

Magda Archer

ArtsFEST 2014

New Mills & Derbyshire Open Arts

Andrew Griffiths takes a High Peak view of Derbyshire annual arts open days

For three days over the May Spring Bank Holiday weekend, Derbyshire shows off its artistic side during a celebration of creative talent which is the Derbyshire Open Arts. Each year over 300 artists and craftspeople display their work at venues across the county.

As well as an opportunity to see what Derbyshire's visual arts professionals have been getting up to, it is a chance for the public to meet and talk with the artists, and find out more about how they approach their work.

The first Open Arts event was held in 2006, and it has been taken up with

increasing enthusiasm across the county ever since. New Mills is no exception - in fact, so enthusiastically has the town embraced the concept that just one weekend is no longer enough for them - the creative community has grown the event to last a full two weeks!

New Mills ArtsFEST 2014 takes in the



Lynn Bannister preparing for an exhibition in New Mills' Studios gallery

Derbyshire Open Arts weekend (24th-26th May) and runs from 17th May to 1st June. The fortnight is a chance for grassroots artists to show their work alongside more established practitioners. The Festival has been created by practicing artists themselves, who are all passionate about using contemporary arts to raise the profile of New Mills, with all the social and economic benefits that can bring.



Exhibition pieces by: Beatrice Haines

During the ArtsFEST, many of the town's public buildings are turned into galleries for the fortnight. The ArtsFEST events are about more than the visual arts alone though - music, song, poetry and performance are all featured, and there is plenty of opportunity for the public to get involved in a sleeves rolled up, hands-on kind of way, whether it is a tapestry making workshop at the Old Stationers on High Street, or a 'bring your own instrument' music night in the Pulse Cafe.

The driving force behind New Mills ArtsFEST has been three local artists, Debs Pitman, Arthur Burns and Lyn Bannister. Lyn particularly seems to be on a one woman crusade to put New Mills well and truly on the map. As well as her involvement in the ArtsFEST, she is chair of the Autumn Festival, culminating in the Lantern Parade, which seems to get bigger and better and draws people in from further afield every year.

As Debs Pitman says: 'I joke that I am caught in Lyn's slipstream. Her drive, vision and expertise are everything.'

Lyn does not confine herself to an organisational role alone though. In

November 2013 she opened The Studios Gallery in the old post office in New Mills. Nothing unusual about that, you may think, but what has been unusual is the calibre of artists that she has managed to persuade to show their work in a small, Peak District town.

"I joke that I am caught in Lyn's slipstream. Her drive, vision and expertise are everything."

Lyn is no stranger to promoting contemporary art. For two years she organised the exhibitions at The Art Lounge above The Beehive pub in New Mills, and is also currently a co-director at the Bolton-based artists collective 'neo:studios', which hosts a programme of international and national prizes and residencies.

That Lyn was planning to do things differently in New Mills was well sign-posted in her Studios Gallery opening show which included work by controversial art collector Charles Saatchi's 'New Sensation' Bartosz Beda.



New Mills' The Studios

For the New Mills ArtsFEST / Derbyshire Open Arts, Lyn has put together an exhibition she has called 'Drawing Possibilities' which would not look out of place in a London setting. She features twelve artists, headlining with the work of David Shrigley. Shrigley is probably best known for his humorous drawings that make wry and often dark comments on everyday life.

Shrigley was nominated for the Turner prize in 2013 and his sculpture 'Thumbs up' is set to be installed on Trafalgar Square's fourth plinth in 2016. The Fourth Plinth brief is to display contemporary works created by 'leading national and international artists'.

Another is Sophia Crilly, currently Director and Curator of Bureau, a Manchester-based gallery and international arts promoting body. Crilly has exhibited her own work in Berlin, Helsinki, London and New York.

Both are in good company as well: many of the artists Lyn has persuaded to exhibit have an international reputation and their work could grace any fashionable metropolitan gallery anywhere in the world. That she has managed to entice them to New Mills is a formidable feat in itself!

'To be able to bring the work of such a talented line-up of artists to New Mills is very exciting,' says Lyn. 'I am thrilled that the artists have agreed to show their work at the Studios and I know from past experience that the reception will be extremely positive.'

During the Arts Trail, the whole town becomes an art gallery as local shops give up their window space for the festival fortnight. This year is something of an experiment, as Lyn has invited some quite established names in the world of art to show their work in the town's shops.

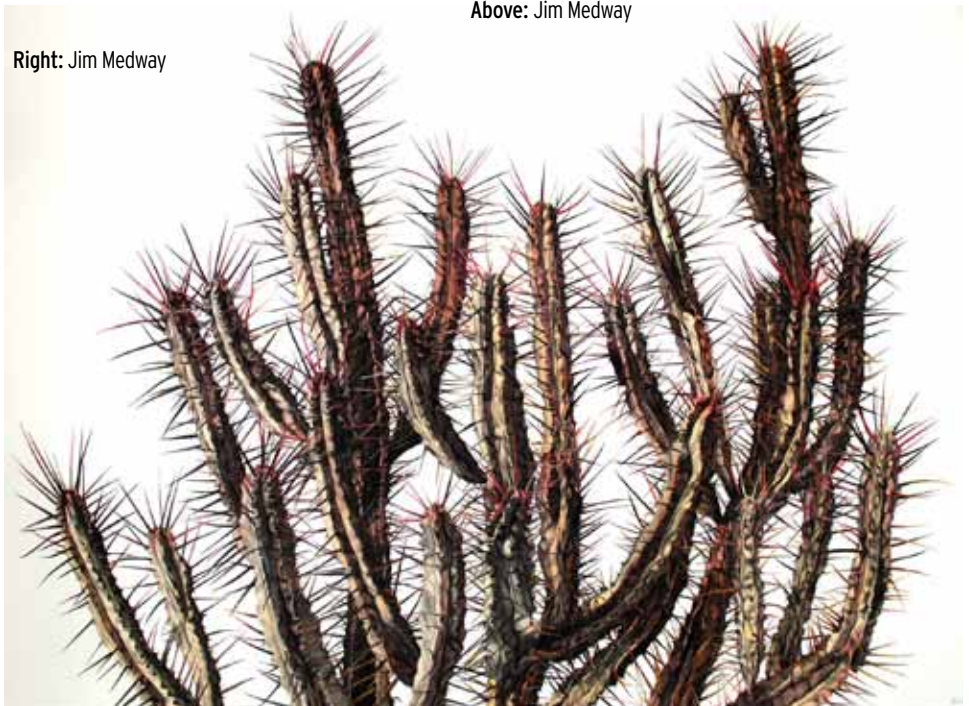
'It is all part of that same ethos,' says Lyn. 'To introduce people to contemporary arts. We are taking this kind of work out of the galleries and putting it into shop windows.'

At first Lyn was nervous about asking the more established artists. 'I was thinking, "what will they say?"', because I am inviting people who are used to exhibiting at big exhibitions.'

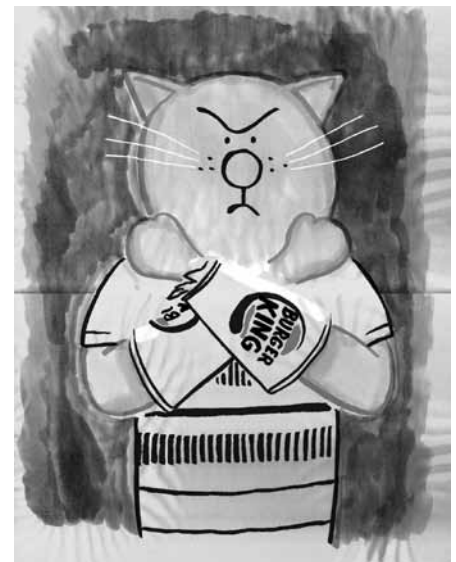
But it is testament to Lyn's persuasive skills that most of them said 'Yes'. So wander around New Mills between 17th May and the 1st of June, and you never know whose work you might see! ■

For more information about New Mills ArtsFEST see: www.newmillsarts.co.uk, facebook and twitter: #newmillsarts, email: newmillsarts@gmail.com tel:07753842861. And for Derbyshire Open Arts: www.derbyshireopenarts.co.uk

Right: Jim Medway



Above: Magda Archer



Above: Jim Medway