

**OD ARTS  
FESTIVAL**  
23-25 MAY 2025



**Od Arts Festival 2025:**  
*Thinking in Circles*  
**Evaluation Report**

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## Introduction

### OSR Projects

OSR Projects registered as a community interest company in 2019 with a specific mission to support artists and local communities where their activities take place. From its base in rural Somerset, OSR Projects has produced ambitious, critically and socially engaged art projects since 2011, in the South West and further afield. Od Arts Festival was established in 2018, with subsequent editions in 2021, 2023 and 2025. In 2020 the OSR team established a 'lockdown pottery'. This has subsequently developed into 'Community Clay', an ongoing project which offers regular making sessions for local communities and workshops for local primary schools.

Other OSR projects include Weather Station (2015-2018), a mobile pavilion for the collection of images and objects inspired by the beautiful and broken landscapes of the South West; Ropewalkers (2016), an art programme responding to the architecture, history and materials of the historic Dawes' Twineworks; *What are you looking at?* (2021) An exhibition of new work by artist Angela Charles and award winning film by Liberty Smith exploring notions of 'seeing' in art from the perspective of a visually impaired painter; *A Weekend at Hotel Palenque* (2023) OSR Projects were invited to take over the Arnolfini theatre space with work by Andy Parker, Sam Jukes and Simon Lee Dicker.

OSR Projects is led by founding directors Simon Lee Dicker and Chantelle Henocq, alongside non-executive directors Susie Clark, Bob Gelsthorpe, Jo Bickerton and Sam Jukes.

### Location

East and West Coker are neighbouring villages and civil parishes within the district of South Somerset. Together, their populations number 3,703 residents. 12.75% of their populations are under 16, 31.4% are over 65 years of age. 98.2% of residents are 'White British' and 1.4% are Black and Minority Ethnic. 11% of residents are unpaid care providers and 12.7% are registered Disabled under the Equality Act. 12.7% of the villages' population aged over 16 have no qualifications, and 44.75% of households are 'deprived in one or more dimension'. West Coker is served by a regular but limited bus service, whilst the bus service in East Coker is very limited and irregular. The nearest train stations

are Yeovil Penn Mill and Yeovil Junction, around 5 and 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, churches and village halls<sup>1</sup>.

### Report Structure and Methodology

This report begins with an introductory section about the festival and then focuses in more depth on its value to community and schools, the general public, and artists. It concludes with a summary on the overall value of the festival. Each section summarises the quantitative and qualitative data collected by the OSR team and festival volunteers. It is also informed by the evaluator's own experiences and observations of the artist seminar day and festival weekend.

This evaluation adopts a mixed and adaptive methodology. The data was collected using a variety of methods, including audience surveys and conversations with a range of stakeholders: audiences, artists, team and volunteers.

Qualitative data collection included first-hand observation of events and conversations with stakeholders carried out by the evaluator, documentation, photographs and video. It also includes feedback submitted by visitors on the feedback cards, which were offered at all venues during the festival (55 cards were submitted – as many people visited in groups this may represent 100-150 visitors, however even if this assumption is correct the sample is small), and the results of online surveys sent to all participating artists and volunteers following the festival.

This report aspires to the principles laid out in UK Evaluation Society's Guidelines for Good Practice in Evaluation: Clarity, Integrity, Independence, Accessibility, Trust, Equity, Transparency, Diversity.

### About the author

This report was compiled by Cat Bagg, an independent curator and producer, with over a decade of experience of delivering and reporting on publicly funded arts projects, including artist-led festivals. Cat was the co-curator of Od Arts Festival in 2023, providing her with a foundation of knowledge of the festival and its locale. She attended the artist seminar and the three public days of 'Thinking in Circles'.

<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics Census 2021, accessed 20/06/23, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/draw/>





Seminar. From the left Cat Rogers, Liv Punnett and Simon Lee Dicker Photograph Katy Docking

## About the Festival

### The creative team

Od Arts Festival has developed under the creative leadership of directors and co-founders Simon Lee Dicker and Chantelle Henoq over a period of eight years. Simon and Chantelle founded the festival following dedicated research into existing models in the South West and beyond, and continue to research and actively embed themselves in the region's art eco-system to ensure interconnectivity and an informed model of working.

Each edition of the festival has been co-curated with a different artist/curator, bringing new ideas and networks into the fold. In 2025, for the first time, this co-curation role was taken on by two creative practitioners: Liv Penrose Punnett with the support of Cat Rogers:

Liv Penrose Punnett is an independent curator, consultant, and Fine Art lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University. Liv is a member of the Artists Information Companies Artists Council and a Founding Director of Haarlem Artspace, a rural contemporary studio and gallery in Derbyshire.

Cat Rogers has a background in publishing, community arts and festivals showcasing emerging and established artists. She has co-produced various artist development programmes such as WebinArt for Creative Leicestershire and Collectivism, which was part of the British Council's Developing Inclusive Creative Economies programme in Brazil.

Liv and Cat have worked on many projects together, and as a team brought complementary skills to the table. As well as bringing their own curatorial concerns and ideas to the development of the theme and programming of the 2025 festival, Liv and Cat brought networks and connections from the Midlands and further afield.

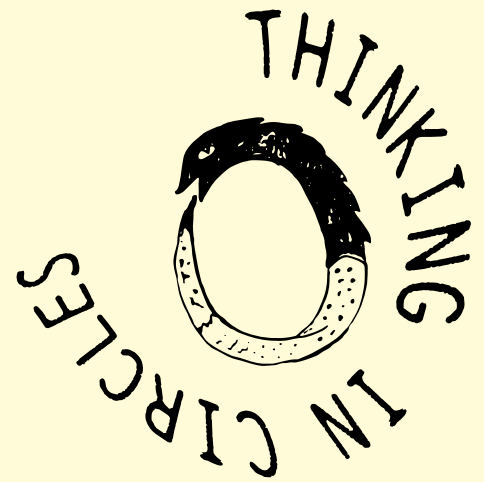
*Each festival is joyous as I'm in the privileged position to work with different curators and artists each time. New friendships are developed from this and our arts community grows.* Chantelle Henoq, Co-Director

### Curation and context

Od Arts Festival 2025 Thinking in Circles set out to explore cycles of growth, production, and consumption. As an extension of this, in their public statement, the curatorial team also addressed the current global context by articulating their intention to acknowledge feelings of ecological grief and culpability in consumerist and colonial culture, and to offer opportunities to pause and discover alternative ways of thinking.

The process of finding and selecting artists included contacting studio groups from both the South West and Midlands regions for suggestions, and a pooling of curatorial knowledge. The team then created a list of artists which would offer a diversity of approach and medium, considering access points within the festival for non-arts audiences. Artists were contacted to assess their interest in being involved, and meetings were set up to discuss the particularities of the festival and the possibilities for the development of newly commissioned work and workshops. The input of the artists contributed to the further development of the festival.

The idea of 'thinking in circles' informed the festival branding, which was based on a 10th-century illustration of an ouroboros (a serpent eating its own tail): an ancient symbol for eternal cyclic renewal or life-cycle, found in both Egyptian, Greek, Norse and Indian traditions.



## Festival by numbers

**2,574**

Venue visits

**53%**

of visitors were new

**24**

Artists

**5**

Community Clay members exhibited

**7**

Community venues

**187**

Children met artists and curators on special primary school tours

**30**

Key stage two pupils participated in clay workshops and showed their work

**118**

Festival workshop participants

**37**

Seminar Day participants

**32**

Volunteers

**2,200**

Website visits



## Exhibitions

The festival takes place across the course of three days, Friday to Sunday, with works exhibited in a range of village locations. There were seven community venues, five of which housed a selection of works by different artists, the remaining two serving as sites for a single work. In addition to this, community notice boards in both villages displayed collage works by Mónica Rivas Velásquez, in the public realm, and walks and workshops ventured out into the surrounding countryside.

*The whole event is clearly put together with such care, and it really shows - It was such a pleasure to take part in and the feedback, interactions and conversations with people [...] felt so valuable, and was such a joy to share the work with an audience who really got it.* Artist

### The exhibition venues included:

**Dawes' Twineworks**, a volunteer-run heritage centre, with preserved Victorian machinery. The visitor centre and internal areas of the historic site were used to display videoworks by Geoff Diego Litherland exploring the materiality and history of fax, and newly commissioned sculpture by artist Emii Alrai, who made links to the maritime trade that the twine industry supported, and the colonial collection of ancient artefacts from other cultures. In addition to this, the large outdoor covered area provided by the first floor 'ropewalk' was used for many of the festival's workshops, and a plant exchange was facilitated by volunteers throughout the festival.

**West Coker's village hall** hosted a rolling screening of 'Robinson in Space', the first part of Patrick Keiller's famous video trilogy, which offers "an attempt to see through landscape, to grasp the invisible forces that have shaped it"<sup>2</sup>. Also on display were ceramics, made by local school children, artists and members of Community Clay at a series of pre-festival workshops. These included ouroboros circular forms - connected to the festival theme - and many wryly convincing facsimiles of the type of snacks that might be conceivably be sold in the old-school members club style bar in which they were displayed (think packs of Scampi Fries, Tunnocks Teacakes and Iced Gems).

**OSR Projects** - headquarters of the organisation, and the only 'gallery style' venue of the festival,

where works by four artists each reflecting in different ways on crises of nature or landscape. Rowan Corkill's large sculptural intervention suggestive of dystopian horticultural machinery, Monica Rivas Velasquez's wall drawing offering a visual reflection on the political histories and ecological plight of Colombia, Ella Yolande's short video work exploring the commodification of plants and legacy of colonial 'plant hunters' and Dermot Punnet's paintings presenting landscapes beset by a series of visual glitches and geometric overlays.

**The Sawmills**, a former car lot and garage that was once also a site of timber processing, provided a perfect roadside location between the two villages for artist Libby Bove to park her *Museum of Roadside Magic* - a fictionalised travelling archive of folklore and ritual linked to vehicle maintenance and motorised travel.

**The cemetery chapel in East Coker**, a small contemplative space, clear of furniture or religious symbols, housed a second work by Ella Yolande, a large sculptural intervention - a lightweight textile arch, with a sprawling botanical design comprised of seeds and vegetal material, that transected the space. This was accompanied by Chantal Powell's *A Summoning* a sculptural assemblage of five white glazed ceramic hands, with sheaves of wheat, with its pointed fingers forming a directional circle, and a further painting by Dermot Punnet.

**Coker Court**, a historic manor house (with history extending back to the 15th century) and currently a private home, provides an imposing 'great hall', entry chamber and library nook as exhibition space. The entrance was used to show Adam Chodzko's video work *The Pickers*, in which young Romanian migrant strawberry pickers reflect on a range of footage, including documentation of their own labour, whilst the main hall was a large sculptural intervention by Simon Lee Dicker - a fluorescent glowing giant haystack reflecting the historic nuclear contamination of the Pentland Firth. The library nook provided the backdrop to a large-scale woven textile work by Yelena Popova depicting an ouroboros form encircling the tree of life.

**St Michaels and All Angels church**, in the grounds of Coker Court, provided a venue for a large gold spherical sculpture by Jennifer Taylor, with sound and internal projection elements and a trail of discarded electronics and ephemera.

<sup>2</sup>Dennis Lim, ARTFORUM, 2017, <https://www.artforum.com/features/no-nook-of-english-ground-secure-the-films-of-patrick-keiller-232454/>

<sup>3</sup>An ongoing OSR project which offers regular making sessions for local communities and workshops for local primary schools.





School visit. *Find Us in the Slip Spaces* by Ella Yolande in the Cemetery Chapel . Photograph Katy Docking



## Learning and Community Engagement

Learning and community engagement are at the core of the Od Art Festival model. The OSR projects team are deeply embedded in their local community, and ongoing work through a 'Community Clay' group and delivery for local primary schools means the festival maintains a foundation of creative activity between editions. As well as providing engagement opportunities through workshop activity, performance and participatory art, a range of paid and volunteer opportunities are offered, meaning a range of local people are part of the team from board level down. This engenders a real sense of community ownership.

### Schools involvement

Thirty key stage two school pupils were engaged in the run up to the festival via a series of practical ceramic sessions - the aim of which was to create space for young people to engage with creative activity that is not available in school, developing skills and building confidence.

Artists and festival directors Simon Lee Dicker and Chantelle Henocq ran a series of four 'Young Potters' sessions for 12 key stage two pupils from East Coker Primary school at OSR Projects. This provided the participating pupils with the chance to learn pinch pottery and slab building techniques, and to try out making simple forms including a plant pot and plate, before being introduced to the festival theme and the possibilities for making something for display. The pupils were provided with examples of ceramic art and artists, and learnt about the concept of the ouroboros. They learnt about slips and glazes and decorated their own pieces of ceramic art.

A bespoke 2.5-hour workshop was also provided for 8 pupils from West Coker School. And a set of instructions was adapted and shared with Perrott Hill School art teacher Tabatha Palmer, who had the resources to deliver sessions for 10 of her pupils.

Ceramics created by each of the participating children were fired at OSR Projects and displayed together with pieces made by adult members of Community Clay, at the festival – a public celebration which provided the young potters with a first experience of being part of an exhibition.

A total of 187 children were given special guided tours of festival venues: 120 children from East Coker Primary had a special festival preview on

Thursday 22nd, and on Friday 23rd May 36 pupils from West Coker School, 15 pupils from Haselbury Plucknett School and 16 pupils from Perrot Hill School visited festival venues. The Perrot Hill pupils had the opportunity to meet artist Emii Alrai to hear directly from her about the development of her new work responding to histories connected to the Twineworks, and to ask questions.

Flax Project CIC provided a workshop for 36 key stage one pupils from West Coker School, supported by Simon Lee Dicker (OSR Projects), Ross Aitken and Chris Barker (Dawes' Twineworks). This included sowing flax seeds at the Twineworks, in an area prepared by the OSR Projects team in advance, and a practical introduction to growing and processing flax. They also contributed to a publication about flax growing.

*I cannot say enough how much we all enjoyed our visit. It was so well organised and hands on for the children-very well thought out! The children thoroughly enjoyed themselves. They especially enjoyed taking the flax and breaking it to relieve the fibres.* West Coker school teacher

### Community Clay

When not in use as a festival venue or gallery, OSR Projects 'HQ' is in use as a studio space, with regular use by members of 'Community Clay'. This group grew out of a series of 'Lockdown Pottery' workshops in 2020, and there has been a steady membership since, sustaining Thursday Night Potters sessions and creating the demand for a new regular Thursday morning session.

A series of pre-festival workshops were opened up to regular potters, and those that face social or financial barriers to participate. The invitation to participate for those that were harder to reach, by advertising in the parish newsletters and social media. 32 individuals each participated in multiple sessions. Each session accommodated between 6 and 12 people, allowing space for participants to learn in a calm, supportive and gently social way. A total of 26 sessions were delivered over six months, providing a sustained benefit for the participants and contributing to the development of OSR Projects as a hub for creative community activity.



Festival themes of circular thinking, cycles of growth, production, and consumption were explored as part of these sessions and also introduced at the regular Thursday sessions, with 5 members of the Thursday night group going on to make work that was exhibited at the festival.

*Thursday Night Potters has been amazing. I haven't had the chance to do any pottery due to other commitments since my foundation arts course in the 1970's. It has helped a lot with my self confidence and my ability to actually achieve things that I didn't think I could, and has introduced me to a new group of friends. As a pensioner and full time carer the reduced rate funding also gave me a chance to participate. Something I am truly grateful for.*

Community Clay regular

### Workshops

There were five different workshops on offer to festival visitors:

**A West Coker 'strop' making workshop** provided an opportunity to handle and learn about the history of flax, linen and ropemaking. Participants contributed to the making of a new 'strop' – a thick woven cord created by collaborative process somewhat akin to maypole dancing. The workshop ran as a drop-in over two sessions at Dawe's Twineworks, a historic site of flax twine production. It was led by Vicky Putler, Founder of the Flax Project CIC and artist Rachel Dobbs, who has a sustained interest in social practice and has supported the Flax Project through her work with The Village Hub, in the Stoke area of Plymouth.

- 36 primary school children and 16 public participants contributed to the performative making of several metres of strop, with historic terms interwoven into the new structure.

*[A highlight was] getting the adults at the strop making session to complete the maypole weave on the rope by negotiating a slow and jerky dance together, and this descending into ridiculous laughter.*

Volunteer comment

**Drop-in printmaking workshops** provided visitors of all ages the opportunities to explore their own creativity by creating monoprints using recycled materials (principally using the interiors of used Tetra Pak containers as printing plates). In addition to making this very practical link to the festival themes of circularity and ecological awareness, participants of *Printing in Circles* were invited to take inspiration from the *Thinking in Circles* theme and their own experiences of artworks at the festival. The sessions were led by local teacher Tabatha Palmer, who is head of the art department at the nearby Perrott Hill School – widening the community connection and making use of local expertise.

- 54 people made prints over the course of two, three-hour drop-in sessions, one each morning on the Saturday and Sunday of the festival.

*People commenting on having the time to work through processes to create art made them feel calm - one person said it was the best they'd felt about themselves for a long time being part of the festival.* Volunteer comment

**Flaxen Bodies was a participatory artist-led session**, developed by *GroundMouth*, a collaboration between Harry Martin and Milly Melbourne, especially for the setting of Dawe's Twineworks. Participants were gathered around an assemblage of historic and contemporary weaving and processing paraphernalia. The session combined specially composed music and a spoken word performance offering an open-ended fictive reflection on hyper-industrialisation and its effects, with the practical opportunity to process flax by hand. Participants were guided through a series of mindful actions, and invited to create their own talismans from found materials at the Twineworks, contemporary textile and threads and their own hand-processed flax – instigating thought and conversation about processes of production and consumption. There were two bookable, two and a half hour sessions, one on Saturday and one on Sunday.

- 14 people participated for two and a half hours each over the course of two sessions, one on Saturday and one on Sunday.



A young visitor. Printing in circles workshop - Dawes Twineworks. Photograph Katy Docking



**Soil Séance** by Michelle Atherton, employed experimental and electronic devices to allow people to listen to micro sounds produced by the soil. Participants were invited to sit or lie on the ground and engage in slow and sustained listening - an unusual and absorbing experience which was highly valued by those who took part:

*Extraordinary - such an amazing experience - the soundscape, the variety and depths of sounds.* Visitor feedback

- 12 people participated in one-on-one experiences lasting thirty to forty-five minutes on the Saturday and Sunday of the festival.

**Together we walk**, three artists from the group shared some of their ideas of practising 'commoning' as artists and offered simple tasks and acts of reflection on the natural world at intervals on a short walk through some of the ancient holloways of East Coker. There was a balance between communal and individual experience, with space made for two or three-way conversations, individual explorations, shared listening and a hedgerow-inspired snack.

- 22 people participated in this one and a half hour experience on Sunday.

The strop making and PaC walk were both offered free of charge, with a nominal fee of £6 applied to the other activities. As evidenced by the high level of take-up of the printmaking activity in particular, this fee did not adversely affect the level of participation.



PaC walk. Photograph Katy Docking

## Talks and performance

On the Monday preceding the festival, artist Chantal Powell gave an online talk entitled *Symbol of the Snake*, providing insight into her wider practice and an opportunity for those unable to attend in person to engage. There was a live audience of 59 people, with many people taking the opportunity to pose questions to the artist.

On the opening evening of the festival, Mónica Rivas Velásquez performed two text pieces which drew out some of the myriad of connections to politics, violence and ecological trauma in Colombia which are fundamental to her work. The artist also gave time to the audience of 25 people, allowing a series of deeply engaged questions on the materiality and conceptual aspects of her work.

Saturday evening was drawn to a close by a special performance by vocalist and sound-artist t l k. 70 people attended their performance of *The Butterfly Effect* in St Michael's and All Angels Church. The performance mixed field recordings and live vocal, piano, and flute, creating echoes and cyclical patterns. The event provided a gathering point for audiences, artists and team, with a drinks reception preceding and a less formal, but still sizeable gathering in the pub, allowing conversations and reflections to continue afterwards.



West Coker Strop, by Flax Project. Photograph Katy Docking



t I k performing *The butterfly effect* - St Michael and All Angels church. Photograph Katy Docking



### Other ways of participating

Libby Bove's *Museum of Roadside Magic* offered a gentle ongoing invitation to participate throughout the three days of the festival. She activated her work, appearing in costume as the custodian of the archive - adding to the fictional narrative. Visitors were actively encouraged to try on 'traditional' hand-made costumes, resulting in a number of striking images that were widely shared on various social media channels, and a travelling museum gift shop offered talismans and ritual objects for purchase alongside merch such as t-shirts and car bumper stickers.

A plant and seed exchange run by festival volunteers operated over the three days of the festival, this generous scheme allowed people to adopt plants even if they had nothing with them to donate.

### Volunteering

32 people volunteered to support the stewardship of artworks and venues, and to welcome and facilitate visitor experiences.

17 of these volunteers have given time to past editions of the festival, with many volunteering on multiple occasions. This repeat engagement is in a reflection of the positive experience evidenced by an abundance of qualitative feedback, with all those responding to the survey reflecting positively on the training day, clear communications, and how they were looked after by the festival team. It is also a reflection of the embeddedness of the festival directors in their community, and their dedication to contributing to the civic life of the parish beyond their own output – this opinion was voiced by multiple volunteers in informal conversation. Many of the festival volunteers have an interest in art, with 61% citing the desire to be more involved in the arts as part of their rationale for volunteering. There was also an abundance of feedback on positive experiences of the artworks and workshops:

*Specific works at different venues were each remarkable in their own ways and on different levels and the journeys through village and countryside between them made these encounters even more memorable. Also I loved the plant exchange - glad it was back again this year! One of the highlights for me was discovering new artists [...] I loved*

*t I k, Libby's Roadside Magic, and Patrick Keiller's film. I also really enjoyed Tabitha's printing workshop.*

However a small proportion of the volunteer team (20% of those surveyed) did not take the opportunity to engage with the art at all. Although this may seem odd, there is a fairly clear explanation to be drawn from the survey data, with the greatest number of respondents (76% citing the desire to be involved in the community as a reason for volunteering and 29% and 38% respectively citing mental health/wellbeing and the opportunity to meet new people).

*The incredible energy and the positive, uplifting, and inspirational experience of the entire festival made it even more special.*

*The whole experience was brilliant. So lovely to meet other volunteers and visitors. Visitors were all so delighted by the festival! One elderly visitor was particularly moved by the Kent fruit pickers film, stopping to share his own story of 'hopping' as a child from south London. He'd never seen footage before....*

It is also important to note the significant contribution of the established volunteer group that runs Dawes' Twineworks. The Twineworks is one of the largest and most used festival venues, and in addition to providing public access, the team there support artist commissions drawing on the histories of the works. They also provide tea, coffee and homemade cake, on a donation basis, which is an important addition given the low number of commercial food enterprises in the villages.

Volunteering is clearly an essential aspect of delivering the festival in a safe and welcoming fashion, but importantly, is also beneficial for those giving their time.

### Recommendations for the future:

- Schools clearly gain a lot from their involvement in the festival. Consider involving secondary schools and colleges in tours and activity – this would likely necessitate an additional team role which may prove prohibitive.
- Low-key drop-in activity e.g. printmaking, was hugely popular, and more activity of this sort (potentially including clay) could prove a popular addition, and another reason for people to visit.
- Consider tracking quality of engagement using mood wheels and/or other forms of short qualitative feedback directly following workshop engagement.
- Consider delegating more responsibility to regular volunteers who have the skills, knowledge and desire. For instance opening/closing a single venue, or giving a short introduction talk about festival, and venues, to visiting groups.



A festival volunteer, dressing up at Libby Bove's The Museum of Roadside magic. Photograph Pauline Burr



Festival volunteers. Photograph Pauline Burr





Groundmouth workshop at Dawe's Twineworks. Photograph Katy Docking

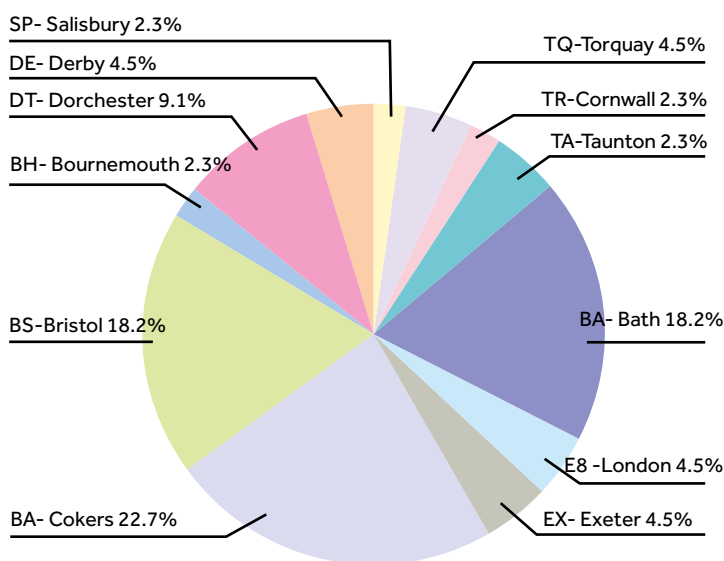


## Public Engagement

### Who came to the festival and why?

The festival audience was predominantly local, with 23% of surveyed visitors coming from the immediate postcode area, a further 34% from the wider local area (in some cases DT, SP and TA postcodes are closer than other BA postcode areas). However it also drew visitors from across the South West and from London (9% from a variety of postcodes).

Although there were many family groups in attendance, the main demographic was middle aged and older visitors.



There were clearly large numbers of festival goers with a sustained interest in art, including many artists, curators and writers based in the South West. However, almost 10% of visitors 'rarely/never' visit exhibitions or art events – demonstrating the wide appeal and welcoming atmosphere.

The main reasons cited by visitors for attending the festival (from a range of predetermined options) were 'to experience something new' and to 'reflect and think'. From the range of qualitative information collected for this report, it is highly reasonable to conclude that these two aims were exceptionally well met. People seemed genuinely delighted with the range and diversity of artwork on show, and the festival workshops each seemed to be designed to create space to be slow, to engage deeply and reflect.

The word cloud below shows the words most used by visitors to the festival to describe how their experience of the festival made them feel:



### How did visitors engage and respond?

Most festival visitors spent significant periods of time at the festival engaging in multiple ways. There was a visible flow of people through the festival, with people moving from venue to venue on foot or by trishaw (provided by the festival), and this pattern of visiting is backed up by feedback which often cover multiple venues and events. If setting out to see every piece of work the majority of a day would have been needed, and at least 214 visitors also chose to spend time in workshops, talks and performances.

Feedback on the overall experience was unanimously positive, with only a handful of suggestions for improvements (mostly related to signage, or to the availability of food beyond that provided by the festival). Almost every visitor surveyed referred to a specific artwork or artworks as their festival highlight, with the *Museum of Roadside Magic* and the artworks at Coker Court proving particular favourites.

People really appreciated the quality and diversity of the festival offer as a whole:

*Suited to the environment with interesting artists who I'd like to know more about - art beautifully presented in interesting locations. All stewards and artists were friendly and helpful. Something there for all who visited. Thought provoking and sometimes visually exciting work.*



*Wonderful, great to see work across a dispersed rural place.*

*Loved it! it takes me out of my comfort zone.*

*Having art this good, so local is brilliant.*

*A real community experience.*

*Amazing - engaging, accessible, diverse  
Great mix of exhibitions, and a lovely atmosphere  
at the fascinating Twineworks.*

### **Navigating the Festival**

The Od Arts Festival printed guide is of central importance to the visitor experience. Printed in large numbers and distributed to a range of community venues in local towns and villages, as being available on arrival at festival venues, the guide provides a full introduction and invitation to the festival. The design and layout have been finely honed in the eight years since the first edition of the festival. There is a generous illustrated entry about each artist, ordered by venue for ease of use, and a separate section with all the event and workshop information ordered by date.

At the centre of the guide, an essential map of festival venues gives road and walking routes and important accessibility information. The map is backed up by more detailed information in the first few pages, and the final page of the booklet provides a helpful summary of each venue, with a list of artist names, and symbols for wheelchair access, hearing loop availability, toilet and parking provision. The systems used to convey information throughout are simple and consistent.

The achievements of this concise 32-page document should not be underestimated. Festivals are complex propositions for visitors, and the Od Arts Festival printed guide provides concise and user-friendly information.

There are obvious accessibility challenges for a rural festival split across two villages, without regular public transport provision – there is, for instance, no regular bus from the nearest train station, and no regular bus service between the two villages. The festival team have worked to mitigate this by clearly mapping walking routes and times, and offering a free, bookable, trishaw service, provided by Cycling Without Age. Despite utilising a variety of community and private buildings, the festival was able to offer

wheelchair access to all but two artworks and hearing loops in two locations where sound was key, in addition to the volunteer team being prepped to provide audio descriptions if needed.

There is consistent signage at each venue, offering a relevant venue introduction and information about each exhibiting artist. The signage was clearly visible on arrival at each venue, and the language used was well considered for a mixed public audience. However, a small percentage of visitors (7%) noted there was room for improvement, both in terms of navigating works at venues and navigating between venues.

### **Recommendations for the future:**

- Increase signage in the villages, with more banners/boards in place in the weeks running up to and during the festival.
- Consider introducing a venue map board with artwork makers for Dawes' Twineworks, and any other venues with a complex layout.
- Add dates of artworks, and materials (where possible) to venue signage to assist with artwork identification and increase understanding of works.
- Increase prominence of audio description and hearing loop availability at venues, as well as using the programme to highlight this.
- Consider tracking length of engagement time by asking 'how long have you spent/do you intend to spend at the festival' and depth of engagement using mood wheels and/or other forms of short qualitative feedback directly following workshop engagement.



Mónica Rivas Velásquez talk at OSR Projects. Photograph Katy Docking



## Supporting Art and Artists

24 Artists and 5 Community Clay members exhibited  
19 artworks exhibited  
7 Commissions  
4 New workshops/talks

### Exhibiting artists

The 2025 Od Arts Festival included artists at a range of different career stages. There were two artworks in the festival which are already well known within the artworld: Adam Chodzko's *The Pickers*, originally commissioned for Whitstable Biennial in 2010, and Patrick Keiller's *Robinson in Space*, produced by the BBC and part of a major exhibition by Keiller at Tate Britain in 2012. As well as being relevant thematically, for audiences and artists in the know, these works provide a draw and set the tone for the quality of work on show. Of the remaining artist line up, the majority (57%), could be described as being at a mid/established career stage, with significant experience in their field, however space was also made for early career artists including recent graduates, and amateur artists (in the form of 5 members of the Community Clay group) were also represented.

The festival team balanced this range of artistic experience, ensuring that a consistently high standard of work was presented and focusing signage and programme texts on the content and thematic connections of the artwork rather than the profiles of the artists. The opportunity to be commissioned or exhibited alongside high-profile artists is clearly of particular value to those earlier in their career, but also benefits more established artists through providing a new critical context for their work.

The exhibiting artists are based across the UK, with 31% in London and the South East, 26% in the Midlands or the North, one artist in Wales, and the rest based in a variety of locations across the South West (including 10% who are hyper-local). 20% of the artist line-up have citizenship outside the UK, international or dual heritage. Despite a geographic spread from Yorkshire to Devon, most artists involved in the festival were on site during the live period of the festival, delivering workshops or talks and/or being present with their work, and meeting other people. This is not always the case, and it is a huge strength of this particular festival model, allowing new artistic connections to form and visitors to interact with artists informally and directly. 71% of artists made new industry connections and 81%

recognised it as an opportunity to network and talk to other artists.

The range of practices represented was diverse, with painting, sculpture, textile, assemblage, performance and social practice all present within the lineup.

Although the quality of previous festivals and professionalism of the team were key factors for many artists in deciding whether or not to take part, the main appeal across the group was the theme and location of the festival. For more than half the artists this was a first or rare chance to exhibit in a rural setting and of those 78% felt that the festival provided an opportunity to reimagine their work in that context with 88% appreciating the opportunity to develop work site-specifically. (Interestingly this is a greater number than were specifically commissioned to produce new work, and is perhaps indicative of the wider impact for artists of experiencing their work in new contexts, 81% felt the festival would have an impact on their practice in the longer term.)

*It all went very smoothly thanks to the support of Simon, Livvy and Chantelle. I'd say that it was a standout moment for me when, repeatedly, I heard from Simon: we totally support your ideas, we have total belief in your practice. This was meaningful because I felt I was being invited to develop new work and that there was a great trust placed in me and this in turn made me feel very committed to give my best. So the trust they gave me and the generosity in their invitation [...] covered multiple aspects of my practice, this was very exciting.* Artist feedback

*I felt very welcome and the overall vibe was friendly and inclusive.* Artist feedback

*What an absolutely incredible thing to be a part of. [We] have been just buzzing with inspiration on the way back, the whole thing felt so right for our work and allowed us to bring a lot of quite ambitious elements together that are propelling us to a new phase of our practice.* Artist feedback





Thinking in Circles seminar lunch at Dawe's Twineworks. Photograph Katy Docking



## Wider artist community

Od Arts Festival is ambitious in its aim to develop new artist commissions and in supporting the regional arts community. In addition to the opportunities for commissioned and exhibited artists, the team has a proven track record of delivering successful seminar-style events providing CPD and networking. In 2025, a day of talks and activities for artists, curators, cultural producers and writers was programmed to take place a month before the festival opened, on Friday 25th April.

The day began with talks from 2025 festival artists Emii Alrai and Michelle Atherton, providing background on their practices and introducing some of the ideas behind works that would be at the festival. Artist Cherry Truluck provided a specially curated communal lunch experience, with a menu composed principally from beetroot, mushrooms and oats, treated in a number of different ways. There was an invitation for everyone seated at a single long table to begin by closing their eyes and laying their heads on the 'plates' cut from turf, with aromats and wild flowers inset.

In the afternoon, participants were able to choose two from a selection of three artist-led sessions. Painter Geoff Diego Litherland led a mindful drawing session, during which participants were guided through a three-stage process of mark making in response to the sounds of the surrounding landscape. Vicky Pulter, Founder of the Flax Project CIC, shared some of her expert knowledge and talked participants through the stages of processing flax by hand. Artist and researcher Laura Eldret introduced some of her understanding and thinking around the concept of the commons, and commoning, then created a space for participants to share thoughts and responses.

The day as a whole could perhaps best be summarised as 'creating space'. The morning created space for two of the festival artists to open up the complexities of their practice, and for participants to pose questions. From lunchtime onwards, the learning became more experiential, and throughout all the activities, a slowness was instigated, bringing close attention and communal experience to the fore. The day as a whole created a space for conversations and meetings.

With the exception of Cherry Truluck, the artists leading the talks and activities at the seminar all presented work or workshops at the festival,

providing those who attended with an opportunity to make deeper connections.

The festival also creates an important space for the regional art community to gather and meet, whether formally through group visits such as that organised by and for Spike Island Associate artists, or informally with individuals working in towns, cities and rural environments across the region, connecting and reconnecting at events and in the spaces created between.

In a post-seminar survey, 15 participants reported on their experiences:

- 100% agreed that they had learned something new (60% agreed strongly)
- 100% met new people
- 80% agreed that the speakers were well-selected (60% agreed strongly)
- 83% agreed that they will take what they've learned into their future practice
- 100% agreed that they would like to take part in future activity organised by OSR Projects (73% agreed strongly)

*Amazing experience for all concerned re artists dialogues, networks and activity beyond urban settings crucial to beginning to be widening access and participation*  
Festival artist

## Recommendations for the future:

- The festival is hugely valued by participating and visiting artists as a way of connecting with other artists/arts professionals. New connections could be supported even further with some light interventions to social occasions within the festival - for instance, by advertising an 'artists gathering' at the pub, or connecting all festival artists by email with the suggestion of a meeting time and place.
- Recording some of the live talk material and sharing this online could increase the overall reach of these valuable resources.
- The majority of seminar participants found out about the event by direct invite or word of mouth. It would be good to consider ways of widening the reach including to younger artists (only one under 35 within the surveyed group).
- Tracking of the impact on artists in the years following the festival has now begun, and could be expanded to gain a deeper understanding of the longer-term reverberations





*Red Hot Haystacks* by Simon Lee Dicker in Coker Court. Photograph Katy Docking



## Publicity and documentation

### Publicity

Now in its fourth edition Od Arts Festival has developed a local and regional following. This is evident in strong local turnout and through the tracking of social media stats. Instagram following and reach in particular have grown considerably since the last festival. (Since August 2023, there has been a 33% increase in Instagram followers of the OdArtsFestival account, 2,447). In 2023, 6,307 accounts were reached in the 90 days before, during and directly after the festival. This year 4,332 accounts were reached in just the seven-day period from 21st to 27th May.

The festival has also established a database of 878 newsletter subscribers, who were sent five news bulletins in the run-up to the festival. There is also a well-established facebook account with a reach of 3,284 in the 28 days before, during and directly after the festival.

61% of audiences who completed feedback cards stated that they found out about Thinking in Circles via word of mouth. 21% cited social media, and 11% the festival website. A few people also remembered the newsletters, and one person mentioned having seen an advert. It seems that the generation of powerful 'word of mouth' publicity, especially where it relates to audiences beyond the immediate locale, must to some extent be underpinned by a small engaged audience segment making use of newsletter, website and social media to stay informed.

The printed marketing material primarily targeted publications with a distribution radius of 45 miles from the villages. These publications provided the most extensive coverage at a cost-effective price. The printed marketing included listings, paid advertisements, and short editorial pieces accompanied by images.

Publications and their circulation included:

**Evolver** (50,000) every 2 months

**Ropewalker Parish Magazine** (1,020) monthly

**Sherborne Times** (6,000) monthly

**Nearfield** (Festival edition) (10,000) monthly

**Somerset Life** (Readership 14,200) monthly

Od Arts Festival guide 2,500 copies were printed; a portion were distributed within a 40-mile radius, with the majority freely available to visitors at the Festival.

In addition to this Simon Lee Dicker was interviewed by Clare Carter on BBC Radio Somerset (41,000 weekly listeners) for an extended feature on Od Arts Festival on 21st May, two days before the festival.

A whole page advert was also included in Sluice Magazine's Spring/Summer edition targeting arts audiences with a particular interest in artist-led projects.



## Documentation

A strong team, established over several editions of the festival, creates and shares high-quality documentation of the festival. This is important to the publicity reach and the legacy impact, both for the festival as an ongoing entity and for participating artists. Katy Docking, a locally based photographer and Bristol-based filmmaker Liberty Smith capture something of each festival event, shots of audiences in exhibition venues and documentation of the artworks. Both bring obvious creative expertise to their roles, producing visual records which convey the atmosphere of the festival, the detail and the unique siting of the artworks. Susie Clark, a curator and non-executive director of OSR Projects, brings significant art industry knowledge to the role of social media management, the impact of which is evidenced by the significant increase in followers and reach as outlined in 'Publicity'.

This year, for the first time, the festival team made the decision to work with a PR agency. This resulted in a four-star review of the festival by art critic Hettie Judah, published in the Guardian online on 27th May 2025, hugely extending the reach of the festival. One of the commissions for each edition is also reserved for an arts writer to make a creative response, a somewhat unusual aspect of the festival model, the value of which goes beyond simple documentation by envisaging the festival as part of an ongoing process of creative production. The writing commission in 2025 was undertaken by curator and writer Jes Fernie, who produced a text manifested as an audio piece which gives a creative narrative reflection connecting ideas and experiences from the festival. This piece was released via an Od Arts Festival newsletter and social media in early July.

The documentation of the festival will be very important to individual artists, curators, researchers and educators wanting to work with or draw on the festival as a model in the future. It is also important in terms of community pride, as a public record of the festival quality and as a means of honouring and reflecting back local heritage and the generosity of the volunteer and core team.

*I guess that I have been reflecting on how the festival is such a rich moment and how its ripples are unfolding now for me. That the festival doesn't only happen across a weekend (plus the install!) but that it actually has a much longer life afterwards.*

Artist feedback.

## Recommendations for the future:

- Release headline stats of festival on social media, website and newsletters, as part of an extended 'save the date'/teaser campaign, as early as possible: eg. 24 artists, 7 venues, workshops, talks, walks and more.

- Explore new ways of leveraging word of mouth, e.g. curator/director talks about the festival at colleges, universities and artist communities, in the run-up to the event. Volunteer advocacy in different community groups.

- Maximise impact of Guardian article, by referencing in local press releases and marketing materials for next edition, and by making links in social media and articles.



Installation

Review

## Nuclear haystacks and the patron saint of tyre repairs - Od arts festival review

Various venues, Somerset

There are so many delights in this bite-sized biennale with a wild side - from glowing haystacks to hop-pickers on stilts and star turn the Museum of Roadside Magic





*Portal* by Jennifer Taylor in St Michael and All Angels. Photograph Katy Docking

## Value

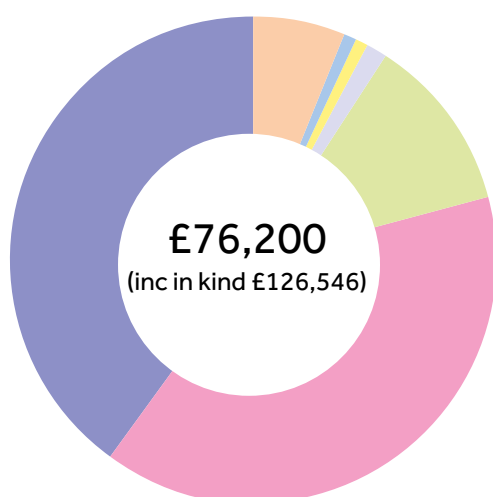
### Financial

The festival was supported by a range of funders, including local investments by Dawes' Twinetworks, the Somerset Community Foundation and parish councils, the value of which was grown exponentially by the festival, by using these sums as match funding for grants from National Lottery Heritage Fund and Arts Council England. Given that the festival's activities were all offered free or at low cost to audiences, a significant sum was also raised as earned income, including: ticket sales for workshops before and during the festival, and the pre-festival artist seminar day; sales of festival merchandise; and the proceeds of a fundraising event.

The financial value of the festival is complex, and can not be reduced to simply 'cost per visitor', as it is impossible to completely separate out the costs of the engagement work undertaken with schools and the local community, and the considerable investment in artistic support and production. As a CIC, OSR Projects exists to support a creative artistic community and the local community where the activities take place, with its official charitable aim listed as artistic production.

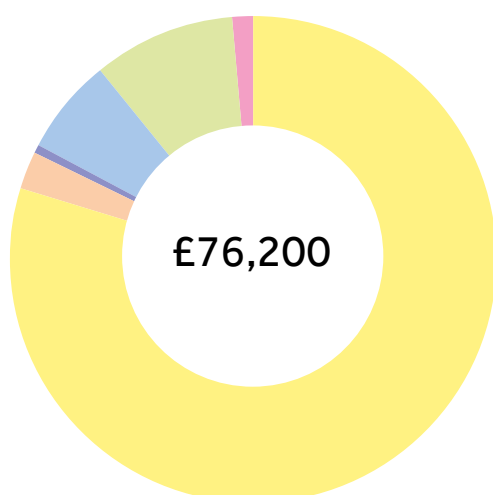
The festival provided approximately 300 days employment to artists, creative practitioners and festival team to create or contribute to the creative content and delivery of the festival.

Rates for exhibiting artists were in-line with AN's Paying Artists guidelines. Artists were also provided with accommodation and free access to the artist seminar in April.



### Project Income

- Earned Income: £7,945
- Local Authority Funding: £1,000
- Other Public Funding: £1,000
- Private Income: £2,000
- HLF: £14,500
- ACE: £49,750
- (in-kind) £50,450



### Project Expenditure

- Paying people - artistic, creative, specialist costs: 80%
- Making Work Accessible: 2.6%
- Organisational development: 0.3%
- Marketing and Developing Audiences: 6.41%
- Overheads: 9.43%
- Assets: 1.31%



Six new artworks, four new workshop models, and a new piece of creative writing were commissioned - each of which will have a legacy of impact, both for the artists and future audiences beyond the festival weekend. A small number of artists from previous editions of the festival were interviewed and/or surveyed, all reporting significant impact on careers and developing practice following their experiences of the festival:

*I have continued relationships with several of the artists, and have plans to collaborate with one of them for the first time this year. That says a lot!*

*It has inspired new reflection and ways of sharing practice, developing collaborative works.*

There were 526 active participants: 217 school children and 192 festival attendees\* benefited from free workshops, talks, performances and tours, with a further 80 festival visitors and 37 artists benefiting from subsidised experiences.

A substantial investment was made into PR for the festival this year, the most significant result of which was a review by Hettie Judah in the Guardian online on 27th May, 2025. This article significantly increases the online reach of the festival and provides the festival and featured artists with additional profile in a way that can not be reasonably financially assessed.

*I'm also (obvs) over the moon about the glowing review in the paper, which has already, it seems, generated a few new potential bookings.* Artist feedback

*It is building momentum and it's the only thing like it in the whole of the South West. More people need to know on a national level how exciting and impressive it is, whilst at the same time it is totally non corporate and friendly, unlike the huge urban biennials.* Artist (from previous edition).



Audience for the seminar. Photograph Katy Docking.

## Social and cultural

The festival has huge social value, in providing rural access to high-end, diverse and thought-provoking art, in the provision of creative activity, and in the bringing together of people and communities.

*Festivals have the capacity to create new ways of experiencing art, place and community. Those new ways are, in the case of Od, quite urgent: marked by care and generosity, as well as rigour. Od as a festival offered in my view the possibility to inhabit a space/time of reflection, immersion that is very valuable. that surpasses visiting an exhibition for a day. The festival offered such a rich programme that one felt very submerged in the themes, venues, artworks. I revisited the exhibitions. had real quality time with all the spaces. I learnt a lot about British history, it really was informative and the artworks provided deep moments of reflection and encounter.* Festival artist

Qualitative feedback and the considerable investment of time and resources by many individuals shows that the community is really invested in Od Arts Festival; they are keen to engage on a number of levels and value both the inclusion of local artists and the diversity of art and ideas represented. The festival successfully involves children from all local primary schools, providing important cultural experiences in this very rural place without local access to public galleries and museums.

## Artistic

The South West is the least well-funded region of England for arts<sup>5</sup>. It is also particularly rural and dispersed, with only three cities with populations greater than 200,000 people, and the population of approx 6 million people<sup>6</sup> largely spread out across towns and villages. (It also has an unusually high number of artists<sup>7</sup>.) It is impractical in this context to imagine every small community having its own quality art centre, theatre or gallery, and festival and other regular project models provide an important alternative – offering the community as a whole the opportunity to encounter, engage with and enjoy art and culture, and a regional arts community a place to

come to together to learn and to network.

*We are so lucky to have this in Somerset.*

Visitor feedback

*It's an important event for this part of England - for artists and audiences.*

Festival artist

There is an artistic legacy to the festival, new works and approaches developed, networks grown and strengthened, and new cross-regional connections forged.

*Having the opportunity to work outside of my home region in the South West was invaluable for developing new opportunities and expanding the contexts in which I practise. The area's heritage was great to be able to work with. It allowed me to build meaningful connections with local arts professionals, and I'm hopeful that these links will lead to future collaborations and work.* Liv Punnett, Co-Curator



*Floriculture* by Rowan Corkill in OSR Projects. Photograph Katy Docking.

<sup>5</sup><https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/arts-council-england-funding-and-regional-distribution/>

<sup>6</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/regionsinenglandtable1>

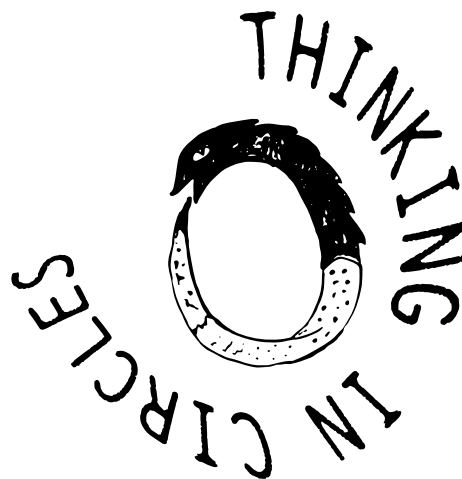
<sup>7</sup>Pg. 30 [https://cvan.art/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Visual-Arts-Workers\\_full-report\\_2021\\_final.pdf](https://cvan.art/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Visual-Arts-Workers_full-report_2021_final.pdf)





Waypoints by Emii Alrai in Dawe's Twineworks. Photograph Katy Docking

## Thank you



Od Arts Festival is produced by OSR Projects CIC. We are artist-run and welcome everyone.

Thank you to our host venues, and the people that run them, including: Dawe's Twineworks, West Coker Village Hall, The Village Café, East Coker Sawmills, Coker Court, The Cemetery Chapel and St Michael and All Angels' Church.

Thank you to our wonderful team of volunteers for being great ambassadors for the festival. Od Arts Festival committee: Ross, Tabatha, Candy, Seana, Jonny, Jess, Alex and Katy. Andy and Jon for technical support. Susie for social media over the weekend and all round support and Cat for the evaluation.

We are grateful for the generosity and support of our funders and sponsors Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery Fund, Coker Rope and Sail CIO, Somerset Community Foundation, John Burton Signs, West Coker Parish Council and Creeds Design & Print.

Thank you to the organisations that helped co-select artists: Primary and Spike Island Associates.

A special thanks to all the artists involved in this year's festival.

And thank you for coming along!

Simon Lee Dicker, Chantelle Henocq, Liv Penrose Punnett and Cat Rogers

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