

Highlands Open Studios

AGM 23 November 2008 2pm
Culloden Academy Community Centre

Present – Gail Steele, Julie Cribb, Dorothy Francis, Valerie Ford, Michael Stuart Green, Ruth Black, Carol Cocks. Gillian Pattinson, Fiona Mathieson, Margaret Cowie, John Nicholson, Avril Marr, Jenny Turner

Apologies – Fred Black, Gwen Black, Caroline Hewat, Jenny Hepburn, Chris Callum, Lynn Bennet MacKenzie, Inger Smith, Ingebjorn Smith
Victor Rose, Cyril Reed, Hazel Reed, Jenny McLaren, Cathy Putman, Clare Blois, Frances Baxter, Joan Baxter, Marie Young

Acting Chairman Dorothy Francis welcomed everyone to the AGM

Minutes of the previous AGM had been distributed prior to the meeting. They were approved by all present. Proposed by Gillian and seconded by Michael.

Chairman's Report

On the whole, 2008 has been a successful year but it has also been a year of mixed fortunes: the high points being five successful events; the low points being so many Committee resignations and at this point, I would like to thank all of the Committee past and present for their hard work and commitment to HOS.

Our first event was the directory launch at Eden Court on Friday 4th April where members and invited guests had a buffet reception in the MacLean room and were given a digital presentation of member's work by Bill Francis. The large screen was very effective in exhibiting images of members' work and many people commented favourably on this. The Directory has been very popular with members and the general public and one of our main sponsors, Robert Livingston of Hi Arts, declared that it was the best he had come across. The choice of cover designed by A4 Print Studio, though controversial, did win approval as it was bright but the main plaudits were for the interior design by Michael Stuart Green.

Our main event The Open Studios Week was held in June this year instead of September and in the survey conducted, there was clear support from the majority of members for this to continue to be the set date. This year, HOS invested in signage which met with general approval. The Committee encouraged members to arrange their own publicity which worked well for some and not for others. The cards which were intended for members' own use were a waste of resources and will not be repeated. Financially, many members did very well, but they were those who had their own previews and actively did their own promotion. The lesson from this is that members must be more proactive in promoting themselves and not rely on general paid advertising which is difficult to reach the appropriate target.

In August, we took a stand at Moy Games Fair to promote HOS. As a condition of receiving monies from Awards 4 All, HOS were committed to engage the public in a hands-on experience of artistic activities. This proved quite difficult to organise due to Health and Safety regulations but we did fulfil our legal obligations and several members did demonstrations which created a lot of interest amongst the public. It was good PR and we did get several enquiries about membership but the Committee felt that it would not be cost effective to repeat it next year.

The Committee had originally planned to hold the Members' Annual Exhibition at the Scottish Natural Heritage building for six weeks in September and October but planning became unstuck when we realised that HOS would have to man the exhibition for this length of time and that we would only have access during office hours Monday to Friday. The final obstacle was that the ASI decided that they would no longer hire out their display stands. This was a disappointment to many and the Committee spent a lot of time searching and negotiating over new venues, and even considered holding an Art Fair as a replacement event.

Then we struck lucky and had the offer of two venues for our annual exhibition. Jay Muirhead of Airde Gallery offered us exhibition space in The House of Beaulieu for a small exhibition in October. The preview reception was opened by the celebrity folk-singer Archie Fischer and the buffet reception was financed by The House of Beaulieu. Art work was mainly paintings and only three applied artists chose to exhibit which was rather disappointing as there was plenty space available for 3D work. Given the current economic situation and time of year, sales were quite satisfactory in the region of £1660 - £2000.

Our Current exhibition in Eden Court has impressed many. Despite lots of problems hanging the work due to lack of hanging materials provided by Eden Court, we were able to borrow enough and the exhibition has proved a hit with the public and Eden Court staff. The quality and variety of work has been widely praised and the latest sales figures stand at £1935 with six days to go till the end of the exhibition on Friday, 28th November. We would particularly like to thank John Nicholson, Gail Steele and Ruth Black for hanging the exhibition and overcoming the difficulties.

The status of HOS has been raised considerably by having our final exhibition of 2008 in the prestigious venue of Eden Court which attracts a quarter of a million visitors annually. We have been invited to hold three exhibitions at Eden Court in 2009. The future could look rosy.

However, the caveat is that success needs a committed membership and a large enough committee to carry the work forward. We have been very unfortunate in losing so many of our committee at various times of the year due to all sorts of personal circumstances and misfortunes.

I would like to thank Fred Black for his duties as Chairman for getting HOS off to an excellent start; Caroline Hewat as Secretary, Funding and Publicity officer for getting our necessary funding, Jenny McLaren for doing the newsletter, Clare Blois for doing the minutes and Daniel Kavanagh for helping out with the exhibitions

The remaining Committee have stepped in and covered the posts of those who had to resign mid-term and I want to proffer a personal thanks to the rest for remaining on the committee till the AGM.

A committee is made up of unsung heroes who do all the hard work behind the scenes and mine are Michael Stuart Green for his wonderful graphic designs, Val Ford for all her patient hard work on the finances, Gail Steele for her enthusiasm and energy in pursuing opportunities, Ruth Black for stepping to help with the fund raising, Cathy Putman for her moral support and good sense, Julie Cribb for doing all the emails and the internet admin and Carol Cocks and Gillian Pattinson for taking part and travelling so far to support the Committee and to Helene Bost who has just joined the committee as Publicity officer.

A final thanks to all who have helped with Moy and the exhibitions..

I have enjoyed being acting chairman for six months and working with everyone, but I will be very happy to hand over the reigns to the next Chairman and Committee. I think that we leave HOS with a much higher profile and though the economic situation is uncertain, I am optimistic for the future continuance of HOS. I wish the next committee every success.

Treasurers Report

As your committee, we are still doing all that we can to promote Highlands Open Studios. The decision was taken to try and keep HOS in the public eye throughout the year, and as a result, 2008 has been a very busy, high profile year for us.

Overall, finances for the year have been quite healthy. 2008 brought us a further increase in members, we were granted a very generous amount of external funding, and we managed to achieve all the goals that we set ourselves without overstretching the budget.

Our total income for 2008 was £17,851.30 – an increase of 6.6% on last year.

After a worryingly slow start, we received a last minute flurry of applications which brought the total number of members up to 106 – an increase of 7% on last year's total of 99. Although advertising revenue fell slightly from £1300 last year to just £1208.33 for 2008, we were very fortunate in the amount of funding we received - Hi-Arts granted us £2,500 and Awards 4 All donated £5,000. We also hired out our gridwall during the year which brought in an additional £50.

There is a rumour going around that I don't like spending HOS money, but that's not true – I don't mind spending money at all, I just like it to earn its keep before we part with it, and last year we received interest of £85.25 on our funds.

Expenditure for the year totalled £16,214.40 – an increase on last year of just under 2% which was below the annual rate of inflation.

Once again, the largest item of expenditure was the design and printing of the Directory. By changing to a different printing company the committee were able to reduce the cost of the directory from just over £9,000 last year to a very reasonable £8,079.32 for 2008 – a reduction of 11%.

The external funding we received from Hi-Arts and Awards 4 All was to help us with the marketing, promotion and advertising of HOS. The committee decided to use some of this cash to purchase direction signs and these were distributed to members for promoting their venues during open studios week. These signs can also be used for future years simply by updating the HOS logo and directory venue number. We paid out a total of £1,862.38 to buy these signs for you.

The launch of the new Directory is one of the eagerly awaited highlights of our year, that's when we finally get to see the result of Michael's hard work, and this year we spent a total of £695.18 for the Directory launch at Eden Court. The promotional event at Moy cost £554 and we also spent an additional £1,073.75 on general advertising. Costs for the HOS website came to £2,052.38.

Because the committee had increased the amount allocated to promotion and advertising for 2008, the budget for members' exhibitions was capped at £1,500.

Dorothy and her team of helpers have done an excellent job of providing two superb exhibitions of members' work and have managed to keep costs well under budget with total costs coming in at just £1,260.16 for the year.

An Income and Expenditure account has been produced for the year ending 31st October 2008; this shows that we have funds amounting to £1,636.90 in the bank which have been carried forward to 2009.

Based on this year's figures, the draft budget for 2009 indicates that we will need an income in the region of £17,000 to cover expected costs for HOS'09.

It's hard to believe that 2009 will be the fourth year of Highland Open Studios.

Whilst this is an excellent achievement, it also has the potential to cause us major problems. Now that we are no longer considered to be a fledgling group, we can't continue to rely on the receipt of external funding and we need to focus our efforts on becoming more financially self-sufficient. For this reason, the committee have decided that email should be the preferred method of communication during 2009, and a valid email address will now be a mandatory requirement for all our members.

I would have liked to end my report on a positive note but, unfortunately, at the time of writing, only 17 members have submitted their 2009 application forms.

Unless we maintain a good level of members, Highlands Open Studios will become economically unviable and we will have to hang up our paintbrushes and bring down the shutters. None of us want to imagine this happening, so could I please take this opportunity to remind you all that the closing date for applications is December 1st – you now have only one week left to select the perfect photo of your work to submit with your entry!

We have the prospect of a wonderful year ahead for HOS'09 – please don't let us down. HOS'09 needs your support.

The final accounts distributed by Val were read and approved. Proposed by Val, seconded by Ruth

Election of Committee

Dorothy asked for 3 office bearers and 7 members to make up the new committee. Most of the existing committee were happy to stand again, but not all in the same positions.

The position of Secretary will be split into three – General Secretary, Membership Secretary and Minutes Secretary

Ruth said she would be happy to be chairman provided that it meant only chairing the meetings and writing a report for the end of the year, she was also happy to

The new website will be far more flexible as Len Black (our new webmaster) will produce a site that will enable members to make changes to at any time. Requests for changes will be sent to Julie who will then forward them on to Len.

Margaret asked if previous members who did not rejoin in 2008 have been contacted about rejoining in 2009. Julie said that this has not been done, but she would go back over the old membership lists and rectify this.

Dorothy produced a letter from Caroline re The Cromarty Arts Trust, Julie had already emailed this to the membership.

Dorothy read a proposal from H el ene to call for HOS members to get involved in a community project. H el ene has done this several times before with different groups. The committee had discussed this at a meeting and were not happy to propose this as a HOS project. Julie will email the members with H el ene's proposal and will ask anyone interested to deal directly with H el ene. Michael said that it is important to stress that this is not a HOS event. Val wanted to make it clear that there would be no funding coming from HOS for this.

Margaret asked how important the catalogue launch is, should we have one or should the catalogues just appear? Dorothy said that although the attendance to the 2008 launch was disappointing, we do need to make an event of the catalogues appearance. General consensus was that we should continue to have a launch evening, but tied in with an exhibition opening.

The question of a HOS newsletter was raised and it was decided that there would no longer be one. It has been difficult to get the membership interested enough to submit anything and no-one has complained since the committee decided to stop producing one several months ago.

To date Michael has received only 19 membership forms.

Val told us that there is a hat maker showing interest in joining making Gillian comment on where do we draw the line, how do we define 'artist'.

This provoked a discussion on how we protect the quality of the group, should we have a selection process (as Hi-Arts has suggested). Michael commented that NEOS suffered from an influx of semi-professional/hobbyists joining which made some full time/professional artists not rejoin. Gail said that if we are the only Open Studios group to have a selection process then we are taking ourselves away from the ethos of the whole movement. Dorothy commented that the £85 membership fee would discourage anyone not serious about their art.

It was decided that this needs further discussion at committee level and then the membership should be asked how they feel. Ruth commented that we have to be careful that we do not alienate Hi-Arts as they could then withdraw their funding.

Avril, on behalf of the membership said thanks to the committee for all their hard work during the year. Everyone appreciated that it had been a difficult year. Ruth

expressed the committees thanks to Dorothy for stepping into the breach when Fred resigned.

Meeting closed at 3.30pm

Date of next AGM 22nd November 2009 venue to be confirmed

PLEASE NOTE: for various reasons the date of the AGM has been brought forward to 1st November 2009 – 2pm at Eden Court Theatre, Inverness.