

**Re: Project to establish a Visual Arts Group in Orkney**

Dear

We are writing to tell you about an artist led, constituted group for visual artists based in Orkney - which we are in the process of forming.

We feel that there is an absence of a constituted, artist led collective representing aspects of the visual arts locally - particularly those not primarily of a commercial nature and which may be of a more experimental, research focussed, conceptual or collaborative type.

In November of 2006, a small number of artists from Orkney attended the Highlands and Islands Visual Arts Gathering in Ullapool. This two day artist led event (organised by HI~Arts, the arts development agency for the Highlands and Islands) was an opportunity for artists, gallery owners, curators, arts workers and arts educators to exchange ideas, share experience and shape an agenda for future visual arts development in the region. It followed on from the publication of a recent study and report into the current state of the visual arts in the Highlands and Islands, which was commissioned by HI~Arts and written by Georgina Coburn - entitled 'Five Challenges'.

One of the speakers at the Gathering was Roxane Permar, a visual artist based in Shetland, who talked about the artist led group Veer North, of which she is a founding member.

As you may be aware, Veer North is an association of artists, set up in 2003 in order to provide a supportive and professional network for visual artists in Shetland. Their members try to encourage debate and develop opportunities for visual artists alongside promoting contemporary art practices and awareness of what visual artists do and how they contribute to the community.

We were particularly struck by the activities and vision of Veer North and, since our return from the Gathering, have been investigating the feasibility of establishing a similar, constituted group for visual artists in Orkney, with the support and advice of Roxane.

An artist led, constituted group could play a powerful, positive role in supporting the professional development of visual artists locally and support our voice in the cultural landscape of Orkney in the future. Whilst it is important that members should not feel wholly defined by such a group (nor do we feel that only one visual arts group of this kind could exist locally), it could support a range of exciting opportunities by providing an organised framework for local visual artists to connect with. Also, in addition to the opportunities for social networking, dialogue and artistic collaboration, it could become an important voice and influence, amongst others, in the debate concerning the state of the visual arts - locally, regionally and nationally.

This is the reason we have contacted you and a number of other visual artists currently practicing in Orkney. We would like to progress the development of an artist led, professional, constituted, independent, visual arts association here in Orkney - and would warmly welcome your input.

**Aims & objectives**

Initially, our proposal for the group is for it to be a constituted membership association with the aims and objectives of:

- **Facilitating a supportive and professional network for visual artists in Orkney;**
- **Encouraging dialogue and critical debate within the field of visual arts in Orkney and beyond;**
- **Supporting and promoting experimental, research based, conceptual and collaborative visual arts;**
- **Promoting dialogue between artists, galleries, arts workers, educators and the public;**
- **Raising awareness of what visual artists do and how they contribute to the wider community;**
- **Facilitating projects and events which develop contemporary visual art practice in Orkney;**
- **Encouraging and developing creative opportunities for visual artists within Orkney; and**
- **Supporting creative opportunities for local visual artists beyond Orkney.**

We feel that the group should be led by a committee, elected at an AGM, and that each committee member could have a distinct role or area of responsibility.

If you feel that you would like to be involved in the growth and direction of such a group with these aims and objectives, or just feel that you would welcome becoming a member in the near future, we would like to cordially invite you to an informal gathering to discuss ideas and elect a committee so that a group can become formally constituted.

The date and location for a meeting have yet to be arranged and if you feel that you would like to take part, please let any of the undersigned know in person, via email at [info@untitledvisualarts.org.uk](mailto:info@untitledvisualarts.org.uk), by post at the above address, or by telephone at one of the numbers listed below - *ideally before Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> February*.

We are proposing to schedule the meeting, at a suitable venue in Orkney, sometime in early March 2007. We will inform those who express an interest of the details of the gathering in due course.

We do hope that you are interested in the idea and we look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

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|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Clare Gee</b>               | tel. 07770 850821 |
| <b>Rik Hammond</b>             | tel. 01856 861433 |
| <b>Frances Pelly</b>           | tel. 01856 751464 |
| <b>Christopher Prendergast</b> | tel. 01856 851305 |
| <b>Matilda Tumim</b>           | tel. 01856 851305 |

*P.S.* Please feel free to copy this letter to any other visual artists in Orkney who you feel would also be interested in being involved in the project (this letter is available in Adobe PDF format at [www.untitledvisualarts.org.uk](http://www.untitledvisualarts.org.uk)).

*Some initial thoughts for possible group projects:*

Visual arts studio provision campaign (possibly supporting existing groups with their studio campaigns) / History of the visual arts in Orkney documentation project / Art and science research incubator / Collaborative networking events with Veer North / Cultural entitlements (visual arts) feeder group (working with Orkney Arts Forum/OIC Arts Development) / Member's artwork exchange scheme / Artists and curators project (exploring potential non-traditional exhibition spaces and alternative approaches to exhibiting) / Art picnic networking days

*Related information:* [www.untitledvisualarts.org.uk](http://www.untitledvisualarts.org.uk)  
[www.veernorth.org.uk](http://www.veernorth.org.uk)  
[www.hi-arts.co.uk](http://www.hi-arts.co.uk)