

hidden

GEMS

EXPLORING LIVERPOOL'S INDEPENDENT ART SPACES

Thanks for picking this up. We're only a small team of writers and artists trying to tell a story that we take part in every day, so it's wonderful to know we're being listened to – even just a little.

We're going to take a wild guess and say that, if you're reading this, you already want to find out more about Liverpool's iconic cultural landscape. From JMU to Jacksons, Liverpool has a creative heartbeat that has existed for as long as Castle Street.

Now, sit back, sip your coffee slowly, and please, hear our story.

WHAT'S UP DOCK?

You'd think the *Kazimier* was building an empire in their monster of a venue on the North Docks, but in fact when they moved in a couple of years ago, the main thing on their minds was cheap space. Most people know the *Kazimier* as a music venue in Wolstenholme Square, which sadly came to an end in January 2016, but not so many are aware that the *Kazimier* had been quietly beaver away for two years in their warehouse on the North Docks, producing large scale commissions and all-encompassing experiences for festivals or anyone else across the country who required such a niche service. In November 2015 the *Kazimier* decided to put on their own event in the space, named the *Invisible Wind Factory*, and since then eyes have been turning towards the North Docks.

The buzz of excitement from this Charlie and the Chocolate Factory-esque venture comes not only from

the covert projects that are going on, the incredible scale of operations taking place, the cranes and other huge machinery, the muddled sounds of sawing drilling and shouting with the occasional burst of music, but most importantly from all the people that are involved. The industrious workers have all the skills needed for the company to produce any kind of end-to-end show; they invent and design, build and fabricate, compose and edit sound and music, work with technology, and there are even your standard (but certainly not boring) office workers. The *Invisible Wind Factory* is creating a community and it's the sort of community that artists love.

The decision to offer artists' studios seemed like a natural move for the *Invisible Wind Factory*. Bringing artists in not only boosts excitement around the venue, but also offers great opportunity for collaboration from both sides. The idea started with a tweet and very soon the studios were full. Without any real planning (they admit to doing their market research in hindsight!) the *Invisible Wind Factory* has offered a unique alternative for artist studios in Liverpool; huge spaces, cheap rent and incredible views across the Mersey. There's even a half finished café ready to be transformed into a hub that will provide for the artists, workers and anyone else who might want to join in the fun.

90 Squared started as just 90 square feet of space in the basement of Elevator Studios on Parliament Street, but after only 2 months moved to occupy the main warehouse on the 2nd Floor of the same building and now, three years later, this entrepreneurial artists' studio is making headlines with a new venture: *Make Liverpool*. The *Make* space is next door to the In-

visible *Wind Factory* and the choice of venue was no coincidence. The *Invisible Wind Factory* wanted like-minded neighbours and the directors of *Make Liverpool* could see great potential in the area. When *90 Squared* directors Kirsten Little, Liam Kelly and Alex Kelly first sat down to come up with a plan for the perfect studios they recognised a need for a facility which not only offers space, but equipment. From printmaking, photography and laser cutting facilities, to the basics of a scanner and printer, artists who come straight out of university are used to having access to all this stuff and all in one place. *90 Squared* had recognised that access to facilities was a massive barrier to artists embarking on their journey in the real world. This is the grand plan for *Make Liverpool*: a one stop shop studio and resource centre. Considering that their first studio didn't even have a sink, they've come a long way!

To complete the set, *The Lantern Company* can also be found on Carlton Street. Known in Liverpool for the creation of amazing and memorable events such as *The Lantern Parade* in Sefton Park and their most recent success story, *Luminous Landscapes* in the Festival Gardens, the *Lantern Company* has actually been storing its back catalogue in a Carlton Street warehouse for the last 10 years.

On the North Docks the amount of space that you can get for your money is incomparable to a city centre unit. Along with the *Invisible Wind Factory*, *Make Liverpool* is also interested in offering big space and messy space. The constraint of a small studio certainly affects the work of an individual artist and in the grand scheme of things it could be argued that this impacts on the work of a whole art community. Is

it time for a sea change in the scale of work created by artists in Liverpool? The other beautiful thing about the *Invisible Wind Factory* and *Make Liverpool* moving into this area is that the manufacturing from the North Docks' past has been brought back to life. Those buildings have been empty for years and now the tools and processes that once made the area a hive of industrial activity are set in motion again, but with an end result that is something completely different. (JJ) ♦

A BIT PAST THE BLACKSTUFF: BRIDEWELL STUDIOS AND GALLERY IN 2016

It's 2016, so why is the word *Bridewell* still around?

Liverpool had a fair few *Bridewells* dotted around the city centre, and they tend not to have the most exciting history. We all know the lock ups by Picton Clock, the old Archbishop Blanch site, and the internationally famous folly stitched into every Everton Football Club shirt ever worn. That was where the drunks slept it off. If you spent the night in there you were a nuisance at best. The *Bridewells* were a small step up. That was where the aggressive drunks went; the pick pockets, the petty thieves. So no, I'll not be regaling you with tales of famous mur-

derers, or their ghosts stalking the halls of the building on windy nights (although there are rumours of one). This article is an explanation of how a building, that spent huge portions of its life in limbo, has remained relevant and made some of the most incredible contributions to local, national and international creative industries.

So yes, the Bridewell temporarily harboured fictional Marxists and bore a series of national insults to the benefits system through *Boys from the Blackstuff*, but that is only a small part of its history. The artists Anish Kapoor and Adrian Henri, and singer-songwriter David Gray have spent time behind these walls since the building reopened in 1976. Some of the most important and well-known names in popular culture across the globe, not just in Liverpool.

That's a serious story and that's the focus of this investigation. Why has the Bridewell continued to be such a strong and silent force behind Liverpool's creative impact on the world? Unlike rival spaces the Bridewell does not seek to be contemporary; on the contrary, it puts most of its effort into remaining independent and preserving the old fashioned drives behind studio practice rather than staying in touch with the new comings and goings.

Part of their success is this dedication to keeping the foundational ideas behind studio practice going, and that's something which will always be part of the arts in Liverpool. There are countless reasons for that, but to my mind I can't conjure one more significant than who works there. Damian Cruikshank and Richard Robinson are part of the fabric of Liverpool's creative industries – whether they know/like it or not. Both have had a massive influence on art students beginning their creative education, as tutors on Liverpool City College's Foundation Diploma in Art & Design (although I believe the name changes quite regularly these days), and as exhibiting artists themselves. Even the recently retired Colin Beckett used to share his time between the College and his Bridewell Studio.

Richard Robinson has recently launched the most jaw dropping ceramics studio in Liverpool too. Sur-

prise, surprise, it's in the Bridewell. His new ceramics rooms are just one of a selection of intriguing ventures the studio gallery is undergoing. With a recent foray into theatre and their now dedicated gallery room the building has found a new audience with soon-to-be-graduates, hosting three student exhibitions already in 2016.

It's not just the local impact that justifies its place either. 101 Prescott Street was home to Anish Kapoor in the early 1980s while he was starting to establish the international reputation that has made him a household name. At the time, he was the 1982 Artist in Residence at The Walker, but there are few details about how he used his room in Bridewell Studios.

1982 was important to the Grade II listed studio building for more than just Anish Kapoor though. The 10th of October that year was the evening that *Boys from the Blackstuff* aired for the very first time on BBC2. The series has had its positives and negatives for the studio spaces, but despite the pains between the two, there is no love lost at the end of it all, with Snowy Malone's signature still in the corner of his plaster work.

The series, which starred Michael Angelis and Bernard Hill, used the Bridewell as its set in several episodes, even referring to its history as a police station. It doesn't particularly hold the themes of the series to heart these days, but perhaps its dedication to communal decision making and traditional communicative studio practice has been influenced by its famous history.

No longer a place of law-enforcement: diplomacy and discretion between artists has become the law, with studio managers Fiona Filby and Damien Cruikshank recently using a simple first come first served rule book to decide who got the cupboard. Damien won, and it's now a craft beer room.

Looking back at the building's history though, the room that stood out as testament to the cultural changes that have taken place since its use as a police station, was Julian Taylor's huge studio, where his unmistakable *Band of Life* Hillsborough tribute was built. The room used to be the parade hall, where, with all the bravado of a child in fancy dress, officers lined up

for uniform inspections prior to their daily duties. Now, the only masculine influence that remains is a topless Action Man on the windowsill.

Of their current studio members, you would be hard pushed to find one who was not worthy of note for one thing or another, with Tabitha Moses, a long standing studio holder, the first artist to win both the people's and judges' prizes for the Liverpool Art Prize at Metal. With so much already happening, and planned, it's hard to believe they could manage much more, but on top of all that, they've just become a charity.

This year is the 40th anniversary of the birth of Bridewell Studios, and the studio members have established an enviable habitat for creating work. With their new charitable status, they could be about to find a new audience too, but we shall have to wait and see. Birthdays this big are a time to look back on chequered histories, and use the bits that work towards a chequered future. (PKS) ◊

TRANSLATING THE STREET WITH ALTERNATOR

Founded by Brigitte Jurack in 2012, *Alternator Studio* is located in The Old Bakery at 57–59 Balls Road East, Birkenhead CH43 2TZ. Alternator Studio currently houses four artists, with an additional outdoor building awaiting upgrading. The plan is that a dedicated space is made available all year round for short micro-residencies for local and international artists, especially those seeking a large making space close to the docklands and a multicultural neighbourhood. Alternator Studio recently received Arts Council funding for a project called *Translating the Street*, which focussed on Oxtan Road, a street connecting the homogenous High Street and indoor shopping arcades of Birkenhead with the lush heights of Oxtan Village. Alternator Studio, located at the top end of Oxtan Road, considers this street as a great place to start thinking about issues around site and identity. Oxtan Road is full of independent shops and small-scale businesses and artefacts, from model ships to parrot cages, from brooms and light fittings to exotic fruits, and from international hair studios to world food shops. Three international artists, Haleh Jamali, Harold Offeh and Jeff Young, were the guests of three independent shops on Oxtan Road and the adjacent Borough Road.

Brigitte Jurack says, "In 2012 I took over one of the three remaining buildings on Balls Road East in Birkenhead. The linked buildings that flank the left-hand side as you come up from Borough Road were originally built in 1900 to house the Disbury

Bakery and shop. The buildings are now occupied by a wood stripper, a picture framer and gallery, an office-based business and Alternator Studio.



Alternator Studio sits at the junction with Oxtan Road on which I discovered a diverse range of independent businesses, some of which became my regular haunts. These businesses serve a culturally diverse community, not only in relation to ethnicity, but also in relation to professions and pastimes. But how to unlock this treasure-trove of stories, cultures and customs? Each door could open the hidden worlds of shelves, boxes, clients and shopkeepers. The idea for micro-residencies was thus born! Just like the dough rising in the grand bakery, the studio once again is used to transform the small into the substantial. International artists have been invited to translate the stories of the street, build bridges and make visible the hitherto hidden. *Translating the Street* welcomed artists Harold Offeh, Haleh Jamali and Jeff Young to live and work in Birkenhead and to listen to the stories unfolding in three iconic businesses." (BJ) ◊

ENTER THROUGH THE NEWSAGENTS

104 Duke Street Studio is home to nine thriving creative practitioners, based right in the heart of Liverpool city centre. In existence for over three years, the three founding members took on new premises beside the prominent Duke Street newsagents and transformed it into a creative hub; a home to a mix of fine artists, painters, art therapists, and photographers. In addition to artistic practice 104 Duke Street Studio functions as a pop-up exhibition venue; *The Dark Side of Light Night* being a prominent exhibition for Light Night Liverpool 2016. What does 104 Duke Street Studio bring to the Liverpool art scene and will they continue to thrive as a creative hub?

Colette Lilley is a North West based fine artist, exhibiting locally and internationally. A co-founder of 104 Duke Street Studio, she and two other members, Cherie Grist and Laura O'Reilly, looked for new premises after their former base in Wolstenholme

Square was condemned and they were forced to move out, effective immediately. Lilley began to use the space for portraiture where she explores ways of seeing; her work is process based, involving pen and ink and the use of straight edge. She had developed the concept of seeing for survival and looks to introduce the process of meditation into her artworks.

Originally from Goole, near Hull, Lilley moved down to Loughborough University to study the BA in Illustration; after completing this she stayed at the institution to study for her MA in Dyslexia and Creative Process, where she developed techniques in theory-based drawing processes. After years of study in the Midlands she felt dislocated; she quit her part-time job as a checkout girl at Morrisons and began a new life. Coming to Liverpool for a New Year's Eve party six years ago she was enchanted by the city and decided to make it her new creative base. In finding part time employment with the University of Liverpool she began the process of taking her artistic career to new heights.

...And that she did. From 104 Duke Street Studio she has exhibited throughout the country and internationally. In 2011, Lilley was selected to work on the Tate Modern project *From Morning Till Night* co-ordinated by Katherina Sede. Lilley recently featured on Axis Spotlight as one of five artists to watch in Liverpool Biennial 2014. A residency at Stiwdio Maelor in Corris, Wales last summer took her drawing to new heights. In this, she shared a house with two other artists and a writer, with her own bedroom and adjoining studio. A creative micro-base in a remote Welsh town with one shop and one pub was her new residence. Creatively rejuvenated by the period she is in the process of applying for similar arts-led schemes this year. A co-founder, a director, a leading creative force that will make things happen: Colette Lilley is a driving force at 104 Duke Street Studio and within the Liverpool artists' community.

Cherie Grist is one of the co-founders of 104 Duke Street; her creativity and painting processes are prominent on the ground level of these eclectic studios. In her work she looks to combine abstract expressionism with more focussed graphic marks, combining various paints with acrylics and mixed media patterns, to form a vastness in variety through wall based painted media. She is very emotional in her approach to creating her paintings: she describes them as "visual references" to what is going on around her, a snapshot in time. She looks to layer paint, sometimes exposing and hiding areas, similar to the way we convey emotions through life's experiences.

In her *Squares* paintings, we are presented with *Fighting*, where Grist has used a mass of mainly primary colours positioned to contrast with each other. Jagged edged shapes and hazard style graphics combine to create an image of *Conflict*, a strong piece.

Similar methods are used in *Transition*, where the concept of motion and change is conveyed through the scraping of paint in a horizontal motion and the moving of the wooden bases to control the dripping of the paint. This is complemented by the use of areas of relative emptiness and areas where masses of coloured marks encapsulate the surface. These paintings contrast with other works which are almost fully black and white. Again, we have an artist who presents high levels of variation in her practice: through her pen and ink work we see very controlled geometric patterns and the exploration of one-point perspective. Straight edges are used in the mark-making process, and the use of blocks of flat colour is commonplace.

From her creative base in Duke Street, Grist is making her mark on the creative industries, a solo show already planned in Knowsley for 2017. Selling through the Saatchi Art website she has come a long way since graduating from the University of the Arts, London in 2008. Winning the Cass Art Prize in 2011 she has moved from strength to strength; in Liverpool she had key works shown in 2015 for Light Night and the Threshold Festival, followed by solo shows at Constellations and The Brink. Cherie Grist is a name to watch.

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The Dark Side of Light Night was a major exhibition held at 104 Duke Street Studio for Liverpool's annual Light Night festival. The studios were transformed into an exhibition venue for previous years and group shows have been curated, *The Dark Side* being the most successful to date. Curated by Colette Lilley the exhibition ran from 13 – 15th May 2016 and explored the shadowy side of the human condition. An intimate exhibition featuring many experimental works, atmospheric and emotional information, bringing new focus onto the negativity of the human experience and mental

well-being. The success of the opening night was partly due to the performance given by Iona Thonger and Edwina Lea (Be The Change Theatre), who compose work in protest of human trafficking.

In 104 Duke Street Studio we have a truly chaotic mix of artists. We have ink being inscribed to configure the complexities of human emotion. We have portraiture which reflects the thoughts and emotions behind the physical shell of the human form. We have paint being scraped on and off canvases, we have wood bases being rotated to alter drip motions, we have



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wallpaper being combined with graphical prints. We have performance art which challenges the socio-politics of human trafficking. We have exhibitions being hung which challenge our thoughts, beliefs and turn our heads in new directions. (AL) ◊

150 YEARS OF JACKSONS



This year *R. Jackson and Sons* is an extraordinary 150 years old. Started by Robert P. Jackson in 1866 at Number 3, Slater Street, this much loved business continues to provide art and design materials to the people of Liverpool to this day. Enduring the May Blitz of 1941 and ending up in its current home at Number 20 Slater Street, ‘Jacksons’ (as it is fondly referred to by locals) is possibly the oldest remaining independent shop in Liverpool and one of the oldest art shops in the UK. (ANON) ◊

FLORRIE GETS ART CURATOR

Liverpool’s much loved community heritage venue has been popular with creative types since its regeneration and reopening in 2012, but with the creation of a new Art Curator post within the organisation, *The Florrie* is now strengthening Liverpool’s art scene with a new exhibition programme launching in July. Tom Calderbank was appointed earlier this year with the brief of establishing The Florrie as a credible art venue in the city, something he believes must involve reaching a number of audiences.

The first of a series of ambitious exhibitions will be by acclaimed international artist and musician, Jimmy Cauty, best known as one half of the hit-making duo The KLF, who, after retiring from the music industry in 1992, became The K Foundation (an art duo consisting of Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty). The *K Founda-*

tion Burn a Million Quid action in 1994 burned cash in the amount of one million pounds sterling. The money represented the bulk of the K Foundation’s funds, earned by Drummond and Cauty as The KLF. At The Florrie, Cauty’s *ADP Riot Village* will explore the concepts of freedom and state control in a post-riot urban landscape. Cauty invites you to witness the aftermath of an uprising, depicted though a fascinating miniature model village encased within a 40ft steel shipping container.

As a fan and follower of Cauty on Twitter, Tom Calderbank responded to a tweet from the artist, asking for nominations from anywhere in the country that has had a riot in the last 1000 years, to host the exhibition as it tours. Tom cited the Toxteth Riots of 1981 and invited Cauty to The Florrie.

Alongside *ADP Riot Village*, The Florrie will be mounting its own exhibition titled *Aftermath 81*. With a call to the community to help tell the story of the aftermath of the Toxteth Riots, the exhibition will commemorate the riots’ 35th anniversary with 35 objects on display. Tom remarks, “I want people to hold objects in their hands that are meaningful, that tell stories and that start conversations.”

The Florrie’s second exhibition continues to impress with work from artist Jamie Reid, known for his iconic work for the Sex Pistols and Suburban Press. Despite bursting onto the scene with a display of high profile artists, Tom is keen to point out that both were selected for their Liverpool connections, and his ambitions for The Florrie’s future are to engage with the grass roots artists’ community and build opportunities for local artists to exhibit. (JJ) ◊

HELP! I'M IN AN ART GALLERY!

Have you ever found yourself in a gallery, at an exhibition or just wherever art is and thought, “I don’t get it”, “I don’t know what to do or say”, or “should I put my hand on my chin and stare at something or would that just make me look silly?” If yes to any of them, then don’t worry, it happens to the best of us. Here are some simple tips and general advice on what to do when you’re surrounded by art when it’s not really your thing, or if you’re just starting to develop your interest in art.

I tend to spend my weekends (and weekdays) watching millionaires in shorts kick a ball around, but recently I’ve found myself going to more art events and exhibits. Liverpool is an amazing city for art and you’re never going to be short of choice whatever type of art you like. There’s a good chance there’s going to be something that you will be interested in taking

ART IN LIVERPOOL Exhibitions and event listings for independent art spaces in Liverpool. www.artinliverpool.com

a look at.

I’ve looked at a few different art forms, from photography at the Open Eye Gallery to the more conceptual at Tate Liverpool. I liked some of it, didn’t like some of it but for what felt like the majority of the time I found myself thinking “I don’t get it”. And that’s the big fear really isn’t it? Especially if you’re at these events or exhibits with other people. You don’t want to feel stupid, or have people think you’re a knuckle dragging philistine yelling “I could have done that” when you look at something.

There’s a simple way around this, and it’s that it doesn’t really matter. If you don’t get it, you don’t get it. It’s simply not for you. Art isn’t a test you have to pass, you’re there to enjoy or interpret the art that’s on offer. You’re not going to like or understand everything and the people that have been around art for years aren’t going to like or understand everything either. It’s best to just be honest about what you think when you see it; people will appreciate it rather than you trying to fumble your way through praise of something you think is a bit naff. Odds are no one is going to roll their eyes at you, so don’t worry about saying exactly what you think even if it’s just “I don’t like it” then shrugging.

Another thing is that you’ll probably want to give a few different mediums a go. There’s illustration, painting, sculpture, photography, and loads of others. You might discover you have a preference for one or you might even like them all. If you don’t like one, don’t dismiss the others. It’s important to stay open minded about art; if you go into it with a readymade opinion odds are you’ll spend your time trying to enforce it. You should just go in thinking, “I might like this, I might hate it, I might not get it, I might still like it though, can’t hurt going”.

To quickly sum up, give a few different things a go, be honest, be open minded, and then if you’re still not into art then sound, it’s just not for you but at least you tried. If you did like some of the things you saw then now you know what type of art you like. And you’re in Liverpool, which is a massive bonus, there are always going to be events, exhibitions, and festivals where you can indulge in your new-

found hobby (as long as it doesn’t clash with the football of course, let’s not get ahead of ourselves). (CM) ◊

THINK SMALL

How a kino in Berlin became the inspiration for an old magistrates court in Liverpool: Re-Dock talk *Small Cinema*.

The cinema is all about theatre: plush velvet seats, a suited usher showing you to your seat with a torch, the opening curtain, the performance you’re pointed towards. Ahead of you all manner of stories will be told: you’ll dive under the sea, gently float in space, ride a horse into war. A multi-billion pound industry focussed on winning your heart.

What is cinema? Technology is changing how we absorb film, so do we still need the shared experience of film-watching? As people in Liverpool fret over the Futurist, a cinema opened in 1912 and closed a generation ago, the Small Cinema is reviving a city central ethos of community film, of intimate, connected film love.

Liverpool’s Small Cinema on Victoria Street is an arts project. Devised and developed by Re-Dock, based two floors above the cinema itself, the 56 seater is an experiment in what can happen when you take what we understand about cinema going, what we know about our city and how we tell stories.

First it’s important to say the Small Cinema you may have visited on Victoria Street isn’t Re-Dock’s first Small Cinema. In 2007, Sam Skinner approached Sam Meech to take part in a gallery show at View Two showing local artists as part of Liverpool Biennial. *Local Heroes*, as it was to be called, would show artist films in the gallery. “If it’s in a gallery”, says Sam Meech, “I told him no one will pay attention. They’ll talk, and unless the film is designed to accommodate ambience it’s not going to work.”

At the same time, Meech went to Berlin. He discovered the culture of kino, small, 40–50 seater cinemas above cafés, flats, or tucked into corners. It completely changed his perception of what a cinema was. One person could run it and use an existing space

to be a cinema. “I wanted to make a small cinema in Liverpool. And I knew the name ‘Small Cinema’ meant there didn’t have to be just one. You could dress the space, create the whole experience around a cinema with the right tickets, roles like ushers.”

So that’s what he did at View Two. He turned *Local Heroes* into the first Small Cinema Liverpool. “By the time people sat down they were already having a good time. They’re used to the experience and the theatre of the cinema. They know how to behave, they know how to queue. That was part of the experience, it was enjoyable for them and me.”

How people interact with an urban space is very much part of Re-Dock’s practice. Led by four artists and filmmakers Sam Meech, Hwa Young Jung, Tim Brunsten & Neil Winterburn, they describe themselves as working with people and technology. Their work tells stories and connects with communities. Another Liverpool Biennial project mapped people’s experiences of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal. One used memories of the Liverpool waterfront to create a documentary of the postwar on the UNESCO site. Tim Brunsten is working on the stories of the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, London, a famed gay pub home to cabaret and drag acts that is at the heart of a fight against developers in the capital. Tim’s film *Save the Tavern* tells the story of the performers who created a cultural landmark and how they are fighting to protect it.

“We’re not gallery focussed,” both Tim and Sam explain. “Our work happens within the community.”

“Work outside of a gallery is a more interesting proposition,” explains Sam, “Your work is going to be tested and critiqued and it will fail if it doesn’t engage people. You’re doing it in the real world, not the bubble of a traditional art space.”

Which is why the Small Cinema feels like such an exciting and intriguing space. Cinema is, increasingly, a highly commercial venture. Film choices reflect that industry. What happens if you keep showing films no one comes to see. Commercially you’re not viable. Small Cinema isn’t avowedly eschewing commerciality for its own sake, but instead is exploring how people react to the space, both as programmers and punters.

“There’s something about transforming a space”, says Tim. The Small Cinema was once a family magistrates court. Their landlord, Ronnie, was up for exploring this alternative pop up cinema model. It took them months to find a space to do it, almost a decade if you consider Sam’s first test of a kino in Liverpool at the View Two Gallery.

Over 4,000 people came through the cinema’s doors in its first year. Sam admits it surpassed his expectation, possibly due to the range of programming the team of programmers contributes (which includes Liverpool Radical Film Festival, Think Cinema, Cheap Thrills and Scalarama). “The team is

amazing”, says Tim. “They feed off each other. The tricky bit has been how it runs itself, how we work out that we’re not managing it as Re-Dock. We have let it go in as it’s own thing. That’s interesting, with its own challenges, of course.”

Run by volunteers, the challenges at the Small Cinema will always be that’s it’s part of a marketplace, and while it’s an alternative model it can’t operate in a vacuum. Practically, its volunteers have other demands on their time, so without new blood, the program can’t expand exponentially without reaching some kind of capacity.

Sam also says that even in the two years since they began asking for donations to build the cinema, space has changed in Liverpool. The Small Cinema happened because there was awareness and recognition in the tail end of the recession that arts and culture could transform empty spaces. Technology is also cheaper so while just five years ago it may have been prohibitive to own a projector and project films in this way, now it isn’t. Social media and cloud networks have made it much simpler for the team to run itself remotely. Also, community cinema is becoming more significant to people. There’s a real appetite for that ethos of DIY. It’s very strong and increasingly so.

“What I’d like to see”, says Sam, “is some kind of industry level recognition of a change of pattern. This level of ecology of community cinema, film colleges or whatever is a viable distribution network. It isn’t, perhaps, for first release films but here are huge communities and their screens have an audience of thousands.”

Things will change, some good, some bad. It’s the nature of working in the urban landscape for Re-Dock. Both Tim and Sam are fairly accepting that the building they’re in could be sold. Liverpool is a hot property for developers right now. Yet knowing they have done it once makes it easier to do it again.

“We keep the price as low as possible. And that means we can take risks.” (LB) ◊

THE INS AND OUTS OF ARENA STUDIOS

One of the first things I learned when I joined *Arena Studios* was that it was not always housed in the Elevator Building on Parliament Street. Before that it was on Jordan Street, and before that Duke Street, in ‘Arena House’ which is named after Arena Studios and still has that name today.

Arena Studios was set up by Terry Duffy in 1985. At that time, he recalls, the creative heart of Liverpool

was Hope Street and the bohemian set, pivoting around the art college, the Crack, the Everyman, and focusing on the poets, intellectuals, writers and actors. And then there came Arena, completing a ‘creative triangle’ between Duke Street, the Bluecoat and Bold Street. The intention was to start an organisation which promoted excellence in fine art and design: a creative hub, a hot bed for talent and new ideas. But when trying to set Arena up, Terry was met with a surprisingly negative response from the Director of Merseyside Arts: “Great idea, but it’s not possible as there’s not enough talent in Liverpool. In fact there is more talent in Wrexham than Liverpool.” So there was no start up funding.

Terry said, “I knew it was a great idea and it would work, so I had to find the funds myself, encouraged by the good will of artists and designers locally, helping with the holes in the roof and the mountains of pigeon dirt and also the good will of the City Council holding back on the massive rates bill until I could register the charity and realise the mandatory rates reduction due to charities. It was a worrying time but we succeeded.”

I only moved to Liverpool five years ago and was welcomed into the artistic community with loving arms. This was after Liverpool was named European Capital of Culture for 2008, after Liverpool One was built, the Albert Dock was regenerated and way after Arena stood as a lone arts organisation on Duke Street. I find it hard to imagine a time before Liverpool was the internationally recognised hub of artistic activity that it is now. Terry tells me it would have been hard to imagine back then that John Lewis would become the local shop. But Liverpool was a very different place then; although I am under-qualified to write about the art scene in Liverpool at that time, I do know that it was unrecognisable from what we have now.

As the coolest artistic hub in town, Arena helped to energise the Duke Street area, housing hundreds of artists and hosting legendary auctions, exhibitions, fashion shows, music gigs and parties in the vaults below. As a result of its own success, Arena went from being told there’s more artistic talent in Wrexham, to having to leave

20 years later, its popularity assisting with the gentrification of the area. In 2006, Arena and its 40 studio members were forced out as Arena House was to be sold to developers. Not only this, but Arena had rent arrears which would have been its downfall had it not been saved by a mysterious donation of £10,000 from an unknown person, who became known as ‘Anonymous Bob’. This ejection from the building did allow for the staging of an ambitious Biennial Exhibition with money from the Arts Council, a creative swansong for the end of an era.

Arena temporarily moved into a small unit on Jordan Street in the gritty, industrial, bleak lands to the south of the city. While adapting this cold, featureless unit into studio spaces with funding from The Culture Company, Arena was constantly looking for a more permanent home. In 2007, Elevator Studios was being formed in a huge warehouse around the corner and after several meetings Arena signed a contract to take the first floor of what was then a derelict building. In 2008 Arena cleared out of Jordan Street, but not before using the empty space to host an international exhibition as part of the Independents Biennial.

The insecurity of Arena’s housing situation is, however, by no means at an end. When Arena moved into Elevator, there were a handful of other creative businesses housed in the same building, Leaf café downstairs, the Biennial office round the corner and that was pretty much it for creative support. No Baltic Creative, no Camp and Furnace and certainly none of the trendy bars, cafes and venues that have popped up from nowhere in the last couple of years. In a flash, Baltic Triangle residents have gone from being paranoid that their car is going to get broken into, to pissed off that they can’t get a parking space.

Now it would be ridiculous for me to claim that Arena has single-handedly made Liverpool’s Baltic Triangle cool, but it was there at the beginning and it’s not likely to be there at the end. And it’s an odd situation, because the transformation of the Baltic Triangle into this cutting edge destination has been incredibly exciting to watch, it has inspired great art and artistic events, it has increased the popular-

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ity of our studios and it fills me with pride to say I work in the coolest part of town. I love it, but I am afraid that history will repeat itself. If our rent goes up, we'll have to charge our artists more and at that point they may choose to leave. Without the artists paying the rent, Arena will have to leave too. It's a classic situation that comes with the gentrification of any area, affecting all types of small businesses, in every city. Maybe it is just Arena's destiny.

When I spoke with Terry Duffy about it, he described the art world like a pyramid. He said there are a few very successful artists and organisations at the top, but underneath there is a great volume of small organisations and individual artists working hard, providing art and entertainment for free, for the love of it, to try and make it big, because it's just what they do; but these people are absolutely vital in supporting the few that sit proudly at the top. The 'grass roots' artists do all the groundwork, underpaid or for free, while the big businesses ultimately benefit.

So what is the solution to the problem of artists being forced to leave the areas they help to popularise? Terry and I could only come up with one - don't rent, buy. A couple of great examples demonstrate how this has worked in Liverpool: the Bridewell Studios and Gallery, which started 40 years ago and has remained in the same building, had the foresight and opportunity to buy it at the start, and the beloved Jacksons art shop on Slater Street. With the building owned by the business, Jacksons is going nowhere.

But there is actually one other thing you can do. Just take it on the chin, be happy that you were there at the beginning, that you helped make something exciting happen for creativity in the city that you love and then think about any future move as an opportunity, an adventure. With movement comes change, with change a challenge and a challenge is something artists thrive on.

For the time being I'm happy to say that Arena is still home to 22 artists, illustrators and designers at varying stages in their careers and with bucketsful of talent just like in the old Arena. We've even retained a small but perfectly formed gallery that continues to showcase artistic talent from Liverpool and beyond. Arena has shown great resilience throughout its 30-plus year life, and so may the story continue. (JJ) ♡

A MESSY SPACE FOR CERAMIC ARTISTS

Chris Turrell-Watts had been working at Southport College as a ceramics technician for about 9 years when the

college decided to close the ceramics department. That was about 4 and a half years ago. Chris remembers being part of a fantastic department that also facilitated part of the first year BA Fine Art course at John Moores, so catered for degree and adult education students and was a very well used resource. Unfortunately there are similar stories across the country; when the money men come round and see the amount of space the studio and equipment is taking up and then they work out how many more students and computers they could fit into that space, it apparently becomes a no brainer. However, at least this time a good thing came out of a bad situation. Before the refurbishment of the art and design department started, the college decided to sell the ceramics equipment off; it was a once in a lifetime opportunity to buy it at virtually nothing, so Chris and his colleague Don Parkinson decided to take the plunge and set up the Southport Ceramic Studio.

Chris had lived in Liverpool for 11 years and felt there might be a real interest in ceramics closer to home, so after serving the people of Southport with ceramic inspiration he began a new quest to start a studio in Liverpool's Baltic Triangle. The story of *Baltic Clay* began with a crowd funding campaign that raised funds way above its target and worked wonders to spread the word before they had even moved into the space. Ahead of their opening in November 2015 they were full up, both with members and

bookings for evening classes.

The Baltic Clay is a messy space for ceramic artists. Rather than the traditional set up of individual studios, there is one big shared space, 2 kilns, two wheels and 12 experienced members who come and go as they please. The studio holds three evening classes a week, taught by Chris, and there are all sorts of ideas for the future, including workshops, expansion and collective work by members. If Baltic Clay's Light Night performance is anything to go by, Liverpool has great things coming its way. The studios put on a participatory activity with a gigantic ceramic city built by anyone who wanted to have a go and of course they all did! Who doesn't love messing around with clay? (JJ) ♡

GATEWAY TO THE PUBLIC: LIVERPOOL'S COMMERCIAL GALLERIES

While the great comedian W.C. Fields is quoted to have said, "Never work with children or animals", it is safe to say even the most discerning of artists would probably add themselves onto that list. And yet in Liverpool there is a scattering of independent but non-artist-led galleries that subject them-

selves to the perils of dealing with artists on a daily basis; exactly why is an intriguing question with no straight answers.

Interviewed Billy Wilson from *The Gallery Liverpool*, Olwen McLaughlin from *Editions*, Lucy Byrne from *dot-art*, Nic Corke from the *Corke Art Gallery* and Ken Martin from *View Two*, with the main question being, "Why on earth do you do it?", and I'm still not sure I really got to the bottom of it. Let's get one thing straight from the beginning though: it's definitely not about the money. If these galleries were in London you might say otherwise, but if anyone thinks that there's great wads of cash to be earned from selling art in Liverpool in the current market, then think again. What the interviews did reveal, though, was an insight into commercial spaces run by five completely different individuals with one common thread: they want to champion and sell the work of local artists.

Other common ground between these gallery owners includes being an art lover, the excitement of feeling part of something, and not wanting to do the average nine to five job. Funnily, no one mentioned their wish to build an empire and take over the world, but even if this is not quite the case, there has to be an element of wanting to make their own mark on the Liverpool art scene. Don't be too quick to judge though; if you're an artist in Liverpool and you want to try and sell work here, your greatest opportunity will come from one of these

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people. These galleries are offering something that artist-led spaces are not: a gateway to the public, the normal folk, and some who might actually have a bit of money to spend on a piece of artwork.

DOT-ART

We will start with *dot-art*, because it is a little different from the rest. The newly opened dot-art gallery is just one feature of the social enterprise that supports artists in the North West by selling locally sourced, affordable art, working with businesses to put art in the workplace and public realm, running art classes and working with schools and community groups. The dot-art gallery shows work by its own members only.

When asked why someone would become a gallery owner, Lucy laughed and said, "It's about skill set, we probably want to be artists and can't", and went on to say, "I loved art from being a small child and always wanted to be involved with art, but I was also good at academic subjects." Lucy was somewhat steered away from art but went against the grain and studied on an art foundation course. She was glad to have done it, but she realised at that point that she wasn't doing it to pursue a career as an artist herself. "I didn't have the ideas and drive and vision of an artist. I could draw but wasn't able to take it to the next step."

Instead, Lucy studied Art History at the University of Liverpool. Afterwards she was told that she would have to move to London if she wanted to get a job relating to her degree. "I didn't want to move to London so decided to create myself a job here in Liverpool. I graduated in 2002 and spent a couple of years working it out, going on courses about business and management. I worked as a bar manager in the meantime. I never thought it would be easy but thought I had nothing to lose."

The business was called dot-art because it was always meant to be online. "One of the reasons I came to Liverpool is because of its amazing arts infrastructure, the Tate, Biennial, Walker, but there was nowhere to buy art, especially not for the man on the street." The vision was to make

art accessible to everybody and Lucy hoped there was a gap in the market. "I made it up as I went along."

This year is dot-art's 10th anniversary and the current gallery is actually their third gallery venue, the first being on Water Street, provided by their current landlord for free for 6 months in 2006 and then there was a unit at the front of Queen Avenue which opened in 2008. "After the novelty of Capital of Culture was wearing off (not that it actually had any impact on us anyway), the recession was kicking in in a big way and the gallery was just not feasible. We had to retreat and survive." So dot-art moved into smaller premises, but five years later they have managed to open a gallery again on Queen Avenue.

When asked about the business side of things Lucy said, "None of us are in it for the money". But instead, for Lucy it's about being part of that world. "I don't want to go to work every day and be miserable, I want to do something I love and believe in. I am very lucky: no two days are the same, I'm helping artists, we're encouraging the next generation of artists and championing the value of art to everyone. Of course I have days when I am terrified and wonder what on earth I'm doing, but I'd rather that than be doing a job I am not passionate about."

EDITIONS

My visit to *Editions* to meet Olwen McLaughlin happened on the day of the opening night of *Liverpool Open*, an annual group open exhibition that the gallery holds, offering local artists a chance to get noticed and sell some work. Although it was a few hours until opening time, there was already a buzz in the air; the artwork of the show's expectant artists, ear-wiggling on our conversation, Olwen showing me her favourite pieces and asking me which ones I liked. We discussed the way the artists had priced their work and Olwen's dismay when some artists choose to sell for such a low price, "I tell the artists you can't function this way! But I just let them do what they want." Before we get started Olwen shows me a new book, *111 Places in Liverpool that you shouldn't miss* by Julian Treuherz and Peter de

Figueiredo. It features Editions under the title of 'Olwen's Staircase', referencing the building that Editions is housed in, designed by architect Peter Ellis. "It's a great book", she says, expressing amusement that Editions is in there but the Tate was not featured.

"30 years ago we had a photographic business called Light Impressions, which moved to the Bluecoat Chambers. We opened a shop (Editions) to sell the photographs and prints of the books we produced." Olwen ran the shop side of things. "We would sell art works, we had a big gallery space in the Bluecoat, having exhibitions every month or so and it was very successful then, but not now, because everything is on the internet and things have changed." The Bluecoat Chambers closed for refurbishment about 11 years ago and then the business moved to Cook Street. The Cook Street gallery, which also operates as a framing business, is small but with a refined feel and features a rack of exquisite prints. Olwen has great admiration for skills of print makers.

You'll be excused for thinking that the gallery is there to support Editions' framing business, but actually the opposite is true. Olwen told me, "There's no such thing as the old fashioned gallery that people talk about. I said to a young artist recently, do you go into galleries? She replied, 'no, because they are so posh I am scared to go in. I don't like the way they look at you when you walk in the door, you have to ring the buzzer.' I said, you know why that is? Because they are so poor they only have one person in there, you have to ring the buzzer in case some nutter comes in. They are desperate to see you! And where do you think you are going to show your work?"

"People assume I'm making a load of money because I must be to have a gallery and no one would be so stupid to have a gallery that was not making money! What keeps us going is the framing. There's no money to be made, but all the artists will think there is." Olwen's frames are well made and surprisingly affordable but she jokes that artists hate giving a percentage, and find it hard to spend money on frames for work that may not sell, "They will buy any old shite frame, which falls off the wall, they will even make their artwork into a frame to save buying a frame." But these views are to be taken tongue in cheek. It's obvious that Olwen loves artists, the gallery brings her great enjoyment and she is keen to help artists.

"I don't ask anything of the artists; if they pay to exhibit, I feel guilty if I don't sell their work. I think it's something I couldn't cope with, so I just put up their work. We never charge for the wine at openings (it's one way to get them through the door!)"

It's true to say that these small Liverpool galleries not only contend with a struggling Liverpool art market, but also a global art world that

relies on the buyer's anxiety and focusses on the providence of a piece of artwork as much as the art itself. Olwen described how she exhibits the work of a Royal Academician, but buyers will still prefer to go down to London to purchase the same work from a high profile gallery. Olwen makes a good point: that a great percentage of the people who come to see the work in Editions and also the other galleries mentioned here are artists themselves, rather than buyers. The galleries are providing a space for artists to see each other's work as much as a platform for promotion and sales.

In Liverpool at least, Editions has a good reputation. Olwen selects the work herself. She chooses things she likes personally and believes it is the integrity of a gallery owner to show things they like, rather than the work of people who will pay for space. With no artistic background, never being taken to galleries when she was young, and having been formally educated in science, Olwen feels lucky to have found a passion for art. She takes pleasure in selecting art and showing it on the gallery walls; it becomes a part of her as well as the artist. "I have years of art in my head, as every day I am surrounded by it."

VIEW TWO

I met with Ken Martin who owns *View Two* on the same day, with another opening about to happen. Bob Williams, who looks after the gallery when Ken is not around, was doing the finishing touches to the hang and although I turned up unannounced I was given an incredibly warm welcome.

"He's second in command," says Ken. "I live in Cumbria, I'm here when we have music and private views. As I've got older I do other things. I've had a gallery 27 years."

Before *View Two*, Ken owned *The View* in the Gostins Building on Hanover Street. "I called this one *View Two* because if I'd called it *The View* people would have gone to the other building." I'm not sure if this is in jest but it's a good point. Ken is not only a creative but also a practical person. He ran an architects' practice for 42 years, retiring from practice two years ago; he is best known for designing New Brighton's Floral Pavilion. When it comes to galleries, Ken believes the quality of the architecture should stand alone and it doesn't require signage covering the facade to tell you what the building is. "The Tate has made the Albert Dock look like an advert for Tate and Lyle sugar. The way they have to put lettering on museums is disappointing. They have reduced Britain's biggest Grade One listed building to an advert for sugar."

I asked him why he started *The View* in the Gostins Building. Ken said that he rented out the 6th floor of the building as offices. "There were about 15 offices and it had a circulation space which was reasonably big with views across Liverpool towards



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ALMA MATTERS
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131 Vauxhall Road, L3 6BN
www.almamatters.biz

THE CAVE
69 Victoria Street, L1 6DE
www.caveliverpool.co.uk

CROWN BUILDING STUDIOS
57–59 Victoria Street, L1 6DE
www.cbsgallery.co.uk

DOMINO GALLERY
11 Upper Newington, L1 2SR
www.facebook.com/Domino-
Gallery-114818615269516

DOT-ART
14 Queen Avenue, Castle Street, L2 4TX
www.dot-art.co.uk

DRAWING PAPER
The Royal Standard, Unit 3,
131 Vauxhall Road, L3 6BN
www.drawing-paper.tumblr.com

EDITIONS
16 Cook Street, L2 9RF
www.editionsltd.net

EGG SPACE
Top Floor, 16–18 Newington, L1 4ED
www.eggspace.org

LIVER SKETCHING CLUB
Gostins Building,
32–36 Hanover Street, L1 4LN
www.liversketchingclub.com

LIVERPOOL SMALL CINEMA
57–59 Victoria Street, L1 6DE
www.liverpoolsmallcinema.org.uk

RENNIES GALLERY
63 Bold Street, L1 4EZ
www.renniesgallery.co.uk

ROAD STUDIOS
69 Victoria Street, L1 6DE
www.roadstudios.co.uk

THE ROYAL STANDARD
Unit 3, 131 Vauxhall Road, L3 6BN
www.the-royal-standard.com

A SMALL VIEW
Gostins Building,
32–36 Hanover Street, L1 4LN
www.asmallviewproject.wordpress.com

STATIC GALLERY
23 Roscoe Lane, L1 9JD
www.statictrading.com

VIEW TWO
23 Mathew Street, L2 6RE
www.viewtwogallery.co.uk

THE WELL
2 Roscoe Street, L1 2SX
www.thewell-liverpool.org

WOLSTENHOLME CREATIVE SPACE
Wolstenholme Square, L1 4JJ (R.I.P.)

ZAP GRAFFITI
35 Renshaw Street, L1 2SF
www.zapgraffiti.co.uk

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ARTS HUB 47
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www.artshub47.co.uk

CORKE ART GALLERY
296–298 Aigburth Road, L17 9PW
www.corkeartgallery.co.uk

THE FLORRIE
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www.theflorrie.org

BALTIC TRIANGLE

90 SQUARED
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27 Parliament Street, L8 5RN
www.ninetysquared.com

ARENA STUDIOS AND GALLERY
First Floor, Elevator Building,
27 Parliament Street, L8 5RN
www.arenastudiosandgallery.com

BALTIC CLAY
Unit G8, Queens Dock Business Centre,
67–83 Norfolk Street, L1 0BG
www.balticclay.com

BALTIC CREATIVE
49 Jamaica Street, L1 0AH
www.baltic-creative.com

FUNF
63 Blundell Street, L1 0AJ
www.cargocollective.com/wearefunf

THE GALLERY LIVERPOOL
First Floor, The Courtyard,
41 Stanhope Street, L8 5RE
www.thegalleryliverpool.co.uk

THE HUB ARTISTS
Third Floor, Elevator Building,
27 Parliament Street, L8 5RN
www.facebook.com/TheHubArtists

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ALTERNATOR
The Old Bakery,
57–59 Balls Road East, CH41 2TZ
www.facebook.com/Alternator-Studio-
and-Project-Space-at-The-Old-
Bakery-741308269275460

RATHBONE STUDIO
28 Argyle Street, CH41 6AE
www.rathbonestudio.com

RENNIES ARTS AND CRAFTS
63 Bold Street, L1 4EZ
0151 708 0599
www.renniesgallery.co.uk

Pier Head.” Ken used this space to hold exhibitions for artists as a free gallery, without any charges. “But I was quite autocratic,” he says, “I always selected who I thought were very good artists. I was then encouraged by the artists Mike Knowles and Nicholas Horsfield to open a commercial gallery, which I did after a few years. Because I had a practice and income from it, it wasn’t really a commercial gallery in that sense; it was subsidised by my practice and the same applies here at View Two.” Ken described how the building, in the heart of Mathew Street, was originally a banana warehouse, part of the Fruit Exchange. He bought it freehold in 1976 but had to renovate it, including a new roof.

“I was head of the School of Architecture for the Polytechnic when it became John Moores University and I decided I wanted to go back into practice. So I left teaching and took up the building in Hanover Street. Art is like an intellectual extension of my practice now.”



Ken told me about his exhibition of work by the Stuckists, opening in July, which will be the gallery’s third Stuckist exhibition. “Now the problem we’ve got is that when the Biennial is on everyone is persuaded that they should go down to the Baltic Triangle and all that, which is where all that public money has gone, whereas meanwhile we’ve been here doing this for years with an independent gallery and no Arts Council funding. I regard this place as a market place, the artists suggest their price, we take our com-

mission. Liverpool is a tough market.”

You would not expect to find a gallery like View Two on Mathew Street, in the heart of Liverpool’s Beatles-inspired nightlife hotspot. It is a unique space, including stairs and landings used as exhibition space and a large event room on the top floor. All areas combined, it’s pretty big. There’s a great range of art: an eclectic mix of changing exhibitions and more permanent fixtures. For Ken, a lot of the enjoyment of running View Two comes from the live acoustic music events that they hold.

When asked about finances, it’s the same story. “It hasn’t to lose money but it doesn’t have to make it. It’s not my main source of income and therefore it has been a pleasure. If you tried to run a gallery in Liverpool, separately from a business, I’m not sure it would work.” We spoke further about selling work, managing artists’ expectations, and the recurring theme of artists having a belief that the gallery makes a load of money. “Now Liverpool has seen a lot of galleries that have come and gone. A lot came up during the Capital of Culture year, which was a dead loss for me in many ways. The Capital of Culture had no impact on the galleries that already existed; it was a gravy train for people on big salaries who were bringing culture into Liverpool. Now Liverpool needed some culture, but it also already had lots of culture of its own.”

In View Two, Ken puts on a show about once a month. He’s never counted how many shows there have been over the years, but has drawers of all the adverts. I commented that it must be an extraordinary archive, but Ken said, “Who’s going to want them? That doesn’t matter.” View Two shows both abstract and figurative work. Ken recognises that over the years his audience has changed. “As you get older, your client base gets older, but I’m quite relaxed about that as the music is taking on the energy and giving me lots of pleasure. It’s a gallery that has turned into a music venue as well and it’s given it a certain cultural richness.” In the corner of the main gallery space is a grand piano, which Ken told me the musicians love and with that, a pianist entered for the night’s opening and began to practice and I have

that feeling of being part of something really inspirational. I asked Ken if he sees the gallery as a resource for artists and he modestly replied, “it’s been a small resource in the city.” After having a successful architects’ practice, Ken feels he’s putting something back into Liverpool.

Ken showed me a painting of himself, made by a Chinese artist, when he was resident artist at the gallery. “We’ve had two extremely successful Chinese exhibitions which were unique to England. They were quite remarkable. We had this whole room made into a Chinese pavilion, with wall to ceiling in computer graphics. It felt like a walk into a Chinese garden and into a temple. It was amazing. It was only there for 10 days, they suddenly arrived put it all up, and then they went. They came at very short notice and I was able to accommodate them. We can make a decision and we can do it and that’s the beauty of this place. I only answer to myself, because if I lose money on it, that’s a decision I can make. I have had great fun running the gallery and I’ve had a very good innings.”

THE GALLERY

The Gallery Liverpool, owned by Billy Wilson, is situated on the outskirts of the up-and-coming Baltic Triangle area. Billy runs a sign making and engraving business on the ground floor and the gallery is housed in a huge space above, with an entrance via its own private staircase. The Gallery is beautifully done out with moveable walls, an impressive lighting system and even has a licensed bar. Billy used to rent the space out to sail makers until November 2009 when it was decided to open an art gallery, offering an exciting venue which would promote a range of creative approaches, be they contemporary or traditional. “The ethos behind this project was to showcase and actively promote home-grown artists of all disciplines”, says Billy.

When I asked Billy why he does it, he laughed and said, “I’m mad and I like art. In Liverpool there’s a shortage of places to exhibit and it’s shrinking every year.” This is certainly true when it comes to big spaces, and as with the other galleries, Billy could be described as providing a service to artists. Although he charges for the hire of his space, he says, “we are keen to kept costs as reasonable as possible in order to support and encourage existing and emerging artists locally.”

We discussed how Billy could instead use that space for all sorts of other things that would generate more of an income. He too has bought the building and fortunately did this before property in the Baltic Triangle area became desirable. “We are in a very fortunate position; since we are independent, we are able to showcase a diverse range of exhibitions as well as having the freedom to do pretty

much what we fancy. As an independent gallery it is essential to be commercially focussed but in saying that, it is important to showcase something for everyone. In 2013 the Gallery Liverpool hosted an erotica art exhibition which raised more than a few eyebrows whilst putting the venue on the map.”

The way the gallery is operated means that local artists know there is something out there that they can approach if they are in need of a big space. The potential to hire the space is there and so even its availability can give an artist something to work for. Billy tells me that The Gallery is fully booked until the end of the year. For this period the main body of the work comes from down south and includes a booking from Jarvis Cocker and a series of exhibitions over the summer and autumn exploring the influence and legacy of Punk 40 years on. Billy feels it is very important to build collaborations between the southern and northern art scenes.

The Gallery gets approaches from all over the country. I asked Billy if he himself ever approached artists. “It does vary, but a couple of years ago we had a realism exhibition and that was led by me.” Billy is a fan of realism in painting and feels the genre doesn’t get enough representation.

CORKE ART GALLERY

My final interview takes me right out of town into South Liverpool, where Nic Corke runs the *Corke Art Gallery* in a unit with huge front windows and a number of different rooms to wander through. Nic has a habit of hurtling off excitedly onto a completely different subject during any conversation, yet for the dedicated followers of the gallery, this is exactly the kind of personality trait that draws them in. Nic’s passion about art and his lust for life is incredibly catchy.

I asked Nic how it all started. Nic ran a design and marketing business for nearly 20 years and in 2008 he was invited by artist Terry Duffy, Chair of the Independents Biennial board at that time, to pitch for the job of facilitating the Independents, which had that year received funding from the Arts Council. Nic was appointed in June 2008 with the brief of encouraging artists to be part of the Independents, which was to open in September that year so everything ended up being very last minute.

In the building which at that time was the Contemporary Urban Centre in the Baltic Triangle, Terry Duffy curated an international artists’ show. Nic says, “Bizarrely, I ended up creating a site-specific installation in that show because we had a couple of artists in a large room so something else was needed to fill the space. Terry and I went for a pint and after sketching some ideas I said I’d make something with 120 chairs and 30 tables I had in storage. The result was a sculpture titled *Meeting after Meeting*. It was

basically a mickey take, but dramatically lit it looked quite interesting. An Arts Council representative came to check out the Independents Festival and asked to see that show. He said, ‘Oh that’s brilliant – who is the artist?’ I was left in the awkward situation thinking, I can’t say it’s me, so said it was ‘by someone you won’t have heard of, I can’t remember his name’. It was quite funny and proved the point that art is perceived and valued by where and how it is shown. You could hang a Caravaggio in a small gallery that sells prints and most people would not realise it was a masterpiece, conversely if you put a fake in a major gallery most would say how good and how important it is.”

During the Independents Nic realised that there was a real lack of professionally run galleries in Liverpool. Artists could only exhibit work in their studios, empty shops or run-down buildings and they also struggled to build up a public following who would visit and buy their work. When he closed his design and marketing business he had an empty building on his hands and decided to open the Corke Gallery. The gallery opened in June 2010, ready for a programme of exhibitions to coincide with the Liverpool Biennial. “Stupidly I thought, I know, I’ll do a show every week. It was just insane, I think in the first year I did something like 25 shows. I was at the gallery all night hanging stuff, decorating, with hours spent listening to Rhod Sharp and Dotun Adebayo on *Up All Night* on Radio 5 Live.”

Private views and artists’ talks at the Corke Gallery are very social. Nick says, “I think they should be a relaxed opportunity for people to meet the artists, make new friends, discuss the art and catch up on the latest news and gossip – if they buy some paintings, great, if they just have a look and go away and tell their friends, I’m happy.” The visitors to Nic’s gallery are certainly made to feel welcome and he seems to attract a certain ‘South Liverpool’ client base that other galleries have been less successful at getting their hands on.

“You get the most interesting people in galleries,” he says. His audience is generally the great and the good from the South end of Liverpool, as well as the Wirral, Chester and even the occasional Mancunian. If you’re lucky you’ll even catch the odd local celebrity.

Although sales can be unpredictable at times, Nic is pleased with the successes he has had to-date. “For very popular artists I sell work before the show opens, by sending out a catalogue. I’ve had people literally pushing in past me saying ‘red dot that please’ and that’s exciting. It is a rollercoaster having a gallery. I get a buzz from the all or nothing risk of doing a show. My favourite memory involved a client who walked into the gallery and before I could even say hello announced that they wanted to

buy two five-figure sum paintings. I couldn’t take any credit for selling the work so I felt I hadn’t really earned my commission. Whenever the client returns now I make sure I say hello before they get a chance to speak!”

The gallery is not for hire and Nic curates all shows himself, taking a commission if work is sold. “I go on risk effectively and I prefer it that way because it shows the artists my commitment to them. You can put a lot of time and effort into a show and then for whatever reason get a poor turnout due to a clash of dates, lousy weather, c’est la vie.”

The Corke Gallery features well established and emerging artists, including names such as the late Adrian Henri, and 2006 John Moores Painting Prize winner Martin Greenland. Throughout this year’s Biennial period the gallery will feature a plethora of past John Moores Painting Prize shortlisted artists. Nic tells me he has a wish list of artists he wants to show, but is interested in approaches from anyone who is committed to their own practice. “I judge people by their artwork, not their day job or qualifications so if you can paint and you’re passionate about what you do and I like it, I’ll consider showing it.” He jokes about how he takes delight in saying no to ‘cocky and arrogant’ artists who turn up at the Gallery thinking they’re something special and come in expecting to get a show. Saying that, Nic actually loves opinionated artists and recalls the best nights he’s had in the gallery being the ones where gobby artists, who’ve had a couple of glasses of wine, let loose with passionate opinions on art and theory. “It’s what art should be about,” he says, “belief in an idea and the ability to create it.” (JJ) ◊

THERE IS NO CASH KEPT IN THIS BUILDING

19 June 2016 22:44:21 GMT, *The Royal Standard* presents on a blackboard, the blue door opens to a sign in thick marker, gallery arrow shows left, through the narrow corridor to the yellow workshop plaque, dark, office is bolted shut, piles of paper and boxes, 20 pair link to next room, TRS multiplied by CBS equals XMAS, sheets of wood pressed together on floor painted grey with note in biro that reads please no move, across gallery behind thick white sheet there is vent-axia type SD, off, N, L, B, please take necessary precautions, fly traps hanging in windows, seriously wash your cup after you’ve used it, weird clear narrow vinyl sign with the words section stock, FED from G-1 stores via 16mm 6491X 4 way 32A, we must respect this space typed in bold, £100

each with a :-), moving on, the studio arrow leads up to a different entrance, the gents is just behind you, long corridor to grey gloss door with charcoal text that says such a mug’s game, portraits on some, take the reverse arrow to performers slash makers slash writers, we’re all welcome in the event of suspected gas leak, checking-checking BTBusinessHub-572, you in there, blue LED glowing, do you want this dentist chair with meridian norstar wiring, hell yeah, singer, chipboard as branding, too many kettles, 415 volts leads everywhere, clipart, check out the stairwell and see duck-taped to wall an out of date flyer that says we have 4 wonderful Ukrainian artists on a residency with us, it’s 4324b4264a accompanied by glitter bombs, 80 pair cable to herald WSHP ground floor, 2016 is our 10 year anniversary, words now painted over with white matte but you can still make it out, every time you enter and leave don’t forget the deadlock, always remember the deadlock, there’s free stuff over there, it’s late and nobody’s around, humming from lights, trickling water somewhere down the corridor, the emptiness echoes on and on, it’s spooky, looking forward to seeing you, can you please pass this info on to TRS members, thank you, PS this door has repeatedly been damaged by allowing it to swing freely in the wind. (MS) ◊

NOT SUCH A SMALL VIEW GALLERY

Tucked away on Hanover Street, nestling in Liverpool’s city centre we have Gostins shopping arcade. In this we have a mishmash of independent traders: e-cigarettes to millinery, cafés to hairdressers, tattoo parlours to antiques. But it is also home to many artists: the art shop at ground floor level paving the way for Sophie Green’s studio, the building also the base for the Liver Sketching Club, and the combining of new technology with arts practice which is going on at DoES. Most importantly, it is also home to *A Small View*, one of Liverpool’s newest gal-

lery spaces. Set up in 2015 by a couple of UCLAN students, but not just any ordinary art students. In 15 short months we have had 15 strong exhibitions, transforming the empty retail unit into an exhibition venue of calibre. The original floor tiles and their stickiness were ripped out and replaced by a painted surface. Although by their own account the first two shows were “atrocious”, the venue grew from that point. From there we have seen exhibitions of video art, architecture, performance, fine art, painting, photography, digital works and interactive sculpture, in addition to a leading performance curated by Jodie Lee involving a rain dance intended to cast away the flooding that the region fell victim to over the last year. This new space is certainly one to watch in Liverpool.

Benjamin Davies and Kelly Hayes curate, hang, administer and market this gem of the cultural scene. In day-to-day practice Kelly handles the graphics for posters and Ben is the Twitter person. The direction for the exhibition space is very much artist-led; Ben and Kelly have only said no to a partition wall being knocked down during the period the gallery has been open. There is a genuine long-standing friendship between the duo: both are from Liverpool and met while studying on the Art Foundation course in the city, before they both studied for the BA in Fine Art at UCLAN in Preston, followed by the MA which they will complete this autumn. Kelly works with digital based photography, sculpture and dabbles in film as a medium. Ben uses video game technology to create art based projections. Their works complement each other and their dynamic relationship is evident in the exhibitions they have held together.

Holodeck was the first major exhibition of Kelly and Ben’s work held at A Small View in spring 2015. This was a collaborative exhibition between the two curators and Jon Mackereth, a Liverpool-based architect. The exhibition explored alternative models of reality where interaction was key to the success of the collaboration. We were presented with photography on each of the adjacent walls leading towards a large video game simulation on the central wall. To one side Kelly showed a collection of digital prints where she

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had photographed an array of different coloured artificial lights leading towards an exit through the visual implication of a corridor or a doorway. Opposite this, Jon Mackereth presented an assemblage of darker prints in a grid-like formation; images simulated from a model which identified the passage of time through the presence of sunlight. On the central wall of the space we were given Ben's digital installation. The video game took us through deserted streets and the debris of human inhabitation; buildings, plastic waste, signs and advertisements, using digital technology to explore a reality which exists outside of our current material world. The collaboration was a great success in terms of the simulation of model realities in favour of our actual surroundings.

Got Worms has been one of the most successful exhibitions held at A Small View; the exhibition period coincided with Light Night 2016, a key event on Liverpool's cultural calendar. Roxy Topia and Paddy Gould were the artists behind the formation of the visual sculptures; worm-like forms suspended from walls and arranged between plinths. Roxy and Paddy have been collaborating since 2008, and recently completed a year-long residency in Roswell, New Mexico. Their creative process starts with drawing, which is digitally collaged, then printed on to satin, the sculptural forms then being created; forms which are tactile and can be moved into new positions. The team do not just work together as artists, but have also been in a relationship with one another for many years.

The provocative title of the show *Got Worms* is clearly intentional, and much of their work is of a sexual nature. Forms such as *The Internal Clitoris* draw on messages from the second brain and look at the ritual of sex and stretching inwards. In *Acid Kiss Experiment* we are confronted with a pair of ovaries presented in pen and airbrush. The visual was accompanied by an audio of a gorilla mating ritual. The pair claim the works are about maintaining desire in a long term relationship. Visually stunning, tactile pieces combining coiling and stretching to create intimate forms which explore physical existence.

A Small View are hosting a longer exhibition from 9th July to 19th August 2016, to coincide with the Liverpool Biennial. *The White Pube* is a collaborative relationship between Zarina Muhammad and Gabrielle de la Puente, who use various forms of digital media to project their views of the art world. A mixture of performance art and digital enhancement, they take a low-tech approach to producing work, with a strong element of humour running throughout. Drawing attention to popular culture through the use of karaoke to re-work popular songs such as *Bohemian Rhapsody*, they mix in the names of leading artists, such as Tracey Emin and Anish Kapoor; the results are free and spontaneous, mistakes left unedited to

produce something that is raw and effective. Other works use podcast technology where other artists give their opinion on 'High' and 'Low' art. Having recently shown at MUESLI, based at the Royal Standard, A Small View will host The White Pube's next major exhibition.

A Small View is a space that can be adapted to any medium, embracing all forms of contemporary practice. A gallery which collaborates with many organisations including FACT and the Hanover Project in Preston. So what is the future for Liverpool's newest independent exhibition space? Firstly, Kelly and Ben intend to finish their MA courses, which will then allow them to commit more time to the gallery. They wish to keep the space free for artists to exhibit and for the public to look around and attend private views. Although they have received some funding from different sources the space is mainly funded by themselves, many of the works shown remaining the property of the artists. They plan to start hosting fine art video showings, workshops, and a more intensive programme of exhibitions; although initially they had sought out creatives to use the space, over the last few months artists have been being approaching them. There is also the potential for them to use other spaces on the upper levels of the Gostins Building. A magnificent start to an exhibition venue which has grown from humble beginnings to a space becoming prominent within the creative sector. (AL) ◇

LIVERPOOL'S STAPLE BOUND GALLERY: THE DRAWING PAPER

When I was asked to write about the hidden spaces of Liverpool's art scene I didn't instantly think, "yep, I'll write about a newspaper", but one of Liverpool's most overlooked galleries is bound by a single staple and distributed sporadically around an ever changing creative landscape.

The *Drawing Paper*, conceived by Jon Barraclough and Mike Carney in 2010, is an exceptional kind of gallery that displays anything that could be described as drawing, and that can fit on a page. It has been incredibly well received by those who have found it, and it even made an appearance at Tate Liverpool earlier this year. Its success, in simple terms, is down to the fact that anyone who picks it up can roll it and walk around with a gallery in their back pocket. And it provided the only time I've ever swung a gallery at a fly, which is a fairly good USP. Unlike rivals of similar mediums, it rarely finds its way to a recy-

cling bin, and tends to find a home on a shelf. I can't say the same for the *Metro*.

The main concern of the paper is, as its title suggests, drawing. That opens up channels for popular questions in the arts, but specifically, questions I have heard regularly around the city while writing for *ArtinLiverpool.com* What do drawings mean? Why do people draw? Why is drawing important? Do we need to learn life drawing at university?

The most influential question, that proves there is a link between the small spaces and the huge ones, is one put forward by Tate's summer programme "Why do we draw?" Unfortunately, by the time you read this article that exhibition will most likely have been replaced by the Biennial contributions to Tate Liverpool. Luckily though, if you go for a coffee in most shops in The Baltic Triangle there are copies of Drawing Paper #4 hiding in dark corners. That paper was part of a recent exhibition at Tate Liverpool too. The exhibition, *Art Gym*, which tied Young Tate to The Tate, had the young artists asking all the questions recent graduates should be asking. The following exhibition series, featuring work by Francis Bacon, Melissa Lassnig and Ella Kruglyanskaya, tried very hard to answer those questions. It failed, but in a good way. It was never going to answer a question so huge, but to try shows an effort on the part of one of Liverpool's giants. Whether that's attributable to the Drawing Paper is unlikely, but there is no doubt that they have focussed the questions of Liverpool's creative family towards wanting to understand 'why' they do things, rather than simply 'how' they do things.

So far, that focus has been displayed in eight issues, all titled unexcitingly as #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7 and #8. A very intentional kind of dull though. As Barraclough and Carney explain inside every issue, it is intentionally "a logo and advert free zone". It's that lack of fluff that enables the artist contributors to make the most of their space.

Speaking of artists though, it is worth mentioning that this paper is managed by artists who are dedicated to its aims and ethos. Jon Barra-

clough and Mike Carney came up with an idea and ran with it. It now seems to define their practice and, in a way, their lives. They have stopped exploring other avenues, and focus almost entirely on drawing – their own, and that of others.

Barraclough and Carney have a lot to boast about beyond the Drawing Paper too though, with Mike Carney being largely responsible for how we view creative spaces in Liverpool. I don't mean anything ethereal by that at all; it's far more straightforward than how I usually write. He has designed materials for The Double Negative, Bluecoat and The Royal Standard and branded half of Liverpool, so he knows the significance drawing can have more than most.

Issue #4, the paper that has lived on my publications shelf for the last year waiting for its chance to be written about, features the work of some exceptional artists, who at the time perhaps didn't quite have that big a name for themselves. One that jumps out, and might well to you here too, is Frances Disley, an artist who as a Biennial associate artist through Cactus, will be featuring heavily in Liverpool Biennial 2016. Cactus Gallery is located in The Royal Standard complex with the Drawing Paper's very own founders. From a single page spread in a 2011 issue of the drawing paper, to Liverpool Biennial 2016, Disley's practice is almost unrecognisable from then; now working on a much larger scale, and rarely with materials as delicate as the clay and pencil which featured in *After the Deluge* on page 14 of issue #4. Far from being unknown in 2011, Drawing Paper was a platform for Disley to explore drawing in a new kind of gallery. Her most recent work will be driving around Liverpool on the side of an Arriva bus for the next three years.

In 2012, the year they printed their fourth issue, the project was shortlisted for the Liverpool Art Prize, an award created by *ArtinLiverpool.com* and now curated by Metal at Edge Hill Station. While the reasons behind their nomination aren't exactly bullet pointed, it's a fair assumption that it was an acknowledgement of the significant contribution they were beginning to have on how Liver-

pool presented its creativity. Whether it was critical or just craft is slightly irrelevant. As I said before, Drawing Paper exists to ask questions and show stuff off. That's the simple way of putting it at least.

These newspaper galleries are printed in editions of 3–4000 and distributed by request. The regular distributors are Bluecoat, FACT, Tate, The Royal Standard, Cactus and Camp and Furnace, but with such an influx of independent spaces and the rise of the Independent Liverpool app there is a huge surge in shops and galleries that could support these paper exhibitions, so who knows, it might be time to expand and start tripling their print editions. Their most recent edition expressed an interest in widening their circulation nationally.

I don't have an answer to most of the questions I have asked throughout this article, but if I had to answer one, I'd suggest that the importance of drawing lies in the ability of 'image' to coincide with 'word'. An image might be worth a thousand words, but words tend to be more legible, so it's a necessary exercise to try and switch their context around once in a while. Stick some words on a wall and some images on a page. In its most absolute state, that is what Drawing Paper does. And in doing so they give anyone who wants it a chance to experience drawing in a different light. (PKS) ◇

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ROAD STUDIOS

On all *Road Studios* press releases, we describe ourselves thus:

Road Studios is an independent collective of artists, photographers, sculptors and designers based in Carlisle Buildings, Victoria Street. It has been established as a creative hub nurturing artistic talent since 2013.

The introduction of this byline is innocent enough. I came up with it myself when I was commissioned by Studio Director Tony Knox to write a press release. I knew I could write art reviews, but I wasn't entirely sure what to include in a press release, so I started with the best of all resources for such a mission: *Writing Copy for Dummies*. I followed the chapter on writing press releases meticulously, and included what I found out was a boilerplate. Most of my first draft press release did not make the cut, but the boilerplate remains. These two lines are designed to articulate the story of Road succinctly, and yet they will never convey the determination of a handful of artists to bring about a centre of creativity with heart.

In his international best-seller *How Proust Can Change Your Life*, Alain de Botton explains at length the



sense of gratification writer Marcel Proust gleaned from filling in 'news-in-brief' stories with imaginary details that ventured to recount a more rounded tale. De Botton writes: "It shows how vulnerable much of human experience is to abbreviation... Much literature and drama would conceivably have proved entirely unengaging, would have said nothing to us had we first encountered its subject matter over breakfast in the form of news-in-brief." Not wishing to compare the story of Road to great drama – although it can sometimes feel as such – I feel compelled to expand upon those boilerplate bones.

When spaces are left wanting of tenants, artists fill the voids, being none too fussy about the décor, the lack of thermal insulation, leaking roofs, creaking floor boards and even the odd instance of native wildlife. The traditional concepts that govern a studio's success are time and space. Often, people associate studios with a fixed address and if a studio loses its abode, the likelihood is that its time in existence is limited.

Road Studios began as an artistic studio set up by Joe McNulty, yet this was not the studio's first tenure as an arts venue, previously serving Curve Gallery as well as Weird Arts. The space housed musicians as well as a handful of visual artists, never taking off as a pin on the Liverpool art map. Lacking a fixed identity, it

could easily have lost its way without the passion of a few ambitious artists. Joe left his position at the helm of Road Studios, and prior to that, other members had found a new home at the next door space, Circuit Studios. Unable to maintain full rent payments, Rob Flynn, Tony Knox, Alan Williams, Adele Spiers and Haitham Salem were left with two options: to fight to keep Road Studios living and breathing, or to find new spaces and go their separate ways. "We felt that Road was a great venue in a great location in the middle of the city centre with a lot of potential, and we really didn't want it to end that way", states Studio Director Rob Flynn. Determined, these artists put out the call for new artists, and were rewarded with an array of talented creatives who were able to inject their personalities into the studio.

When Light Night 2015 came around, Road Studios opened its doors to the general public for the first time to showcase *Beyond the New World*, a collaborative exhibition of toy cars like you've never seen them before or since. The opportunity to show the general public their work in situ spurred the Road members on, and allowed us hope we might be an asset to the Liverpool art scene.

This vigour transferred to ambition, and perhaps with a touch of the Icarus complex, a super majority of creatives voted to expand into Circuit Studios when their director moved on.

Would it work, taking on a whole new space with even more rent to pay and spaces to fill, plus a host of new personalities? One thing was for certain: we were keeping the name 'Road Studios'.

"I saw it as a chance to expand the possibilities of what Road could do and become. In the past we were hunting for space to do events and exhibitions to the point where we'd cram them in next to the kitchen sink, but with the expansion we now have the space to do the shows we want and we can offer so much more to the Liverpool art scene. Also with the bigger space we were able to bring a load more great artists in who have really contributed to the studio", Rob Flynn explains.

Negotiations with the landlord and a renovation project ensued. Over a period of six months, with all hands on deck, Road artists set to work filling in the holes in the roof of 'Side B', seeking out polystyrene sheets to make our own thermal insulation, bringing back found wooden panels to cover the ceiling, and polishing the floors to expose the natural floorboards that had been hidden way with years of dirt and graffiti. Tony Knox compares it to the happy house elves in *Bagpuss*, fixing and sticking everything together: "We predicted renovations would take a month. Sadly back in the real world, six months later we were still trying to finish off certain aspects of the space. A large percentage of the materials came from the adjoining skip outside

<http://rds.li/tomo>

the Shankly Hotel. The ever-changing economics of Liverpool brought forth the skip with the materials to help build the thermal insulation. Just like happy house elves, we were singing the *Mending Song* featured in *Bagpuss*. The summer was lost within a haze of dust.”

This was a testing time and a deal breaker for a few artists we were sad to lose, because during this time the studio was unusable. Yet, undeterred, 12 December 2015 saw the inauguration of Road Studios 2.0. Introducing the Roadworks Gallery in addition to the new workshop spaces, a special exhibition showcased some of the best work of all our members. We welcomed the city of Liverpool once again to celebrate with us, which drew a much bigger crowd than our Light Night open event, a fact which validated our decision to expand.

Knowing we could achieve as long as we worked as a group, we stretched ourselves to produce something incredible for Threshold Festival 2016. The result was *Dejarik*, a piece which transformed fine art sculptures into digital projections. We were the only studio-wide collaboration in the visual arts section, something which goes some way to defining our ethos of nurturing talent as a collective.

Aptly, and coming full circle, Light Night 2016 cemented a sense of what can only be described as fellowship among the participants. Inspired by the combination of traditional-art-meets-new-media that we were able to pull off at Threshold, we continued with this theme for Light Night, setting up a selection of activities using projections and social media that invited the audience to converse with the art.

Seeing how far Road Studios came in one year, from Light Night 2015 to Light Night 2016, we have witnessed a growth in the size of the studio as well as a development in the work we are able to create together, thanks to the innovation, ambition and skills of our artists, as well as a nurturing environment. From small beginnings, Road Studios is well on its way to finding a voice. This is not without its teething problems, but it is testament to the desire to succeed not only as a studio but as a collective.

Coming back to the notion of space and time, it is with regret that Carlisle Buildings may not always be home to Road, and we may not see Light Night 2017 for reasons outside of our control. Yet, as a few artists were determined to keep Road Studios alive, it is our ambition to survive as a collective that is constantly adapting wherever we end up. A studio is more than just its geographical location. It is the sum of the multiple personalities who have contributed to it in the past and who drive it into the future. As Tony Knox puts it, “Road has been constantly changing and developing. People have come and gone, and some aspects of the journey have been joyful while others have been somewhat traumatising. The common goal was a very creative, affordable and safe environment that would nurture and facilitate opportunities just like a tree from which many branches grow and flourish, and from a single tree a forest would arise.”

So, returning to the boilerplate, we may well have to remove “Carlisle Buildings, Victoria Street” from the description one sad day not too far away, yet it is our hope that we will continue to be “an artistic hub nurturing creative talent” for many more years to come. (KH) ♦

DON'T ADJUST THE DIAL

It speaks volumes about *Static Gallery* that, when they announced their latest project was to open a new food venture making fermented Korean cabbage, no one much turned a hair. Kimchi Human's bubbling jars of Kimchi was just the latest in this razor-sharp gallery's curious engagement with the world around it. If ever a space personified that well-worn trope of the best galleries having permeable walls – where outside and inside coalesce via some kind of breathable membrane – Static is it.

Actually, its walls were so permeable, a noise abatement order was slapped on it – silencing one of the city's best music venues too. So no more incendiary gigs by the likes of Steve Mason, Micah P Hinson, Maps,

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and Clinic, alas.

Still, this 6,000 square foot space is as vital as ever. Owner, Paul Sullivan sees to that – in the astute way in which he nurtures, develops and tests out the stuff that falls through the cracks of the city's other spaces. It's where Leaf, the city's best-loved tea-and-booze bar was born. And its huddle of offices have nurtured photographers, festival organisers (*Africa Oye*), bloggers (*The Double Negative*), and magazines (*Bido Lito!*).

And their surefooted stewardship has not gone unnoticed. Static was invited to the *Korean International Art Fair 2010* as part of a special UK invitation from the British Embassy. Static's response? To prod and probe a curious meta-industry of the world's art fairs: the architecture of the sale process. The art fair as a 'temporary business event' – no-one had shone a light on the international art fair's ecosystem in quite as audacious a way before.

Static ran with the idea for a major, multi-national collaborative event. *Terminal Convention* was part exhibition, symposium, music festival, art fair and farmers' market – and totally, completely Static.

For Sullivan, Static remains deeply interested in the inner-workings of contemporary culture – it's why the space was used for TED-style talks (*Social Media Café*). He's wise enough to know he doesn't have all the answers, but, at least at Static, you know they'll always be asking really brilliant questions. Questions whose tendrils reach out from those virtual walls, and on into the world beyond. (DL) ♦

SPACES OF THE LIVER SKETCHING CLUB SINCE 1872

The *Liver Sketching Club* was founded on 11 May 1872. The passage of time may have dulled our appreciation of

just how long ago this was; Charles Dickens had died just two years earlier, the club was formed only seven years after Abraham Lincoln was assassinated and, in the USA, the Jesse James gang was still active (they robbed a bank in Kentucky a month before the club was founded). During the past 144 years, the club has been based in many locations around Liverpool. The meeting at which the club was founded was held in the Committee Room at St Augustine's School, Salisbury Street, as were the initial meetings. The school was close to Liverpool Collegiate where the founders, the art teacher Samuel Burkinshaw, and ten of his students, met.

In December 1875, the club relocated to The Palatine Dining Rooms, Cable Street. Some reports show it as the Palatine Restaurant and others as the Palatine Hotel. Cable Street no longer exists following the bombing in the 1940s. By 1879, the club had moved to Pool Buildings, South Castle Street. Until then, members had met to offer constructive criticism of each other's work, listen to lectures and discuss the business of the club, but this move was significant because it gave them rooms in which they could meet, work and hold exhibitions.

The next move was to the top floor of the warehouse of a fruit merchant at 22 Williamson Street. Josh Fisher wrote about his early days as a club member, “I remember the first model class I attended. This took place in Williamson Street in the top room of a fruit warehouse where we had to struggle our way up a flight of stone steps with boxes of oranges and barrels of apples on every step. The walls were lime-washed and heavy wooden beams supported the roof.” This part of Williamson Street was destroyed in the war. In 1880, the club moved to nearby Cuthbert's Building, Clayton Square. This was a good and popular studio, but access was by a long, difficult staircase. After about ten years, it was decided to look for more modern premises. The main reason for a move seems to have been “the advent of lifts”.

On 13 December 1890, an advertisement appeared in the *Liverpool Mercury*: “To Artists and Others. To be let: the large room with top light,

at present occupied by the Liver Sketching Club in Cuthbert's Building, Clayton Square. Rent moderate. Apply to Cleaver, Holden & Co, solicitors, 26 North John Street, Liverpool”. In 1890, the club moved to premises at 11 Dale Street where it would remain for more than 80 years. It was reported in the *Liverpool Mercury* on Monday 5 January 1891 that that the new studio was, at last, “reached by an elevator”.

Although the club was happy to be in Dale Street, we almost burned the building down. The *Liverpool Daily Post* reported on 3 June 1936, “Quick work by Liverpool Fire Brigade prevented a fire at the Liver Sketching Club's studio from spreading to valuable business property in the same building. Seeing smoke arising from the building block, a constable in Dale Street telephoned for the fire brigade. The firemen smashed a panel of the massive front door to gain entry, and located the fire on the club's premises on the third floor. Books and other property were ablaze, and the heat had cracked the roof windows. Books and pictures were destroyed, but little damage was done to the structure of the building.” The cause of the fire was known: “the cause of the fire was negligence on the part of one of our members in leaving the radiator burning and neglecting to switch off the power.” The culprit was not named.

In his report for 1972/73, the Secretary reported on what he rightly called “an eventful year” which included the club's centenary celebrations and ended with “our sudden eviction from 11 Dale Street”. When the eviction from 11 Dale Street came, an emergency General Meeting was held, and the club moved to Bluecoat Chambers. Another move took the ‘Liver’ to 36 Seel Street in 1992.

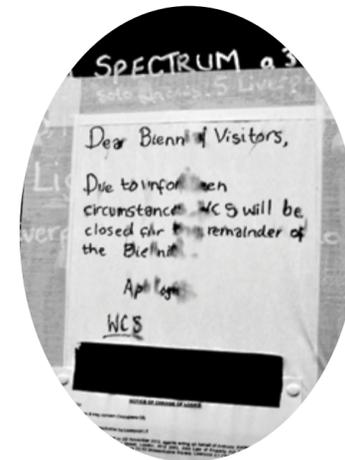
The basement of 36 Seel Street was once the studio of sculptor, Arthur Dooley, who was one of the club's Patrons. Access to the upper floors was either by the stairs or by a vintage lift, although it was quicker and safer to use the stairs. Parts of Liverpool around Seel Street were undergoing redevelopment and the landlord of our studio warned that the building would be part of that development at some point. The club was variously told that this could be either in a few months or a couple of years. The Committee decided that it would be better to find a new studio now, rather than be left in a situation where we were given very little notice and were forced to take whatever was available at the time, if anything was available!

So, in March 2004, the Liver Sketching Club moved into Gostins Building, Hanover Street, where it remains active to this day. The club has almost 100 members who attend some or all of the 36 classes every month. There is a meeting at the studio almost every day – sometimes twice a day – and virtually all of them, in line with the club's aims since the start,

involve working from a live model.

Many places linked to the club no longer exist. The site of St Augustine's School is now part of a housing estate, Cable Street has been subsumed by the Liverpool One development and is now occupied by Debenhams, and what was Pool Buildings is now the Queen Elizabeth II Law Courts. 22 Williamson Street is now a modern shop, Cuthbert's Building is now Boots in Clayton Square and 36 Seel Street is currently being redeveloped. Bluecoat Chambers remains, although much changed from the club's time there, and we wait to see what happens to our current studio home in Gostins Building! (DB) ♦

R.I.P. W.C.S.



“This independent, not-for-profit contemporary gallery, live music venue and studios sadly closed at the end of 2012; the future of the building is currently unknown. One of Liverpool's finest DIY art spaces – it will be missed.” (www.creativetourist.com, 2012)

Wolstenholme Creative Space could be best described by those who frequented it, so here are comments left by gallery visitors, gig-goers, film watchers and an all round awesome community that kept its creaky old floorboards heaving for 3(ish) years:

“I miss Wolstenholme Creative Space. Baaaah.”

“I remember watching Abolition tear it up in there. What a fuckin' venue!”

“A place that gave us a lot of freedom and support.”

“Very interesting. Reminds me of growing up on a housing estate in London. Love the Kwik Save bags and the fashion.”

“One of the best exhibitions I've seen in ages. Bloody brilliant. Thank you.” (PS) ♦

N	O	S	N	A	L	L	A	A	N	D
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THANK YOU WORD SEARCH

Hidden in the grid are ALL the words listed below. Once you have found every word, the remaining letters will spell out a message.

JEN ALLANSON
 HELEN BRYSON AND FAMILY
 JENNY CLARKE
 IAN AND MINAKO JACKSON
 LIVERPOOL PERENNIALS /
 THE FLORRIE
 HM RELK
 CAROLYN SHEPHERD



HIDDEN GEMS

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A very special thank you to Ian and Minako Jackson of *Art in Liverpool*. These two stalwarts of the independent Liverpool art scene have done tremendous amounts of work in supporting artists and the name of art in the city. All the best for the future!

To absent friends Billy Wilson and Rose Brewer, you'll be sadly missed.

A PDF version of this publication is available to download from the Art in Liverpool website.

www.artinliverpool.com

Pages 3, 6 and 13: Tony Knox, *Mothman's Silent Protest*, 2016

Back cover: Interior signage from Bridewell Studios and Gallery, date unknown.

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