

East Street Arts: A holistic approach to facilitating artists' practise.

The Studios

East Street Arts (ESA) is a visual arts organisation working across artists' needs that believes a vibrant creative sector is important to a healthy society. The organisation takes a holistic approach to working with artists, empowering them to realise their potential by providing an appropriate environment, professional and contextual support whilst maintaining a critical and outward facing programme.

ESA recognises the importance of workspace to artists, as both a physical place in which to make work and a space in which to meet and interact with other artists. They currently run two studio complexes, Patrick and Beaver Studios in Leeds, which are key contributors to the vitality of the Leeds artistic culture.



Patrick Studios



Beaver Studios



Jon & Karen, founders of ESA

The Project

In 1992 Jon Wakeman and Karen Watson returned to Leeds after completing their university studies. Unable to find a suitable studio space for their ceramic practice, Jon and Karen decided to set up their own space and found a site at East Street Mills. The space was split into eight studios plus a communal area and kitchen. Keeping one studio for their own work, the remaining seven studios were rented quickly via word of mouth.

From this first studio site Jon and Karen envisaged ESA being more than just studio providers, and a strong sense of community was created through critical debates and social events. But the scope of ESA's plans was limited by the poor physical condition of the Mills and leasehold issues, so the search for new premises began.

In 2005, after six years of negotiations, funding applications and hard work, the first studio holders moved into ESA Patrick Studios. Since this time ESA have created a vibrant community and infrastructure providing its studio holders with the tools to compete on a local, national and international platform. An integral part of ESA's philosophy is the artist development programme uniquely tailored to the specific needs of each artist. The program is vital in addressing artists need for structured support outside academic institutions. The cost of running the development programme is covered by the Patrick Studio's rental income. Participation in the programme is a mandatory requirement of studio holders at Patrick Studios, but the demand for studio places at the complex demonstrated the need for programmes such as ESA's.

Timeline

1993 – Jon and Karen rent the third floor of East Street Mills, ESA is established.

1999 –ESA commenced negotiations to rent the St Patrick's complex from West Yorkshire Playhouse. But during the negotiations the Playhouse decided to sell the complex rather than rent it out.

2000 –ESA with the support of Irena Bauman of BaumanLyons architects apply for ACE lottery funding to purchase the St Patrick's complex.

2002 - The East Street Mills studios expand from 8 to 45 spaces.

Aug 2004 – Building work commences on Patrick Studios.

Oct 2004 – Official launch of Patrick Studios.

May 2005 – Studio holders move into Patrick Studios.

Jan 2008 – Appointment of Gabriela Boiangiu as artist development officer focusing on the studio holders' professional development.

ESA artists who have benefited from the development programme

- *'My experience of DCAP was career- (and therefore life-) changing. It opened doors and showed me that a career in the visual arts was possible, none of which had ever been so much as hinted at during a four-year University education!' - Kerry Harker is a freelance curator and artist based at ESA Patrick Studios.*
- *'The programme has benefited me in so many ways and without it I think I would have struggled with making work. I get supported with applications for art related jobs, funding and fellowships. I'm involved in critical dialogues in the studio about my practice, other artists practice and contemporary art which I feel is vital for my progression and thinking. Having access to the internet, workshops for using computer software and equipment make it easier and affordable to work. Most of all is having a social environment to work in is the nicest part.'*
- Josephine Flynn is a current studio holder based at ESA Patrick Studios.

Top Tips

- Explore, visit and research other studio models – you don't have to re-invent the wheel! Many studio groups are willing to share their experiences.
- Be aware of the political and social environment you are operating in. Do you compliment other organisations, do you fill a gap or need in the community?
- Be visible in your community; build relationships with influential external groups and policy makers. From the outset Karen and ESA have been involved in partnership building, sitting on external groups and boards in support for artists and the community they operate in, including Leeds Visual Arts Forum and VARU.

Future Plans

Associate Programme – In May 2008 ESA will launch an associate programme for non-studio artists to participate in ESA programs and use some studio facilities. The programme will also expand ESA's dialogue with the public, promoting artistic programmes in Leeds.

Increase Studio capacity – Planned expansion of the number of studio spaces into a third site within in the next year.



Artist's Studio, Patrick Studios



Project Space, Patrick Studios



Portfolio session at Patrick Studios

Fact File – Patrick Studios

Website: <http://www.esaweb.org.uk>

Established: 2005

Organisational Structure: Company Limited by Guarantee Guarantee

Freehold sites: 1

Studio Units: 34

Studio-members: 32

Meeting rooms for hire: 1

Resource area: 1

Communal area: 1

Project Space: 1

Open Studio Events: Yes

Professional Development Programme: Yes

Fact File – Beaver Studios

Website: <http://www.esaweb.org.uk>

Established: 2007

Organisational Structure: Company Limited by

Leasehold site: 1

Studio Units: 30

Studio-members: 30

Communal area: 1