

fierce

Fierce Curatorial Policy **January 2024 ~~May 2018~~**

Fierce receives requests from artists all over the world for their work to be programmed at Fierce Festival. Being a biennial festival **with a handful of year-round events**, Fierce has limited programming slots and so we've written this curatorial policy to help us define what it is we're interested in, and hopefully make our curatorial process more transparent for artists and audiences.

This document is a work-in-progress. Building on the work and writing of Artistic Director Aaron Wright and of the Fierce team, past and present. Curating, in many ways, is about where and when. As such, expect the words to shift and change through Director (Artistic) Clayton Lee's tenure in the role. New language – written in January 2024 – has been highlighted in yellow, with language – written in May 2018 – that is no longer relevant crossed out.

Fierce is a curated festival, which means there isn't an open call for proposals. Programming decisions are led by Fierce's **Director (Artistic) Clayton Lee** ~~Artistic Director Aaron Wright~~ **but built in conversation with the rest of the Fierce team, artists, presenters, and other friends and colleagues locally, nationally, and internationally.** Fierce curates a wide breadth of artists, but what unites all the work we programme is an interest in 'liveness' and the live event. **That said, we are curious about the boundaries of 'liveness' and we indulge in artistic strategies that can mutate our notions of it.** We often refer to Fierce as a 'cross disciplinary festival of performance', recognising that the performances/events we programme come from a broad range of artistic disciplines including dance, theatre, visual art and music. We're perhaps best described as a 'Live Art' organisation, a slippery term, well [defined by the Live Art Development Agency](#). ~~Other types of unusual practice~~ We're also interested in ~~include~~ Performance Art, one-on-one performance, participatory projects, social engaged practice, progressive cabaret and publicly cited unusual works such as previous Fierce projects like Benjamin Verdonck's *The Great Swallow* in 2005, Bennett Miller's *Dachshund UN* in 2012, **and Paul Ramirez Jonas's Key to the City in 2022.**

Fierce is interested in new, overlooked, difficult and risky artistic practices. However, 'new' shouldn't be read to mean 'young'. We know artists in their 80s still having new ideas. **And we insist on recognising and acknowledging the lineage of our artistic practices, locally, nationally, and internationally. Everything is additive and cumulative.** We buck programming trends in the UK, frequently presenting UK premieres and the UK debut performances of significant international artists. We do this to contribute to creative dialogues in the UK, hopefully inspiring the UK scene, by allowing them access to the most exciting performance from around the world, showcasing practices that wouldn't be seen in the UK otherwise. In recent years, we've presented the UK debut performances of artists including: Simone Aughterlony, Dana Michel, Erin Markey, Marie-Caroline Hominal, Louis Vanhaverbeke, Preach R. Sun, Antonija Livingstone, Miguel Gutierrez, Michele Rizzo and many more. Due to various barriers, the majority of the work we programme is "Western" but we are currently focusing on building relationships with artists outside of Europe, Australia and North America. In our quest to support overlooked practices, we're unlikely to present work that has previously toured in the UK. The UK work we present tends to be newly commissioned, **including Cade & MacAskill's The Making of Pinocchio, Oozing Gloop & friends' Tentacular Spectacular, and Freddie Wulf's we are all made of stars for the 2022 festival.** **Our core funding does not support commissions directly; we fundraise for them separately and are most often for UK-based artists.** ~~We don't do much international commissioning, but if we do it will probably be through the [WEB Network](#) — an informal network of European commissioners that Fierce is a part of.~~

Fierce is informed by an intersectional queer politic (stemming from its original roots as Queerfest back in the mid 90s) and subsequently we're very interested in embodied practices and embodied politics. We're invested in presenting the work of marginalised artists, be that based on gender, race, class, sexuality, ability or numerous other factors. Fierce isn't an 'issue' led festival but knows that the best artistic work so frequently comes from a marginalised position. **We want to empower marginalised artists to make whatever work they want to make.** **Simultaneously, we reject the notion of work being made from these identities as having inherent value. We wonder what value means in this context, anyway.**

Fierce wants to challenge predominant hierarchies in the art world, asking questions about what art is deemed valuable, who it can be for and where it can be presented. We're interested in the relationship between the mainstream and the underground, and that of the allegedly **low art and high art** ~~low-brow and high-brow~~. To this end Fierce is interested in a range of practices that might be considered punk, outsider, trash, camp, or generally "alternative". Fierce doesn't take itself too seriously in the hope that audiences won't either with the aspiration of making experimental arts practices more accessible to general audiences.

Theatre is a broad term. The theatre we are interested in tends to be devised and shuns naturalistic modes of performance or 'acting'. We're particularly interested in theatre that is experiential in some way. This could include site-responsiveness or site-specific work, one-on-one performance, installation, participatory performance or immersive work. Theatre artists and companies Fierce has programmed in the past include Forced Entertainment, Gob Squad, Abigail Conway, Ant Hampton, Bobby Baker, Eva Meyer Keller, Tania El Khoury, Stan's Cafe, Uninvited Guests, Kate McIntosh, Action Hero, Quarantine, Kim Noble, Phillippe Quesne, Cade & MacAskill, Nicola Gunn, Davy Pieters and many more. Fierce isn't interested in repertory theatre and the playwright/director system and circus or physical theatre which is well supported elsewhere.

In recent years Fierce has programmed more and more dance. However, a more appropriate term might be 'expanded choreography'. Whilst the artists we've worked with might be formally trained in dance you're unlikely to see much classic choreography in the work. In line with our interest in embodied practice and embodied politics we're also less interested in work that has been choreographed for other bodies. Dance artists we've worked with include Ann Liv Young, Holzinger & Riebeek, Quarto, Dana Michel, The Famous Lauren Barri Holstein, Jamila Johnson-Small, Lucy Suggate, Mariana Valencia, Andrew Tay, Stephen Thompson, Malik Nashad Sharpe, Ellen Furey, Alice Ripoll, and Cherish Menzo and more.

A festival is an opportunity to engage in conversation. Thus, context remains the primary driver in our curatorial process. Context is geographic, spatial, historical, political, time-based, and more. Context is our material and that material is constantly evolving. We want to understand how an artist's practice fits into the Birmingham and West Midlands scene, as well as the national and international ones. We think about how our supported projects are in conversation with each other and with the audience.

Fierce loves to animate the city of Birmingham in unusual ways, casting a new light on the city. We're therefore very interested in programming work outside of traditional art spaces. In the past we've presented work in public squares, warehouses, parks, train stations, shops, carparks, churches, nightclubs, swimming pools, community centres, on trams, trains & buses, under Spaghetti Junction, in hot air balloons and even installed artworks on top of Birmingham Central Library and on the side of the Birmingham Bullring Rotunda.

The West Midlands is a vibrant region and we work closely with a huge number of venues locally from main stages, to artist led spaces. There are also a number of fantastic festivals in the city with more formal genre distinctions so do have a look

at ~~Birmingham European Theatre Festival~~, Supersonic Festival (music), Flatpack (Film) Festival and ~~Birmingham International Dance Festival~~, as we all like to complement and not replicate each other's programming.

Artists are welcome to send details of their work to the Fierce team if you think your work fits with our programming policy. We're always looking to make new relationships – relationships are at the core of our curatorial practice – and prefer to see performances in person, so sending upcoming dates is useful, as is full length video documentation, as we can't travel to see everything. Fierce is run by a very small team, and so it may take a while to get back to you. ~~Please allow 6 weeks for us to respond before resending your email.~~

And finally, Fierce reserves the right to make exceptions to this policy, as it sees fit.
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Clayton Lee,
Director (Artistic)
February 2024

~~Aaron Wright,
Artistic Director
May, 2018~~