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A window into the art world

Discover how the area's artists have
found a new way to display their work

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The glass gallery: How city's artists

One of the art scene's biggest events – Cambridge Open Studios – will not be happening this year, but there is a lockdown plan to replace it. **Alex Spencer** reports.

When artist Kate Green realised one of the biggest art events of the year in Cambridge would not be able to take place due to the coronavirus lockdown, she was not to be deterred.

The Cambridge Open Studios project, where artists allow visitors to come into the studios where they work – often in their own homes – to see how and where they do their creative work, has been a staple of the cultural scene in Cambridge for more than 20 years.

It is also a way for artists and makers to exhibit their work, meet the public and perhaps make a few sales or take commissions.

But with strict rules in place about visiting other people's homes to prevent the spread of Covid-19, the event needed a rethink. That's when artist Kate realised there could still be a way for Open Studios members to show off their work.

"It was something I had seen happening around the country in cities where other open studios have been cancelled," says Kate. "I read about artists putting work up in their windows so that people could take a look as they walked past and I thought it was a brilliant idea."

"People are thinking of ways around the lockdown. The hashtag #OpenWindows2020 originated in Brighton, I think. But I had heard of other artists doing this and thought it could be something we do over the month of July around Cambridge seeing as Open Studios as normal isn't happening. I thought it would be a great thing to do so we can invest in our local community and cheer people up a bit."

So far around 100 artists have signed up to the impromptu street exhibition, but Kate is expecting to hear from many more taking part.

"It's going to be really artist led," she said. "We will have some hashtags that people can use on social media and artists can promote what they are doing and

join in the conversation.

"We will focus on the four weekends of July. I'm planning on it being a bit of a treasure hunt where people find the artists in their neighbourhood."

Instead of producing a brochure for the July event like they do in other years, the Cambridge Open Studios artists will place a map on the website camopenstudios.co.uk with dots showing on which streets art is being exhibited in windows. But viewers won't know who the artist is or what is on show unless they physically walk past.

"It's being planned as something that would function in lockdown, so people can see the artwork on their daily walk, and it's a way to introduce ourselves to our local area," says Kate.

"I'm in the Arbury area, but we have groups all over. We have artists around the city centre, but also a group in Ely and people dotted around in the villages. Hopefully there will be an artist in walking distance for everyone."

"I've already come across six artists who are already displaying their art in their windows, so we are catching up with them."

She adds: "I have already had 70 people say yes. It doesn't suit everybody because not everyone has street-facing windows or some people might live in the middle of a field, but they have still been in touch to say I'm glad something is happening."

"Even if an artist is the only one in their village doing it, then the whole village can come and have a look – although we will emphasize social distancing! The website maps will go live at the start of June."

Kate is a mixed media abstract artist who is also taking an MA in art at Anglia Ruskin University. She lives in Cambridge with her husband and three daughters and works from her garden studio.

She says on her website: "I'd describe myself as a song painter, using paint to 'sing with colour'. Visceral, visual utterances of shape, hue and mark are my vocabulary – a whole heart, mind, body and soul thing."

Kate said: "I love colour and movement, pattern and detail, working in layers and getting messy. I'm excited by the



Kate Green

extravagant dimensions and intimate details that I see in creation – a joyfulness in the very act of creating and aim to reflect this in my work. My style leans towards abstract expressionism, seeking to represent and communicate things unseen, making the invisible visible.

"I love to encourage creativity in others. It adds dimension, taste, depth, texture and richness to life, aiding expression, taking us beyond the seen and ordinary."

She is certainly hoping that this explosion of art in people's windows will inspire others. "Creativity is something I think is helping people right now."

"Some people have lots of time on their hands at the moment, I'm not one of them, but I think there is a lot of creativity going on and it calms people down, it gives them something positive to do – there's a therapeutic nature to it too."

"We are championing creativity. I hope it will inspire other people to get the paints out and maybe all the windows in Cambridge will fill up with people's artwork."

"All the rainbows people have been doing are really cool, but it's been a while since people started making rainbows, perhaps people will step out of the box a bit and push it beyond that."

She added that although it was a challenging time for artists financially because exhibitions and workshops have been cancelled, the Open Windows project was not about selling art.

"This is about us trying to do a

nice thing for those around us rather than us expecting it to bring in any money. It is very much about cheering people up while they walk past our houses."

Cambridge Open Studios is one of the oldest open studio events in the country. It has its roots in the 1960s when a small group of artists invited local people to visit their studios and see how their art was produced, as part of a movement to demystify arts and make them available to all.

Today the group has more than 500 members including painters, sculptors, jewellers, photographers, illustrators and furniture makers working in studios throughout Cambridgeshire.

Its aim is to promote the making of original works of art and craft, and to forge a lasting relationship between local people and local makers.

Although this year's event will be a very different experience, the artists are hoping people will still engage with the artworks on offer.

"We will encourage the artists to put their yellow Cambridge Open Studios flags outside their homes so people don't miss their work in the windows. But we will only ask them to put their work in the windows at weekend as it will block the windows and sunlight isn't great for artwork!"

■ Visit camopenstudios.co.uk. The maps of Open Windows exhibits go live on June 1. Check out the hashtags #openwindows2020 and #COSart2020.

Above and main image, examples of Kate's work

are turning to street art exhibitions

Becoming an art spotter



Sarah Blake

These Cambridge artists are already displaying their work in their windows, ahead of the Cambridge Open Window event, which will take place in July. No addresses are being given, so walkers will have to keep their eyes peeled.

Catherine Mellis (Romsey, East Cambridge)
"I am primarily a screen printer," says Catherine. "I produce mono prints working often only with an open screen."

"I spent my teens in Saudi Arabia, where I learnt to dive, I spent my 20s at art school, doing a degree in fine art. I now hold both lives with me here in Cambridge."

"I am drawn almost perpetually to water. As a diver I yearn constantly to be underwater and when I am not I obsessively try and recreate the feelings I get when I am there. I try to bring them home with me on paper."

Stephen Tromans (Impington)
Stephen paints mainly in oils, but also some watercolour and mixed media. His subjects are landscapes, seascapes, churches and other buildings, and some portraits.

He has studied at the Norfolk Painting School and completed a diploma there in 2018.

Jackie Duckworth (Fulbourn)
Jackie normally works in the traditional medium of linocut,

but she is using lockdown as a spur to experiment with different techniques, choosing a different theme each week. She displays her latest artworks in an ever-changing Open Window exhibition, to connect with the local community.

Penny Price (Coton)
Professional calligrapher and botanical artist, Penny teaches botanical art at both Kew Gardens and Cambridge University Botanic Garden and is the founder of the Cambridge Botanical Art Society.

She says: "The works on display in my top windows in this lockdown are mostly large acrylic paintings, which are bold enough to be seen from the pavement. They combine my botanical art with the freer creativity of working on large canvasses, with a good dose of serendipity thrown in too."

"My aim is to give an added interest to local people's walks each day, and display paintings that would have been exhibited in the July Open Studios this summer."

Sarah Blake (Romsey, East Cambridge)
Sarah creates paintings in watercolour and ink and acrylic, inspired by travel, with elements of abstraction and a love of movement.

She says: "I am interested in the movement of colour and light, I enjoy the atmosphere

watercolour creates leaving an impression of emotion and sensation. I am inspired by simple lines and washes of colour, I've recently started to paint in acrylic and am enjoying the textures and opacity of layering paint."

"I also teach painting and drawing at Anglia Ruskin University, Hills Road Sixth Form College to adults and I work with learners of all ages at the Fitzwilliam Museum."

Binnie Macellari (Petersfield, East Cambridge)
She says: "My paintings explore light, space, colour."

"I took up painting after completing an art history degree. I aim to convey atmosphere and emotion. Also to capture light - which was dazzling in Argentina, where I lived for many years - but is more subtle and precious in this country."

"I have found oil is the best medium for me, though I also work in acrylic, watercolours and mixed media when the subject calls for them."

"As well as figurative painting, I am exploring a more abstract approach to my subjects. I find much inspiration in Cambridge and its countryside, as well as Norfolk, Suffolk, Cornwall, Ireland and Italy, and I enjoy the challenge of new places and methods of expression."

Find out more, including locations, by visiting camopenstudios.co.uk.



Jackie Duckworth



Stephen Tromans



Catherine Mellis