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Artists of the World, Unite

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With [National Interfaith Week](#) just over, we should take a good look at how our diverse communities are really getting along.

With the government speaking of moving away from 'state multiculturalism' and towards integration, the question of how to bring faiths and communities closer together, how to tackle tensions and build understanding, becomes more urgent.

There's a lot of work to be done. In 2010, there were 9,679 racist and religious hate crimes in London alone. In all of the UK in 2009 a total of 52,028 crimes were recorded in which the offence was motivated by prejudice.

It doesn't help that the incentives to integrate aren't always there. Leaving the comfort of one's own community can be a daunting prospect, and if the benefits aren't obvious then why, it can be reasonably asked, should people bother?

We need to demonstrate - in word and deed - how much social capital we can unlock when everyone contributes and communal boundaries are no longer an issue. I believe that to do this we need to create a culture that encourages collaboration and participation in the civic space, where all communities are encouraged to bring their own talents and perspectives to the table.

At [3FF](#) we'd like to think that we took one small step towards creating that culture this Interfaith Week, by organising an [interfaith art exhibition](#). 35 individual artists and 3 multi-faith artist groups are now displaying their work side by side at [RED Gallery](#) in Shoreditch, London. While it may seem that hanging art in a gallery does little to better inter-communal relations, consider what had to be done to get there and the point becomes clearer:

Three faith-based organisations ([JCC for London](#), [Maslaha](#), [Art and Christianity Enquiry](#)) were brought on board as partners, to help build links with artists and audiences from different communities. Three faith-based galleries ([Jewish Museum](#), [Mica Gallery](#), [Sacred Space](#)) partnered up to display work to their visitors, bringing multi-faith art - and the idea of interfaith collaboration - to new audiences.

Not to mention the artists themselves: Three groups of very talented artists of different faiths and beliefs were brought together and worked for months to create inspiring pieces. Individual artists, and their networks and friends, were also brought together for the first time. School groups (mainly faith schools) and young professionals are visiting the space, the art stimulating discussion and engagement.

All throughout this process new links and connections between the communities involved are built at many different levels: between artists, faith organisations, galleries and visitors. And these relationships are not built primarily by 'interfaith organisations', but by the people involved themselves. Interfaith organisations can pave the way by linking people and groups, but it's the responsibility of us all to take the opportunities to engage offered for the sake of our own communities - and society as a whole.

Integration is not going to happen on its own, and it's not going to happen through government regulations - cohesion can't be legislated. Instead, we must start building a more inclusive culture ourselves. It will take time and effort, but ultimately the rewards will far outweigh the effort of stepping outside our comfort zones.

'Faith in the City' at RED Gallery (3 Rivington Street, London EC2A 3DT) is open until 4 December, every day 12 noon - 4 pm. Thursday 1 December is a women's day.

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