

## Artists' Union England (AUE)

Artists' Union England formally launched 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014 and gained its certificate of independence in 2016. AUE aims to represent visual and applied artists at strategic decision-making events in order to negotiate fair pay and better working conditions. [The members are the Union - get active, get involved, have your say!](#)



### What was the spark for starting AUE and where did the idea come from?

An evident lack of accountable, democratic, independent representation for artists. In 2013 a group of artists wanted this situation to change and decided to do something about it. AUE had several priorities to address:

- **Representation** The lack of representation and the need for an accountable, democratic, independent voice for artists instigated our actions for change. Visual, socially engaged and applied artists have a range of arts organisations to join; some free, some requiring payment for membership, some offering opportunities, advice and guidance. **A trade union is not an arts organisation.** As a Trade Union we can represent individual artists in the workplace as well as speak collectively. As a Trade Union we are a democratic and independent body – independent of employers and those that engage us as workers.
- **Austerity measures and cuts.** Arts organisations, local authorities, galleries and publicly funded bodies have made cuts to save money. Artists have felt the effects of these cost-driven measures as the financial squeeze takes hold within our communities. We no longer have to fight alone. As a Union, we can speak with a loud collective voice to resist; to speak out against unfair cuts to the arts, and to take a stand regarding exploitative pay and conditions. We have been forced to compete in an environment that is destructive, divisive and unsustainable, in pursuit of decreasing pay. In effect, artists are being paid less money for doing more work. This employment practice is unethical, unprofessional, damaging and restricts the growth of the creative sector.
- **Lack of opportunities to form solidarity with other workers.** Artists operate

as sole traders, community interest companies and the like, and therefore find it difficult and challenging to form solidarity with other workers. AUE has negotiated automatic membership within the General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) and a potential affiliation to the Trades Union Congress (TUC). These trade union alliances enable us to support one another significantly across professions and across trades, which means that we are much stronger as we build on our common interests. The result is that we have a stronger mandate to question exploitative employment practice, improve deficient Health and Safety standards, and endorse models of good practice. Union affiliation allows independent artists a platform on which to exert an authoritative voice: OUR VOICE.

### **What is the history of Artists' unions?**

MayDay Rooms is home to the archive of the last Artists' Union which closed in 1984. MDR is an educational charity founded as a safe haven for historical material linked to social movements, experimental culture, and the radical expression of marginalised figures and groups. \*

### **How does AUE operate?**

- AUE operates by its Rule Book. Changes are made to the Rule Book at Annual General Meetings (AGM) through democratic debate and discussion.
- At our AGM there is opportunity to submit, discuss and vote on motions that affect or become union policy.
- We work in branches throughout the country with union representatives, an elected Executive Committee, regular meetings. We need members to volunteer and set up union branches geographically. Contact us for help and advice on how to do this.
- AUE operates using membership fees as its main source of income. It is committed to remaining financially independent of funding bodies and employers. Additional income is generated through fundraising events and activities, as well as through donations. Presently, most union activity is carried out by unpaid volunteers.

## What are AUE's current campaigns?

- Our main campaign focus is on artists' pay and support other campaigns with comparable, and joint, interests.\*\* In 2015 we developed our first stage 'Rates of Pay' document.
- To negotiate with employers to acknowledge AUE. To identify employers who want to raise the bar for artists', particularly through improving pay and conditions for artists.
- We are actively recruiting new members. We are supporting members' activism so as to influence and persuade employers to treat artists fairly.
- To develop geographic local branches across England.

## Why join AUE? What are the benefits?

- Input into regulation of our pay and conditions to help stop exploitative and unfair employment practices.
- Membership of GFTU and access to free training courses.
- Legal advice and (currently being negotiated) a package of insurance benefits. These are priced on a sliding scale in relation to numbers of members so will be cheaper when we have 1,000 members.
- ***Fact: unionised workers have better pay and working conditions than those that aren't unionised.***
- ***Fact: UK legislation gives everyone the right to belong to a trade union.***

How do people join? <http://www.artistsunionengland.org.uk/category/join/>

Stay in touch [info@artistsunionengland.org.uk](mailto:info@artistsunionengland.org.uk)

[www.artistsunionengland.org.uk](http://www.artistsunionengland.org.uk)

<https://www.facebook.com/artistsunionengland>

@ArtistsUnionE

**To find out more about what Trade Unions do, visit:**

Trades Union Congress (TUC) – <http://www.tuc.org.uk/> General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) – <http://gftu.org/content/> Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematograph and Theatre Union (Bectu) <https://www.bectu.org.uk/home> Equity – <http://www.equity.org.uk/home/> Musicians Union (MU) – <http://www.musiciansunion.org.uk/> University College Union (UCU) – <http://www.ucu.org.uk/1680> <http://action.shareaction.org/page/content/ritzy-share/> a-n's Paying Artists campaign <http://www.artistsunionengland.org.uk/paying-artists/> TUC Britain Needs a Pay Rise <http://britainneedsapayrise.org/>

\* <http://maydayrooms.org/>

\*\* Ritzy (London) Campaign for the London Living Wage 2014