ARTIST
CASE STUDY ONE

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When I graduated I remember being told, "you'll need to find a part-time job and think about moving to Hackney, it's cheap there." So I did just that, found a part-time job as a gardener (then as a schoolteacher) and moved to Hackney. A couple of years later I was cycling weekly to the dole office and signing on as unemployed, living in Mile End and making art again.

The small chinks of payment over this period were like rays of sunlight. Having a show in a public gallery could be recognised and acknowledged through an artist fee, a fee to the artist. It wasn't just about being grateful for the opportunity. Subsequently, the process of registering as self employed helped me to see that, in however small a way, I was a business with income and expenses, and where the income was from 'artist fees' my case for self-employment as an artist was significantly strengthened, both for the tax inspectors and for my own emerging sense of a professional self. I am an artist.

Some of us choose a route where we are not producing saleable art or choose not to have the commercial gallery as our rainbow's end. We develop independent successful careers that contribute to, and continually reinvent, Britain's creative economy.

It was some time later that I became comfortable talking about money. As an artist mentor, this is often a major point of discussion with emerging artists: it's ok to be able to talk about money, essential even. I totally support the Paying Artists campaign. Payment is fundamental to self worth and a sense of identity for artists. Publicly-funded galleries and public sector organisations in general are duty bound to continue to pay artists if we are to maintain a vibrant national creative economy.

Once we've established a sense of individual value, and we perhaps find ourselves sitting around a table discussing a new project with fellow arts professionals, and with architects, planners and so on, we can feel confident in our own worth, and our day rates.