

# The Gate



This is the text of a talk given at a Pecha Kucha gathering, Warehouse 4 on 20 March 2025. In it we imagine the Gate, a major resource for Gloucester. Our new art space at 21 Westgate Street was also named the Gate – *from little acorns, mighty oaks do grow...*)

You may remember the blockbuster exhibition by conceptual artist Cornelia Parker's at the opening of Gloucester's **The Gate**. Cornelia studied at Gloucester's College of Art and Design so it was, in many ways, a homecoming. Gloucester had seen nothing like it before and the show put the city on the art map.



It was followed by an exhibition by Turner Prize winner Lubaina Himid. These shows not only engaged with local people but drew visitors from far and wide. Before the opening of **The Gate**, we would have had to travel as far as London to see work of this calibre.

**The Gate** remains a *unique* cultural resource in our county.



But **The Gate** is no elitist ‘white cube’ – it is a hub for the city, catalysing creativity and building communities. Anyone who has been there will know the café at its heart. Pop in for a coffee and you will be aware of the number and diversity of visitors.



Perhaps they have come to meet their friends in this inclusive space or to engage in one of the many workshops; from yoga to dance, from watercolour to life-drawing. This is a space for all. Art building social cohesion, strengthening mental health and well-being, and a focus for economic prosperity in our city.



**The Gate** is a place where people connect, learn and take part in activities that strengthen local bonds. It provides a welcoming space for all ages, helping to reduce social isolation. The Gate strives to offer something for everyone.



More than just a building, **The Gate** offers inclusion, supports local initiatives and brings communities closer together. It finds the synergies between all the contemporary art forms. Together we are stronger.



The key to its success and its energy has been its independence. **The Gate** has many income streams that support its public programming. There is the coffee shop and bar that becomes an evening performance space with its calendar of spoken word, music and film. Then there is the popular bakery – with queues stretching out of the door every morning.



**The Gate** has 20 artist studios and maker-spaces to rent with communal areas that encourage collaboration– and the affordable office space rented to art-related businesses brings in yet more income.



**The Gate** shop, selling artworks and limited edition productions, including homeware and clothing, by local and nationally renowned artists, brings in 40% of the income.

It's not just artworks in the shop, but a great range of books and children's games too. (You wouldn't believe how much it makes from the sale of greeting cards.).



And, in addition to the international standard exhibition space, there is a smaller gallery for local visual artists and craftspeople to hire to show their work.

Gloucester is rich in practicing artists: sculptors, painters, puppet makers, glass artists, artist bookbinders, digital artists, conceptual artists... All proud of their city and proud of **The Gate**.



**The Gate** has become a true community hub, but being simply local wasn't enough: **The Gate** needed a unique identity to make it stand out in the art scene – and this has come from reflecting our community with a programme that focuses on British and international black and Asian artists...



... and by giving *local* artists their breakout solo shows to bring them to national attention.

The rider is that every exhibiting artist must also engage with the community giving local people the unique chance to work with, learn from, and be inspired by their creativity.



Of course, **The Gate** doesn't exist.

Gloucester has nothing like it.

The county of Gloucestershire has nothing like it.

The Guildhall has closed its visual arts workshops and its gallery space.

The city's cultural strategy has turned its back on the visual arts.



Search for 'visual arts' and 'crafts' in the current strategy and you will find a mention in its definition of Culture but nothing else. The word 'gallery' was deleted from the strategy in the revision five years ago.

Search for 'painting', nothing; search for 'sculpture', nothing. ....



And that is why Gloucester Contemporary Artists was formed.

GCA is for local artists who aspire to make Gloucester a respected centre for contemporary art. Along the way we are creating pop-up exhibition spaces and events like the Art Trail in city centre shop windows, to build an audience for visual arts in the city.



Ultimately we are aiming to work in partnership to create an art centre for Gloucester that celebrates local, regional, national and international excellence in the visual arts, in all the contemporary arts, that everyone in the community can enjoy.



We are a support network for practicing, and emerging, visual artists of all ages, ethnicities, orientations, genders and creeds.

All members are expected to contribute in some way to support our shared aims and objectives by making contributions of their skills, experience and time.



Join our community of artists, join our conversation, build the reputation for the visual arts in our city, influence the decision makers and, with us , building partnerships with the city's other arts organisations, we can build **The Gate**.



**And**, if you feel as strongly about this as we do, book to attend the consultation meeting for the new culture strategy at the Guildhall on 30<sup>th</sup> April.

You have to book but attendance is free – the organisers say everyone is welcome.

If you are interested you will find the booking form on the Guildhall website.

I will finish with a quote from a visitor to our Gloucester Open event last summer:

*"Art is good for the soul. Compared to Cheltenham and Stroud, there is a real lack of art around Gloucester. So anything that raises the profile of art here has got to be a good thing"*

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