

Inspiration for 2012

This year hundreds of events took place across the UK as part of the very first Craft and Design Month. Response has been phenomenal and already lots of people are making plans for Craft and Design Month 2012. Here we talk with a group who organised a very successful Open Studios in The East Riding of Yorkshire and gather a few tips from them about how to organise an event such as this at minimal cost.

Was your Open Studios event organised specifically for Craft and Design Month?

Yes it was - and more specifically, for National Ceramics Week.

Who organised it all?

Most of the artists involved have previously worked together to publicise our area as part of the county-wide Reveal Open Studios event. To emphasise the National Ceramics Week theme, we used the five potters within the group as venue hosts, with at least one invited guest working in a different medium at each venue. The five potters are Penny De Corte, Jill Ford, (Lyn and) Gerry Grant, Tony Wells, and Barbara Wood. Our guests were Pete Schoenecker (painting and printmaking), Avril Cheetham (enamelwork), Mo Burrows (contemporary jewellery), Shirley Davis Dew (painting), Shirley Smith (textiles and glass), Jan Jones (painting), Carol Seaman (textiles and silver jewellery), and Cluny Chapman (textiles and painting). The organisational tasks were shared between us, Lyn wrote and distributed the press release, Penny contacted the local paper, who gave us a half page feature prior to the event, Jill contacted *craft&design* magazine, and I (Barbara) designed and produced an A4 flier, poster, and direction signs, all showing the c&d month logo.

What publicity did you do and how did you fund it?

The main publicity cost was in printing the flier, we got 10,000, which were distributed throughout the area, plus posters and balloons to put outside each venue. We split the costs between us - a bargain at only £30 each. The press release was circulated widely; we used the c&d website, and talked on local radio.

Did you make use of any of our free C&D Month promotional downloads (logo, sample press release etc?)

Yes, the press release was based on your template and the logos were used throughout.

Did people turn up?

Lots of people turned up - some regular open studio visitors, some first timers. Numbers were similar to those for the larger Reveal event, though our costs were much lower (about 100 visitors over

"The help and the impetus from the craft&design team was fantastic. Artists often just need the extra push to organise events. Free help and publicity - and advice when needed - make it very do-able."

2 days - not a huge number, but most of them do buy from at least one venue).

What do you think your Open Studios event during Craft and Design Month achieved?

We got visitors at a different time of year, and sales were healthy! Having a variety of different media in small clusters and a wide range of prices allows visitors to take away something, even if it's just a small piece, and hopefully they will return another time, or think of us when looking for artworks or gifts. Repeated open studios can make people more aware of the number of artists around, and perhaps they'll consider buying original art, locally produced, rather than visiting a large Swedish retail outlet for mass produced pieces. This helps to stimulate the local economy, which we all benefit from. It promotes creativity in our region to a wider audience, and allows visitors to see how the work is produced.

What did you learn from organising this event and what advice would you give others?

Because the core of our group had already participated in events together, we knew something of the strengths of each person, and so were able to share tasks between us. Don't expect one person to do all of the work (unless you're prepared to pay them to do it!). Identify a route around the studios, so that visitors can easily travel between them, and make it a day out. Include suggestions for refreshment stops, or other places of interest along the way, but don't include too many venues. Many visitors said they liked the fact that they could see all of us in one day.

Publicity is key - try to cover as many media as possible, including road signage, internet, postal, poster leaflet drops. Be aware of the need for reminders - plan publicity so that it can be staged with initial launch then reminders two weeks and one week before the event.

Will you do it again next year?

Yes! Organising an event like this is a great way to network with fellow artists, and share tips and experiences between the group. A lot of artists work in isolation, and this is an excuse to get together socially and learn more about each other. We have a couple of 'meetings' (with food and drink!) before the event, and then a follow up session afterwards

to discuss how it went, what we did well, and what we should change for next time.

Collaborations can arise in unexpected places; as a result of this event, I've had Cluny's three Shetland rams grazing in my 'garden', and we're now working together (Cluny and I, not the rams!) to produce a series of art works mixing textiles and ceramics, which we hope to show next year.

The help and the impetus from c&d team was fantastic. Artists often just need the extra push to organise events. Free help and publicity - and advice when needed - make it very do-able.



Gerry Grant



Carol Seaman



Cluny Chapman



Barbara Wood



Jill Ford