

RUNNING A FACULTY'S CULTURAL SPACE: CASE STUDY OF ART4C, GALLERY AND CREATIVE LEARNING SPACE

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ABSTRACT

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This research examines the operation of an art space of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Chulalongkorn University. The paper focuses on a case study, 'Art4C: Gallery and Creative Learning Space,' initiated by the Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, the project began in early 2019 with the aim of creating a community gallery. On August 16, 2019, Art4C progressed into a physical space located in a prime area of Samyan, a popular 'food' district in Bangkok. The methodology employed for this space combined an analysis of existing university art spaces to identify an appropriate operational model with insights from personal experience and observation. The gallery and creative learning space operated for about six months before the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. Since its opening, the author has served as the director of Art4C, overseeing its operations from its opening in August 2019 to the completion of this paper, a period of nearly five years. The initial concept was to establish a community-centric gallery that would seamlessly integrate and collaborate with its urban surroundings. However, the community and location did not perceive Art4C as anticipated. Furthermore, Art4C encountered several challenges that necessitated significant shifts in its operational model and initial direction. Despite the challenges presented by the coronavirus pandemic, digital disruption, and financial sustainability issues, Art4C has managed to establish a successful operating model, merging art and business. This paper explores the strategies and adaptations that have enabled Art4C to meet these challenges, and highlights the key lessons to be learned from the case study.

Keywords: Art gallery; university art space; art for community; multidisciplinary creative space; art and urban development

1. INTRODUCTION

The Faculty of Fine and Applied Art, Chulalongkorn University (FAA, CU) is nearly forty years old and offers five majors: visual arts, creative arts, dance, Thai music, and Western music. However, the faculty has never had a gallery nor an art and cultural space like other art and design institutions. For the first time in 2019, a gallery and creative space with a coffee shop called Art4C was founded, situated outside the main Chulalongkorn campus in the Samyarn area is a three-story, three-block shophouse with a cafe on the first floor, gallery on the second floor, and a multifunctional space on the 3rd floor. It is the first art and cultural space managed by the faculty.

Art4C had its opening reception on August 16, 2019, with an art exhibition called 'The Townie Creatures.' It continued holding art exhibitions and workshops regularly until February 2020, when the COVID-19 virus began to spread in Thailand. The Thai government initiated a lock-down policy in March 2020 and within two months, the number of COVID-19 cases in Thailand had dropped to zero and people resumed their daily activities. In December 2020, a second wave of the virus hit Thailand once again. People reacted to the pandemic pretty quickly this time and things seemed to cool down. Again in April 2021, a third wave came and the situation became so bad that lockdown policies returned. Despite this, Art4C has been in continuous operation for two years and two months, both on-site and online.

The first year or two of the art space operation was supposed to be about establishing the organization, strengthening its positioning; however, disruption caused by the pandemic pushed Art4C to develop its digital reliability, thus, Art4C found its operative direction, evolved from the initial plan, but adjusted with lessons and experiences garnered from operating the art space. This paper will describe the background of Art4C, then summarize the methodology of running the space for the past two years and finally consider current and future directions.

2. BACKGROUND OF ART4C

Art4C was formally called CU Art4C, which stands for 'Chulalongkorn University's Art for Community'. It is a project realized as an operative space that functions as a gallery and a co-learning space. An unpublished manuscript by Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University (2019) on Art4C noted that the faculty was in need of a project space for workshops and a showcase for creative projects by the faculty, students, and alumni. The space was supposed to collaborate with other organizations, and to provide a public service, especially in this case, for the local community.

Chulalongkorn University has substantial landholdings in central Bangkok; some of the land forms the university campus, while other parts are rented out, by both government and commercial institutions. Also, there are areas where people live and work as communities and one of the communities is called Samyan, which is where Art4C is situated. In 2020, Time Out magazine featured Samyan as the 'coolest neighborhood'. It is now more than 60 years old and is famous for its street food and market (Supateerawanit, 2020).

Originally, people who lived in Samyan were Chinese immigrants, most of them were traders. They lived as a community, with their own events and traditions. However, as the years have passed, the university has introduced urban planning and development, which has pushed up rents. As a result, many households have had to move out. Hence, the nature of community has shifted, with new faces coming in, and more people focusing on making a living rather than contributing to community objectives. Some traditions and events have started to fade; people may not know the people who live next door. On top of that, some shops and households in the community have begun to feel the effects from the increased rental fees, raising tensions between the community and university¹.

For the project to get started, Art4C received in-cash and in-kind, support from two sectors of Chulalongkorn University: the Property Development Chulalongkorn University (PMCU) waived the rental fee of the space as a way to give back to the community; and CU Innovation Hub supported the renovation of the building. The utility bills were paid by the partner who ran a cafe on the first floor, who also took care of the daily routine of the building, (this part will be explained in detail later in the paper). All activities were supported by the faculty.

The organizational chart of Art4C is rather small (see Figure 1). There is a committee, which is the same management board of the FAA, CU; board members mainly give feedback and advice to the project as well as evaluate its annual performance. The director is in charge of all operations and policies supported by a full-time manager. Art4C has an open-call for internships all-year-round and students and the FAA and other faculties all assist with project-based exhibitions and activities. Staff from the cafe assist with operations and support projects when needed.

¹ The author gathers this information from observations and discussions with people in community for the past years.

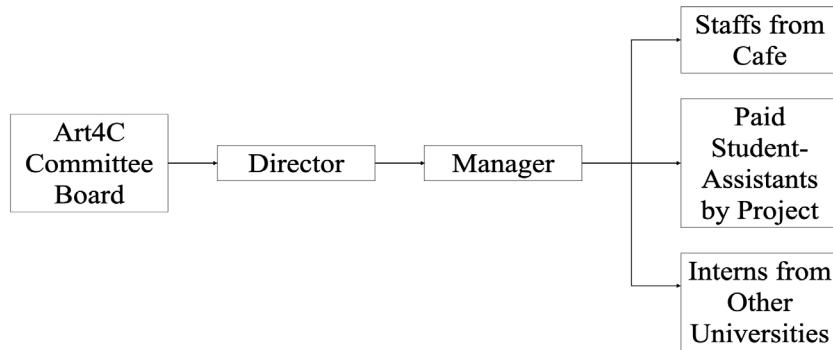


Figure 1: An organization chart of Art4C

The physical structure of Art4C is a three-block and three-story shophouse (Figure 2), situated next to the main Rama IV road, and is near to various public transportation stations. This is a prime urban location.

2.1 Organizational framework of operations, 2019–2023

On the first floor, there was a cafe which, as mentioned, took care of the electricity and water bills, as well as maintained the whole building. The cafe also opened and closed the space according to operating hours. When Art4C was first operated as CU Art4C, the partner cafe was called 'Class Cafe', a franchise start-up cafe. Class Cafe worked with Art4C until February 2021, but their business in this and other branches was affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. They had to shut down several franchises including the one at Art4C. Subsequently, Art4C open-called for a proposal for a new partner, this time adding additional responsibilities to the partnership. The operation learned what Class Cafe had lacked in the previous partnership so when the new cafe joined ART4C, it had had to be a real partnership, not a separate organization. The cafe that operated from 2021 to 2023 was run by Dragon Ink Co., Ltd a communication agency. For every project held at Art4C, the cafe was a part of the operations team. With a new partnership and rebranding, the whole project building was called Art4C, and named different level according to the main purpose of the space as 'Bitescape' for the cafe, 'Artscape' for the gallery, and 'Actscape' for multi-purpose space.



Figure 2: A storefront of Art4C in 2021, image courtesy of Thanchanok Thuasuphap

The second floor of Art4C was a gallery space, 'Artscape'. It was a typical 'white cube space' to hold art exhibitions. Exhibitions here were mostly under the artistic direction of the director, i.e. exhibitions came from invitations and discussions with artists and curators. However, Art4C also attempted to support art and cultural activities in general, therefore, we opened a call for proposals for further collaboration. Furthermore, as Art4C is FAA, CU's space promoting works by faculty members, students, and alumni was essential to the space.

The third floor was called 'Artscape', a multi-purpose area, it held experimental art exhibitions, lectures, workshops, performances, and so on. Similar to the second floor, some activities were initiated by Art4C under the director's artistic direction, while others were organized by different parts of the FAA, CU and some were held in collaboration with other organizations.

In terms of income generation, Bitescape could sell food, drinks, and other items, but Art4C could not. Despite the fact that Art4C held exhibitions and workshops under FAA, CU's budget, Art4C could not sell artworks directly or charge for space rental due to faculty policy. However, there was a major change in this matter which will be pointed out later in this paper.

2.2 Objectives

Art4C aims to be an agent of change, supporting the local community through creative art and culture. It works towards being a place that connects community, society, and other stakeholders, to support artistic practice and innovation. Furthermore, Art4C intends to be a learning space for everyone, to search for inspiration and hold imaginative activities, to utilize the space as an office and meeting sphere, for relaxation or as a workshop and activity space. The objectives of Art4C can be summarized into three points, as follows:

1. To make practical use of artistic practice to the benefit of everyone.
2. To export artistic knowledge, aiding the development of academic research, and creativity. and
3. To promote the national and international profile of the faculty.

Apart from simplifying Art4C as 'art for the community', '4C' also represents other elements. First, FAA, CU has four departments - visual arts, creative arts, dance, and music (music is divided into two majors), Art4C supports these four branches of artistic practices. In addition, '4C' also indicates connection, center, contributions, and co-learning space, which actually links back to the three objectives above (Faculty of Fine and Applied Art, Chulalongkorn University, 2019).

2.3 Challenges

Art4C has a good location and firm connections. However, Art4C has faced and continues to face, some serious challenges. The number of staff is small, the director is also a full-time faculty member and the manager has to take care of many tasks in running the space. As a result, some operational features such as public relations or evaluations which include community feedback may have been left out.

The second and most difficult challenge for Art4C, is the community. As referred to earlier, the community is not happy with university rental fees. Therefore, since Art4C's establishment the community still feels alienated or dismissive of the space although some people hope that the space would attract more tourists to the area and boost their businesses. The author interviewed Dr. D. Chusri (personal communication, June 29, 2021), a researcher who has worked with communities for more than 30 years and she is currently working on an art park project in Samyan area. Chusri agrees that the university should be involved with nearby communities one way or another and Art4C's positioning on supporting the community is a good initiative.

Universities are being called upon to meet an ever increasing list of challenges based on rapidly changing technologies, environmental estrangement and a growing disparity between social and economic classes. Besides becoming more relevant to the people they serve and the neighbourhoods in which they are embedded, universities are being asked to actively partner with communities in order to co-create economic and environmental solutions. There is also a call for social innovation through bridging isolated professional workplaces to an increasing understanding and awareness of the benefits of community.

(Timm-Bottos & Reilly, 2015, p. 102)

Nevertheless, the community of Samyan is not as close as before. Residents in Samyan today come from different places with the sole purpose of opening a business in a prime location. Moreover, property is rented not owned, so the occupants feel no need to develop the community as there is no sense of belonging and owning the place. It is very challenging working with a community in which the unity is weak.

The third challenge is the COVID-19 pandemic. The first six months of Art4C went well and people in the Thai artistic community started to recognize Art4C as a place to visit to experience contemporary art. Then, the COVID 19 pandemic arrived, and later curfews and lockdowns. With only one full-time staff member, a manager who does not have experience in marketing, it has been very difficult to initiate online activities. Art4C has needed to shift its direction from the initial plan which was to build understanding of the space through

exhibitions and activities. Instead, online promotions and activities were developed and initiated. On top of that, online platforming is very competitive, so, it was and still is a struggle for Art4C in terms of public relations which can be traced back to the first issue.

The final challenge came earlier in 2024. From 2019 to 2023, Art4C did not have concerns about financial independence; however, in 2024 PMCU started to charge a rental fee but with generous discount, which the facility needs to fund by utilizing a more business-like approach.

3. RUNNING ART4C GALLERY AND CREATIVE LEARNING SPACE

There are articles, theories and handbooks on how to run an art space, however, in reality, running an art space depends so much on social context, along with different conditions and restrictions. This paper will show methods of running Art4C as a case study which is applied widely in business research. Methods of case study cannot be done purely but added to fieldworks, interviews, and the director/author experiences, adapting to the study of the characters and essences of the space.

3.1 Conceptual framework

In Thailand, art and cultural spaces, both business or non-profit, do not see one another as competitors, but rather as part of a connected network. Therefore, it would appropriate to start with an analysis of how the other art spaces run by academic institutions have been operating. In early 2021, the author wrote an article for 'BACC E-Journal' entitled "Policies of University Art Galleries and Creative Spaces in Bangkok towards Contemporary Art and Culture". The article is an overview on university-run' contemporary art and cultural spaces in the Bangkok Metropolitan region (Javanalikhikara, 2021).

Table 1 shows six art organizations under tertiary educational institutions. Some operate under the university, some by faculty. The primary focus of each space is different but all of them have a gallery as a part of the space.

Table 1: Universities' contemporary art and cultural spaces in Bangkok Metropolitan Region

Name of the space	Operation under faculty or university	Primary focus	Founded in	Remarks
Art Centre Silpakorn University	University	Gallery	1979	The oldest university art gallery in Thailand.
PSG Art Gallery	Faculty	Gallery	1987	With 2 locations, the faculty has 2 campuses.
Office of Art and Culture, Chulalongkorn University	University	Organization	N/A, more than 30 years old	University's sub organization taking care of 6 operations.
Art4C	Faculty	Project Space	2019	Not situated on the university campus.
BUG (Bangkok University Gallery)	University	Gallery	1996	Just moved from city campus to Rangsit campus (outskirt Bangkok).
Art Gallery G23	University	Project Space	N/A, approx. 10 years	More of a rental space.

Silpakorn University has two galleries, one as a sub operation of the university, equivalent to the faculty, and another under management of the Faculty of Painting, Sculpture and Graphic Arts. Silpakorn University is known as the first art university in Thailand, which has enabled it to operate several art galleries. The Art Centre Silpakorn University operates according to the university's main objectives and under artistic directions of the director, well-curated with a higher budget for production. This space also creates an art ecosystem for students to obtain a gallery job after graduation. PSG Art Gallery has two locations and both of them are under the operation of faculty. Initially, they were spaces to show faculty members', students', and alumni works. But recently, they have started to show exhibitions from their network.

Similar to Silpakorn University, Chulalongkorn University already has an office that supports art and culture but this office works independently from any faculty answering to university policy. The Office of Art

and Culture, Chulalongkorn University runs six operations; including musical performances, theatre, galleries, museums, and a Thai house. The Office also has a famous collection of Modern Thai art, but is not that well known for contemporary art and culture nor for its relations with the local community. In contrast, Art4C operates according to its stated objectives, local setting, and artistic direction.

BUG and Art Gallery G23 are university run art spaces. BUG used to be well-known in the Thai contemporary art sphere but since it moved to the outskirts of Bangkok right before the pandemic, things have gone quiet there. The organizational structure has changed and the target audience has shifted completely. As for Art Gallery G23, most spaces are for rent, with very few programmes. The direction there is 'art and creativity for all'.

Art4C also looks into art and cultural spaces nearby, working with local galleries and art spaces. Art4C is a part of the PARs project. PARs is an acronym for Pathumwan Art Routes, Pathumwan is the district in which Chulalongkorn University and Art4C are located. This district is also home to two prominent spaces for contemporary art – the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre (BACC) and Jim Thompson Art Centre. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, art space activity has been slow, so the artistic community in Pathumwan gathered together to collectively promote art in the district. The PARs project founded in October 2020 has enabled the participant spaces to be more aware of the artistic sphere in the neighborhood.

Another case study approach comes from the director's professional experience of being a project manager and assistant curator at BACC for six years. Running art spaces needs a great deal of management skill and creativity to guide artistic direction. Considering BACC's work shows that running a non-profit art and cultural organization does not only involve showing artworks or holding activities but also requires supporting activities, promotion and archiving.

To summarize, the conceptual framework for the methodology of running Art4C includes:

1. Understand the community surrounding the setting.
2. Study art and cultural spaces run by educational institutions.
3. Connect to other art and cultural art spaces in the area.
4. Artistic direction and organization policy from experience.

3.2 Pre-pandemic to the first year of establishment

Since the organization is very small, at the beginning, the strategy of getting recognition was to hold exhibitions and activities. The very first exhibitions and activities invited alumni and the director's personal connections, following word of mouth, after a period of time, people started sending in proposals.

All exhibitions are curated or at least have a solid artistic direction. The quality of an exhibition is crucial as it helps set the standards for the space and to build a reputation. Moreover, the intentions of an art exhibition are not primarily to sell the works, but to show artworks and educate on contemporary art along the way. Therefore, each exhibition must include an art exhibition, an opening reception, press kit, educational activities, photographic documentation, video documentation, and survey for evaluation.

Whereas workshops and activities were considered more open than exhibitions. Workshops were held frequently, every other weekend to make the space alive and active. Target audiences ranged from young kids to the elderly, including people with disabilities.

3.3 Art4C during Coronavirus pandemic

The operation of Art4C went well with exhibitions, workshops, performances, public lectures. People in the artistic community and some groups in the Samyan community started to acknowledge Art4C, following exhibitions and activities. Public relations were not so reliant on social media, and were mostly done through the personal connections of the participants. Photographic and video documentations were produced as archival materials and post-PR.

Then came the Coronavirus pandemic. The first wave of COVID-19 with a complete lockdown left us no choice but to have online workshops. All on site exhibitions were postponed. The first wave did not stay for long so there were not many projects to experiment with online. Later, for another half a year, all exhibitions and activities were carried on as usual. Then, for another half a year, Thai people were living in semi-lockdown situation.

The semi-lockdown that we faced was more difficult than a complete lockdown in terms of project space management. Each exhibition was allowed to be shown but people were afraid to go out to visit. The opening reception needed to limit the number of participants. Consequently, exhibitions were held but not many people attended, and online promotion needed to be highlighted. Furthermore, online archives of photo and video were not enough, so the possibility of having a VR archive came into play. But such technology cost more money and VR remained relatively untested.

3.4 Art4C re-branding from 2021–2023

As pointed out earlier, Art4C changed partnership in July 2021. Before that with Class Cafe, the exhibitions and activities seemed to be separable from workshops. Then, a new partnership included all operations under Art4C, divided into sub-operations, as Bitescape, Artscape, and Actscape with the aim of unifying the space. Not only that, the operation is collaborative i.e. FAA, CU has a part in Bitescape like pop-up menus, activities, or decoration, as well as when it comes to exhibition and activities in Artscape and Actscape, everyone has input in the operations as a team.

This rebranding did not only come with the new cafe, it also assisted in defining and setting in motion Art4C's new direction. Exhibitions and activities are gradually improving in terms of aspect and attribution but it lacks of distinctive character. With the location, objectives, and evaluations from previous activities, the artistic direction of Art4C now was to promote contemporary culture, while underlining sustainability and other socio-political issues. The characteristics came naturally from the previous two years of running a space.

During the pandemic, it became apparent that Art4C's activities cannot be supported fully by the faculty forever. Also, under current economic conditions obtaining sponsorships is complicated. The faculty is starting an enterprise that invites current projects to join in. Under this new development, Art4C is working towards becoming a social enterprise to continue to give back to the community. This process is ongoing.

3.5 Art4C as an enterprise in 2024

This paper noted the challenge of financial independence that Art4C has faced since the beginning of this year. In the beginning, PMCU did not charge Art4C for rent but from January 2024, Art4C has begun to start paying rent (albeit with a very generous discount). Bitescape decided not to continue with their partnership but kindly donated electrical appliances and furniture. At that point, Art4C needed to generate income to be able to continue its operation. One of the stumbling blocks to income generation was that Art4C could not earn money due the university's regulations. Nonetheless, FAA, CU has faculty/university/ a private owned business whose policy is supported by the university called Singum Enterprise.

For this business venture, Art4C has brought in a new partner, Iyada Mooksadee to invest in an art shop and assist with the business side of Art4C. In a chart below (Figure 3), it shows that Art4C's main incomes come from two things; space rental with 10% GP (Gross Profit) and 30% GP at art shop. For this business model, Art4C rents out spaces for art and cultural events like art exhibitions, workshops and so on for very reasonable fees. Nonetheless, if only rental, it may not be sustainable in terms of promoting artists. In this case, Art4C actively promotes and sells the products that come with the activities. The art shop on the first floor is somewhat of a major change. Art4C gets 30% GP from all the sales and the rest goes back to the artists. From all income generated, exempting profit, 20% will go to Singum Enterprise. Their shareholders include faculty members and the university, meaning part of the income will go back to support Art4C in a way; university = the space, the faculty = manager. 80% of the sales go back to Mooksadee who supports funding the renovation of the shop and oversees the cashflow of Art4C. This 80% goes to all the infrastructure costs (electricity, water, internet, housekeeping) and the rental fee, then, Mooksadee can keep the rest.

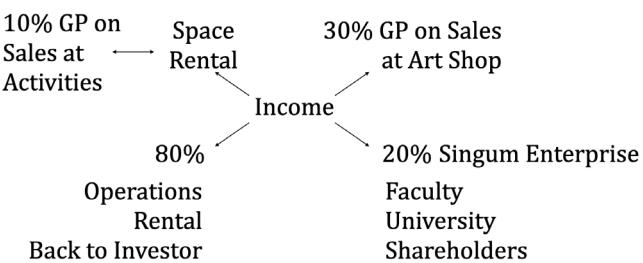


Figure 3: A flowchart of Art4C's source of income and proportion of benefit

Since the discontinuation of Bitescape, there was some debate as to whether Art4C should have another cafe or not, but Art4C was not ready to start its own café; therefore, the first floor has transformed into an art shop (Figure 4). All of the products are borrowed from artists, so there is less investment required. Once something is sold, the artists will get 30% of the sales at the end of the month. This helps promote and support those artists who do smaller scale artworks and offers artistic merchandise to a wider audience. Having a shop in a gallery can stimulate the comprehension of art exhibitions and desirable experiences (McIntyre, 2010).



Figure 4: Art the first floor shop at Art4C, image courtesy of Thianchai Thiansiripiphat

3.6 Impact of Art4C

Art4C has promoted the university's transformation towards a more regulated culture, achieving greater awareness of multi-disciplinary collaboration and integrated management. It also has cultural and community agency results;

- Art4C creates and brings about different groups in artistic community.
- Art4C promotes artistic and cultural talent.
- Art4C can be a broader platform for showcasing artistic and cultural capabilities.

4. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Running an art space is not only about creating activities but also about creating a space with a distinctive character and essence, which requires applied research methodology. Akpomuje (2019) suggests, learning in art spaces involves a dynamic interaction between the space, the collections, and the community, highlighting the need for flexible, experiential methodologies. Nonetheless, the methodologies applied to management practices tend to be subjective, reflecting the unique challenges posed by each cultural space.

The primary research tools for this paper were case studies and personal experience, which aligns with Stake's (1995) emphasis on the art of case study research in understanding complex organizational dynamics. Although this study incorporated article and book reviews, their practical application was limited in comparison to hands-on experience and adaptation.

This paper demonstrates that managing a faculty's cultural space is subject to constant change, with practical realities often reshaping the original objectives. Grodach (2011) argues that art spaces play a crucial role in community and economic development, yet their success depends on ongoing adaptations to neighborhood needs and the cultural economy. Similarly, Art4C had to shift from its initial vision to address emerging socio-political issues, this shift is also observed by Murphy and O'Driscoll (2015) in their discussion of art's role in public spaces.

The COVID-19 pandemic, as pointed out by Dieck et al. (2016) accelerated the adoption of digital tools, which became vital for promoting content and enhancing engagement in Art4C. This mirrors the broader trend of digital disruption observed across art institutions globally. Without the pandemic, Art4C's reliance on digital platforms may not have evolved as quickly, nor would its focus on social issues have become as pronounced, similar to the shifts suggested by Ayu and Sulistyo (2020) in urban working spaces.

A few key conclusions can be drawn from this case study:

1. Diverse Stakeholders: Running an art space within an educational institution involves balancing the interests of various stakeholders, as seen in Art4C's efforts to remain neutral and avoid censorship. This echoes the challenges faced by socially engaged art spaces (Olsen, 2018).

2. Disciplinary Integration: Given that Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Chulalongkorn University encompasses diverse fields such as fine arts, music, and dance, it is important for the activities at Art4C to reflect this variety in the context of gallery learning environments.

3. Community Engagement: Art4C's proximity to an urban community presents unique challenges and opportunities, as Binson et al. (2011) highlighted in their study of Bangkok's cultural spaces. This environment

fosters authentic artistic practice that engages with socio-political issues, much like the findings of Dona and Manaranjanie (2017) on the role of arts in urban social spaces.

After two years of adjustments, Art4C has developed a resilient structure. The pandemic, as noted earlier, facilitated necessary improvements in its operations. Without this disruption, the gallery's focus on digital platforms and social issues might not have emerged as strongly. However, its establishment as a hybrid educational and enterprise model brings both advantages and disadvantages. Financial sustainability has been achieved, but at the cost of reduced curatorial freedom, a trade-off perhaps, that is becoming an issue for art spaces trying to balance economic and cultural roles.

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