



Ort Gallery Annual Report 2017



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Successes of 2017

Towards the end of 2016 Ort Gallery was awarded a strategic investment by the Arts Council England called Elevate. The aim behind the grant was to support our growing organisation to become more financially sustainable, develop the organisation and support our social mission to facilitate dialogue in the community by exhibiting ambitious projects by diverse artists for a diverse audience.

Team

Through the fund we employed Amahra Spence (Part Time Project Manager), Tim Hodgson (Part Time Project Manager), Ridhi Kalaria (Part Time Diversity Officer), Adam Carver (Part Time Project Manager Maternity Cover), Josephine Reichert (Part Time Project Manager) and Syeda Shah (Community Ambassador and Workshop Leader). Creating this team allowed us to develop the organisation as each individual brought their own expertise, networks and interests to the organisation. It also allowed us to work with many more local organisations (more on this point below) and establish strong links in the city. Despite being situated in the community and out of the way of most arts organisations in the city centre and Digbeth we feel well connected and part of the scene. Expanding the work force also allowed us to apply for more grants from trusts and foundations and we were successful in receiving further investment of £60,000 this year. Finally we were able to take on bigger project such as running our very first South Asian Arts Festival in the local area.

Steering Committee

We created a Steering Committee of a diverse range of industry experts from a variety of industries including Accounting, Politics, Academia, Marketing, Arts and Finance. Through regular meetings we are able to draw on their expertise, we are held accountable to our social mission as a CIC and we have a sound board to receive feedback and advice from. Through a session on marketing we managed to hugely improve our marketing strategy across the board including a new website and many more followers on social media.

Funding

As mentioned we were successful in receiving large investment from trusts and foundations. Our British Values workshops for homeschooled children which runs for 9 months into 2018 was awarded a grant by the Big Lottery. We were also successful in receiving a Grant for the Arts for our project with Janet Mendelsohn allowing us to spend more time and resources researching the images and collecting oral histories from local residents that we will exhibit alongside the show in 2018. We hired Rachael Cox as our researcher for the project and she will continue her work in 2018. Finally we received a grant from the City Council over £40,000 to put on a South Asian Arts Festival in Sparkhill and Sparkbrook which we called SPARK.

SPARK South Asian Arts Festival

The festival saw us work with six local community and arts organisations: Soul City Arts, The Muath Trust, ACP Ashiana Project, The GAP Arts, Beatfrees and Art Works, the local arts forum. During the two weeks of the festival we put on a Yemeni Arts Festival, a South Asian Film Festival, an interactive mural on Ladypool Road and support lots of cultural activity across the surrounding neighbourhoods. Engagement with the activity was far beyond expectation with a couple of hundred people attending the opening of the Yemeni Arts Festival alone. We hired Harpreet Kaur to run the programme of the festival.



Partners

As the above paragraph shows we worked with many new arts and community organisations through SPARK festival. We also formed formal partnerships with Fierce, SHOUT Festival, BE Festival, Still Walking Festival, NAWM, Flatpack Festival and MAIA. The partnerships look at shared values between our organisations and a pledge to create more joint work in 2018. We worked with SHOUT and Fierce Festival in 2017 for the Eca Eps exhibition putting on a performance in the Moseley Road Baths across the road looking at migration and the displacement of people and a zine and printmaking workshop looking at LGBT discrimination in Nigeria. For the above mentioned British Values workshops we partnered with Femtinos and Round Midnight to run the series of workshops looking at what it means to be British in 2017. We worked with NAWM during our first Members Show to organise a Crit Club for all participants and during the BCU show to organise a workshop on how to approach galleries and apply for opportunities successfully. We worked with BCU's Fine Art Course



to offer the students an opportunity for an exhibition and the winning group showed a professional looking exhibition dealing with urban change. In February we supported 'One Day Without Us' by working with Hope Not Hate, Asirrt and Right to Work, to celebrate the contribution of migrants to the UK. We supported the organisation of a Street Iftar on Moseley Road by working with MELA, Clifton Road Mosque and the Muslim Students House. We exhibited local emerging Somali artist Ahmed Magare and worked with Writers Without Borders and Warwick University to organise a screening of a documentary about Somali people in Birmingham and a Poetry event.

Membership

We created a Membership Programme called Schwarmerei which allows all members to apply to our yearly open submission exhibition, special members events, signposting to events by our partners and other professional development opportunities. At the end of the year we have 54 members. The membership also helps us have a constant unallocated income stream as the individuals pay £20 per year to be a member. Having interviewed a couple of members we have received very positive feedback from the individuals mentioning that the exhibition opportunities, networking, signposting and critical feedback are amongst the most successful parts of the scheme.

Volunteer and Community Ambassador Schemes

We also formalised our Volunteer and Community Ambassador schemes working with the local job centre to work with more volunteers to support our work as an organisation, to offer professional development opportunities to the individuals and to ensure we remain accessible to people from all pockets of society. The community ambassadors help us ensure our projects are culturally sensitive and accessible and help us programme exhibitions and events that our audiences want to see. We offer regular placements to students from the MA in Television & Media from University of Birmingham and the students create professional documentary films of the exhibition projects which form part of our archive.

Target Audiences / Community Groups

In 2017 we were successful in tapping into audience groups that are very hard to reach including Muslim mothers and the Yemeni community. Working with local community organisations such as as Femtinos, the Muath Trust and Ashiana ACP we have been able to establish a connection with these communities.

Room Hire

In January we renovated our gallery and office space to make it brighter, cleaner and more open. This has helped us to attract more room hire inquiries but these remain still too low for our capacity. We need to attract more inquiries in 2018 to ensure we have more unallocated income streams to support our work.

Marketing

Through the help of a bigger team and our Steering Group we have vastly improved our brand, marketing and social media figures. In November we launched a new website which is more accessible, image heavy as opposed to text heavy and welcoming.

Our new website finally has the capability of monitoring how many people use it and how. Since November 2017 (when the website launched) we had 332 monthly active users of which 76% are from the UK. That's a total of 1144 users and over 6000 page views.

We have a much better activity on social media with 1174 facebook followers, 1071 twitter followers, 611 Instagram followers and 566 individuals signed up to our mailing list.

Attendance & Participation

We recorded over 3500 visitors last year of which 1000 took part in the SPARK festival.

In 2017 we collected 67 monitoring Forms. 40% of visitors are from South Birmingham and 30% from other areas of Birmingham and beyond. 40% of visitors are White British and 30% of Non-White background with 15% of Asian heritage. 80% of visitors are female.



Exhibitions

In 2017 we had four exhibitions as part of our programme: a Solo Show by Kristina Cranfeld looking at the Citizenship Test and its validity and absurdity, our open submission Schwarmerei Members Show, a solo show by Eca Eps looking at the displacement of people and the BCU Fine Art Student Show 'FLUX'. We also had two exhibitions during our summer break, one by Somali artist Ahmed Magare looking at migration and belonging and 'ROCK' by Kirk Andrews and Tim Thomson, Schwarmerei members who hired the gallery space for their exhibition.

For more details, we have an extensive archive on our new website: ortgallery.co.uk/exhibitions



Eca Eps 'From Chibok to Calais' Installation shot

Kristina Cranfeld 'In this Perfect British Landscape...' Installation shot



A Plan for 2018

We believe 2017 was a great year for Ort Gallery's organisational development. Due to better investment we were able to expand our team which allowed us to formalise partnerships with independent arts and community organisations in the city who share our ethos. We also formalised our Membership, Community Ambassador and Volunteer Scheme and set up a Steering Committee. We had good attendance throughout the year and Eca Eps' show was especially well received. We have been told that her performance at the Mosley Road Baths has gained the interest of the British Council.

So to summarise - we are now better connected than ever, more people engage with our programme on a regular basis, we work with all target audiences that we set out to work with and our organisation is strong and healthy.

2018 is therefore going to be all about deepening the relationships we have formed and using them to not only stretch our investment but also reach more people in the community. As our programme and events are set in the Elevate bid we will need to work with our new partners to encourage more people to take part in our programme as well as find ways to create new joint work especially for specific groups.

We believe that our priorities for 2018 are to programme artists from underrepresented social groups to ask difficult questions and to use our events to make the exhibitions more accessible. We will draw on the connections made within the city to ensure more people engage with our programme. We will ensure our marketing strategy remains consistent and we use our social media platforms to shout about what we do regularly. Rather than going out to find people we will put on events with our new partners for the community groups in order to give the audience groups what they are missing in the area.

Finally, we will ensure that we remain relevant. We believe that we still fill a gap in the city by exhibiting and working with diverse artists, asking difficult questions about society, migration, sexuality and faith and facilitate dialogue amongst people who would not normally speak to one another.

