

PRESS RELEASE: 1 June 2011

WORK-A-THON FOR THE SELF-EMPLOYED

Monday 13 June 2011

9:00 – 17:00

Toynbee Studios, London

Lone Workers Unite!

- **Are you one of the growing number of self-employed people working in the UK?**
- **Do you often feel lonely or isolated whilst working?**
- **Do you find yourself working long and unregulated hours?**
- **Are you often ‘too busy’ with work to socialise?**

Well, why not take part in the *Work-a-thon for the Self-Employed*?

Work-a-thon for the Self-Employed is an attempt to set a world record for the most self-employed people working together (on their own individual projects) in the same place at the same time, over the course of a normal 9-to-5 day.

The brainchild of artist Ellie Harrison, the *Work-a-thon* is an attempt at reversing some of the negative side effects of the freelance lifestyle – the isolation¹ and the unregulated and increasingly longer working hours².

Open to all self-employed people in the UK, the *Work-a-thon* aims to help enforce a ‘normal working day’ and, in doing so, to create a social working environment in which the informal conversations which lone workers miss out on – those ‘chats by the water cooler’ – can happen. For Ellie the event offers “an opportunity for self-employed people like myself to ‘be part’ of a social activity – a world record setting attempt – without losing out on those precious working hours!”

Work-a-thon for the Self-Employed takes place against the backdrop of an increasingly fragmented and precarious labour market, which has resulted, in part, from the expansion of self-employment. Now well over 12% of the country’s workforce³ fall into this largely non-unionised group for whom risk has been ‘privatised’ – pensions, sick-pay and the rest have become the individual’s responsibility.

Writing in *Art Monthly*, Martin Herbert described those taking part in the *Work-a-thon* as being “at once alone and together, in what amounts to a blindingly logical, hopeful sidestep of the atomising that attends the self-employed – a rising, barely-on-the-radar, fragile demographic in the UK... lacking ‘the luxury of employee benefits and the concept of workplace solidarity’.”⁴

It is Ellie’s hope that on Monday 13 June – for one day only – “we will work together, lunch together, knock-off at five and go to the pub together – forge new friendships, connections, collaborations, working methodologies and political action, perhaps even the birth of a ‘Union for the Self-Employed’.”

Notes to Editors:

Ellie Harrison is an artist based in Glasgow. Her practice emerges from what she sees as a continual attempt to strike-a-balance between the competing roles of ‘artist’, ‘activist’ and ‘administrator’. She uses skills and strategies drawn from each of these perspectives to create playful and engaging work, in-and-out of art world contexts, which aims to expose and challenge the systems which control and rule over our lives.

In July 2010, as a reaction to cuts in arts funding she devised and launched the *Artists’ Lottery Syndicate* – a 40-strong collective of artists, including Dave Beech, Dean Kenning, Susan Collis and Hayley Newman, joining forces to attempt to win the jackpot over the course of a year. In 2009 she founded the *Bring Back British Rail* campaign and in February 2010 became the first individual artist to openly publicise an ‘Environmental Policy’ on her website.

Work-a-thon for the Self-Employed is part of Artsadmin’s Two Degrees festival, a week of art and activism, climate and cuts, taking place from 12 – 18 June 2011.

Participants are being recruited via an ‘open-call’ in collaboration with organisations who do support and represent freelance workers across the UK including the Association of Illustrators, AIR: Artists’ Interaction & Representation and the Writers’ Guild of Great Britain, as well as artists’ groups concerned with contemporary labour issues, such as Amateurist Network and Furtherfield.org.

Registrations take place online until 12 June 2011 at: selfemployed.me.uk

For more information please contact: ellie@ellieharrison.com | 07929 565 855
selfemployed.me.uk | ellieharrison.com | artsadmin.co.uk/twodegrees

¹ “isolation, in its various guises, continues to be a danger for most freelance cultural workers” in *A Very Complicated Version of Freedom* by David Hesmondhalgh & Sarah Baker, Variant Spring 2011

² “just one more example of the twisted mentality of self-exploitation that has spread itself through the world of employment in the last decade and a half” in *A Capitalist’s Dream* by Andrew Ross, LRB 19 May 2011

³ *Workforce Turns to Self-Employment* in *Money*, The Guardian, 10 October 2006

⁴ *Ellie Harrison Profile* by Martin Herbert in *Art Monthly*, May 2011