

# Diversity in London's Cultural Industry—The Faces of the City Itself?

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*Polis Intern and LSE MSc student Gia Jianyang Zhang reports on the latest Polis Media Agenda Talk featuring Gabrielle Smith and Vinay Patel.*



Photo by Szu-ting Chou

The city with three of the top ten museums and galleries in the world and 857 art galleries in total, the city with more than 17,000 music performances across 300+ venues through the year, the city with more than 800 bookshops and over 380 public libraries, and the city with more than 300 languages spoken and around 250 festivals annually. Which world city do you think is the most culturally vibrant? What if a city exists that could satisfy us all? This, for me, is London, a city of creativity, art and culture.

'Multicultural' artists in London have become an essential part of the creative economy due to their particular perspectives. According to the English Regional Statistics released by Creative Blueprint in 2012, BAME (Black and Minority Ethnic) artists accounted for 9% of the Creative and Cultural industries in London and contributed up to 20% for the total creative economy of the city.

Keeping a healthy balance between British and Grenadian culture, 30-year-old graphic designer Gabrielle Smith described her original intention to establish *Thenublk*, a website showcasing the work of contemporary creatives of Africa and Diaspora, as a "self-exploration". *Thenublk*, is her unique contribution to the process of redefining herself as a "new black." The website won the popular vote for Best International Blog at the Black Weblog Awards in 2011, which made her gain more confidence to continue the work.

In 2013, *Yellow Face*, a semi-autobiographical play by the Chinese-American playwright, David Henry Hwang, made its UK Premiere at Park Theatre in Finsbury Park, London on 21 May. In the play, the character Hwang accidentally casts a white man, indicating the contradictory force between the playwright's desire to integrate into western culture and the cultural bias in society.

"London as a city pushes the consolidation of many good theatres and encourages risk and diversity", says Vinay Patel, the Indian playwright, who has had work performed at Theatre 503, The Bush, the White Bear Theatre and Rich Mix. "Theatres are willing to reflect the different ways through which a city like London represents itself." Patel described London as a place in which he could find inspiration anywhere: "Anywhere isn't my bedroom."

Could the diversity of artists in London represent the culture of the city? The city itself should be a stage for the artists, wherever they are from, to equally show their talent and impress the audience. It could take twists and turns for a piece of art to finally make the public realize its value, and if what it has to suffer comes from the cultural bias against the artist's identity, this is part of the story of the city itself. The cultural diversity in the industry may lead to new insights for the progress for the city, and an open attitude to improving diversity in the creative industry serves as a force to make London more special.

So what could the mainstream media offer to help improve the city's cultural industry? The general impression is that there is already a relatively broad range of multicultural coverage in London. But the media could offer more genuine respect to diversity. Mass media, especially the news media, serves an essential role in the society influencing public attitudes. It is vital that the mass media – with its tendency towards narrow stereotypes – strives harder to give significant news space to the artists from different backgrounds to make their voice heard.

For me, this sense of diverse belonging is the best thing a city could offer.

***This article by Polis intern, Gia Jianyang Zhang***

Polis Media Agenda Talks are every Tuesday at 5pm and are free and open to the public – [details here](#)

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