

ArtCan

In conversation with Kate Enters

Written by David Pratt

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For just over four and a half years, a new movement has been bubbling away in London's art scene.

Driven by collaboration and a new approach focused on the artists just as much as their work, ArtCan has grown from a single exhibition to a diverse portfolio of events across the capital and now the world, with almost 80 artists feeding into its international efforts.

The initiative stems from the observations and savvy approach of its founder, Kate Enters, who upon graduating Norwich Art School in 2000 found herself in a situation recognisable to many in her field.

"I left not really knowing what it meant to be an artist in the big wide world. In art school you are in a lovely safe bubble where you're allowed to explore and develop your practice but with no real understanding of how that gets implemented when you suddenly have to stand on your own two feet," she explained.

Motivated by the need to "understand the machinations" of the art world, Kate earned herself a position in the press team at the prestigious V&A museum, where she grew that understanding of how to take art to the masses. Similar roles in PR and freelance contracts followed, further adding to this experience.



After almost a decade of professional growth, Kate returned to her practice and delivered her first solo show in 2009, putting years of arts event experience into use.

"I approached it in the same way I approached the projects I worked on in PR. I knew what needed to be delivered, I knew the stories that needed to be shared and the information that needed to be told."

Years of work within the industry allowed Kate to draw on her extensive network of contacts to make it a success, not least in the eyes of a number of London's galleries who took her on board.

She then decided to strike out on her own, using her existing contacts to put on shows outside of the gallery system.

However, Kate soon found that her supporters and attendees were often replicated across each exhibition. A new approach was needed to bolster her guest list and the beginnings of ArtCan were born.

"I thought there must be other artists who were feeling the same, so if I organised a group show and got other artists involved, but did it in the same way I was doing my solo shows, then presumably they can all bring people to the private view. Then we can share knowledge and the opportunity and that can build a network and each other's contacts. Then we're already winning, more so than if we were acting alone as artists."

This idea of power through collaboration grew and following a call for artists and a space found through Kate's network, ArtCan was ready to begin with a range of UK talent and international artists thrown in the mix.

As they still are today, accepted artists were told to bring a certain number of people to each private view as well as share press releases and in exchange they would have the opportunity to exhibit in one of the great art capitals of the world without the formal commission structure of a gallery setting.

"I felt that I was in no position to take any commission from any artist. As an artist myself, if I've done the work and I need to be able to continue to make work, there has to be a structure of making sure that artists, if they sell, get all of it.

"We only ask for a small admin fee to help cover any overheads, we're non-profit so whatever that is goes straight back into making the exhibitions work. What I also found was as soon as we'd said to a potential buyer at one of our exhibitions that all the money would go to the artist, they tend to buy more often than not. That level of clarity is reassuring because they know that whatever we're doing will go straight back to the artists.

"We're securing and sustaining their practices and that means you never know when that next moment of genius is going to arrive."



Following the success of the first shows, including a third exhibition at the "grand and rather ridiculously large" Mall Galleries secured through personal investment from Kate, ArtCan has grown from strength to strength.

Under its previous moniker WITP, the group became a formal business after taking on respected trustees from the London art world. Following that momentous step, ArtCan is now in the process of registering as a charitable organisation. ArtCan now delivers private views, its trademark salon exhibitions and international events across a wide portfolio that also includes a yearly open submission event. All while consulting with the growing list of artists from around the world to create a new democratic art movement with personal and professional growth at its heart.

As Kate explains, this purpose for ArtCan has not changed from its early days: "Being an artist is very lonely, it's very solitary. You create and the only time you get to see people is normally at an exhibition opening but that means you're only speaking to people that are interested in your artwork but not how it was developed.

"That challenge of your creativity is what I missed and it is something you did get at art school which actually does develop you and push you into the areas you want.

"You need that companionship and collaboration as artists."

With a growing roster of 76 artists across the UK, Europe and beyond,

the value of Kate's work over the last five years has borne fruit. ArtCan members are now using her knowledge and that of others within the group to take the name to new places, with June 2017 seeing one of the group's artists putting on ArtCan's second major international exhibition in the Polish city of Poznan.

"That to me is exactly what I wanted from this group, to give the artists their own platform to deliver an exhibition. Then the opportunity is there for them and they can explore and develop personally, which is what I wanted as an artist; to be challenged. I was always hoping I would get to this point, where I can let other curate. That's been really nice because I feel like we're getting there. But that's also why I'm not ready to sit back.

"We can grow and as long as the artists still feel supported and are able to put on their own things under our banner it means we are a voice in the art world and that is fantastic. That's how we can continue to grow and have that collaborative group feeling which creates bigger ripple effects and it's that which is incredibly important, especially today.

"Give us a space, we will make something happen."



www.artcan.org.uk