

Studio Visit Ethics

Warm greetings from Feminist Culture House ♡

We're a non-profit curatorial platform and intersectional feminist collective that works with and for underrepresented artists and arts workers in Helsinki, Finland. We dream of equitable futures, and aim to advance feminist politics in the arts. One way to do this is to create tools for change, so our practice involves interrogating and testing ways to pollinate the art field with fairer working conditions. Our ears prick up when someone says, "that's just how it is." We work to encourage dialogue, create space to voice needs, and to normalise taking moments within a collaborative encounter to ensure everyone feels empowered to speak up, speak back, and enunciate difficulties. We wish for all parties to be seen, heard, accommodated, and respected.

This publication is the result of a project researching the ethics of studio visits. Studio visits can be understood as a social interaction in which an artist hosts and presents their practice to a guest in their working space. These are normalised professional encounters within the cultural field, over which the possibility of an undefined or unspoken opportunity often dangles. If you meet [this important visitor], something [good/"international"/€€€] might happen. Studio visits invoke a spectrum of emotions, which might range from the pleasurable—inviting an artist friend to hang out, bounce ideas, and talk through insecurities over a cup of tea—to the anxiety inducing—welcoming a seemingly-powerful stranger into an intimate space with no sense of the visit's parameters.

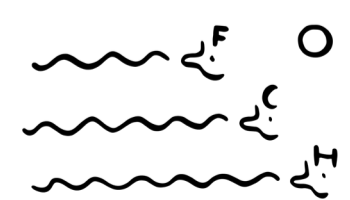
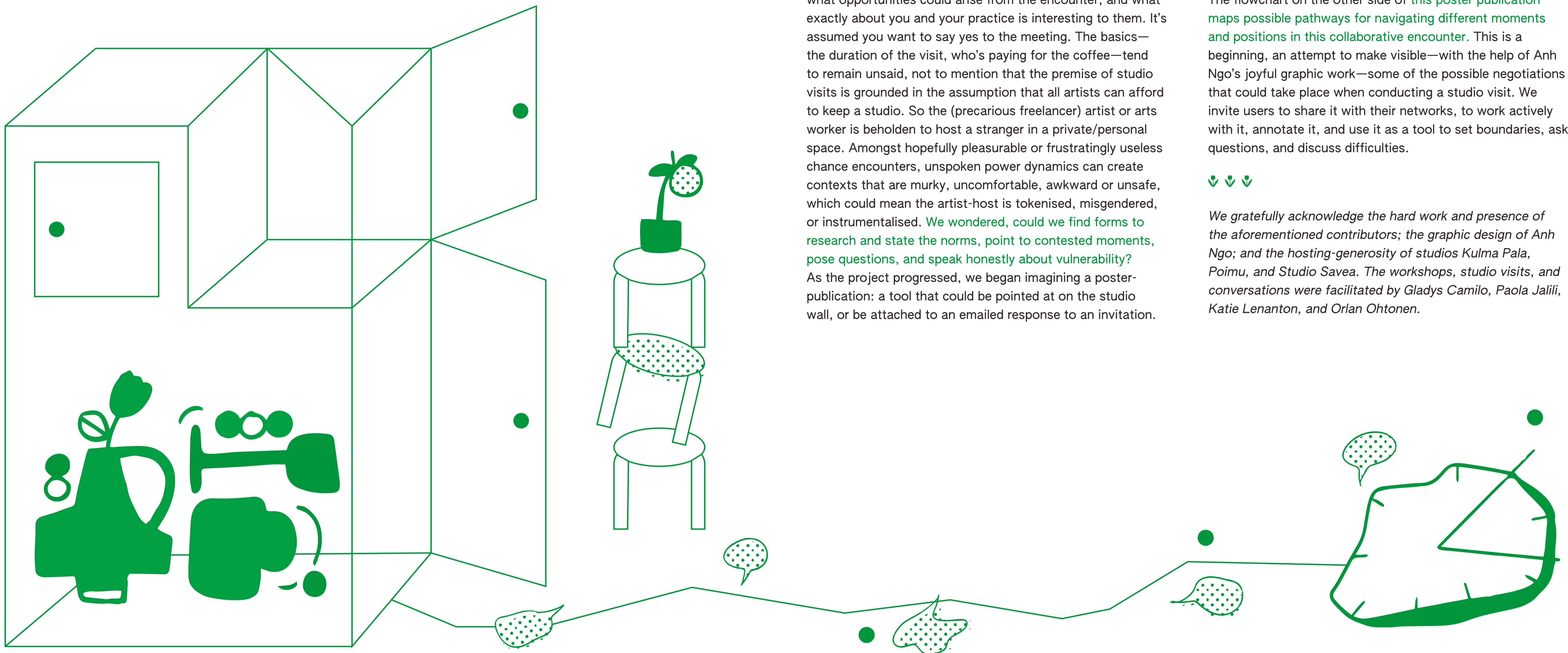
To generalise: the currencies of time and presence are not often acknowledged. Shrouded in vagueness, the institutional-matchmaker or visitor might not be explicit about what opportunities could arise from the encounter, and what exactly about you and your practice is interesting to them. It's assumed you want to say yes to the meeting. The basics—the duration of the visit, who's paying for the coffee—tend to remain unsaid, not to mention that the premise of studio visits is grounded in the assumption that all artists can afford to keep a studio. So the (precarious freelancer) artist or arts worker is beholden to host a stranger in a private/personal space. Amongst hopefully pleasurable or frustratingly useless chance encounters, unspoken power dynamics can create contexts that are murky, uncomfortable, awkward or unsafe, which could mean the artist-host is tokenised, misgendered, or instrumentalised. We wondered, could we find forms to research and state the norms, point to contested moments, pose questions, and speak honestly about vulnerability? As the project progressed, we began imagining a poster-publication: a tool that could be pointed at on the studio wall, or be attached to an emailed response to an invitation.

During spring 2022, we began the research process, collaborating with an amazing group of artists, curators, and cultural workers. Sasha Huber, Sonya Lindfors, Vidha Saumya, Shubhangi Singh, and Kaino Wennerstrand acted as artist-mentors, while the commissioned artists from our peer groups and networks were Ignata Elena, Özgü Gundeslioglu, Natalie Hamada, Sara Moayed, Thomas Moose, and Haliz Yosef. We approached the research in two parts: a workshop, held in May, where we gathered to discuss what "ethical practices" could mean in relation to studio visits, and shared experiences, needs, and practical tools with each other. Those thoughts fermented until August, when we gathered again to put our research into practice: the artists shared their works-in-progress, and through gentle conversation and shared moments of hospitality, received insightful feedback and generous advice from the mentors.

The flowchart on the other side of this poster publication maps possible pathways for navigating different moments and positions in this collaborative encounter. This is a beginning, an attempt to make visible—with the help of Anh Ngo's joyful graphic work—some of the possible negotiations that could take place when conducting a studio visit. We invite users to share it with their networks, to work actively with it, annotate it, and use it as a tool to set boundaries, ask questions, and discuss difficulties.



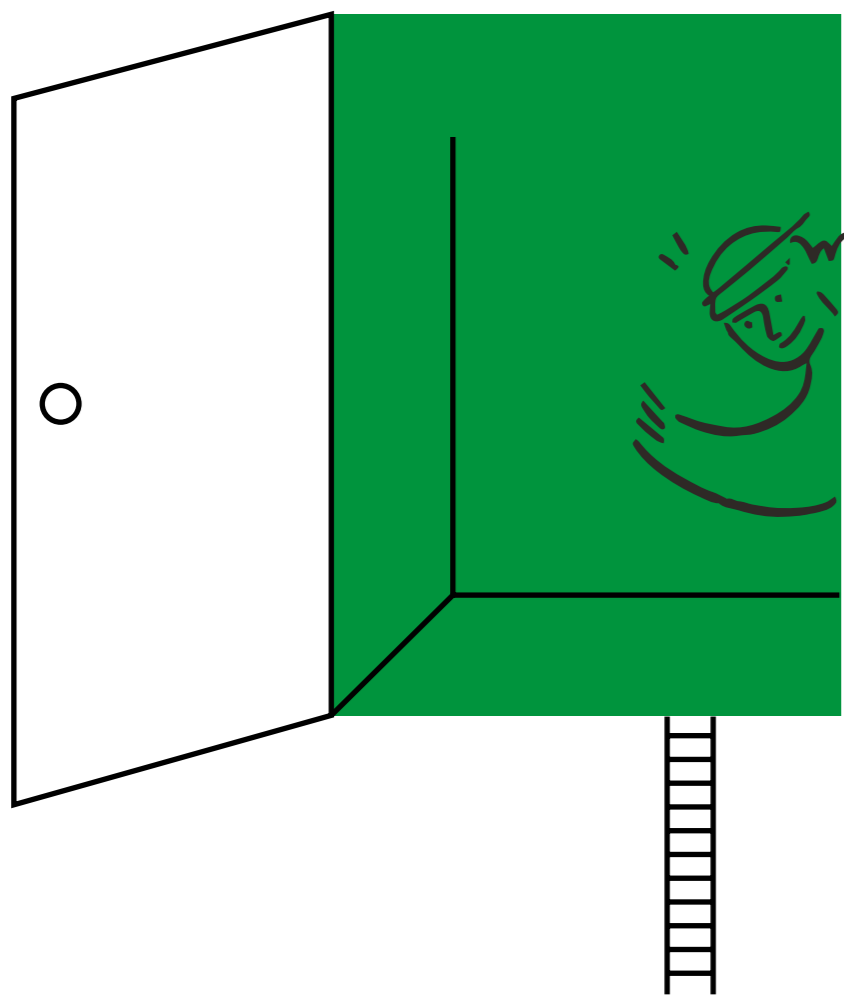
We gratefully acknowledge the hard work and presence of the aforementioned contributors; the graphic design of Anh Ngo; and the hosting-generosity of studios Kulma Pala, Poimu, and Studio Savea. The workshops, studio visits, and conversations were facilitated by Gladys Camilo, Paola Jalili, Katie Lenanton, and Orlan Ohtonen.



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Studio Visit Flowchart

Before the visit



1 What kind of visitor are you?

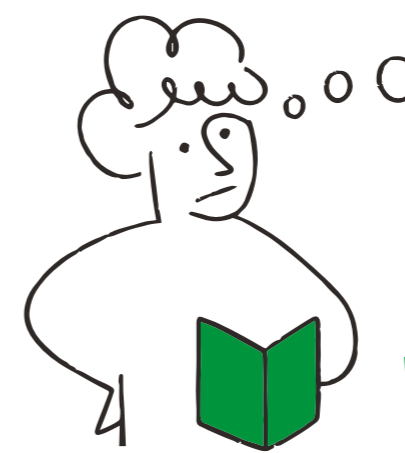
- ↓ Salaried curator
- ↓ Freelance curator
- ↓ Curator on residency
- ↓ Institutional representative
- ↓ Collector / Gallerist
- ↓ Artist Friend / Peer
- ↓ Artist acquaintance
- ↓ Teacher / Advisor / Mentor
- ↓ Individual buyer
- ↓ Fan or admirer
- ↓ Potential collaborator



"What are the power dynamics?"
 "What expectations have been put forward?"
 "Who is getting paid for their time?"
 "From what position(s) do we speak?"

2 Research

- ↓ Mutual research: do the parties research each other beforehand?
- ↓ Who is more obligated to do the research?
- ↓ Does the research begin from a place of external matchmaking, or genuine interest / curatorial agency...
- ↓ What do we know about each other, and how is this communicated?



"What do I want them to know about me?"
 "How should I prepare for this visit?"
 "In what rooms have they been in, and in what rooms might I end up?"
 "What currencies are involved, and where do they come from?"

3 Invitation

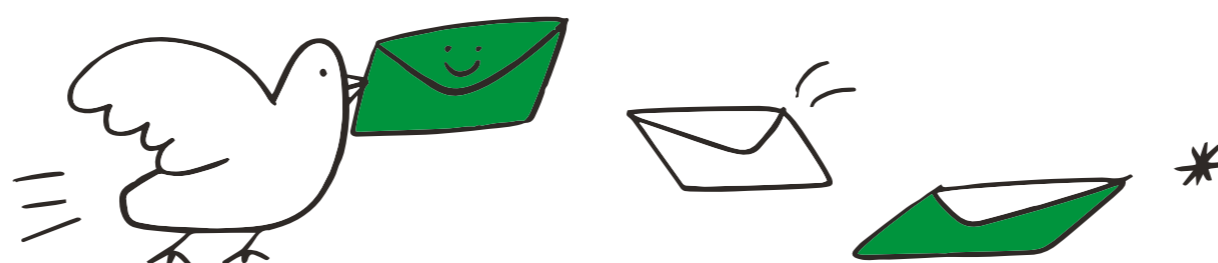
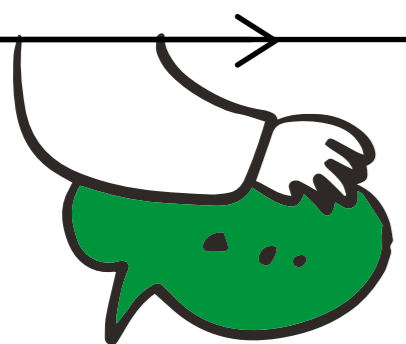
What information is needed beforehand?

- ↓ Meeting agenda and pronouns
- ↓ Discussion points
- ↓ Research questions
- ↓ Invitation to share accessibility needs

"Do you only want to meet me / my artworks? Is there something in particular you want to discuss?"
 "Are you planning an exhibition?"
 "Are you interested in a more long-term relationship?"
 "What are your hopes and dreams, and are you interested in mine?"
 "Who else are you meeting during your stay?"

Have we clarified...

- ↓ "Why me?" Give some concrete examples / rationale for the visit
- ↓ Individual accessibility needs? (Neurodiversity, physical access, safer space guidelines, etc.)
- ↓ Accessibility of meeting place (access needs, gender-neutral bathrooms, budget limitations, public transport costs, a quiet space, etc.)
- ↓ Our boundaries > time / capacity
- ↓ Who's responsible for the hospitality, who's paying?



4 Safety

Have we considered...

- ↓ Measurements, communication, and / or structures to feel safe during the visit (for both parties)
- ↓ When should a third person or a support person be in the room?
- ↓ If the visit should be recorded? How to take notes and retain information?
- ↓ Tokenisation
- ↓ The implications of asking "Where are you from?"
- ↓ Conflict / resolution



5 Presence

- ↓ Hospitality / other types of currencies (cookies, support letters, introductions, connections, etc.)
- ↓ Getting situated / introduction to the space and amenities
- ↓ Check in about today's schedule
- ↓ Is anyone else joining, and why?
- ↓ Are we both comfortable?

"Are we in a traditional studio context? If not, can we expand the idea of what constitutes a studio?"
 "Do we need to be in the studio space, or can we be outside or somewhere else we find pleasurable?"
 "Who can afford to keep a studio?"
 "Can larger institutions and art spaces share their premises for those without a studio / place for meetings?"

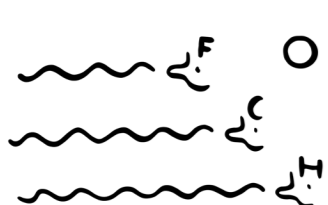
6 Aftercare

- ↓ Do we both feel good about the meeting?
- ↓ Is there something that requires resolution or feedback?
- ↓ (Are there) next steps?
- ↓ Are there resources to share or introductions to make?
- ↓ Are we on the same page about future needs / hopes?
- ↓ What makes a visit feel useless?
- ↓ How to share (and action) feedback?
- ↓ Are you ghosting?

Let's appreciate different types of results: an enjoyable chat; an invitation to an exhibition; an exchange of ideas, references, advice; a publishing collaboration...



After the visit



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