



Ort Gallery Annual Report 2019

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gallery

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Successes of 2019

In 2019 we had a bit of a rollercoaster start. We heard at the end of 2018 that we were unsuccessful with a large Arts Council (ACE) bid which meant that we had to vacate our space in the Old Print Works, which had been our home since 2012 leaving us spaceless for 6 months. It also meant all staff and freelancers were made redundant. It was a big blow to our organisation following the Elevate investment which had seen our organisation go from strength to strength in 2017 and 2018. Thankfully our voluntary board carried on working and managed to find funding eventually, more on this in the funding section.

In January we opened 'Ways of Belonging' at Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), exhibiting 4 local artists and their work questioning the concept of belonging and not belonging to a place. The show was ambitious and drew many new audiences to the centre. With nearly 100k visitors it was also the most viewed show we have ever organised.

In summer 2019 we moved into our new home, literally next door to our old one. The new space is based in the Moseley Community Hub in the former Moseley Art School. It's a beautiful space which hosts great physical and mental accessibility (see below) as well as many more opportunities for earning income for our organisation.

We became part of GUILD, run by East Street Arts in Leeds, a sector support project that is working with 20 artist-led spaces Nationally looking at supporting us to become more resilient and sustainable.

Restarting our bi-monthly family art workshops was another great success with many local families returning and thoroughly enjoying the art and craft workshops learning new skills at every session. Sam Krankpod (lead), Rosie Abbey (shadow artist) and Lesley Stewart (volunteer) have become a great team in running these workshops and feedback from children and parents has been extremely positive.

In 2019 we also saw previous partnerships bear fruit, mainly for artists we had worked with. Famina B's work was part of Ikon's Forward exhibition at the Medicine Gallery, Farwa Moledina started working at Ikon and was exhibited at the Lahore Biennale in

early 2020, Hira Butt had her work shown at the New Art West Midlands showcase in Coventry and Karen McLean announced a show at Walsall Art Gallery in April 2020. We are so happy to see that investment into artists from underrepresented groups is an investment in their careers and supports them long after their work with Ort Gallery ends.

Team

In 2019 Ian Sergeant, Josephine Reichert and Ridhi Kalaria continued their work as directors. Josephine is still the project manager and artistic director of the organisation



overlooking all day to day activity, programming the exhibitions and events and managing all staff. Anisa Fazal continued the role of Diversity Consultant supporting our events through consultancy, audience development and programming. Samantha Krankpod joined us in the role of Workshop Facilitator running our bi-monthly

family art workshops with shadow-artist Rosie Abbey. Salma Zulfiqar carried on as a Community Ambassador running ARTconnects workshops with local people including newly settled refugees and vulnerable adults. We were also joined by artists Uzmah Naz and Lesley Stewart as regular volunteers.

Steering Committee

After 2 years in post we asked all our Steering Committee members to step down to allow us to rethink how we could work better with a group of individuals to support our work. We tried hiring a new chair to help us with this process but this was not successful. We have therefore decided to invite two new directors to join the board of directors of the CIC in an official capacity. This is still in process and something we hope to achieve in 2020.

Funding

2019 had a rocky start with ACE declining our funding bids twice which also had an impact on funding from Amal, who's grant was contingent on the ACE investment and therefore declined as well. Luckily we managed to win our third ACE investment for a programme of activity from July 2019 to June 2020. We also managed to win funding from Amal to support the engagement programme for Laura Boushnak's, Raju Rage's and Olivia Twist's shows in 2020. We were successful in attracting funding from the Community Fund (Big Lottery) who support our family workshops. We should also mention that 8 bids were not successful from various trusts and foundations despite some funders showing growing interest in our organisation's work. This is a sign of the times for us, that fundraising is becoming increasingly competitive.

We earned income through our membership programme, as before. In order to become more financially sustainable we started a few new working methods in 2019. Firstly, our offsite show at MAC was fully funded by them allowing us to pay the artists a fair fee for their work. We also started running monthly



professional development sessions for emerging artists. We reopened our shop selling artwork and products made locally by artists and small companies. Our largest income stream is from room hire. Our new space attracts many more clients ranging from parties and meetings to events and exhibitions.

Access

2019 saw the gallery change venue when we moved over to the Moseley Community Hub. We updated and published our Access Guide on our website in pdf format. This runs through a number of ways to visit the gallery via public transport, as well as instructions on parking and general accessibility within the building. We are proud to say that we have improved the physical access to our space greatly as there is now step free access into the venue as well disabled toilets and lifts.

We have continued to live stream certain events in order to allow audience members who are unable to attend to take part. It remains vitally important to us that the gallery should be easily accessible to all and so we design every exhibition with this in mind. We use simple jargon-free language online and in print, we give all visitors a friendly welcome and free guided tours of the shows, we are approachable to visitors and aspiring artists alike, we support emerging talent and we run regular events that are designed to support engagement with the themes of the exhibitions and take the



shape of craft workshops, discussions, artist talks, screenings and tours.

However, we are also aware that we still have a long way to go to making our space physically and mentally as

accessible as possible and we are working towards achieving this goal.

Partners

We began 2019 working with the Midlands Arts Centre who hosted our Ways of Belonging exhibition. We also hosted a second offsite exhibition at the Gunmakers Arms pub in Hockley.

Due to the gap in our programme we worked with fewer partners than usual but it gave

us time to reassess how we work with partners and we have made some new connections for our programme going forward. Ikon are still mentoring us as an organisation and we are finding this support invaluable.



During Laura Boushnak's exhibition we worked with partners Writers Without Borders who helped us organise a poetry night in response to the work on show.

Membership

Our membership now consists of 44 members. They are largely made up of local artists and industry workers. We ran our third open submission members show from early August to late September as the first exhibition to be held in the new gallery. The exhibition was extremely well received and some artists were successful in taking their work further afield following the show. Several members also sold their art work.

We now run monthly professional development sessions followed by a social. These are free to members and low-cost to non-members. We cover topics such as "How to sell

your art work” to “How do I become a curator?” giving emerging artists a chance for lifelong learning and career development opportunities. They are run by industry specialists and allow local artists to meet people in the industry.

Volunteers

Due to the change in venue and offsite programme during half the year we worked with far fewer volunteers than usual. As mentioned above, Lesley Stewart and Uzmah Naz joined us as regular volunteers supporting events, representing the organisation and invigilating the space. In return we offer one to one session with the team to thank them for their ongoing support. We worked with Charlene Haylett in placement from the MA in Television & Media from University of Birmingham who is creating a professional documentary film of Laura Boushnak's exhibition for our archive.

Marketing

Our communication to our audiences is manifold. We speak to people every day in our venue as there is no separation between our office and the gallery space. We meet people at events, we ask them to fill out surveys, attend focus groups, email us, we use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and our mailing list to keep them up to date.

We have to date 4,238 Facebook followers, 1,798 Instagram followers and 2,306 followers on Twitter. We have 797 people subscribed to our newsletter. We recently updated our marketing plan for the coming 2 years and have also written an audience development plan. Both can be seen on request. Please see "Plan for 2020" for some more info on what we are planning for the next 12 months.

Attendance & Participation

In 2019 we had 101,809 total live audience, this high figure is due to a three month off-site exhibition at MAC where we experienced a very high footfall with 100k visitors. At Ort Gallery we had 1809 live visitors over a 5 month period (the gallery was closed from January to July). This figure is comparable to our average monthly visitors number in 2018. In 2019 we had 619 participants at 19 events.

143 people filled out monitoring information forms. 30% of visitors were of minority ethnic background, 30% of mixed race, 20% of Polish background and 20% of White British background. 63% of visitors and participants were of Muslim faith, 8% of Christian faith and 18% of no faith. 64% of visitors and participants were unemployed, 25% employed or self-employed and 10% retired. 50% of visitors and participants said they came from working class backgrounds and 25% of middle class backgrounds.

These figures are a great improvement on our audience reach since we started, and our figures now match the demography of our immediate surrounding neighbourhoods. We are proud that local residents find our exhibitions and events relevant, stimulating and inspiring. We see a lot of return custom and know many of our visitors by name. This is important to us as a small organisation, as it allows us to offer a friendly and approachable service many large organisations cannot match.

Exhibitions

We began 2019 in a period of transition towards a new venue. Temporarily bereft of a base, we conducted two offsite exhibitions across Birmingham. The first of these was a project hosted by the MAC called 'Ways of Belonging'. It brought together four young female Birmingham based artists with the focus on refining the narrative around what it means to belong somewhere and indeed what it means to be *local*. The exhibition highlighted a very personal act which is currently being depersonalised and stereotyped



by tabloid media and certain strands of mainstream political thought.

Following our collaboration with MAC and continuing the theme of the personal at odds with the political, our next exhibition: 'Human Story' took place at the Gunmakers Arms pub in Hockley. An amalgam of work belonging to six separate

artists, 'Human Story' focused on individual expressions and opinions in the age of mass information. All six artists are from our membership and we were very happy to offer them another exhibition opportunity on top of our yearly members show.

Following our arrival at our new venue in August, it seemed appropriate to christen the new gallery with the members show to celebrate the very best of local talent. The show received very good feedback and all artists stepped up their game in submitting high quality, well produced work. The show perfectly embodied the ethos of the new space: accessible, friendly and ambitious.

In October we exhibited a solo show by local artist Ahmed Magare entitled 'Vessels'. The exhibition was an interdisciplinary mix of painting and drawing that questions the notion behind being a modern day nomad. The



show was accompanied by a publication of poems by Magare of the same name which is on sale at the gallery shop. The opening event saw us share Yemeni tea and Somali snacks, a culinary experience to complement the exhibition.

Finally the year was rounded off with Laura Boushnak's exhibition 'I Read I Write', a thought provoking series of photographs taken in Gaza and Saudi Arabia focusing on local women and their relationship with literacy and education. The exhibition saw us connect to many new local audiences, community groups and students from the local colleges. It was complemented by an events programme in January 2020 with inspiring speakers and performers.



A Plan for 2020

We are late writing this 2019 report and find ourselves in the midst of the covid-19 pandemic, self-isolating at home and having had to shut the gallery temporarily with no knowledge of when we will be able to reopen the space. Our plans for 2020 have therefore changed hugely. We are now applying for emergency funding from Arts

Council England and other trusts and foundations trying to keep our freelancers and organisation afloat. This is an uncertain time and we will battle to keep our organisation going. Having had a tough year in 2019 we are well versed in adapting and finding new ways of working.

Our plans for the future is to work with new partners including International Curators Forum, CIWA (Centre for International Women Artists in Manchester) and ActionSpace. These partnerships will see us work with more National partners (London & Manchester) and also work with more curators. We have found that opportunities for curators from underrepresented backgrounds are severely limited and we want to actively challenge that through our programming giving curators autonomy in working with us.

Creating National links is also a new way of approaching audience development, something we are keen to plan for over the next few years. It will also allow us to position our organisation in the industry as a key player when it comes to representation of underrepresented groups.

Furthermore we are keen to keep working on our accessibility ensuring that we do not rest on our laurels but keep pushing. We want to speak to more people who find accessing art spaces difficult and react to their feedback if possible. We are embarking on an audience development programme starting off with an applied research project funded and supported by Warwick University speaking to local families about their barriers to engagement

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We are also particularly interested in hearing from people with invisible disabilities, D/deaf and disabled visitors and people with learning disabilities. We are planning on investing funds in this project to ensure all our consultants are appropriately remunerated.

We want to add two new directors to our board of directors which has consisted of the three same people since Ort Gallery was incorporated as a CIC in 2013 (Ian Sergeant, Josephine Reichert and Ridhi Kalaria). We now want to add more expertise to the board and also open up the board to new criticism and ways of working.

We have another 'Ways of Belonging' show planned to open at the Hippodrome in February 2020 offering more emerging talent exhibition opportunities in the industry, especially in large, well attended spaces as well as supporting these organisations to reach new audiences. We hope to work with many more organisations going forward. This way we carve a niche in the industry for ourselves allowing us to work with more large partners and giving artists from underrepresented, real, worthwhile, and paid work opportunities in the industry.

