

Visual Art Network – AGM 3 October 2024

Chair's Report (October 2023 – September 2024)

VAN Gallery Sales

It has been a bit of a roller coaster when it comes to sales in the gallery over the past year. October and November 2023 were both down on the previous year but then we had the best December that I can remember taking over £5,000 in sales.

We alternated between good and bad months from January to June and then had two poor months in July and August compared to the same months in 2023 before picking up again in September.

Overall, we are about £950 down on where we were at the same point last year so we need a good run up to Christmas to bring us back on track.

VAN 25th Anniversary Celebrations

We organised a number of events to mark VAN's 25th Anniversary this year. We had an exhibition of members' work in the Community Gallery in The Parade from the beginning of March to the end of June. We held a picnic at West Hope Craft College in June and we had booked a double stall at the Made in Shropshire market in The Square in Shrewsbury which was unfortunately cancelled due to the threat of public disorder following the tragic events in Southport that month.

We have two more events booked; a stall at the Battlefield 1403 (Farm Shop) Christmas Taster Evening and Market on 21st November and another one at the Condover Hall Christmas Fair on 1st December.

We will be having our usual Christmas Social Gathering at the gallery in December and hope that as many of you as possible can join us at that to celebrate 25 years of the Visual Art Network.

Community Project Fund

As agreed at the last AGM we established our Community Project Fund with an initial pot of £5000, taken from our reserve and we identified five arts-related projects to support that met our qualification criteria. These were Shrewsbury Open Studios relaunch, Shrewsbury Arts Trail, The Hive Open Day, Wellington Arts Collective Open Studios and Morda Primary School Arts Club.

We have applications from three projects this year, Shrewsbury Arts Trail, English Bridge Workshops 40th Anniversary events and a schools Christmas/Winter Art Project.

Membership Survey

We conducted a membership survey and had a 38% response rate which is towards the higher end of the average response rate for online surveys (29-40%). A summary of the results was sent out to all members and a copy is available on the website.

Overall the satisfaction rates with the performance of the organisation were high and we had some very useful suggestions on improvements and changes we could make. We are keen to act on these and will need members' help in implementing some of the ideas.

Three of the suggestions that we will be implementing in the coming months are:

- Creating more exhibition space by replacing the wall-mounted card displays at the front of the gallery with free standing, rotating displays and by removing the wooden slats at the rear of the gallery.
- Creating an online form to be completed when members submit work for exhibiting in the gallery.
- Generating more professional looking exhibition labels from the information provided in the online form.

Changes and Improvements During the Year

- Reduction of Volunteer Commission Rate to 20%
- Introduction of mandatory volunteering policy for members exhibiting in the gallery
- Membership renewal dates standardised at 1st January each year
- VAN advert included in the 2024 Shrewsbury Town Guide and Town Map.
- Artist Board rental fee increased to £25 due to increased length of exhibition period
- Introduction of Monthly Prize Draw for gallery volunteers
- Stricter enforcement of the two-steward policy in the gallery
- Introduction of membership cards to enable members to get discounts at various outlets
- We engaged the Community Resource organisation to help us recruit more Trustees
- We joined Community Connectors – a network of local charities, as a way of developing our profile and giving and receiving support
- Introduction of a Visitors' Comments book in the gallery

Looking to the Future (SWOT Analysis)

Our Strengths

- The quality and variety of the work on display in the gallery
- The overall look and feel of the gallery
- Our relationship with Darwin Centre Management, who consider us to be good tenants
- Our relationship with other arts organisations including our participation in Shrewsbury Arts Trail
- Our communications with members – for example, the Newsletter which Julie produces (in the survey 92% of respondents rated communication as Very Good or Good)

Our Weaknesses

- We need to improve and extend our marketing and publicity activities – this is an area where we are going to need help from members
- We need to improve the curation of 3D items in the gallery – we are looking for members to be involved in this at each exhibition changeover
- We need to improve our storage and inventory systems – we'll be organising a 'Task Force' to tidy and organise the basement area

Our Opportunities

- We're keen to create more networking opportunities for members and so will be reintroducing private views at each exhibition changeover from next year
- We'll be organising more social events next year such as trips to other galleries and plein air sketching and painting events
- We are hoping to be able to put on more member-led workshops and we are currently organising a half-day event on building your own website
- We're looking to develop our relationship with Shrewsbury Colleges Group to boost the number of younger members we have
- At the next exhibition changeover we will be creating an area in the window to better publicise the Artists' Boards and Maker's Space

Our Threats

Our biggest threat is our difficulty in recruiting Trustees. As a registered charity we must have appropriate governance in place and as stipulated in our Constitution this is achieved through a Board of Trustees. Without the required number of Trustees the organisation cannot function. In the past Trustees have always come from within our own membership but we have been actively seeking people with appropriate skill sets who are interested in becoming a Trustee from outside the organisation.

Similarly, we need to increase the number of members who are willing to take a turn in stewarding in the gallery so that we can be open when we are supposed to be open. The terms of our lease with the Darwin Centre requires that we are open when the Centre is open. Darwin Centre Management have always been tolerant of our restricted opening hours in the past, but we are at risk of being asked to vacate the unit if we continue to be closed when we should be open.