THE ART OF INCLUSION

University of Brighton academics have been pushing the boundaries that separate art and life, and developing a more inclusive approach to performance.

The world of performance art is becoming more inclusive and engaged, in no small part due to the work of academics at the University of Brighton. Professor Liz Aggiss, Billy Cowie and Alice Fox from the College of Arts and Humanities have pioneered different ways of working with marginalised and under-represented communities in new and unexpected ways.

Their work has been seen by people in over 40 countries via 230 performances, public screenings, festival presentations and widespread online dissemination, and has won international media coverage. Using musical composition, voice, sound choreography and time-based media technologies, they cover issues such as ageing, identity and disability in their performance practices, and seek to blur the distinctions between performers and audiences and art and life.

Professor Aggiss and Billy Cowie’s work saw them named ‘performance ambassadors’ by the British Council as part of its Forward Motion tour to promote UK art. The tour included lectures and masterclasses by Professor Aggiss and

Research: a critical manifesto. Fox, founder of the university’s pioneering MA in Inclusive Arts Practice, says the book, to be published in spring 2015 by Routledge, could be seen as a manifesto for inclusive performance. It is based on her own experiences and those of a wide range of influential artists and thinkers from Europe and the United States, including Jude Kelly, Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre, US artist Suzanne Lacey, Anna Cutler Director of Learning at Tate and Andrew Pike from Kilkenny Collective for Arts Talent (KCAT) Arts and Study Centre.

The book will identify what inclusive practice is, what makes it unique and how it is situated within historical, cultural and contemporary practice. True to the discipline the book itself will be collaborative, an image-rich hybrid of academic essays and accessible summaries.

Fox’s research has led to paradigm shifts in how inclusive performance is viewed by, for example, government-funded bodies, community groups and arts organisations. Her work on inclusive performance includes the Artists on the Move project with partners in Ireland and the Netherlands. The project involved each organisation giving a public exhibition and creative workshops to share best practice. Fox’s Side-by-Side was commissioned by the Arts Council and London’s Southbank Centre and attracted over 6,500 visitors. It brought together 150 able-bodied and disabled artists, representing the collaborative approach and outlook of 30 international organisations.

Fox and Dr Hannah Macpherson from the School of Environment and Technology are just embarking on writing the first book on the theories, research methods and practice of inclusive arts: Inclusive Arts Practice and