

Od Arts Festival 2018
Evaluation Report



The art of rivalry

About Od Arts Festival

The inaugural Od Arts Festival happened over the weekend of 11 to 13 May 2018 across East and West Coker in South Somerset. The festival took its name from the Od: a crooked stream that meanders through the two neighbouring villages. In 2018, Od Arts Festival took the theme of rivalry: commissioning and presenting a programme of public artworks, performances, painting, sculpture and video works that explored artistic, romantic and neighbourly frictions. The project was led by OSR Projects and devised in collaboration with a range of local partners.

Od Arts Festival was supported in funding by Arts Council England through their Grants for the Arts award, by South Somerset District Council, a-n The Artists Information Company, both parish councils and through sponsorship by Old Mill Accountants and Financial Planners. Other sponsors who offered free or discounted services include local businesses Aurora Print & Design and John Burtons Signs.

The festival was delivered by a small and close-knit team. Cardiff-based artist and curator Bob Gelsthorpe was invited to co-curate the festival with OSR Projects director Simon Lee Dicker. Chantelle Hencoq of OSR Design managed design, pr and advertising and co-ordinated volunteers. Artist Jon England assisted with technical installation and exhibition design and Rowan Lear was consulted to devise and implement a marketing and social media strategy.

odartsfestival.co.uk

About OSR Projects

Led by artist Simon Lee-Dicker, OSR Projects is an organisation that launched in 2011 with the opening of the OSR Project Space – a converted schoolroom - in West Coker, Somerset. Much more than a gallery, over seven years the space has acted as a hub for OSR activity and hosted numerous exhibitions, workshops, film screenings, artist talks, open studios, school classes and other events. OSR Projects is particularly renowned in the region for their seminars for artists and arts professionals, the most recent of which, Build Your Own Art World, sold out and attracted international speakers and participants from across the UK.

OSR Projects has also developed ambitious projects with partners across the South West. Weather Station (2015-16) was a mobile pavilion and cumulative project for the collection of images, objects and ideas through the beautiful and broken landscapes of South West England, led by OSR Projects in partnership with B-Side, Backlane West, Exeter Phoenix, Hand in Glove, Plymouth Art Centre, and Stair/Slide/Space. Ropewalkers (2016) was a programme of residencies and new commissioned works by artists Jo Ball, Andy Parker and Simon Whetham made in response to the architecture, history and materials of the historic Dawe's Twineworks in West Coker that have become one of OSR Projects key partners.

About West & East Coker

East and West Coker are neighbouring villages and civil parishes within the district of South Somerset. Together, their populations number 3,685 residents, of which 14.6% are under-16 and 24.6% are aged 65 and over. 97% of residents are 'White British' and 1.7% are Black and Minority Ethnic. 13.5% of residents provide unpaid care and 14.9% are aged over 16 without any qualifications. The villages are served by irregular bus services. The nearest train station is in Yeovil, around 3½ miles away, from which there are good connections to Bristol and London. The villages have a small number of community facilities including a cafe, shop, pubs, restaurant, churches and a village hall.

About this Report

The purpose of this report is threefold:

- 1) To provide a brief but accurate and dynamic account of Od Arts Festival
- 2) gather perspectives and feedback from a variety of stakeholders
- 3) To summarise recommendations gathered from feedback

This report has been compiled from data gathered using a range of methods, including: audience feedback cards available from all venues during the festival; surveys sent to artists, supporters and volunteers immediately following the festival; email feedback provided by a range of partners and visitors; social media engagement; and published critical writing.

About the Author

This report has been commissioned by Od Arts Festival and written and compiled by Rowan Lear. Rowan Lear is an artist, writer and organiser, familiar with the art scene and context of the South West. Rowan has worked and produced a range of evaluative reports within institutional contexts, including Arnolfini as Communications Manager, Situations as Communications Manager for Theaster Gates: Sanctum, and In Between Time as Marketing and Communications Officer. Rowan has also been embedded in non-institutional and artist-led projects, including Associate Producer for Hand in Glove, developing Art in Bearpit, and Co-Director of Bristol Biennial, delivering citywide festivals in 2014 and 2016. Rowan is currently a non-executive director on the board of B-Side, Portland, with a special interest in increasing diversity and access to the arts.





Megan Calver and Gabrielle Hoad - Lean

1. Od Arts Festival provided valuable development and presentation opportunities for artists.

1.1 Artists were at the heart

Od Arts Festival provided valuable paid presentation and opportunities for 16 artists, including a new commission for a participatory project. Artists were selected in part by a national open call – to which over 70 artists applied – and complemented with artists whose works were already known to the curators.

1.2 Artists valued the opportunity

In response to the question, 'How valuable was your opportunity to work with Od Arts Festival?', the majority of responding artists regarded the following as **Very Important**:

- Od Arts Festival provided paid work
- Od Arts Festival brought my work to a new audience
- Od Arts Festival made me see or understand my work in a new light
- Od Arts Festival made me feel valued, welcomed and cared for
- Od Arts Festival will have an impact on my future work

"I loved the way my work was shown, hung with consideration and boldness."

Commissioned Artist

"Getting feedback from the organisers was really helpful as a sounding board."

Commissioned Artist

"It consolidated lots of different strands of my work into something I want to develop further. It was great to meet the other artists and to see how interested the local people were in what we were up to."

Commissioned Artist

1.3 Artists were challenged and supported

Od Arts Festival provided artists with curatorial, technical and community support to embrace new challenges.

"I didn't especially look forward to working with such large groups of children, but they were great."

Commissioned Artist



Janet Sainsbury



1.4 A writer-in-residence was supported

Od Arts Festival also offered a development opportunity to South West based arts writer, Trevor H Smith, who was invited to become a writer-in-residence for the period of the festival. As well as sharing thoughts and images on social media, Smith wrote a critical account of the event for Visual Arts South West.



Writer - in - Residence, Trevor H Smith

“The opportunity was exactly the kind I had been looking for - a free creative brief, with financial support, working within the network of organisations and practitioners that I had hoped to become a part of. It confirmed my instinct that this is where I want to be, that this particular corner of the art world is the one I inhabit and should concentrate my efforts on in the short to medium term.”

Trevor H Smith, Writer-in-Residence



Phil Owen

VISUAL ARTS SOUTH WEST

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Image: Melville Mitchell, *Duet* (still)

What's On



Empire Through the Lens
 Bristol Museum & Art Gallery,
 Queens Rd, Bristol BS8 1RL
 Saturday 30 September 2017 – Friday 31 August 2018

Art Weekender
 28 | 29 | 30 Sept 2018

Od Arts Festival: The Art of Rivalry took place in East and West Coker from 11 – 13th May 2018. Trevor H. Smith reports...

1.5 The theme was relevant and interesting to artists

The majority of participating artists were positive about the theme of the festival and the context it provided for their work.

“A really interesting concept on which to build an opportunity to share work and discussions.”

Commissioned Artist

“A strong and inspiring theme that allowed multiple responses, not restricting.”

Commissioned Artist

“I am wary of themes in general, but this one felt perfectly pitched. It was not always explicit in the work or the individual events and exhibitions, but it was ever-present in the background, ticking over, informing how a critical eye might read the work, and informing my own response to the festival. It was appropriate, given the locations of the festival, and it came over well in the programme.”

Commissioned Artist



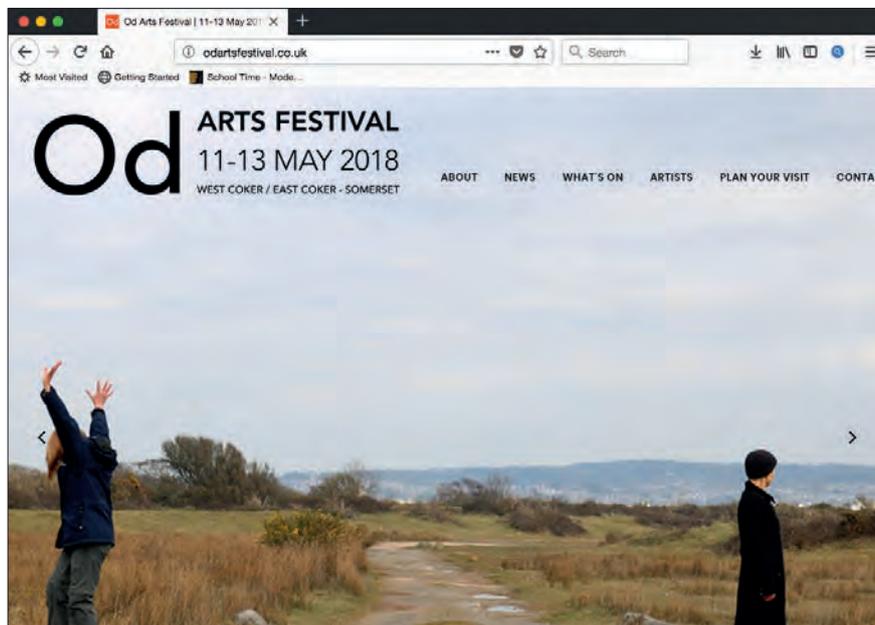
Jolene and the Jealous Guys - Photography Brendan Busenel

2. Od Arts Festival increased access to and generated greater awareness of contemporary art in a rural community.

2.1 Over 3000 people took part

Over three days, Od Arts Festival reached a live audience of 2481 and engaged 815 participants in workshops, training and performances. The festival reached a broadcast audience of over 12,000 people through social media, a radio interview, website visitors - www.odartsfestival.co.uk,

published reviews, regional and local advertising. Focussing on *Instagram* as the main social media channel, followers grew from 0 to 452 and users directly engaged with our content 819 times, through likes, comments, reposts and uses of the hashtag **#odartsfest**



odartsfestival.co.uk



2.2 Local people were key

Od Arts Festival was very successful at attracting local audiences. Over 50% of festival audiences came from East Coker or West Coker, with another 40% visiting from areas within the South West regions, including Yeovil, Taunton, Bridport, Weymouth, Beaminster, Bath and Bristol. Less than 10% visited from further afield, including London.

2.3 Many audiences were new to contemporary art

The festival was also effective at reaching audiences who don't regularly participate in cultural activities. Of the attendees who responded via Feedback Cards, 56% identified as rarely engaging with arts and culture. Less than 10% of attendees claimed to engage with the arts on a weekly basis.

2.4 Local histories and sites were animated

Visitors responded positively to the siting of works in unusual and heritage environments, and to the clear relationship between the festival programme and its context.

“Nice to see the merging of old traditional buildings, country life and modern art!”

Audience Member



Friendly Frontier - Zoe Walker & Neil Bromwich. Coker Court, East Coker. Photography Jon England



2.5 Arts participation built confidence

Many positive comments were received in response to the participatory festival commission, Jolene and the Jealous Guys by Sadie Hennessy. The artwork transformed a bus shelter in each village into a live karaoke booth, in which visitors were invited to recite a song about rivalry in love. The project concluded with a packed-out pub quiz and prize award ceremony for the best karaoke singer.

"My highlight was being an unexpected karaoke singer - I felt self-aware, embarrassed and delighted all in one 3½ minutes of silliness."

Audience Member

"Karaoke in East Coker! I did my Eurovision bit! Never done it before!!!! Great - Elated - Happy like I haven't been in a long time! Silly - Fun - Confident."

Audience Member



2.6 Participants explored their creativity

Od Arts Festival gave local people the opportunity to explore their own creativity in other ways, through practical printmaking and cyanotype workshops, delivered by practicing artists.



Double Elephant print workshop at Dawe's Twine Works - Photography Brendan Busenel



Cyanotype print workshops - Rachael Allain at Dawes Twine Works - Photography John Snelling



“Fantastic and generous cyanotype workshop with Rachel Allain. Beautifully organised - I’ve always wanted to do it.”

Workshop Participant

“I loved the printmaking at Dawes’ Twineworks - great to see intergenerational activity and the reanimation of the works.”

Workshop Participant

2.7 Local people made it happen

Od Arts Festival recruited 15 volunteer guides from the villages of East and West Coker and the surrounding area, who assisted the running of events, photographic documentation, talking to audiences and invigilating exhibitions. The volunteers represented a broad spectrum of the local population, with the group including retired people, working professionals, and teenagers.



Volunteers
- Photography Pauline Burr

2.8 Volunteers enjoyed their experience

In response to the question, 'What was important for you about volunteering at Od Arts Festival?', the majority of volunteers agreed that the following were **Important or Very Important**.

- I met and talked to new people
- I was able to get involved and contribute to my community
- I was able to meet and talk to artists about their work
- I enjoyed working in a small team
- I learned more about different kinds of contemporary art

2.9 Local involvement contributed to community

Other feedback from volunteers indicated that their experience and involvement developed their abilities and contributed to community cohesion.

“Living locally it was great to get to meet other local people who I had not met previously. Gave a real sense of community.”

Festival Volunteer

“It was a great chance to get people around the local area (Coker/Yeovil) to engage in an event and learn more about their area and interact with their neighbours they may not have met. Created a great community atmosphere.”

Festival Volunteer

“Volunteering helped me to build my confidence in taking to new people.”

Festival Volunteer





Zoe Walker & Neil Bromwich, Coker Court. School Visit - Photography John Snelling

3. Od Arts Festival offered young people the opportunity to experience high quality contemporary art where they live and nurtured their creativity.

3.1 Local schools were active partners

Od Arts Festival developed partnerships with local primary schools Perrott Hill School, West Coker Primary School and East Coker Primary School, and with teachers devised a day of arts activities for young people.

Od Arts Festival welcomed over 100 school pupils aged between 8-11 to experience guided tours of festival exhibitions and take part in scheduled printmaking workshops in partnership with Double Elephant Print.

3.2 Young people and teachers were impressed

The responses of pupils and teachers were very positive and illustrated that Od Arts Festival made a strong impression on both.

“The staff and parents have come up to me to say what a lovely time the children had at the printing workshop. I was really impressed by their independence in using all the equipment and they certainly brought back a lot of prints. One teacher is planning on following this up in class with a printing project. Thank you for inspiring our school community.”

Head Teacher, East Coker Primary School

3.3 Children engaged with artists

Simon Lee Dicker worked with groups of young people from two schools to create a series of interviews with festival artists. Aiming to learn what makes the artists tick, pupils undertook independent research, supported by school and families, wrote a series of questions and then recorded themselves asking the questions. Artists responded and the resulting dialogues were made into short films and shared publicly on the Od Arts Festival website.

"I wanted to email you to thank you so much for including East Coker pupils in the Od Festival. It was a huge privilege to be invited to attend so many local art events, which meant all our junior children (150+ pupils) could experience something different to the everyday literacy and numeracy we do. The staff have been extremely complimentary about the events they attended and I know the children will have very memorable experiences from the day. I hope many of our pupils were encouraged to visit the activities over the weekend."

Head Teacher, East Coker Primary School



Photograph by John Snelling



Kate Stapely with Ross, Dawe's Twine Works - Photography Brendan Busenel

4. Od Arts Festival developed partnerships with local businesses, contributing to and integrating culture into the rural economy.

4.1 Local partnerships were vital

A range of strong local partnerships were established for and through Od Arts Festival. These included working with the venues: Inn The Square, The Village Cafe, Forester’s Arms, Dawe’s Twineworks, Saunders Butchers, St Michaels Church and the private residence of Coker Court, alongside community groups and a local theatre company.

4.2 Sponsorship programme was tested

Od Arts Festival approached and engaged Old Mill Accountants and Financial Planners as corporate sponsors. The company and its staff received perks including a private opening night preview and performance by one of the festival artists in the magnificent venue of Coker Court.

Quote from sponsors

“Od Arts Festival was a very satisfying experience; proof that Dawe’s Twineworks really is a very valuable and usable community space.”

Ross Aitkin, Trustee of The Coker Rope And Sail Trust, Dawe’s Twineworks



4.3 Local businesses received a boost

All local partners and venues saw an increase in visitors over the festival weekend and had many people visit them for the first time. Dawes' Twineworks, a late 19th century twineworks with surviving machinery and fittings, became the site for a series of artworks and workshops. Currently in the process of restoration with the assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the twineworks benefitted from increased footfall over the festival weekend, and particularly, new visitors, which expanded awareness of the developing project and the community and heritage value of the site.

East Coker Cafe also entered into the festival spirit by offering an 'Artist Special' dish across the festival weekend. The cafe reported that the dish sold out on both days it was offered, and that they had seen an increase in business over the festival.



Conclusions and Recommendations

This report concludes that Od Arts Festival was a vibrant and innovative event, welcomed by the local community and valued highly by participating artists.

The range of feedback sought included a number of suggestions and proposals for developing the festival further. Some of these have been developed into a series of recommendations.

1. Production

While the production quality was considered to be generally very high among artists and visitors, there were some limitations and problems with faulty equipment. Greater investment in AV technology, other technical infrastructure and storage space should be considered.

2. Travel

East and West Coker are not easy to reach from other parts of the county and country, particularly if visitors are not driving. The nearest train station is a costly taxi ride or 30 minute cycle away. The 'visitor journey' could be considered more fully, and even integrated into the festival programme, whether by artist taxi service, shuttle service or arranged coaches. This would likely increase the number of visitors from further afield.

3. Food

Artists and audiences both commented on the need for enhanced food options, as cafes and pubs in the locale tend to stop serving at certain hours, leaving visitors hungry. Options to investigate include running an Od Arts Festival and/or artist-led cafe – potentially as a commissioned work,

inviting external caterers and food trucks or by working to develop more food offers with local businesses. A delicate balance will need to be maintained to ensure buy-in and support from local food suppliers while creating a positive experience for visitors.

4. Criticality

While the writer-in-residence programme generated and distributed a vital critical response in the South-West, Od Arts Festival lacked a broader critical awareness and national reviews. In the future, additional travel and writing bursaries could be provided to critical writers or targeted journalists, as part of an expanded and resourced PR strategy. Taking advertising in nationally-recognised journals, such as Art Monthly, could also raise interest in the programme among arts professionals and critics.



Road side signage

5. Publicity

Od Arts Festival relied heavily on online marketing and social media, particularly Instagram, as well as well-placed editorial and advertising in regional press. While this strategy was effective on a smaller budget, earlier printing and more extensive distribution of the festival programme to local venues and other organisations in the South West would likely have a big impact, as well as successfully reaching an older generation not active on the internet.

6. Safeguarding

While compliant at present, if work with young people is to be expanded in the future, it would be important to develop an enhanced safeguarding policy and introduce DBS checks for all staff and volunteers

7. Accessibility

Around 6% of festival visitors considered themselves to be disabled, and disabled visitors were actively encouraged to contact the team to support their visit. A future programme could be even better attuned to a variety of access needs and consider artist commissions that might be delivered in ways accessible to visitors with a range of impairments; for example, alternative formats for print material, audio guides and subtitling of video works.

Additionally, it was noted by volunteers that interpretive text on the walls – not just in print – would have improved access for some people.

8. Programming

The inaugural Od Arts Festival was not preceded by connected events, and therefore appeared to stand alone and distinct from OSR Projects other program strands. It may be useful to consider more fully the relationship between the two entities, and if relevant, develop

connections between the two. This could include programming a series of events that introduce themes and promote future festivals a year before they happen and include a number of longer-term artist commissions that has presentation points as part of the festival.

9. Development

Both artists and curators would benefit from increased time and budget to develop their work. Artists noted that a supported period of residency would have generated stronger links between their work and the community context. Future funding bids could also include a go-see budget and CPD for the festival team. This would particularly benefit the programme in areas where preparation time was lacking, for example, discussion-based events, and ensure a rich and relevant programme.

“I would have loved to experiment a bit more with materials which I felt restricted with in the budget. Along with travelling down as well, I felt I couldn’t really afford to come down beforehand as much, but perhaps a longer residency period beforehand could remedy this?”

Commissioned Artist



Event Guide

10. Volunteers

The team of volunteers became very strong advocates for Od Arts Festival, and also provided extensive feedback, reflections and suggestions for the festival's future. It may be highly beneficial to nurture an advocacy group of volunteers and other key local residents, who will be able to support the next phase of the project. This would entail greater mutual investment in volunteers, who will be able to offer more of their skills and whose role could evolve as the needs of the festival change.

"It was great to both feel part of a high quality arts festival and promote a valuable rural community activity."

Festival Volunteer

11. Sponsorship

This year, Od Arts Festival developed and delivered a sponsorship offer from one corporate sponsor. To further this work and improve financial sustainability in the long term, the team may benefit from training in order to deepen understanding of sponsors' needs and requirements, make the most of their contribution and devise tailored programmes for corporate sponsors and potential patrons.

12. Pathways

Od Arts Festival excelled in engaging children with culture in a number of ways. It may be a fruitful pursuit to further develop pathways into the arts: for example, training and opportunities for young arts professionals or a young artists'/curators' steering group.

'Yes, there was such great energy and support/interest/passion from the local community and participating was an enriching and thoroughly enjoyable experience.'

Festival Artist

"YES! Because great things can (and should) happen where you least expect them."

Festival artist

13. The Future

Od Arts Festival has strong potential to develop into a regular fixture over the coming years, as a biennial or annual event. However, the decision to continue the festival on a rolling basis should be considered carefully, and attention paid to the resources required and support available to create a ongoing event. In response to the question, 'Do you think Od Arts Festival should happen again?' artists, audiences, volunteers and supporters overwhelmingly answered Yes. A range of replies are cited below:

'Yes, there was such great energy and support/interest/passion from the local community and participating was an enriching and thoroughly enjoyable experience.'

Festival Artist

"Yes - great experience for all ages. Educational for the local schools. Many people said that it should become a regular event and that they were looking forward to coming again."

Festival Volunteer

"Not sure. I can see the case for going again and the case for ending here. The festival spoke of the particular personalities of the two villages, and the relationship between them, and there is a question over whether that resource was exhausted or has more to give. Plenty time to consider it though. There's no reason why a second event should occur one year later, it could be two, three, or five years on."

Festival Artist

"Yes great idea to build on this strong first festival, benefit from investments, infrastructures, experiene, artist and audience goodwill that is already in place."

Festival Artist

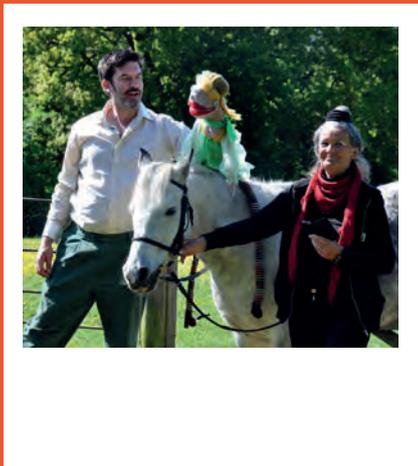
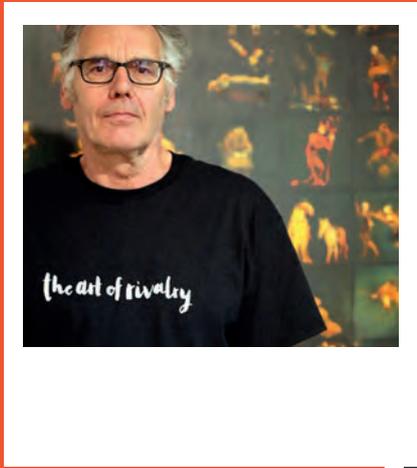
"Yes, if you have the energy! It was a really exciting, unusual event and should happen again - to prove that not all good things happen in big cities and to put all the things learned this year into practice another year. It was fabulous!"

Festival Artist

Od Arts Festival

MAY 11-13

2018



LOTTERY FUNDED

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