kippes and Amir Guetta

What was transformative and unexpected

For Juana Ortega Kippes, the residency at Grupeixe became a lesson in presence. From the very beginning, she understood that her role was not to interrupt or interpret too quickly, but to listen, to decelerate. "It took me time to understand how to be there without making them feel I was there", she says. "I was honestly curious about the material, the gestures, the movements - but also the atmosphere.

What they said while they worked, the rhythm of it, the space between words and actions... it was a soft, inspiring dystopia". Her initial impulse to conduct formal interviews dissolved in favour of spontaneous conversations and shared silences. "There was no need to structure. Things emerged when they had to".

Amir Guetta shared a similar surprise: "I expected the workers to be less joyful, more tired or distant. But I was truly impressed by their openness and happiness - even if we'll never know whether it was because we were there, or if they are always like that". He was particularly struck by the energy in their eyes, the strength and joy they maintained despite the physical and repetitive nature of their work. "They were smiling, full of life. It was moving to witness".

What struck Juana most was the energy and pride of the workers, their precision and joy, even within the physically demanding conditions of the codfish line. And perhaps more surprisingly, the gendered makeup of the workspace : "They were all women - except for one man. That changed how I looked at everything. The cadence, the humour, the strength - it was a powerful, invisible sisterhood".

For Amir, the visual and sensory impact was also powerful - though at times unsettling. As a vegetarian and animal lover, he described the image of "tons of dead bodies" evoking memories of death camps, admitting that this personal association challenged him emotionally. Still, he acknowledged the professionalism and grace of the workers, calling them "lovely women of all ages and types, working so hard".

Challenges and adaptations

The main challenge, she reflects, was conceptual: **how to evoke a wider human condition through a very specific industrial context?** "I didn't want to talk about codfish. Or even just about them. I wanted to create something that speaks about us - our survival, our rituals, our endurance - without betraying what I witnessed". The clarity of the project's frame - its time limitations, safety rules, and industrial rhythms - were not obstacles, but "**margins**" within which she could explore. There were no tensions with the host company, which allowed a quiet trust to develop between observer and observed. "They let us in. That was enough". What followed was

not collaboration in the conventional sense, but **coexistence**: a shared space where observation was permitted, but never staged; where routines continued as usual, yet the presence of the artists added a layer of quiet reflection. In this silent agreement, a unique kind of mutual respect emerged - one that did not rely on words or gestures, but on consistency, proximity, and attentiveness. The residency became a **choreography of distance and presence**, where the artist's role was not to interpret, explain or **intervene**, but to witness and to allow meaning to emerge from what was already happening. It was an act of humility - and of profound creative listening. For

Amir, one of the most difficult challenges was **establishing dialogue**. The workers' time was extremely limited - breaks were short, the rhythm relentless, and any conversation had to happen in the **middle of the work process**. "I found it difficult to approach and disturb them while they were cutting fish heads or salting bodies. I understand why, but it made real exchange almost impossible".

He suggests that, if dialogue is truly intended, then specific time must be organised with the workers - though he recognises the practical difficulty of doing so.

Still, Juana identifies a **clear structural limitation: more time** was needed. Not to produce more, but to go deeper. "Less theory, more in-situ practice. Especially in public space work. You need to be present, to feel the temperature, the rhythm, the fatigue, the pauses. That's where the real material is". In the tight

time frame of ten days, every moment counted - but it also demanded a degree of speed that clashed with the slowness needed for truly embodied creation. There was little room for drifting, for failing, for simply being still - all essential stages in a durational process rooted in observation and transformation. The artistic potential was palpable, yet there was a lingering sense **that something had only just begun**. Time, in this context, was not just a logistical constraint but a **dramaturgical element**: it shaped what could be seen, absorbed, and ultimately expressed. The residency, while rich, remained suspended - **a sketch rather than a composition** - leaving the artist with fragments, impressions, and questions that now call for further unfolding.

Amir added that, from the artist's perspective, it would have been helpful to have clearer information and expectations from the outset. "A lot of things weren't clear at the beginning, and new demands appeared along the way. It would've helped to have all the cards on the table from the start".

Advice for the next ones

Her advice to future residencies is both simple and profound: **arrive slowly, stay longer, ask less, listen more**. Don't impose urgency on a space that has its own rhythm. Instead, let meaning emerge gradually, in the folds of the everyday, in the gestures repeated without spectacle or awareness.

Artistic creation, especially in public and industrial contexts, requires more

than observation - it requires **patience, humility**, and a willingness to be changed by what you encounter. In Ílhavo, amid machines, salt, and the raw reality of codfish, Juana did not seek metaphors - and perhaps for that reason, she found something deeper. She found people. And in their work, in their unspoken rituals and quiet strength, she discovered a form of **silent poetry** - one that needed no explanation, only presence. Amir echoes this call for **time and sensitivity**, but emphasises the need to think carefully about the **choice of context**. "The project will inevitably connect to the sector you're in - so the choice matters.

Be sure you're ready to engage with it fully". To cultural operators, he suggests reflecting honestly on whether workers can realistically participate - not only for **artistic depth** but also for **ethical and reputational reasons**.

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Juana Ortega Kippes - Immersion Time Ilhavo ©JoãoVersosRoldão



Amir Guetta-Immersion Time Ilhavo ©JoãoVersosRoldão

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