Teaching Artistry In Action

Hello I'm Tom also known as The Chubby Northerner. Taking inspiration from Ali
I'm a working class teaching artist who needs to know an encyclopedia to survive. What started as a hobbie was soon turned into making money, because drama was the only thing I got in school above a C. So I suppose in a nutshell, I'm a self taught unofficial/ offical poet, author, performing producer that writes and directs, while being a content creating TIKTOKING conveyor belt activist with no qualifications to be a graphic designing, logo expert in canva, or adobe reader. I'm an accountant with no math GCSE, I'm an unelected community role model with an enhanced DBS. I'm a professional train passenger, I'm a glorified UBER driver with craft materials as my passenger. I'm a mental health champion with no doctorate or MA in being a therapist that uses art for his own therapy. I'm a meal deal connoisseur that can juggle a tuna butty, quavers and iced coffee while walking down a busy high streets between workshops and gigs that I have to eat in under a minute while popping a renne so I don't get indigestion. I'm a sectary & receptionist to myself. I am a board member that has daily board meetings with my laptop in coffee shops in Wigan. I'm a manager & fundraiser who has 1 to 1 meetings with chat GPT. I'm a CEO of a 1 person multi fascited business. I'm a voluntary consultant that doesn't really know what I'm consultating on. I'm a facilitating self-employed workshop leader with no training in teaching but a glued together fractured amateur professional practitioner who is very good at saying yeah fuck it why not. I'm a high rise tower block muti office buisness filled with 100's of salaried employees and departments rolled into a singular artist for a 3rd of the price.
But I love it and I'm sure so do those of you who are also Teaching Artists in the room. Thats why we are all here a shared goal, a shared community, a shared Power, Joy, passion and energy. Oh and the shared purpose of being skint. I only really heard that word "Teaching Artist" originally from Amina this year actually and beautifully summed up today by Madeline. However by god its sometimes draining! So may I share some collective frustration in the name of education.

The diarys of a Struggling freelancer our pet peeves,
can we just...
have ONE universal template
for bloody invoices?
Some want a UTR,
Some want NI
some want a PO,
some want a reference number,

some want a psychic reading
Left to guess what they forgot to tell us.
Then have the audacity to say we're wrong
when they never said what right even was.
And while we're at it
pay. us. on. Time.
My pay day isn't a set Friday,
It's anytime between any Monday to Sunday.

Then there's the classic dance:
"How much do you charge?"
"What's your budget?"
"What do you normally charge?"
And the second we dare to speak our worth
ghosted.
Left on read
like we asked for the crown jewels
instead of the standard rate
they could've just told us in the first place.

Our fee includes holiday pay,
materials,
travel,
sick days,
taxes,
our spine and sanity
so don't tell me a £200 day rate's too high
then try chuck £50 at me
like it's some kind of sympathy donation.
I know my worth.
I just need you to stop pretending you don't.

Meetings that go nowhere,
costing us money
for the privilege of wasting time.

Pretending we live in a 9-to-5 world
when we finish a workshop at 9pm

and answer emails
with paint still drying on our sleeves.

And listen
a brew and a biccy
when we walk in the room we have never been?
That is the key to our hearts.
That's the national currency of feeling valued

And a big one is we have talked about a loneliness epidemic
but some of the loneliest people
are teaching artists.
Freelancing is a strange kind of quiet:
surrounded by kids, communities, organisations,
yet not speaking to anyone
for hours
until a Zoom call
breaks the silence
for twenty minutes
then nothing again.
Working from spare rooms
and kitchen tables,
bad backs from bougie benches in trendy cafés
where the coffee costs more
than our packed lunch that we slyly eat under the table
Cold co-working spaces,
echoing offices,
Barristas that know us
better than our neighbours
We are always around community,
yet somehow
not quite in it.
Just a few pet peeves,
a few shared sighs, a few truths, a few invisible back packs we carry empty

But lets not forget why we are actually here instead of me relaying freelance rants. A collective belonging, collective purpose and collective passion for the arts. That's what it comes down to. We have seen the successes firsthand, we are products of it, we live it,

teach it and see it everyday. The arts its so powerful, it should be implemented in every school, we are not saying every child will be a Shakespearean actor or fine artist, but it will improve confidence and social skills, teach a different way of thinking or problem solving, promote better mental health and well being and at the end of the day the arts makes better bus drivers, teachers, hairdressers, barristers, office workers and more. We all have different journeys and pathways in life but let the arts show you direction.

So lets remember what we are as teaching artists and the impact we have. We carry our craft into classrooms,
studios, libraries,
& community halls alive with questions.
Brining new knowledge that you sometimes can't find in a lesson
We spark curiosity,
build resilience,
and help people find
identity, voice, and belonging
in a world that too often forgets to listen.
We know that the Arts helps us all to learn and grow
far more than watching a play
or losing ourselves in a screen.
The arts teach confidence,
the courage to speak, to try, to fail,
See, any form of creation starts as a seed,
Fed by thoughts, emotions, trauma, wants & needs
Creativity's not fancy, it's survival, it's expression, it's release,
It's finding a bit of calm in a moment of peace.
When the world gets loud and your head's a mess,
Art gives your chaos a place to rest.
It's joy, it's therapy, it's truth, it's play,
It's saying what you've never known how to say.

This is not some half-hearted job
done only to pay the bills;
it is a calling, a craft,
a constant act of making meaning.
For art is a tool and a tool that should be open and accessible to all.
So as the day comes to a close this is a time for reflection. We started the day Paying memories and busking and I now end it with call to arms.

We have explored Beliefs and values. Revolution and collaboration, policy and ecology, qued and stewed, we have rapped and used our words to scrap and even visited the past, the present and now I talk about the future.
So here we stand,
at a tipping point.
Not a whisper,
not a maybe,
not a “one day when we have funding” point
Not after your green tea and mint imperials
but now.
Because the world is loud,
But the arts can louder.
Because we
aren’t side characters in education
we’re the spark,
the engine,
the wild possibility
that walks into a room
and dares it to transform.
We are culture-carriers,
confidence-builders,
door-openers,
truth-speakers,
joy-makers.
We are the hands that guide,
the voices that lift,
the hearts that hold space
for people to find their own.
And if society wants to keep
underrating, underpaying,
underestimating us
fine.
Let them.
Because history is full of people
who were undervalued
right before everything they touched
changed the world.
Thisus, here, today

this is community.
This is momentum.
This is the moment before the moment
people look back on and say,
“That’s when it shifted.”
We are the artists
who teach.
The teachers
who create.
The makers
who refuse to let the world
stay the same.
So let’s keep going
louder, prouder, sharper, stronger.
Let’s push the doors open
for the next kid, the next group,
the next version of ourselves
waiting in the wings.
Because we’re not at the end of a symposium;
we’re at the start of a revolution
This is your call to arms
your reminder, your rally cry:
Keep creating.
Keep fighting.
Keep showing up.
Keep shaping futures
with nothing but your craft,
your courage,
your curiosity
and a bag full of half-used art materials.
This is our tipping point.
Let’s tip it.
Let’s topple it.
Let’s change the world
one workshop,
one story,
one spark
One curiosity at a time.