

Reading Guild of Artists (RGA) Chair's Report 2017

Writing this Annual Report felt a bit like doing a sequel to the View from the Chair that I wrote for Ksenija and John's brilliant Annual Review which was on our coffee tables at the end of 2016. At that point I had been in the chair for 6 months and of course this report marks one year into the job.

As noted then, the Summer Show at the University was a great success, both in terms of the quality and range of work shown and we broke new ground with some of the workshops which accompanied it. Then there was the Royal Berkshire Hospital Corridor Exhibition which each year brings a measure of colour and comfort to users of the hospital, both families and patients. Informal feedback would indicate that this is much appreciated. This was hotly followed by the Slam Sale at Reading Museum. Our new publicity team really got into gear for this one day event including Therese Lawlor and Carole Stephens broadcasting on Radio Berkshire. As a result of all this activity, footfall and sales were greater than last year. Elaine Blake and her Museum team were delighted. Finally, at the time of writing, this year's Annual Exhibition 'Hooray Henley' has just opened at the Old Fire Station gallery in Henley, and it was well received by an enthusiastic crowd on opening day.

One of our aims has been to build bridges between RGA and other organisations such as the University and the Museum. The Summer Show and the Slam sale are certainly making huge contributions in this direction. Another valuable link with the Museum is that Martina, wearing her RGA Archivist hat, has started cataloging all the items in the museum's collection which relate to RGA. This helps us to respond to the significant number of enquiries we get about RGA related art from the past. Elaine is delighted about this too!

We have not been in a position to contribute to the Big Draw for a couple of years now, but I am also hoping to collaborate with the Museum on this project ready for the Autumn.

RGA Fridays and Earley Painters are continuing to thrive thanks to the lively programme of activities planned for them by Carole Pembroke, Hilary Parkinson and Clare Buchta. These workshops are well attended and valued and a number of new members have come our way as a result.

Those of you who attended last year's AGM will remember Hilary Penrose enthusiastically outlining her plans for the Summer Painting Days-an activity which she had just taken over. As many of you know, Hilary became ill during the year and sadly she died in March. We will miss her but I am sure she would have been delighted that Nina O'Connell, who had been working with her, was able to take over, assisted by Karen Spencer.

Blue Sky Thinking days are a good way to stand back and think ‘out of the box’ about RGA and its future. A number of ideas, big and small, arose from last summer’s event. Amongst these, Linda Saul’s idea for the website rgartevents.uk is up and running for a trial period of a year and John Pumfrey is making contact with the new Department of Architecture at the University to see if we can work with them in any way.

At this point I would like to say thank you to everyone-and there are a large and growing number of them - who work so hard to keep the RGA show on the road. In fact there are too many to name. However we do need to mention particularly those officers who are standing down at this AGM and also those members who have been willing to take over from them. David Cotton and Ksenija Krotin have jointly looked after our publicity for several years and are now formally handing over to Therese Lawlor and a whole team of assistants. In fact we will hear more from all of them later in the meeting, but for now, thank you all. Carole Pembroke has done a great job as RGA Secretary holding everything together behind the scenes, but she is now handing the job back to Peg Salaun-Smith who fortunately returned from Scotland just in time! Lastly, the Exhibition Secretary’s job is arguably the most important in the whole organisation. Without vibrant and exciting exhibitions, RGA would be diminished to say the least, and Carole Stephens has fulfilled this role for us all brilliantly for seven years and we owe her a huge debt of gratitude. She would be the first to say that she couldn’t have done it without a keen backup team, chief of whom was Hilary Parkinson, and I am delighted that Hilary is willing to step into Carole’s shoes today. She will need the back up of a keen group of people as Carole did. In fact it has become clear to us all this year that enthusiastic backup is the key to success for all RGA officers. It spreads the load, as we all have day jobs, provides cover in times of emergency, and can pave the way for a smooth transition to the next post holder when the time comes.

Talking of backup, when I left the Vice Chair role this time last year, there was no one to take over and I am delighted that soon afterwards Nina O’Connell and Jane Somner agreed to take on the office as a job share, so you will find their names on the ballot this time. Thank you and what a relief!

Another thing which emerged from the Blue Sky event was that any new initiative needs to be accompanied by new people willing to help in putting it into practice. Increasingly, we are seeing this happening and long may it continue!

It seems to me that RGA is well placed to head into the future with confidence. For us at least, these are challenging but exciting times.

Anthony Wilder
RGA Chair 2017