

MakeSpace Arts & Well-Being Report for 2021/22

In our third trading year we have consolidated our position as Shrewsbury's largest artist studios and a lively source of publicly accessible art exhibitions. The two painted ravens on the studio walls gave us all a great lift in difficult times, and hopefully did the same for the public. We then undertook a social media marketing campaign for 6 months which has raised our profile and filled all our studio spaces, thereby stabilising our income and putting us in a healthy position to continue contributing to and supporting our local art scene.

Spaces

At the end of year 3 we have 11 studio spaces occupied, some more permanently than others. We are also providing a base for Participate Contemporary Art, another group of artists who have had to move out of their studios nearby. This enables us to retain connections and collaboration possibilities with other groups of artists in the area. We have maintained a space throughout for short term hire, both to enable creatives with the need for project space, and to keep our studio community lively with the regular introduction of new people. As we are now focussed on providing studio space, bursaries/commissions and art community support, and Covid remains an issue, studio-based public activities

have ceased. However, Raven Studios took part in a new Arts Trail event in Shrewsbury in June 2021, involving an Open Studios day with an exhibition around the studio of resident and visiting artists' work, which we hope will be repeated. Some studio members also donated work to an art auction fundraiser for local charity Village Water, which raised over £4,000.

Workshops

The online Social Studios group continues, albeit with reduced numbers, possibly due to general financial concerns (energy prices, tax rises, etc). We continue to promote our free downloadable art activity packs to coincide with half terms and holidays.

Exhibitions

Our window gallery has been a successful addition to our visibility. We commissioned a bold, colourful, cycle themed mural on the Shropshire Cycle Hub windows, next to our exhibition windows, followed by a summery bike related display in our exhibition windows, which was also suitably bold and colourful. We have now advertised the space as free for artists who wish to display their work, with a small commission for the studio on any resulting sales. Work by resident artists was followed by an exhibition by a local painter, and there have been regular monthly exhibitions

since then, including by our current bursary holders. We have an ongoing offer for further window commissions advertised on our website.

Bursaries & Commissions

We have awarded 4 enabler bursaries this year, providing half the funds up front and half on completion. One has completed so far, and the rest will complete by the autumn. We have completed a project to provide a map of the visual arts in Shropshire, with pins for venues, galleries and individuals that are accessible to the public. This is being continuously updated as word gets out and is hosted on our website.

The Numbers

Over the year our permanent spaces have provided workspace for more than the 11 creatives who hire space with us. We have provided concessions on space hire to the value of £1800 including discounts for those on low incomes, and in exchange for time contributed to the studio and its day to day running. MakeSpace Arts & Wellbeing has provided £3680 of employment to creatives over the financial year for workshop delivery, commission fees, studio improvements and graphic/web design.

Social Media

Our online engagement has grown steadily, contributing to Shrewsbury and Shropshire's art scene and offering opportunities and inspiration to the local community. Over the year we have had a 262% increase of website visitors (5,000) and our social media following has more than doubled to 1969 people. Our activities this year have improved the local urban environment and aesthetic of the Smithfield Rd area. Our Window Gallery has a regular programme of local artists' exhibitions and is currently booked until the New Year. Our Artscape map has been welcomed by Shropshire visual artists and we aim to have it well distributed by next year.

We are also working on finding a new home, as the future of our current one is uncertain due to planned town developments. Our directors are involved in discussions regarding these developments, and general Shrewsbury town planning, in order to lobby for the inclusion of the arts.

Jancis Vaughan

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