

fermynwoods

contemporary art

1 April 2015 - 31 March 2016

117 new Facebook followers

50 Mentions “@Fermynwoods” on Twitter

292 Tweets sent

+120,000 visitors to
woodland performances
and installations

22828 Website
visits

8 Associate artists

1 Year

7 Board
members

£169,002 Total income

43 Artists

1 Conference

2 Interns

1,458 Participants

6 Part-time staff

36 Events

11 Volunteers

582 Children

234 Livestreamers

876 Adults

116 School workshops

16 young people not in mainstream education

ANNUAL REPORT 2015/2016

OVERVIEW

Fermynwoods Contemporary Art delivered an exciting and ambitious programme of rich, multi-layered and inter-disciplinary arts experiences. We mixed urban and rural, local and international, high and low tech, in public and virtual spaces across Northamptonshire. We brought high quality artistic practice to non-traditional arts audiences through collaborations with key partners from within and outside the arts sector. This was reflected through comments from Dan Hagerty (DeVos Institute of Arts Management, University of Maryland), who described our programme and approach as “*fascinating and smart*”. He stated that Fermynwoods was “*working with leading edge, high quality artists in the most interesting places, in a very meaningful way*” and creating “*unique experiences of a museum quality*”. We also received acknowledgement of our work from Minister Ed Vaizey MP, who wrote that Fermynwoods delivers “*excellent arts programmes to the wider community*”.

In line with Fermynwoods’ strategic aim to deliver higher quality and more ambitious programming, we developed deeper, more long-term partnerships with large organisations, audiences and artists. These included *The Listening Forest* (Corby Borough Council and Corby’s Woodland Friends Groups), *Purple Emperor* and *Roost* (Northamptonshire County Council) and *Sounding Out* (Northamptonshire Music & Performing Arts Trust, Orchestras Live and The Mighty Creatives); projects completed this year that have laid the groundwork for future activity. We partnered with the Royal & Derngate to appoint the Seven Sisters Group (an artist collective) to research the history of Northampton Town Football Club to develop a new site-specific performance for Sixfields Stadium in 2017. We also initiated our *Associate Artists* scheme; a new programme to support the development of mid-career artists through ongoing mentoring and artist residencies.

Internal organisational development work included training in leadership and fundraising (through the DeVos Institute), recruiting and training new staff to deliver our Alternative Education Programme and two paid Internships (in partnership with School of Fish). We also refined our Mission whilst retaining its vision:

Fermynwoods Contemporary Art commissions artistic dialogue between artists and audiences, people and place. We work innovatively and collaboratively to fuse urban culture with the rural landscape and bring rural perspectives into the urban environment. We programme temporary interventions reflecting the performative quality of inter-disciplinary art, in real and virtual spaces across Northamptonshire. We infiltrate and subvert the everyday, to find points of resonance and contrast, and create contemplative spaces for audiences. As an educational charity, learning is intrinsic to all our work and we explore areas of convergence and divergence between the visual arts and other professional sectors, to challenge thinking and develop inter-disciplinary and site responsive artistic practice.

After supporting the organisation for eight years, Tim Smith, the Chair of our Board of Trustees, stepped down in November 2015 at the AGM. He supported Fermynwoods during some very challenging times and always handled situations in a positive manner; ready to listen and taken concise and effective action. Tim has been replaced by Rhona Rowland, who had previously been the Deputy Chair.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Our artistic programme focuses on innovative ways to successfully “infiltrate the everyday”, and we break down barriers by presenting work in public locations, to reach new and non-arts audiences. It is a continuing priority that most of our public events are free to take part in and the majority of our work is focused around rural communities and those who do not otherwise have access to the arts, including young people excluded from mainstream education and young people with disabilities.

We also took a more strategic approach to developing our audiences. A review led by DeVos Consultant Dan Hagerty included an analysis of how we can build stronger relationships with our audience through offering repeated artistic experiences, which we are accomplishing by commissioning new artistic responses to spaces and communities we have previously engaged with. We also updated our Marketing Strategy, which links our programming and institutional marketing to communicate more effectively and build our audience. This has led to an increased engagement through Social Media, with 50 mentions on Twitter and 117 new Facebook followers during the year.

Highlights of our Activity:

- 1,458 people (876 adults and 582 children) took part in 116 workshops and 36 participatory events, and 234 people watched our monthly *Free Exchange* discussions via a live stream
- We supported 29 young people to gain an Arts Award qualification (21 Discover, 5 Explore, 3 Bronze), 16 of these students were not attending mainstream education
- We worked with 43 artists, 1 orchestra and 13 different schools, colleges and community groups
- We commissioned and presented 7 new works of art including: a relaxed orchestral performance in Kettering; a poetry performance in Corby’s woodlands; a new film presented in Fermyn Woods Country Park; and 4 online artworks
- 8 artists were mentored through our professional development programme
- We co-presented a conference at the University of Northampton
- Almost 23,000 people visited our website and approx 1,000 saw our online exhibitions (*Just Like This* and *Too Long for iTunes*)
- Over 120,000 people experienced our woodland performances and installations.

This was delivered by the equivalent of 3 full time members of staff and 10 volunteers.

ARTISTIC & EDUCATION PROGRAMME

ASSOCIATE ARTISTS

Sophie Herxheimer, Rebecca Lee, Virginie Litzler, Nikki Pugh, Jo Roberts, Tim Simmons, Jason Singh, Simon Woolham

“It felt as if it was just at the right time, a good honest probing of where I am. Thank you for being so warm, engaging, caring, challenging and professional.” Jo Roberts

"Time spent reading pushed my thinking with regards to how to read landscapes and also how to write about them. Time spent doing stuff pushed my boundaries of what I think I'm capable of."

Nikki Pugh

Fermynwoods provided mentoring to eight mid-career artists to enable them to develop their practice within a critically supportive environment. Through this programme Fermynwoods was also able to deepen relationships with artists we had commissioned and test out new ideas and ways of working, such as informing our thinking regarding ways we might work with studio based artists and how we might develop a new programme to work with isolated older people. Fermynwoods has provided professional support in a variety of ways that has included expected issues such as:

- assistance with writing artists' text
- giving advice regarding specific projects and career development
- reviewing funding applications
- assisting with website development
- providing references

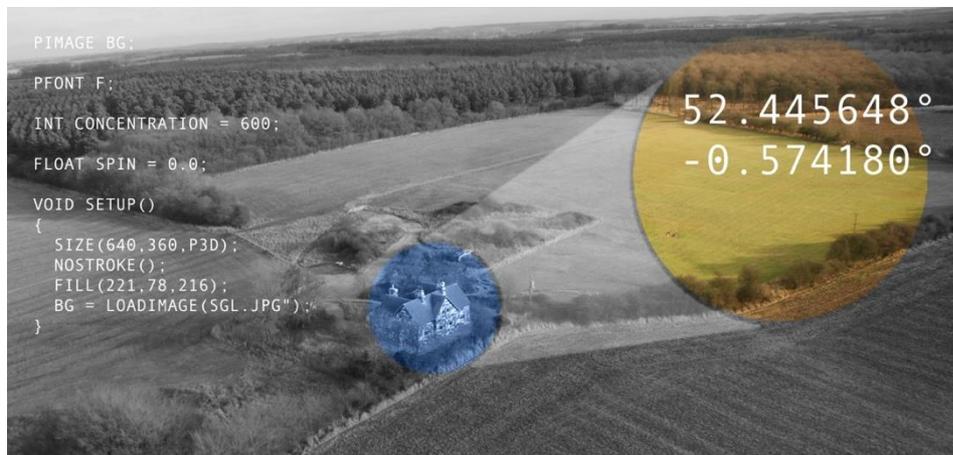
However we were also asked to give advice regarding:

- acting as a Board member
- how to fill empty studio spaces
- and for international contacts.

THE REMOTE LAB

Sophie Herxheimer, Rebecca Lee, Virginie Litzler, Nikki Pugh, Jo Roberts, Tim Simmons, Jason Singh, Simon Woolham

Artists in Residence & Exhibition, Sudborough Green Lodge, July to Sept 2015



During the summer months we opened up Sudborough Green Lodge to our Associate Artists; giving them the opportunity to stay at the Lodge in residence for 2 weeks, to read, to experiment, test out new ideas and to make new work, the focus was on developing contemporary practice through collaboration in a rural space. Some of the work was exhibited during Northamptonshire Open Studios and the Nene Valley Festival - two local audience development initiatives led by Kettering Borough Council and East Northants Council respectively, which coincide over 10 days in September. Visitors, of all ages and from all kinds of professional backgrounds attended, most staying for several hours. We had many positive comments, including:

"A really wonderful experience, thank you"

"What a lovely, inspiring place. Such a wealth of ideas."

"Really stimulating" "Magical"

"Great place in beautiful surroundings, particularly liked the [Listening Forest] book"

"So glad we came out. Loved it. Loved it. Loved it."

"Great to see something different. Very interesting project"

THE LISTENING FOREST (A Fictional Guide to the Woods)

Sophie Herxheimer

Artist Book, Poetry Performances & Exhibition, various locations in London, until Feb 2016



During the previous year, artist and poet Sophie Herxheimer was an Artist in Residence and had engaged with people who lived in and around Rockingham Forest, to draw out their woodland stories. During these conversations, Sophie drew visual poems in pen and ink and the participants took an A3 photocopy home with them. The original drawings were combined with new poetry to form an artist book, *The Listening Forest*. *The Listening Forest* continued this year as Sophie participated in poetry performance events across London and presented an exhibition of the artwork at The Poetry Society in Covent Garden (4 Nov 2015 to 4 Feb 2016). Sophie's hand-printed book was presented in the Southbank Centre as part of the Poetry Library Open Day and at Lambeth Readers & Writers Festival in Brixton.

SOUNDING OUT

Relaxed Orchestral Performance with Sinfonia Viva

Kettering Science Academy Theatre, July 2015



The second phase of *Sounding Out* (a year-long collaboration between artists, musicians, and over 300 young people attending a range of alternative and mainstream educational facilities¹,

¹Boughton Primary School, Isebrook Special Education Needs College, Rowan Gate Primary, Kettering Science Academy, Kettering Music & Performing Arts Centre and Northamptonshire Music Inclusion Group

to create innovative, music and sound art performances), was to produce a relaxed, fully accessible orchestral and sound art performance for members of the public, in which access and interpretation were intrinsic to the artistic content.

PURPLE EMPEROR

Tomoko Take

Fermyn Woods Country Park, July to Oct 2015



Tomoko Take is a Japanese artist based in Amsterdam and her films poetically explore connections between people and place. We presented the *Purple Emperor*, a part-documentary and part-fictional film made by Tomoko, as a result of her residency in 2012. The film revealed different people's relationships to the rare and highly elusive Purple Emperor Butterfly, which lepidopterists travel for miles to catch sight of in Fermyn Woods, yet many local people are unaware of its notoriety or its habits.

THE FREE EXCHANGE

Monthly discussion events in Thrapston

Discussions exploring conceptual areas of overlap between artistic practice and everyday life took place on the first Tuesday of every month, with artists and experts from outside the visual arts sector. The aim of this professional development programme is to develop artistic practice and engage with new audiences. For a frank and open dialogue it is important that the live audience remains small enough to fit around a large table, but we developed our online viewers, with up to 80 people watching the live stream and 800 engaging through Twitter. Sessions included:

- *Art + Data*, Richard Adams (Digital IT Consultant)
- *Art + Computers*, Tim Shore (Artist) & Simon Clifford (Specialist Digital Advisor, NEP)
- *Art + Copyright*, David Littler (Artist) & Antonio Roberts (Artist and Curator)
- *Art + Running*, Melanie Manchot (Artist) & Kai Syng Tan (Artist and Curator)
- *Art + Protest*, Paula Bolton (Activist, Director and Musician) & Richard Dedominichi (Artist)
- *Art + Climate Change*, Rachel Jacobs (Artist) & Bridget McKenzie (Cultural Learning Consultant)
- *Art + Social Investment*, Roger Bullen (Social Impact Bond Consultant) & Emma Smith (Artist)

MAINSTREAM EDUCATION

Art School at Geddington Primary

Geddington University was the name given to Geddington Primary School's After School Club, which was funded by Northants County Council's *Race To The Top* strategy, which "aims to raise educational standards and job prospects for young people...". In response, artist Emma Davies devised and delivered a weekly programme for the young students, based around the approach and techniques used on Art Foundation courses.

COMPLEMENTARY EDUCATION

Weekly workshops at Sudborough Green Lodge, Fermyn Woods



Melanie Cutler, *Art and Activism*



Emma Davies, *Dwellings*

Our annual programme for young people at Key Stage 3 who have been excluded from mainstream schools across Northamptonshire goes from strength to strength. We now have a team of three Education Coordinators, who deliver the programme in partnership with the CE Academy from our base in Fermyn Woods, and is managed by our Education Officer. Although the programme is varied and responsive to the needs and interests of the individual students, each artist who is invited to facilitate sessions is primarily selected on the basis of their artistic practice. The artists then undergo a training process led by our Education Officer before a suitable workshop programme is developed with them.

Artists use the surrounding landscape and new technology to develop the students' artistic abilities, improve their social skills and rekindle their curiosity and desire to learn. One student described visiting Fermynwoods as "*paradise*" and another student asked if she return to Fermynwoods when she goes back to mainstream school. This year the quality of the artwork produced significantly improved, evidenced by the higher level of Arts Awards gained by 16 students. In addition, 5 artworks were selected for the *Youth Open* at Alfred East Gallery in Kettering; one work won first prize and another won third prize.

COMMON PURPOSE: Contemporary art production & presentation in an age of economic uncertainty

A peer-to-peer learning Conference, University of Northampton, 18 June 2015

Speakers included: Gino Attwood (Two Queens); Lucy Byatt (Hospitalfield Studios); Kwong Lee (Castlefield Gallery); Mark Robinson (Thinking Practice); Nikki Russell (Primary); and Gavin Wade (Eastside Projects).

Common Purpose was developed as a unique professional development model to share learning between Directors of small arts organisations (whose work shared aims around artist development and innovative approaches) and Arts Undergraduates. We considered how arts organisations could develop new approaches to their roles in supporting art production and

engaging with audiences, and ways to build on successful activity. Positive strategies to sustain activity under the pressures of cuts in arts funding were explored, as well as ways artists and organisations could work together to build new networks and alliances to ensure the continued production and presentation of contemporary art.

ARTS AWARDS

Fermynwoods was featured as a case study in The Mighty Creatives' *Arts Award Journey* publication and we compared very favourably with other, much larger recipients in the region. During the same timer period, Northants Libraries delivered 20 Discover Awards, Royal & Derngate delivered 9 Discover and 15 Explore Awards, and Fermynwoods delivered 21 Discover Awards, 5 Explore and 2 Bronze Awards, most of which were with young people who had been excluded from school.

PARTNERS & FUNDERS

We are grateful to our many funders and partners, without whom our work could not take place, including: Arts Council England (advisor & funder), Northamptonshire County Council (funder & partner), The Mighty Creatives (funder & partner), Orchestras Live (creative partner), Northamptonshire Music and Performing Arts Trust (creative partner), Northamptonshire Community Foundation (funder), Green Energy (funder), D.C. James Charitable Trust (funder), Forestry Commission (partner & funder), Corby Borough Council (creative partner), Corby Community Arts (creative partner), The Strangward Charitable Trust (funder) and VSH Law (funder).

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Timothy John Smith (Chair, Resigned Nov 15)
Mark Burnell (Secretary, Resigned Jul 15)
Elspeth Anderson (Appointed May 2015)
Andrew Hewitt (Resigned Feb 2016)

Graham Keddie
Barbara Rawcliffe
Rhona Rowland (Chair, Nov 2015)
Caroline Wright (Resigned Nov 2015)

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Charity no. 1122678

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