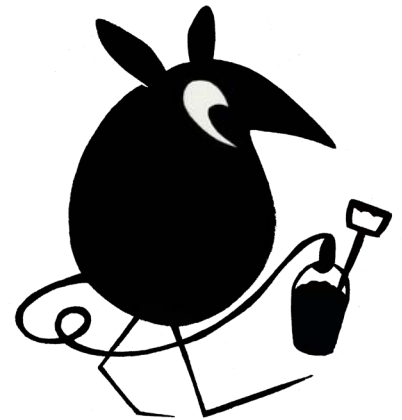


‘WELCOME TO THE CULTURAL DESERT...’





‘WELCOME TO THE CULTURAL DESERT...’





HOW TO READ THIS BOOK...

This is a book about cultural participation.

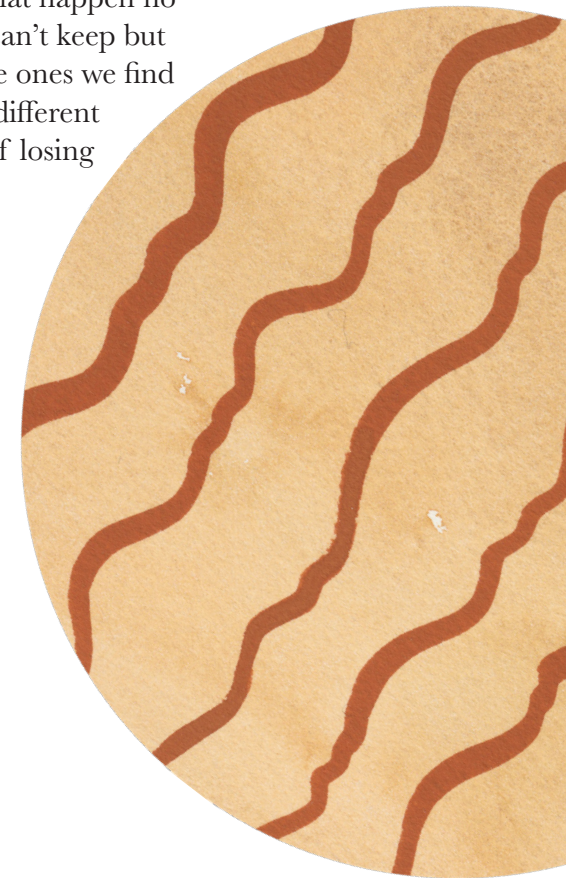
It's about the successes we often hear talked about and the failures we don't. It's about the big system issues of governance and strategy and the smaller, everyday failures that happen no matter how hard we work. It's about making big promises that we know we can't keep but which help us to secure funding. It's about the problems we recognise and the ones we find harder to see; and the relativity of success and failure for different people at different times. Sometimes it's about negligence, but most often it's about fear – fear of losing funding and losing face in a sector that still struggles to assert its value.

Set in a 'cultural desert' near you, with a cast of animal characters, this is a simple story that many of us know only too well, but which can be told in multiple ways. Juxtaposing the claims we make **publicly** with the things we may think **privately**, we invite you to consider which story you find yourself telling most often? To whom, and why?

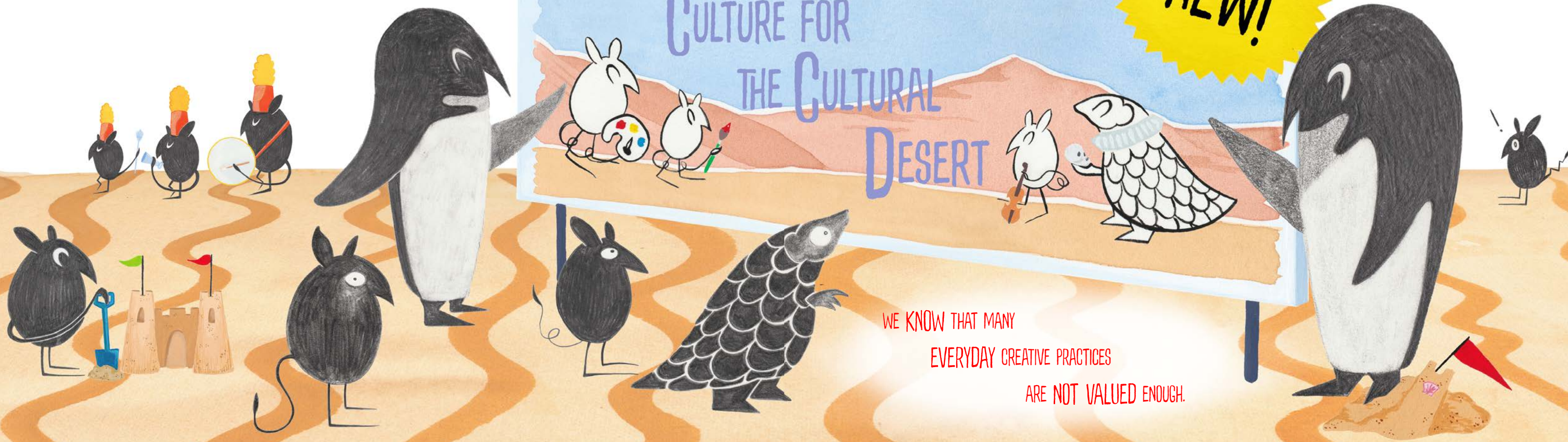
As this is a book with two stories, it also offers two potential endings – one in which the cultural sector continues to emphasise success at all costs and another, hopefully brighter one, in which we are all empowered to interrogate failures and their implications.

The stories we tell each other matter. We hope this book will stimulate and develop your conversations with colleagues and participants, and ultimately, help us all to build a more equitable cultural sector.

With love, Leila, David and Lucy – The Failspace Team



WE BELIEVE THAT EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT
TO PARTICIPATE IN THE BEST OF ARTS AND CULTURE...



WE KNOW THAT MANY
EVERYDAY CREATIVE PRACTICES
ARE NOT VALUED ENOUGH.

WE ASKED THE COMMUNITY WHAT KIND OF CULTURE THEY WANTED...



WE FOUND THAT WE MOSTLY SPOKE
WITH THOSE ALREADY
INTERESTED IN THE ARTS WE LIKE...

WE LISTENED TO EVERYBODY'S IDEAS...



WE LISTENED MOST TO THE IDEAS THAT FITTED OUR AGENDA...

WE CO-PRODUCED A PLAN FOR A...

BIG!
EXCITING!
NEW!
PROJECT



NOT EVERYONE WAS AT THE TABLE...



What about us?





*We want to work together to
create a high-quality arts event
that is suitable for everyone...
a big spectacle to reach the
largest audience possible!
We'll also build a team of local
champions who can sustain the
work when the project ends...*

WE ENCOURAGED AMBITIOUS, COLLABORATIVE WORK...

WE KNEW WE DIDN'T

HAVE THE TIME OR RESOURCES

TO DO THE PROJECT PROPERLY...



*There's only
4 weeks...*

OUR TOP PRIORITY

WAS TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS...



OUR TOP PRIORITY

WAS TO OUR TOP INSTITUTIONS...

WE WERE COMMITTED TO REMOVING ALL BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION...



I'm coming!



WE KNOW THERE ARE STILL SOME WE FAILED TO REMOVE...



I have to work...

The activities aren't suitable for my kids...



I'm just not interested...



The venue isn't accessible...

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS ARE CRUCIAL TO A PROJECT'S SUCCESS!



WE KNOW THAT COMMUNITY ARTISTS WERE OFTEN UNDER-SUPPORTED...

THE OPENING
WAS
SPECTACULAR!



Isn't it fun? But is it art?

Hi Mum!

I'm so proud!

WE BELIEVE THAT PARTICIPATION IN THE ARTS EMPOWERS INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES...

WE SAW LOTS OF COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

THAT WERE NOT SUPPORTED

THE WAY OUR PROJECT WAS...



WE ASKED FOR HONEST FEEDBACK TO INFORM OUR LEARNING...



WE COLLECTED

GOOD NEWS STORIES

FOR OUR FUNDERS...

This is so cool!



EVERYBODY

HAD

A

BRILLIANT

TIME!

WE DIDN'T PAY ENOUGH ATTENTION

TO THOSE WHO DIDN'T ENGAGE...

Say cheese!
(This will
look great in
our post-
project
report..)



THE PROJECT LEFT A STRONG LEGACY IN THE COMMUNITY...



WE HAD NO IDEA

HOW TO MAKE THE BENEFITS SUSTAINABLE

WITHOUT CONTINUED FUNDING...

*That's it...
I'm through
with art...*

*Yes I'd love
work on your
new participation
project!*



WE USE EVALUATION TO REFLECT ON OUR PRACTICE...

POST-GRANT REPORTS

*This one looks
interesting...*

EVALUATION

FAIL!



STRATEGY REPORTS

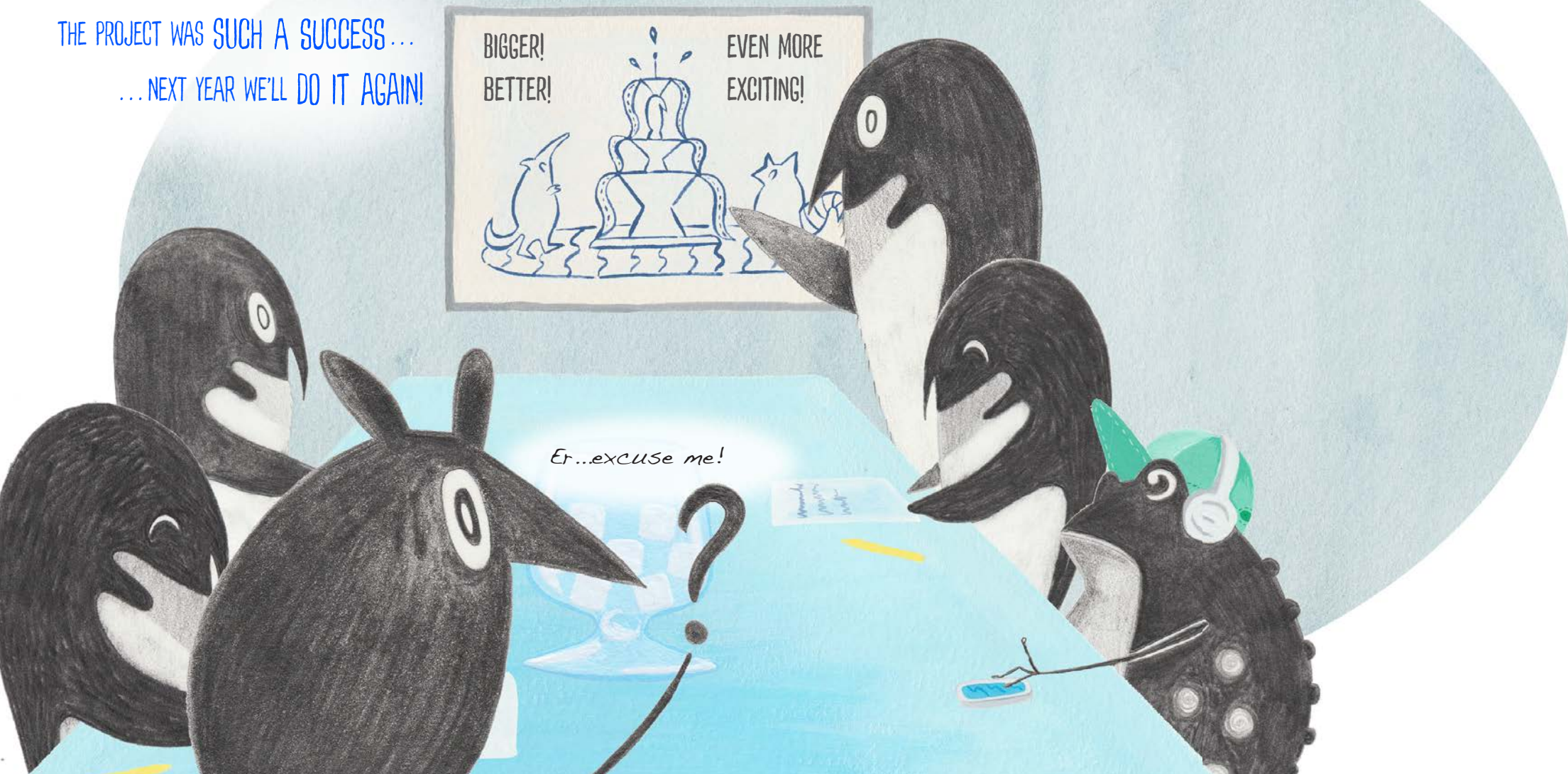
*I'll put it here until
we have time to look
at it properly...*

PROJECT EVALUATION

WE NEVER HAVE ENOUGH TIME TO DEAL WITH THE ISSUES RAISED...



THE PROJECT WAS SUCH A SUCCESS...
...NEXT YEAR WE'LL DO IT AGAIN!



*It wasn't all
that great...*



WE TALKED HONESTLY ABOUT THE PROJECT'S SUCCESSES

AND FAILURES SO NEXT YEAR WE WILL DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY ...



ABOUT THE PROJECT...

‘Cultural Participation: Stories of Success, Histories of Failure’ – also known as ‘FailSpace’ – is an AHRC-funded research project that explores how cultural policy can better recognise, acknowledge and learn from failure. The project is led by Leila Jancovich (University of Leeds), with David Stevenson (Queen Margaret University) and Lucy Wright (University of Leeds / Axis). We think that it’s important to talk more – and more often – about failure and the potential learnings that can be drawn from it, in order to begin to transform the landscape of arts and cultural policy. To find out more about our research, please visit: www.culturalparticipation.co.uk.

‘Welcome to the Cultural Desert...’ was conceived and illustrated by Lucy Wright (www.artistic-researcher.co.uk) and printed by ASAP Digital.

With thanks to Leila Jancovich and David Stevenson, the FailSpace steering group (Sylvan Baker, Eleanora Belfiore, Philip Deverell, Victoria Durrer, Tony Graves, Rob Hoon, Sophie Hope, Jo Hunter, Jo Maclean and David Micklem) and Anthony Schrag for their generous feedback and support during the production of this book. Thanks also to all those who attended FailSpace workshops and/or shared their experiences via interview or our online survey. Special thanks to the regulars at Queens Mill, Castleford, and The Living Room, Hull.

First published 2020 | ISBN 978-1-5272-6863-0





FailSpace