

Notes from “Art for All in Sheffield?”

Saturday 12 October 2013

Session 1: Sheffield Visual Arts Group (SVAG) - Two Years On

Speaker: Janet Murray, SVAG

Two years on:

- the key aims of SVAG are to act as a catalyst, to snap at the heels of the Council and Sheffield Museums to improve access to the collections
- the thrust of the group is to come up with ideas despite lack of public money for arts

Achievements so far:

- organising a successful public meeting in March 2012, gathering a group of committed supporters
- study day 2012 Visioning the Future, work shopping ideas for delivering on our objectives.
- holding a regular programme of meetings with key representatives from SCC and MS

SVAG attempts to:

- contribute strategies
- develop practical projects and collaborations, e.g. Sheffield in 100 Objects with Sheffield University
- gather support from the people of Sheffield for cultural and creative projects
- explore possibilities for apprenticeships, e.g. curatorial

SVAG co-operates with Museums Sheffield, Sheffield City Council and the Arts Council, and works with these to explore the future of the Graves gallery. The “Force of Nature” and “Leonard Beaumont” exhibitions have been successful, but bigger and better ideas are needed. The Trust needs sponsorship until public money flows again. It also needs support from practising artists together with their representation on the Trust.

JM stressed the need for an Advisory Council of artists, art historians and others to promote new ideas, and called for a need to share the rich portfolio of space in the two universities as well as a need to work more closely with schools and colleges. The Trust needs to be more outward looking and we need the Council to

demonstrate that the Arts are important and cherished in Sheffield. There is a great need now to stimulate discussion and to look at the implementation of ideas.

Sheffield in 100 Objects: The Pilot Project

Speakers: Amanda Wade, Lizzie Wright, SVAG

Amanda Wade and Elizabeth Wright outlined the objectives of the 100 Objects pilot, and reported on progress to date. The pilot project is funded through an Arts Enterprise grant from the University of Sheffield, and is being carried out in partnership by representatives of SVAG, the University, and Museums Sheffield. To date, three pop-up events have been held to publicise the project, and invite members of the public to join in a city-wide debate about what should be included in an exhibition on Sheffield's history as illustrated through art and craft. A website and Twitter feed are generating on-going discussion, and Lizzie Wright is making contact with community groups across Sheffield to encourage participation in the project. The pilot culminates in a display of a small selection of nominated objects at Weston Park in May 2014.

Unlike Neil McGregor's Radio 4 series, the 100 Objects in Sheffield will be selected by the people of Sheffield, not by curators.

Session Two: Facing the Future

Speaker: Gordon Bridge, Chair, Museums Sheffield

Important element of facing the future is being fit for the future. The appointment of Kim Streets as Museums Sheffield's Chief Executive was an important factor in his accepting the role of Chair

Context in which they are working : Sheffield's manufacturing base which is growing

5 new trustees have been appointed, with a balance of skills. Sheffield University and Sheffield Hallam University are now represented, and also an accountant and a lawyer. A further appointment is of Dan Sequerra, with his extensive knowledge of the Art World and local government as well as other appropriate personal qualities. A Trustee from the V & A is still to be appointed

Governance. A complete review of Governance has been undertaken; this was essential. One of several actions resulting from this is the establishment of an Advisory Council on which the SVAG will be invited to be represented. Dan Sequerra, as a MS trustee, is to have a key role in establishing this Advisory Council

There are plans to engage more with the business community and more with the general community: the public. We need to get them to understand the issues, but this won't happen overnight

The relationship with Sheffield City Council is excellent. We now have more dialogue and a good working relationship, with regular meetings between the MS and SCC Executive teams, and the MS Trustees and SCC Leadership.

MS Trustees and Executive, as well as dealing with immediate issues, feel it is important to have big dreams for the future, even though they may not be

achievable. We want the best, for the Trust, for the City and for the people of Sheffield. In terms of visual arts, MS aims for a lively Millennium Gallery and Graves Gallery, with art on every floor

Questions & comments from the floor

There was a *question* about the distribution of National Funding. GB commented that Northern cities get less than Southern ones.

Comment on the perils of relying largely on private funding using an example from Detroit where funding was peremptorily removed.

Speaker: Councillor Isobel Bowler, Sheffield City Council

She is interested in how art can support community development. *Tour de France* will bring valuable income to the city.

Key relationships continue to develop: are good, and improving.

A dialogue has been established with Sheffield Visual Arts Group.

Financial problems are worsening. There is a budget reduction which will be manageable for MS. There is pressure on what we have and the line has to be held until better times. She is hopeful that the Council can get through the next 3 years and 'the lights are still on'.

Core Cities have met together with the Arts Council, to talk about some of the serious challenges to the cultural infrastructure. We asked them to consider their requirement for funding 'additionality' rather than core function.

Further detail on the *Tour de France*. There will be a 100 day cultural festival leading up to it; a good cultural offer that runs into it; a Trade Fair which will receive funding of £900,000.

Speaker: Paul Allen

* Successive governments have steadily cut Arts Council staffing and resources with the effect of reducing it to a largely clerical organisation vetting funding applications rather than an active and engaged supporter of artists and arts organisations.

* Combined with cuts to those organisations this had led to a fundamentally risk-averse culture in those institutions; this was fundamentally at odds with the needs of artists, who know that every piece of work is an experiment - they never knew what would 'work' - and therefore undertake risks all the time.

* We needed to pay attention to, and support, artists - who would frequently be mavericks. We needed to support the free and unfettered imagination.

* We had become cowed as a community by the perceived need for austerity and for managerial correctness.

* I quoted two recent books whose authors I'd interviewed for the Cheltenham Literature Festival: Geordie Greig's memoir of Lucian Freud had made it plain that

this great 20th century British artist had never done anything he didn't want to do; he had never ticked any boxes for anyone. Meanwhile Andrew Marr's book about drawing had reminded us that, as with poetry, just about everybody sooner or later has a go at drawing. Art is a part of our lives.

* Trust - as in Museums Sheffield Trust - was an important word. To embrace the passion of those who make art and support art, trust had to be at the core of what Trusts did; trusting the artists.

Questions & Comments

Who owns the Arts? Art cannot save itself. There is a crisis in culture

Only a mass campaign can have any effect; Chicago campaign was promoted

How can funding issues be squared with Gordon Bridge's vision?

Isobel Bowler agreed that issues concerning the Graves building needed to be addressed. A small amount of money has been found to commission a consultancy to talk to all stakeholders. Approaching the Heritage Lottery Fund was under consideration

Suggestion that BP and Unilever should be approached for private funding. (Paul Allen pointed out the difference between sponsoring an exhibition and sponsoring a building)

If one-fifth of basic funding is removed it cannot be replaced from other funding

A practicing artist quoted the Castlefield Gallery where a public/private partnership was working with the Coop

Another contributor stated that the present government's attitude was 'the market will sort it out'. Maybe BBC licence fee or a tax on tickets could be used. There were democratic models which had been proposed by Maurice Glasman whereby there could be a 'third funder'. More confidence should be placed on communities and the possibilities of raising subscriptions

It was also commented that Portland Works was a template for attracting funding

Paul Allen thought the refurbishment of the Graves Building would be the first step with an entrance opening out onto Tudor Square and containing performance space

Session 3 Speakers' Corner

Speakers were asked to give information about their role and involvement in the art world, and to respond to the issues of the day.

Speaker: Paul Iseard

Came to Sheffield in 1977. Has the fob watch of JG Graves. Enjoys JG Graves autobiography, written in 1942. Sheffield people are interested in the life stories of the people behind the artefacts, more should be made of this. Sheffield is not good at tourism but we have a good infrastructure. Thinks Sheffield has made great strides. The loss of external funding means we should deploy our own resources better and get Sheffield people more engaged.

Some suggestions are:

Sheffield Museums has good Facebook and online presence but need to make more use of this facility: e.g. 40% of shoppers look on line before they go to the shops

More space for the ideas of users (“customers”): let them speak

More information about MS Trustees - video clips of each trustee much better than dry CVs

More information about and for Friends of Museums Sheffield

Great potential for public participation

Speaker: Peter York

He is a print maker, and spoke about the many artists in Sheffield. Following the Water Aid event at Showroom, when 30 printers joined together to exhibit 80 pieces of work, they will be putting on a Prints Fair at St Mary’s Community Centre, Bramall Lane on 16 November (which had over 600 visitors)

Speaker: Sian Brown

Sian is the curatorial service manager at Museums Sheffield, and also Senior Curator of Visual Art. She talked about the use of collections in future. Museums Sheffield want to make the collections as accessible as possible through enquiries, research, teaching, loans, displays and exhibitions. Yes, they loan individual art works from the collections for exhibitions elsewhere but priority is given to supporting local and regional venues.

Turning to the collections for their own exhibitions has generated the well-received Leonard Beaumont show and extremely popular “Designed to Shine” exhibition. There will be exposure of the collections for 100 objects project and Children’s Hospital project, as well as for the Stanley Royle, Pictures of Sheffield and Frank Constantine exhibitions to name just a few...

Meanwhile, they need to fundraise for conservation of items in store as this is a major barrier to display. Museums Sheffield are launching an appeal in the new year to support the conservation of a painting selected by the Friends of the Museum.

Major projects include: substantial redisplay at Weston Park including the “About Art” gallery; and the refurbishment of the Metalwork Gallery as well as longer term aspirations for the redevelopment of the Graves and Central Library building. The development of the collections data base is on-going including using volunteers with the aim of getting more records online.

She also described the work of the Public Catalogue Foundation, and the books that have been produced by it of the South Yorkshire oils in public ownership, which are also posted under “Your Painting” on BBC website.

Speaker: Laura Boddy

She is an A level art student at Silverdale. Her art experience in Sheffield: Art Club (7 - 11) ; Art Club Plus (11 - 14); Youth Forum (for 14 - 21 year olds): have now all

lost their funding. Also Rotary Young Artist of the Year. Width of experience in Sheffield: crafts etc.

She spoke inspiringly of the need to support young people to become art producers.

Speaker: Anne Thompson

She is the South Yorkshire representative of the Art Fund which provides grants to galleries and museums towards acquisitions, for example towards MS's Marc Quinn "The Kiss" and Sam Taylor Woods "Floating". Art Fund membership includes "The Art Pass" which gives free or reduced entry to museums and galleries across the country. The local group raises about £2000 a year as its contribution to the Fund.

Question from the floor about why support for artists starting out is not provided: the Fund does now provide some curatorial support, following concern about loss of other funding for this function.

Speaker Anthony Bennett

Anthony, sculptor, is based at Persistence Works, previously at St Vincent's. Wanted to speak about poor experience of young art students in Sheffield, and their future careers, in the context of the opportunities open to art and design graduates across Europe. Worries about the lack of workspace, a seemingly intractable problem with the teaching and development of basic skills, a negligent paucity of engagement with the history of art, at one institution. Worries about how programming via the internet is distancing young students from their tutors, resulting in a significant reduction of opportunity for mentoring and engagement, and the notable resultant frustration of teaching staff. Stated that the considerable creative constituency of ex Psalter Lane students are united in that they all want the very best for young art students commencing their art education in Sheffield.

Comment from the floor by such a student, who agreed with comment about the lack of space, but refuted other comments he had made about that institution, saying her own experience was very different. Another contributor described current efforts in Sheffield via Sheffield College, Sheffield Hallam and encouraged by Sheffield Visual Arts Group, to introduce creative apprenticeships with links to practising artists. Some Department of Work and Pensions money is being made available, nationally.

Session 4 Facing the Future

Speaker: Kim Streets C.E.O Museums Sheffield; Chair of the Cultural Consortium

Kim began by outlining her own background: she is not an Art Historian - but an Art Lover. A Curator by training, with passion for the 'pictures of the city' and interest in the cyclical nature of the challenges posed.

Made reference to the fact that Gordon Bridge had spoken about challenges. There had already been significant changes, that things were moving - and "at a pace".

Made reference to the fact that Sian Brown had spoken about The Collections - which belong to the people of Sheffield: including Natural Sciences / Decorative Arts / Archaeology - representing "All Human Life !" The collections span 10,000 years of human life and people are in touch daily asking if they can donate things [objects/items]. We cannot accept everything that is offered.. There are stories behind the objects.

Museums are currently planning for the future; the plan has to be pragmatic; needs to motivate and appeal to the Team. Aim is to have all material online; means changes to the website. They are currently working on a Museums Sheffield vision statement that will encapsulate their aspirations.

Collections exist to reflect the past, question the present and imagine the future. It was about teaching Sheffield, to inspire the next generation of young people and makers. As custodians, there is a duty of care. The charitable objectives do not change: "Remember that the collections are there, for the people".

The learning programme is part funded by Sheffield City Council and Arts Council England. The team work closely with schools and other learning providers to ensure that what we deliver is relevant and useful. There are no resources available to enable staff to go out to schools, as there are only 3 people in the Learning Team, but people can come to the Gallery, for free.

Feedback from schools is excellent and there is lots of dialogue about how schools will use the spaces in light of the forthcoming curriculum changes. Sheffield Hallam University uses the MG space for life drawing.

There is a lot of collections expertise - but a tiny team. Kim wants to inspire great ideas first, and then put in place the resources to make things happen. Though there are now more than 130 volunteers, working across all disciplines from geology to visual art. It is important that the Team knows the collections. Kim emphasised the need to champion curatorial expertise, and to involve the Universities, and the Trustees and retain SVAG support.

The **big challenge** is keeping the wolf from the door. There is a need to find new ways to deliver on a shoestring. "We have got good ideas" e.g. commercialisation of the Gallery space - weddings, business meetings which support the work . Kim acknowledged some people may not see that positively, but said it is vital for survival.

Business relationships: a lot of work being done (mentioned Gordon Bridge's example of a recent dinner held in the Graves Gallery where 23 out of 28 attendees had never been to the Graves before).

Plans are very much for opening up the collection - using social media and developing advocacy among a wide range of communities.

The display of metalwork is high on the agenda for Sheffield - to teach and inspire the next generation - to get the collections 'out there' and show the strength of the collection.

Weston Park Museum is a victim of its own success and new ways are needed to use the building to exhibit the collections.

Graves and Library Building: almost anything could be done with it, with spectrum from entirely library to entirely art gallery. Could it be the 'New School of Art'? A place to find out all about art and history? Could it spark the next generation of ideas? There are a number of ideas on the table with respect to developing the building.

Meanwhile they are working hard to make the Millennium Gallery the 'Cash Cow'.

The Gallery had welcomed, the previous evening, over 300 people at a Live Art event that showcased the work of emerging urban artists. It's important that the MG has a key role in Sheffield as a 24/7 city.

So there are lots of plans. They are 'motoring', and yet doing this with a backdrop of declining Council funding. But it is an exciting time and if we are 'fleet of foot' we can make it work.

Kim quoted Professor Gordon Dabinett, who in a conversation about austerity and the impact on culture, stated that "Culture will survive". It is not just about the big institutions - it's about people and the cultural ecology of the city. The future is exciting - it is positive!

Session Five SVAG Priorities/ Projects for the next year

Speaker Janet Murray

Janet commented briefly on earlier contributions, highlighting the references to: a possible future iconic building for the Graves; the work being done at The Children's Hospital; the possibility of exhibition space at Weston Park and welcoming suggestions from Paul Iseard on the wider use of social media.

Janet explained that SVAG aimed to be positive but noted that Sheffield City Council's contribution to the arts was low relative to that of other similar cities.

She welcomed:

The recently raised profile for the visual arts

The Advisory Council initiative

The Hundred Objects Project

The proposed Frank Constantine Exhibition

Creation of additional gallery space at the Museum.

Action needed included:

The addressing of the gap between politicians and practitioners - words and deeds

Commissioning plans for the Graves is on its third set. It's taking decisions and seeking ways to implement those plans which is crucial

The “tapping into” of artists networks

More partnership working and the engendering of trust- a more connected network

Less emphasis on insurance cost issues in relation to access

The collaborative utilisation of exhibition spaces e.g. Sheffield Hallam University’s Cantor Building

Exploration of the idea of “Creative Curation” including the integration of work by established artists with that of the up and coming.

Encouraging the trustees to consider the Tate model of an Advisory Council with wide representation

A move to a more open Museums Sheffield

A development of a more transparent recruitment process for trustees

Continued support of the 100 objects project

Sheffield in 100 objects - beyond the pilot

Speakers: Lizzie Wright and Amanda Wade, SVAG; Sian Brown, Museums Sheffield

LW recapped on the situation to date and outlined her role. The project has been promoted extensively through use of social media. The next stage will be the selection of nominated objects.

AW outlined what had been learned to date and the potential for fruitful alliances especially using young volunteers. Twitter interactions had been very useful. Amanda explained that scaling up the project would need: funding; partners; more locations and imaginative thinking. The initial small scale project exhibition would be in Weston Park.

SB emphasised that the project had huge and challenging potential but that there were questions to be addressed around, for example, whose history would be examined, what would the engagement processes be etc. She felt that the remit should be as broad as possible, encompassing material culture. It would not be appropriate to use a conventional chronological or thematic approach.

Session 6 Summing up and Thanks

Speaker Sylvia Harvey

Sylvia said she would not attempt to summarise such complex and varied contributions. She thanked all involved with the day and reminded participants to

sign the tribute book for the late Keith Hayman. Sylvia encouraged attendees to join SVAG and closed the meeting, requesting contributions to cover refreshment and other costs.

Attendance

SVAG	Speakers	Attendees	Attendees	Attendees
S Harvey	Sian Brown	Andrew Benson	Jane Ibarz	Patrick Black
V Seddon	Kim Street	Anne Goodchild	Jean Cherry	Paul Allender
A Wade	Gordon Bridge	AM Benson	Jonathan Marsden	Richard Motley
J Hague	Paul Allen	Brian Johnson	Kevin Duffy	Richard Turner
D Sequerra	Paul Iseard	Caroline Holley	Leah Fleetwood	Robert Murray
S Landau	Peter York	Catherine Boddy	Lesley Warren	Ros Brunt
J Beautyman	Anthony Bennett	Clare Hughes	Lizzie Wright	Steve Hawley
J Murray	Laura Boddy	Colleen Penny	Lynn Marriott	L M Panetta
D Bennett	Isobel Bowler	Crosby Stevens	Margaret Halstead	Mairi Harris
Patrick Smith	Anne Thompson	Dave Sissons	Marion Iseard	Tara Harris
Robert Scott	E Papapanagiotou	Monica Slater	Carol Rosemary	Kaillend
		Jo Mills	Hilary Bronski	Nikki Bond

Later Addition

Written comments from Stephen Carley, Head of Art at King Edward VII School

“Are the City’s Art Galleries Weathering the storm?”

As an artist / teacher, my relationship with the cities galleries works on a number of levels, from a relatively passive viewer or consumer through to a more interactive creative standpoint as an artist and via education and the exhibition programme.

To be honest, I'd much rather that the galleries in Sheffield were thriving, robust and bursting with optimism rather than weathering any kind of storm.

I've taught at King Edward V11 school and language college for over 11 years now, as a teacher of art and photography and I've been curriculum leader for the last three and half years. During that time I have had the pleasure to work with a dedicated and committed mix of professionals from Museums Sheffield, Site Gallery, Bloc Art Space, Bank Street Arts and Access Space.

From bespoke artist led workshops through to festival centric projects, my department and students have benefited hugely from these relationships.

One of the main focuses for us (and many schools) was the Youth Forum: an ambitious, creative, energetic programme that enabled young people to collaborate with artists, curators, designers and each other. Each year we'd welcome a representative from Museums Sheffield (most recently Graham Moore) into school and swathes of keen young students would get involved. It was a sad day when this disappeared from the galleries programme.

It does seem that we are having to work much harder for fewer opportunities. Whilst I acknowledge that in times of austerity the 'arts' tend to galvanise and a thriving DIY culture seems to develop, this feedback loop should not be taken as a given. The more you remove this time, the harder it is to reclaim in the future.

As an artist, I have, of necessity, had to become very resilient. My practise has moved further and further away from any notion of main stream aesthetics and exists now without the need of gallery support or kudos. This is partly of necessity and partly about context.

I worry far more for the young people I teach. Students who live and breathe Art. It's bad enough that creative subjects in schools are being marginalised, seen as second rate in terms of Gove's EBacc nonsense. It's bad enough that Universities are suggesting some subjects are far more important than others in terms of UCAS applications and the arts are at the bottom of this pile. It's bad enough that Art colleges are being hit particularly badly in the current austere economic times and that perhaps only the well off financially will now consider an arts degree. It's bad enough that PGCE courses to train Art and Design teachers are closing and the loss of places like Bretton Hall.

I don't have the answer.

But I do know that there would be much to be gained from a united front. Teachers, students, schools, artists, galleries, art centres, the universities, etc. Some real joined up thinking to help secure the future of the next generation of young people wanting to pursue a career in the creative industries.

Stephen Carley Artist / teacher www.stephencarley.co.uk