

ARNOLFINI

INTRODUCTION

Arnolfini is one of Europe's leading independent contemporary arts organisations, based in Bristol, in the West of England. Since its foundation in 1961, Arnolfini has gained an international reputation for commissioning and presenting innovative, experimental work in the visual arts, live art, dance, film, music, poetry and literature, accompanied by a strong programme of educational activities. Arnolfini is a registered charity, core funded by Arts Council England and in receipt of regular funding from Bristol City Council. It is dedicated to encouraging the practice and knowledge of the contemporary arts and is a dynamic centre for cultural activity and debate. As part of a major new strategic direction, Arnolfini is committed to placing interaction, research and partnership working at the core of its mission.

BACKGROUND & HISTORY

Arnolfini was established in 1961 by artists Jeremy and Annabel Rees with the support of Peter and Caroline Barker Mill above a bookshop on the Triangle in Bristol. Its policy then is still relevant today: *“to seek out challenging, often controversial and sometimes relatively unknown artists and performers and to provide a vital showcase for their work”*.

In 1975 the organisation moved to its current premises, alongside the city's floating harbour. The building, a Grade II* listed former tea warehouse dating from the 1830s is generally attributed to Bristol architect Richard Shackleton Pope. It was later named Bush House after the Bristol family which acquired it in the late 19th century to use as a granary. Arnolfini's move to Bush House was facilitated by John Pontin of JT Group Ltd, the then owners. The building was converted into an arts space on two floors with offices (unconnected with Arnolfini) on the four floors above. In the late 1980s the architect David Chipperfield reorganised the gallery spaces and created a new café-bar with the artist Bruce McLean. In 1999, a new footbridge named Pero's Bridge opened, helping link Arnolfini to the new Millennium Square. Arnolfini's move to Narrow Quay in 1975 proved a catalyst in attracting other businesses to the then neglected docks. The revitalised Harbourside is now a focal point for Bristol's social and cultural life.

In September 2001, Arnolfini was awarded an Arts Council England (ACE) National Lottery grant of £7.5 million, towards an estimated £12million capital development programme. This consisted of purchasing Bush House, converting the basement and second floors for public use in addition to the two floors Arnolfini already occupied and letting the remaining three floors for commercial office use. The purchase of Bush House was completed in October 2001. The refurbishment commenced in October 2003 and the newly refurbished centre opened to the public on 10 September 2005. Arnolfini now provides fully accessible and vastly improved spaces for the production and presentation of the contemporary arts.

Access is central to the ethos of Arnolfini. The principal objective of the charity is “the education of the public through the promotion and presentation of contemporary art, especially through exhibitions, performance, dance, music, film and literature”. As well as creating greatly improved facilities for the public, artists and staff alike, the re-development provides increased space for the programme, with five galleries, including one double-height, and two flexible project spaces, as well as the

auditorium, reading room, bookshop and café bar. Entrance to the galleries is free of charge.

Arnolfini is a registered educational charity (no. 311504), governed by a Council of Management. The organisation is core funded by Arts Council England South West and Bristol City Council. Annual revenue expenditure is in the region of £2million, and roughly 50% of income is generated on site or through project grants, sponsorship and donations. The acquisition of Bush House also provides long-term financial sustainability for Arnolfini, with income generated from tenancies on the three upper floors. However there is still further development work to be done, in particular on the outside of the building, and further fundraising is still required to complete the capital project.

Arnolfini receives approximately 500,000 visits a year to its Harbourside location in the heart of Bristol's cultural quarter. Pre-closure, there were typically 450,000 visits to the building a year and Arnolfini was the 4th most visited tourist attraction in the South West (Mercer Culture SWE 03 report – Joining the Dots).

MISSION STATEMENT

Arnolfini provides Bristol and the West of England with a centre for the contemporary arts of international significance. It aims to create the conditions for experimentation and engagement across the contemporary arts for the widest possible range of people. It is a space for ideas, where artists and audiences come together, providing a forum for creative participation, critical discussion and life-long learning about the contemporary arts for people of all ages and backgrounds.

Our Vision: **Becoming 'A Space for Ideas' in a networked environment**

Arnolfini is a space for ideas. Through a mixed arts programme of exhibitions, live art & dance, sound/music, film, literature, talks and educational activities, it provides a platform for experimentation across the disciplines and for emergent practice of international significance. It is a space for dialogue, enabling artists and audiences to engage in critical debate around issues of contemporary culture, interrogating dominant values and assumptions. At the same time, it is a space for contemplation, allowing room for personal reflection, as well as reflection upon our own individual relationship to wider social conventions and events. As well as ideas, it is a space for subjective felt experience; a space for pleasure, for desire, and for strong emotions. It is therefore also a space to examine how 'my' experience is translated and represented in the wider world and, as such, inherently political. Above all it is a space for making meaning, a social space, and, thus, a force for change.

AIMS

- To play a leading role in the cultural life of the city of Bristol and the South West region by presenting an ambitious and imaginative programme, international in scope and distinctive in character
- To seek out challenging, often controversial and sometimes relatively unknown artists and performers and to provide a vital platform for their work
- To provide a focus and forum for creative participation, critical discussion and life long learning about contemporary arts for people of all ages and backgrounds
- To commission, and act as a catalyst for new and experimental work

- To respond to the specific needs and aspirations of different sections of the community, in particular seeking to reach those who might otherwise be detached from the contemporary arts
- To have a friendly and open minded environment for staff artists and visitors
- To develop the skills and expertise of its staff
- To share its experience and welcome participation with other cultural organisations

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2010 – 2013

Experimentation

A more experimental, project-minded approach to programming, with a stronger culture of research, residencies and process-led production

Interdisciplinarity

Greater interdisciplinary mobility and more cross-artform dialogues, breaking out of programme 'silos' and de-territorializing the spaces within the building, as well as working collaboratively in different non-art contexts

Interaction

More opportunities for a wider range of people to engage with Arnolfini, personalizing their experience of the building and of the programme, by making the institution more porous and enabling dialogue, participation and co-production to be at the core of activity, rather than simply a traditional artist/audience mode of monologue and interpretation

Social context

A socially-engaged approach, firmly locating Arnolfini in the local context of Bristol and relating the programme to its immediate cultural surrounds, as well as to issues of wider social concern where appropriate

Internationalism

A greater international profile through development of partnerships beyond the UK, as well as an emphasis within the programme upon diversity and recognition of the post-colonial, increasingly globalised, context of cultural production

Corporate sustainability

Ensuring that the organisation is financially stable, as a platform for exemplary projects and financial management.