

aspex portsmouth

annual report

2024/25

Aspex Visual Arts Trust Limited

Report of the Trustees for the year ended 31 March 2025

Trustees
Dr Dawn Langley (Co-chair)
Denise Barlow
Dr Leo Burtin (appointed as Co-chair March 2025)
Maxwell Craft
Dr Adrian Hull
Victoria Ingles
Loredana McCay
Dr Panagiota Papadimitri (joined November 2024)
Charlotte Phillips (joined November 2024)
Martyn Reah
Clarke Reynolds
Victoria Turner

Director & Company Secretary
Joanne Bushnell

Registered Office
The Vulcan Building, Gunwharf Quays, Portsmouth, PO1 3BF

Website
aspex.org.uk

Charity registration number
1007620

Company registration number (England & Wales)
02674597

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Front cover: Performer at *Embodied Activism* Preview (2025)
© Goble Photography

Introduction

Aspex Portsmouth continued to have a positive impact on the lives of the people of Portsmouth. In recognition Aspex was awarded Gallery of Sanctuary status in 2024, the first in the South of England, as a result of our long-term work with our local sanctuary seeking community, When Portsmouth was selected to host UK Pride, this became a key narrative through which we took the opportunity to contribute towards this transformational, story changing, moment for the city.

We have sought to reinforce this change, and grow in sync with other cultural organisations who alongside us are leading the way. We are proud of the level of ambition achieved in a place which is often forgotten, misrepresented and misunderstood. We are actively changing the narrative of the city for the artists and communities with whom we work. Together, we move forward, proud of our working class culture and heritage, while earning a sense of achievement in making Portsmouth a culturally exciting, diverse and inclusive place.







Our values, actively put into action by our board, staff team and volunteers, are consistently used to underpin every element of our work and measure our progress. **Communal**, **Open-hearted** and **Radical** reflect where we are going and what we want to do as a cultural organisation, active in the development of our city. We are extremely proud that over the last year, our activity has: created a space for being and belonging; amplified diverse creative voices; increased integration - enabling communities and individuals from all backgrounds to come together and build meaningful connections through creativity and culture.

Dr Dawn Langley & Dr Leo Burtin
Co-chairs, Aspex Visual Arts Trust

Joanne Bushnell
Director, Aspex Portsmouth

This page: Top to bottom - Visitors explore Sivan Rubinstein's *Embodied Activism* exhibition (2025) © Goble Photography. A child and adult looking at works in *CLASSifications* (2024) © Goble Photography.

Right page: Aspex team members celebrating Sanctuary in Arts Award status (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth.

2024/25 at a glance

We delivered **17** exhibitions at our gallery space

We worked with **26** community partners and national partners to deliver projects



We worked with **9** schools, colleges & universities

27 volunteers were supported through professional development opportunities

We worked with people in **6** wards across Portsmouth

8,760 people participated in creative activities

We mentored **21** artists & makers, & **3** creative organisations

We welcomed **11,584** visitors to exhibitions

147 artists were exhibited, commissioned, had residencies or led workshops

Image: Visitor at Lauren Joy Kennett's *Sorry I'm Not Sorry* (2024) © Phoebe Wingrove.

Achievements & Programme Summary

The year's achievements and programme are summarised here against our aims: Art, Creative Engagement, Sector Support, and Resourcing

Aim 1 Art



Exploring urgent themes and issues that are relevant to our communities through creative programming and commissioning, and platforming artists who are underrepresented (in the arts) and marginalised

This page: Top to bottom - Visitors at *COLONY* (2024)
© Goble Photography.

Left page: Guests at *CLASSifications* exhibition preview (2024)
© Phoebe Wingrove.

Commissions & exhibitions

Within the gallery, four exhibitions in the main space were thematically complemented by craft showcases and presentations of creative engagement work in our communal space.



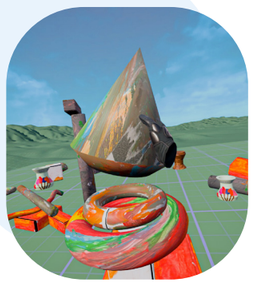
Spring

Sorry I'm Not Sorry
Lauren Joy Kennett
Photographic autobiographical work exploring the artists' experience of autism. Commissioned as part of the *In Focus* programme in partnership with Photoworks.

I saw you in blue…, **Laxmi Hussain**
Paintings inspired by the artists' personal journey of motherhood.

Captive Identities
Outcomes from the Photoworks Photography Club supported by English Heritage and the University of Warwick.

Our Sanctuary
VR and drawings co-created by sanctuary seekers with Michelle Ezeuko and Lara Kobeissi.





This page: Top to bottom - *Captive Identities* (2024) © Goble Photography. Video still from *Our Sanctuary* (2024). *I Saw you in blue* (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth.

Right page: *Sorry I'm Not Sorry* Installation view (2024) © Goble Photography.



"The LJK exhibtion was particularly affecting. Immediate, intimate, a perfect encapsulation of what it feels like to be neurodivergent in an assigned-female-at-birth body"

Summer

***CLASSifications,* Jasleen Kaur, Dinu Li, Jamila Prowse & Joshua Raffell**
Sculptural show which explored how we assign meaning to objects and categorise them, reflecting the complex class systems that shape society.

***A Seat at the Table,* Gee Mullins**
Ceramic, print and painted works that celebrate food culture and the joys of coming together to share a meal.

THINGifications
Evolving collection of artworks co-created with local communities and participants from our creative engagement programme.







This page: Top to bottom - Artwork detail from T*HINGifications* (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth. Artwork detail from *A Seat at the Table* (2024). Installation, Jasleen Kaur, *CLASSifications* (2024) © Phoebe Wingrove.

Right page: Installation, Jamila Prowse, *CLASSifications* (2024) © Phoebe Wingrove.



"Whether you're an art aficionado or just curious, Aspex offers a refreshing cultural experience in the heart of Portsmouth"

Autumn

COLONY
The Platform Graduate Award 2024
Group show examining the enduring impact of colonialism, featuring nine emerging artists, graduating from five local art schools/universities, in partnership with Contemporary Visual Arts Network South East (CVAN SE).

***Underland,* Hannah Bestley-Burt**
Woven hangings, soft sculptures and blooming slime moulds invited viewers to reflect on interconnected systems and their parallels with human society.

***Silent Dialogues,* Vera Hadzhiyska & Anbuh, in partnership with Pompey Darkroom**
Photographic series presented as part of the Photo Fringe Festival 2024.

Open24 Young Photographers
Showcase of work by local photographers aged 14-18 as part of the Photo Fringe Festival 2024.

CONNECT
Work made as part of a collaborative programme with University of Portsmouth students.

Arts Award 2024
Work made by young participants of the Home Ed Arts Club towards achieving an Arts Award qualification.







This page: Top to bottom - Installation view, *COLONY* (2024) © Goble Photography. Artwork detail, *Underland*, Hannah Bestley-Burt (2024). © Aspex Portsmouth. Collage, *CONNECT* (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth.

Right page: Visitor at *COLONY* (2024) © Goble Photography.



“Wonderful to see graduate’s work so thoughtfully and carefully curated.”

Winter

***Embodied Activism,* Sivan Rubinstein**
Merging of visceral movement, choreography, and installation to unpack the complexities of the climate crisis, migration, and womanhood.

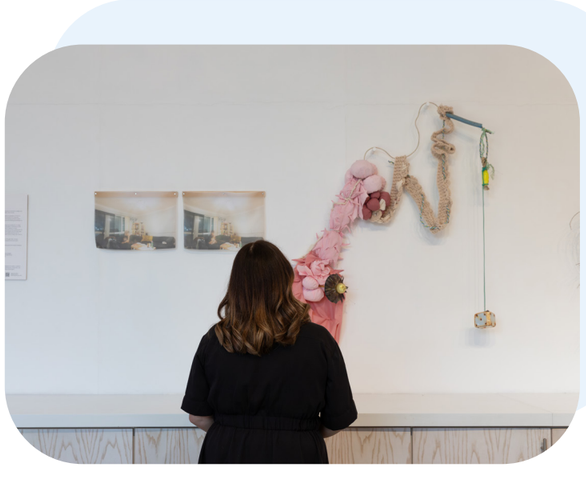
Living Materials,
Louise Frances Smith
Installations, sculpture and works on paper, which sought to capture the fragility and resilience of ecosystems.

***Entwined,* City of Portsmouth College**
Artworks made by Art and Design Level 3 students in response to Sivan Rubinstein's work and practice.

Traces of Being
Group show of the work of 13 artists participating in the Aspire professional development programme.







This page: Top to bottom - *Living Materials,* Louise Frances Smith (2025) © Goble Photography. Collage, *Entwined* (2025) © Aspex Portsmouth. Visitor at *Traces of Being* (2025) © Karl Bailey.

Right page: *Embodied Activism* Installation view (2025) © Goble Photography.

"The exhibitions were very thought-provoking and had a personal and inspiring touch"

Residencies

Alongside the seasonal exhibitions selected artists were invited to use our Artist Studio to develop new work and in doing so, often organised workshops or directly engaged visitors



Pompey Darkroom, photography workshops and drop in sessions invited the public to interact with photography and use it to respond to some of the themes explored within *Sorry I'm Not Sorry*.

Boris Allenou, the musician and technologist invited visitors to explore sound art and ecology.

PAX (Portsmouth Analogue eXperiments), artists Patti Gaal-Holmes, Evagelia Hagikalfa, Frankie Knight, Jane Shepherd and Vicky Smith showcased analogue media through installations and events.

Anna Marris, Platform Alumni reimagined the ocean's vital circulations through creative interventions to highlight its role in regulating global climate.

Tracey Bush, engaged in the exploration of large-scale botanical artworks.

Mutiny Collective, photographers Barney Jobson, Joshua Corston and Ethan Bennett) explored and examined themes of 'place' in partnership with Pompey Darkroom.



"A wonderful time, seeing an artists work and hearing their first hand story"

This page: Top to bottom - Pompey Darkroom residency (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth. Artist Tracey Bush leading workshop (2025) © Aspex Portsmouth.

Right page: Children at Family Saturdays (2025) © Aspex Portsmouth.

Aim 2 Creative engagement



Connecting and empowering artists, audiences, participants, and communities through creativity and collaboration

Programmes at the gallery & in the community

Our creative activities develop stronger links between Portsmouth's diverse communities

Through bespoke and holistic creative workshops, we embrace diversity and encourage collaboration and participation amongst those facing inequality and in need of being celebrated. Work happens at the gallery, with partners in areas most in need in the City, and at community events with our Mobile Art Studio



Creative Families

A programme comprising:

- Creative engagement opportunities at key community events throughout Portsmouth. This year we worked at **5** community events all around the city, delivered with **8** partner organisations, working with **3,232** people.

- Deeper and sustained engagement provided through partnerships with three organisations: Portsmouth City of Sanctuary (with Refugee and Asylum Seekers); Portsmouth Home Education Network (with elective home educated children); and Home-Start Portsmouth (with early years children and carers).

- New taster sessions with Young Carers in Paulsgrove.

- Signposting participants to the sustained free weekly Family Saturday provision offered on a drop-in-basis back at the gallery.

Creative Families was supported by the Partnership Foundation, Wightlink, Trash Arts / Open Ya Mouth Festival, Foyle Foundation and HIVE Portsmouth.

This page: Top to bottom - Young children at the Kite Festival (2024). Young child at *COLONY* (2024). Young child with 'Portsmouth' artwork (2024). Young children painting during a Home Ed session (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth.

Left page: Adult and child at Pride activities (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth.







Generate

A weekly workshop for people with Dementia and their carers (sustained since 2015), provides a safe space and creative outlet for an isolated and vulnerable group in society. It is loved and valued by its participants, clearly demonstrates the wellbeing aspects of creative practice and is one of the parts of our programme that brings real joy to Aspex Portsmouth every Friday morning.

This year the group collaborated with the Mary Rose Museum as part of its Heritage Lottery funded project Anchored in the Community and visited Portsmouth Museum & Art Gallery. Generate was support through HIWCF: Hampshire & Isle of Wight Community Foundation and public donations through the #DonateForGenerate crowdfunding campaign in 2024.

Public programme for adults

Activities included:

- Touch Tours for people who are blind or partially sighted;

- Artist talks, conversations, and collaborative events hosted in partnership with 432 NOMAD's for Refugee Week, Photoworks, Photo Fringe, and seasonally with Pompey Darkroom;

- Friday Lates, a curated social event platforming local artists and creatives in response to the seasons themes, including collaborations with Women In Art and Portsmouth Creates for *We Shine*.



Formal education & partnership projects

We work closely with schools, colleges and universities. In 2024/25 in addition to one-off visits and workshops, we delivered a professional development unit for City of Portsmouth College resulting in an exhibition in our Communal Space; a new project with postgraduate students at the University of Portsmouth's CCI (Creative & Cultural Industries) Faculty; and continued as Industry Patron of Arts University Bournemouth's MA in Fine Art.

Strong partnerships continued with: Contemporary Visual Arts Network, South East, gallery partners and five universities (The Platform Graduate Award 2024); with Portsmouth Cultural Education Partnership; Portsmouth City Council (HAF Fun Pompey, part of the national Holiday Activities and Food government initiative). We continued to support Associate Company This New Ground to develop their programme for learning disabled people, as they work towards a major exhibition and take-over festival in 2026.

Aim 3 Sector Support



Being more inclusive, diverse and socially relevant, actively living our values

This page: Top to bottom - Attendees at *COLONY* preview (2024) © Goble Photography.

Left page: Generate at *Anchored in the Community*, Mary Rose Museum (2025) © Aspex Portsmouth.

Artist and sector support has always been a core concern for Aspex Portsmouth, and this year has seen our work flourish in the area. From welcoming This New Ground as our first ever Associate Company; to supporting the growth of new organisations Pompey Darkroom and 432 NOMAD's; the development of artists through access to studio space, specialist mentoring support, supplying opportunities to test and experiment with new ways of working at events; the new Aspire development programme; or providing the next generation of arts managers learning and developmental opportunities through school and university placements; our engagement with our community is stronger than ever. We were especially thrilled that Jasleen Kaur, included in *CLASSifications*, won the Turner Prize!

Advocacy

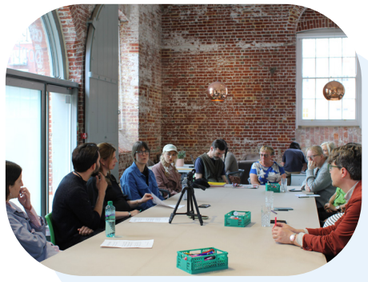
A critical part of our role as an Arts Council England, National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), board and staff all contribute to advocacy in Portsmouth, the sub-region and nationally. Key advocacy work this year included:

- Co-founder & steering group member of the Cultural Collective of Portsmouth based cultural organisations;

- Development of the Portsmouth Visual Arts Network;

- Active participation in CVAN (Contemporary Visual Arts Network) in the South East and South West (Visual Arts South West).





Staff & Volunteers

Aspex Portsmouth has always aimed to provide opportunities for artists and creatives at the start of their careers, key developments included:

- Edon Thomson joined as us Creative Engagement Assistant, for 6 months, through Artworks Breakthrough programme.

- Maya Brassington, former Breakthrough trainee, appointed to the new role of Assistant Curator.

- Programme Assistant placements from MA Curating courses at the University of Leicester and Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton.

- Increase of University of Portsmouth post-graduate student volunteers following establishment of collaborative CONNECT programme.

Volunteers are essential to support the day-to-day delivery of our work. Many are with us for a short time (3-6 months), as they start out in their creative careers coming to us to develop skills and experience, but a small core have been with us for many years, focused on the delivery of specific projects and programmes. Training is provided on a continuous basis, with all staff members and volunteers offered formal and informal training relevant to their roles and development plans.

Governance

The Trustees have updated the way the board works to make it more relevant, reflecting societal and professional shifts in practice. Trustees have worked alongside staff to drive change, including the development, monitoring and evaluation of our Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, and Environmental Action Plans, and all participate in an annual board monitoring survey. We have adapted to hybrid governance, with meetings taking place in person, online or both, better responding to the needs of individuals. We have also created more space for general discussion and engagement with the challenges and opportunities facing Aspex Portsmouth. Two new Trustees were recruited this year through an open process.



This page: Top to bottom - Curator Ricardo Reveron Blanco and Assistant Curator Maya Brassington (2024) © Goble Photography.

Left page: Top to bottom - CVAN SE Manager Oliver Sumner at COLONY Preview (2024) © Goble Photography. Artist talk with Lauren Joy Kennett (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth.

Aim 4 Resourcing



Ensuring environmental responsibility, financial sustainability and being a open-hearted organisation

Environmental responsibility

We have co-environmental champions, our Facilities and Resources Co-ordinator Sam Foot and Trustee Victoria Ingles, who oversee delivery of our Environmental Action Plan. The whole team takes great pride in recycling materials across every aspect of the organisation. Wood, MDF and screws are carefully dismantled and sorted for every exhibition de-installation, enabling repeated reuse. Recycling was a key feature of Joshua Raffell's work in *CLASSifications*, with this ethos taken through the entire summer creative engagement programme. Print was reduced to a minimum throughout the year, and communication around the climate crisis was increased through promotion of the *Embodied Activism* exhibition to have wider impact in the community.



This page: Left to right - Map detail, *Embodied Activism* (2025) © Karl Bailey. Visitor with coffee sitting in the Aspex patio (2025) © Karl Bailey.

Left page: Young children work on sculpture during community activity (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth.

Income generation

Event hire has remained consistent this year, with a mix of repeat clients from the corporate, higher education and charity sectors, including Associate Company This New Ground. Digital marketing agency Delivered Social were maintained as tenants of two stand-alone spaces.

Sales in the shop decreased very slightly, possibly impacted by ongoing cost of living challenges. Its focus remained on contemporary craft work by local and national makers, cards, books, magazines and creative gifts for children and adults.

Income was boosted by an increase in our claim for Museum & Galleries Exhibition Tax Relief, reflecting increased exhibition expenditure and staff time.

Independent caterer Port Coffee run by Alena Rasche delivers a simple but extremely high quality catering offer both for day-to-day operation of the gallery café and special event catering. Customer feedback is exceptional, with Port Coffee developing a growing and loyal customer base.





Fundraising

Throughout the year the Management Team and Trustees worked extremely hard on funding applications to enable the continuation of existing programmes and new projects. Successful funding bids for small grants were made to Counterpoint Arts; Henry Moore Foundation; and HAF Fun Pompey (PCC); Artswork and University of Southampton to support trainee roles; a grant was secured from Big Lottery Awards for All, to fund Generate activity from Spring 2025; and another from the Foyle Foundation to support Creative Families activity through to the end of 2025.

We are continuing to experience a highly competitive environment for traditional fundraising, but we carried on working collaboratively, approaching the challenge with positivity and optimism and thanks to significant support received from Portsmouth Partnership Foundation, HIVE Portsmouth and Foyle Foundation, for our creative engagement work in the community, we achieved a comparable level of grants and donations to last year. Our Patron maintained their donation to our work with emerging artists, and we aim to grow this type of support in the future.

JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion)

Marketing and Communications Manager Kirstie Banks and Trustee/ artist Clarke Reynolds continued as our JEDI champions. They oversee all JEDI activity across the organisation, from programme to organisation policy and practices, working collaboratively to deliver sessions with the staff and board, ensuring JEDI is always on the agenda. We have delivered touch tours throughout the year, large print guides for all exhibitions, implemented alt-text across all social media content, and are designing according to accessible principals.





This page: Top to bottom – SEND tour of *Sorry I'm Not Sorry* (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth. Touch Tour of *Sorry I'm Not Sorry* (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth.

Left page: Touch Tour of *Sorry I'm Not Sorry* (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth.

How we work

What we do

We run a contemporary art gallery, which includes a varied programme of exhibitions, educational/creative engagement opportunities, events and projects on the premises and in the community, together with professional development support for artists.





Where we do it

The gallery occupies part of the Vulcan Building (being an early 19th Century naval storehouse) at Gunwharf Quays, on the waterfront in Portsmouth.

Charitable objectives

The principal activity of Aspex Visual Arts Trust (Aspex Portsmouth) is to further the development, awareness, knowledge and understanding of the visual arts. We believe that in bringing joy, art broadens minds, facilitates learning, connects and nurtures our communities and stimulates radical imagining.



Images Top to bottom: Home Ed Arts Club (2024)
© Aspex Portsmouth. Aspex patio (2025)
© Karl Bailey. Visitors at *CLASSifications* (2024)
© Aspex Portsmouth.

Our vision is to provoke joy through art in a more equitable society

Our mission is cultivating art and creativity, rooted in community

To achieve this, we are guided by our values

Communal

- We are proud of Portsmouth & have a strong sense of belonging;
- We are welcoming, collaborative, inclusive & diverse;
- We are unifying, empowering, platforming & developing our creative community.

Open-hearted

- We are compassionate, caring empathetic, grateful & generous;
- We are authentic, non-judgemental, candid, honest & human.

Radical

- We are change agents, experimenting, testing new ideas & challenging the status quo;
- We are provocative, brave & playful;
- We are resourceful, flexible & resilient.

Looking Forward

We are actively leaning into our Gallery of Sanctuary status, working to change the narrative of the city for the artists and communities with whom we work, to ensure that Portsmouth is a culturally exciting, diverse and inclusive place.

Our programme is strongly focused on sustaining and building on the legacy of the work achieved over the last few years. We are utterly committed to ensuring accessibility is embedded in everything we do. We actively work to create a space without barriers, assumptions or judgement. Partnership work with Associate Company This New Ground, will elevate the artistic voices and talents of people with learning disabilities. We will also build on the connections developed with Portsmouth Pride and Queer All Year, to continue to programme work that is relevant to and inclusive of our LGBTQIA+ community. We will continue to champion sanctuary seeking and migrant artists and communities through our work and partnerships with Portsmouth City of Sanctuary and 432 NOMAD's, including but reaching beyond our support for the annual Refugee Week programme.

Over the coming year we will review the design and delivery of our Creative Engagement programmes to ensure that we keep developing and checking our relevance. The local and national political context is shifting radically, and the impact of devolution and Local Government reorganisation in the near future is still uncertain and will present considerable risks and opportunities. Nevertheless, we are on a transformational journey to become more relevant and sustainable for our local and creative communities in our extremely fast changing world, and plan to approach this with the same level of agility that we have successfully demonstrated in the past.





This page: Top to Bottom - This New Ground interviews (2025) © This New Ground. Artist talk with Lauren Joy Kennett (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth.

Right page: Left to right - Visitor at *CLASSifications* (2024) © Phoebe Wingrove. Collaging at *Friday Late* (2024) © Aspex Portsmouth. Family at *Embodied Activism* © Goble Photography.

Support us







For over 40 years, Aspex Portsmouth has championed free and inclusive access to art.

As a registered charity, we rely on fundraising each year to keep our gallery and activities free, and to continue our mission of nurturing creativity rooted in community.

Your donations, big or small, makes a real difference. It helps safeguard free access to our changing programme of thought-provoking exhibitions, supports inspiring creative learning projects for our local community, and provides essential development opportunities for artists at every stage of their practice through our artist support programme.

Your support is more important than ever in sustaining our legacy and shaping the creative future of our city and its communities.

From one-off donations to corporate sponsorship and patronage, there are a number of ways you can support us. Find out more by heading to our website aspex.org.uk/about/support-us

Aspex Portsmouth is supported by

ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Portsmouth CITY COUNCIL

Partnership Foundation

HIVE portsmouth

HENRY MOORE FOUNDATION

FOYLE FOUNDATION

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