

Alternative Visions

Undiscovered Art
in the South West

Evaluation Report



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Visions
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South West

*I am an artist made of wire,
string and the bones of someone
else I used to be. For me, creativity
is as necessary as respiration.*

Artist's quote from
Alternative Visions catalogue

Introduction

Alternative Visions: Undiscovered Art in the South West was a project to tour an exhibition of work made by artists facing barriers to the art world. Alternative Visions was developed by Arts & Health South West, Outside In and Bristol Culture, in partnership with Falmouth Art Gallery, The Wilson in Cheltenham, Poole Museum and Bristol-based Artists First. The project was delivered in 2016-18 and was funded through Arts Council England's Strategic Touring Programme.

Alternative Visions aimed to:

- challenge and question perceptions of art in relation to people who are excluded from the mainstream art world, for reasons including health, disability, social circumstance or isolation.
- highlight issues of diversity, interpretation and relationships between artists and curators.
- initiate discussion around what people think should be considered as art.
- influence the attitudes of audiences and get more work exhibited in mainstream spaces by those facing barriers.
- create a fairer art world which rejects traditional values and institutional judgements about whose work can and should be displayed in galleries.



John Taylor,
Phantom Limb
Pain



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Introduction

To encourage participation in Alternative Visions, Outside In organised four Induction Days for artists, health and social care organisations, and 8 Artist Support Days at which artists were able to create online galleries on the Outside In website which included photographing their work, writing artist statements and making their submissions for the exhibition. These were hosted by the participating venues and enabled them to make links to local health and social care providers and to individual artists.

Through the open call out and Artist Support Days, 312 submissions were received. A team of selectors chose 20 works for the exhibition, selected for their aesthetic interest, emotional impact and alternative take on the world around us. The selectors were: Alex Coulter, Director of Arts & Health South West; Ruth Hecht, Senior Exhibitions and Events Officer, Bristol Culture; Andy Hood, 2007 Outside In Award Winner; and Georgina Bolton, Assistant Producer at Situations.

In the catalogue introduction, Alex Coulter, Director of Arts & Health South West, and Marc Steene, Director of Outside In, wrote:

There are many undiscovered artists in our local communities. These individuals are driven to produce art for a wider range of reasons, and for different purposes, than many mainstream contemporary artists. They can find themselves facing extra barriers to the mainstream art world due to factors such as health, disability and social circumstance. What is striking about these artists is the self-belief and determination which has led them to develop remarkable art in sometimes difficult circumstances. The works in this exhibition are diverse in content and style; ranging from the highly personal through to the political, from landscapes to portraits, and from paintings to sculptures. The artists' integrity is clear to see. Making art can be a direct and powerful form of communication. It is an accessible means of articulating thoughts and feelings which bypasses verbal language and strikes straight to the heart and brain.

A beautiful, deep exhibition focusing on some of the everyday problems a few people face. It was inspiring and the artwork was incredible, proving everyone is an artist, I'd love to see more exhibitions like this.

Audience member



The exhibition toured to:

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery
3rd June – 10th September 2017

Falmouth Art Gallery
25th September – 10th December 2017

The Wilson in Cheltenham
7th January – 11th March 2018

Poole Museum
21st March – 6th May 2018

The touring exhibition was accompanied by interpretation and educational activities, including short films about the artists made by Somerset Film, and audio interpretation from participants of Artists First, a group of learning disabled visual artists based in Bristol. You can see the film on Youtube here: <http://bit.ly/AlternativeVisionsYouTube>

Overall, the exhibition really emphasised that diversity and inclusion is not just about attracting diverse audiences to a venue, but also about what is programmed in galleries and by whom, interpretation, and whose voice is being represented. It was clear that audiences and venue staff want to see more of this kind of art in galleries and museums.

Above: Artist's talk
at Poole Museum
© Richard Jeffery

Introduction

This is a really important exhibition. It's equally disturbing, revealing and celebratory. The commentary by Artists First is incredibly thought provoking and adds an insightful context, changes your perception. All of the artists should be congratulated. I went to art college but was kicked out, in part due to struggling with mental health problems. This exhibition, the art and the commentary has made me feel better. We all have a place we can be an artist."

Comment from audience feedback postcard

It was so enabling to know that someone picked my work as worth being in the exhibition. I also want to contribute [something] back. You get told a lot as a person on benefits that you are a non-contributing person, you are a drain on society. So, an opportunity to make a concrete contribution to anything – it makes you feel less worthless. I feel that now I can legitimately say that I'm an artist rather than 'I'm signed off sick' – as an identity. That's a huge contribution to my quality of life.

One of the selected artists in an evaluation interview

Some visitors were sceptical of some of the artwork but after watching the video or taking time to read about the artists and the challenges they face, opinions shifted. I think some visitors have started to question their own thoughts on what makes a great art piece and how to interpret it. I think having information about the artists and their creative journeys has promoted both visitors and colleagues to address their own views on what makes great art. Having an informative and personal narrative was vital to stimulating this way of thinking.

Venue staff questionnaire respondent



Evaluation Approach

Alternative Visions adopted a collaborative evaluation approach, led by a freelance evaluator, Nell Farrally, with partners contributing to the evaluation design, data collection methods and interpretation of data. The full evaluation report can be read at <http://bit.ly/AlternativeVisions>

The evaluation design used an Outcomes Framework, alongside research questions which were intended to prompt discussion and reflection amongst partners, grouped into 6 areas:

1. Impact on artists
2. Impact on audiences
3. Impact on venues
4. Partnerships
5. Networks
6. Profile, discussion & debate

Evaluation Findings

Key quantitative measures were:

Participants including artists
639

Exhibition Audience
63,332

Number of exhibition days
269

Number of sessions for education, training or participation
56

Number of individual attendances at 44 different workshops and events
463

Alternative Visions significantly exceeded quantitative output targets – audience numbers were 58% greater than targets, the project provided 7.6% more exhibition days than originally planned, involved more than twice the number of participants and provided more than twice the number of sessions for participation than planned.

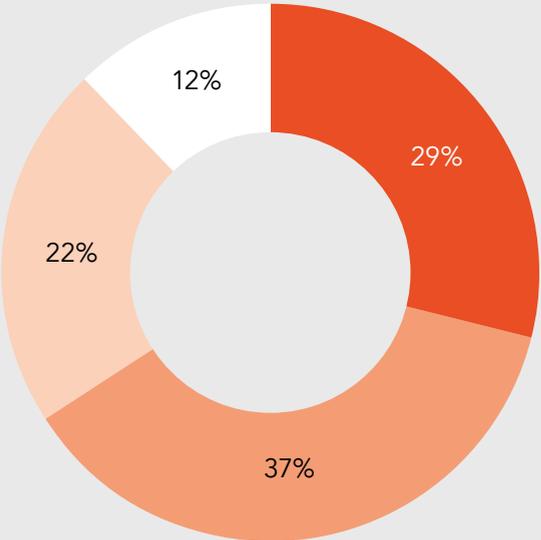
A range of methods were used to collect evaluation data including questionnaires, interviews, informal feedback postcards and observation, and sought contributions from artists, audiences, venue staff and partners.

People stayed in the exhibition for a long time, and responded strongly to the emotional content and sense of individuality for each artist. They tended not to talk much, mainly as most were totally engrossed in the exhibition so this is a positive thing here. One woman was so keen she wanted further photocopied information which we provided.

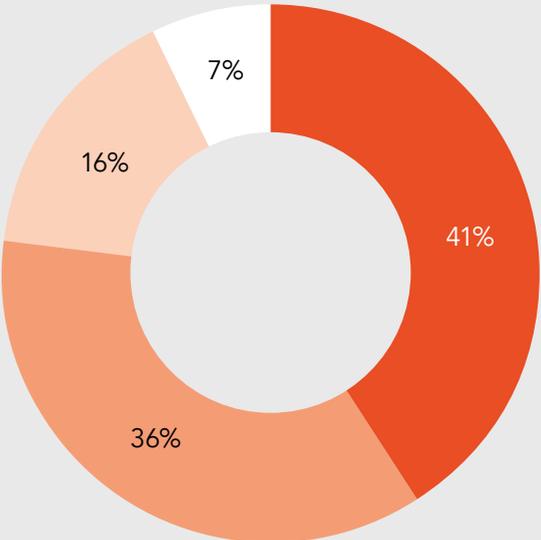
Venue staff

747 people responded to a Visitor Survey, which asked 3 closed questions:

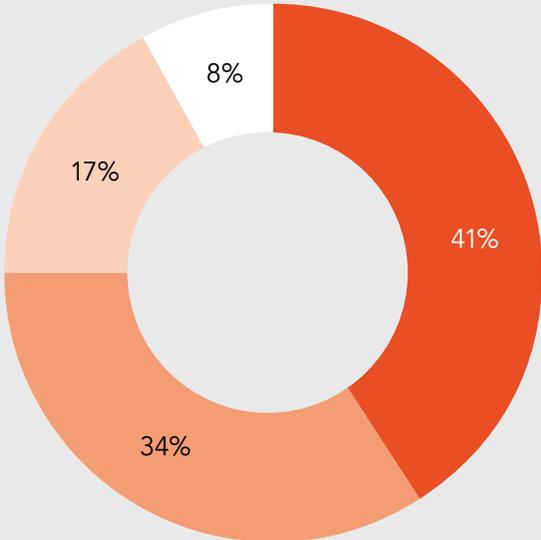
Has the exhibition challenged your perceptions of what kinds of art should be exhibited in galleries?



Has the exhibition prompted you to think differently about art created by people whose work is not usually shown in galleries?



Has the exhibition increased your awareness of the challenges some artists face?



■ Yes, a lot
■ Yes, a little
■ No
■ Not sure / don't know

Evaluation Findings

The Visitor Survey also asked for qualitative comments which were analysed alongside responses from audience feedback postcards. A total of 1,263 textual responses were coded using Template Analysis (a system of open thematic coding which develops a coding structure combining both themes identified before the data analysis begins, with themes which become evident as the data are explored.) The data from the different sources enabled collaborative judgements to be made about how well the project aims and intended outcomes had been met, which included:

- Alternative Visions successfully met the majority of intended outcomes within the original project timeframe.
- The Evaluator and project partners judged Alternative Visions to have made a significant contribution to the ACE Strategic Touring Programme aims and outcomes relevant to the project.
- Alternative Visions had a profound impact on audiences in terms of broadening their understanding of the challenges some artists face. Audiences appreciated the insight into the artists' experiences. There was a strong voice for more exhibitions like Alternative Visions. A minority of audience comments illustrated how challenging some people found the exhibition.
- The majority of selected artists were very positive about their experiences of the project. Inclusion in the exhibition, and the support they received from partners, increased artists' confidence and self-esteem, enhanced their wellbeing, increased their skills, and enabled them to exhibit and sell their work more.

- The different levels of interpretation which accompanied the artwork were appreciated by audiences and venue staff, and proved to be a particular strength of the project. The variety of interpretation methods made the exhibition accessible to a wider range of people; helped them to understand the perspectives of the artists; and for one venue, increased visitors' dwell time.
- All the partner venues valued the project for the contribution it made to their work around community engagement, and diversity and inclusivity of audiences. Alternative Visions prompted venues to consider diversity and inclusivity – not just in terms of attracting diverse audiences to their venue – but also, what is programmed in galleries; whose work is programmed in galleries; and whose voice is represented in the interpretation.
- Audiences, partners and venue staff felt the quality of the exhibition was high. Partnership working was judged to be good. There were aspects of the project which developed in response to audience feedback and formative evaluation.

There were some notable unplanned outcomes, particularly how the exhibition inspired audiences (and in some cases venue staff) to be creative. Many comments spoke of how the artwork and the artists' experiences had inspired them to resume their own creative practice. It was also striking the extent to which audiences connected the artists' messages and experiences to their own lives, particularly their own mental health. This went far beyond the planned outcome of "increased awareness". The interpretation created a lot discussion amongst the venue staff and provoked people to think about their venue's interpretation guidelines and practices.



Right: George J Harding,
Pink Rain and Pain

Finance

The total investment from Arts Council England was £73,000 with a contribution of £7,300 from the 4 venues. Partners felt that the reach and impact of the project was significant when judged against this financial investment. There was an underspend which has enabled the partners to develop some legacy work.

Exhibition at Bristol Museum © Eva Andreski



Legacy

A proposal for legacy work has been approved by Arts Council England. This work will support:

Share Art

Share Art is an opportunity for Outside In artists to share their artwork with an audience by presenting and speaking about images of their work, enabling them to gain and practice skills in public speaking, in turn increasing their confidence in their art work and in their ability to talk about it in front of an audience.

Outside In Ambassadors

Ambassadors can help spread the word about Outside In, engaging people with the work and aims of the charity. Involvement in this opportunity helps artists increase their confidence in speaking about their own lived experiences, and gives them the training and tools need to empower them to spread the word and raise awareness.

Step Up

Interpreting Collections: Step Up is the training and professional development programme of Outside In. Interpreting Collections aims to provide participants with the skills to research and interpret works of art.

AHSW Artists Advisory Group

AHSW will establish an artists' advisory group to influence decision making at board level and bring a more diverse range of perspectives, experiences and needs into the core of the organisation. AHSW will deliver a South West event for Alternative Visions artists and other members of the LENs (Lived Experience Network), which is allied to the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance.

Alternative Visions was a huge boost to my confidence to do more, and thus to find a route through my torment into a sense of worth and wellbeing. Doing this work never diminishes my pain, but it absorbs me, because it is so challenging to do. Being absorbed is good for my mental health.

Participating Artist

Thank you



The project partners are grateful to Arts Council England for their funding and support and to the artists for their trust and for sharing their work with the communities of South West England.

We would like to thank the selectors, partners, support organisations and funders of the exhibition: Arts Council England, The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The Roddick Foundation and The George Dannatt Trust.

The staff and board of AHSW are very grateful to the partners and venues for their support and engagement. Particular thanks to Ruth Hecht and Karen MacDonald from Bristol Culture, Marc Steene, Hannah Whitlock, Harry Scott and Jennifer Gilbert from Outside In, Henrietta Boex from Falmouth Art Gallery, Anna Shiels from Poole Arts Service, and to Sophie Wilson from the Wilson. Thanks are also due to Artists First for their insightful interpretation, Nell Farrally, for such a comprehensive evaluation, and Somerset Film for their engaging film about the artists. Above all, we thank all of the artists for sharing their inspirational ideas, creativity and stories.

Alex Coulter, Director,
Arts & Health South West

Arts & Health South West is an information, support and advocacy organisation for everyone who believes in the value of creativity in enhancing health and wellbeing
www.ahsw.org.uk

Outside In

Founded by Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, in 2006 Outside In provides a platform for artists who see themselves as facing barriers to the art world due to health, disability, social circumstance or isolation. The goal of the project is to create a fairer art world which rejects traditional values and institutional judgements about whose work can and should be displayed.

www.outsidein.org.uk

Venue websites:

Bristol Museum & Art Gallery
www.bristolmuseums.org.uk

Falmouth Art Gallery
www.falmouthartgallery.com

The Wilson in Cheltenham
www.cheltenhammuseum.org.uk

Poole Museum
www.poolemuseum.co.uk

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