

## **R-SPACE GALLERY LIMITED**

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**17 JANUARY 2019**

#### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT & STATEMENT OF PUBLIC BENEFIT**

R-Space Gallery would like to thank The Arts Council NI and National Lottery Fund for their ongoing core funding for delivery of an agreed programme of free to access exhibitions and programming presented in R-Space Gallery, located in the heart of Lisburn City Centre.

Back in the autumn of 2017 responding to his environment, working across the Island of Ireland, Japanese Artist Shiro Masuyama brought his use of flax and shamrock plants to the former centre of Ulster's Linen industry in Lisburn. From the green's that are synonymous with familiar landscapes, the start of 2018 saw Lucy May Schofield present an exhibition entitled 'The Blue of Distance' that also involved public participative workshops. Next up was the colourful use of a mixed pallet of old, unwanted clothing and domestic related textile items as raw materials. This was an installation where the public could watch the artist Lucy Brown indulge in live artistic creation. The spring of 2018 saw glass artist Alison Lowry present 'Re: New Wallace Collection', celebrating the bicentenary of the birth of Sir Richard Wallace (historic Lisburn Landlord & Benefactor), in this the first artistic collaboration with The Wallace Collection Museum in London. Again this show culminated with a public workshop day. This complimented an extensive exhibition about Sir Richard Wallace's family and association with Lisburn presented in the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum, only 200 metres from R-Space Gallery Castle Street arts space. This programming addresses public benefit in terms of enhancing awareness and knowledge among the public of all aspects of arts, including contemporary visual arts and crafts and creative processes as well as creating opportunities to experience and participate in the arts.

Two shows were presented that sought to benefit heightened creative capacity and professional development among new and emerging artists. In the winter of 2017 five artists from Northern Ireland presented on the theme of 'Materials, Messages & Meanings' followed in the summer of 2018 by a show entitled 'Material Language', involving four makers commenting on our relationship with objects; man-made, mass-manufactured, and through nostalgia and memory. These exhibitions allowed the artists to develop creative ideas and technical processes, whilst sharing skills and collaborative experiences that showed their enthusiasm for and belief in the arts as a means of expression and fulfilment.

Since registration as a charity in 2018 R-Space Gallery has undertaken its most ambitious project to date, being the delivery of the first ever Linen Biennale N. Ireland Festival from August to October 2018. The Linen Biennale celebrates the past, present and future of linen through an extended heritage and arts festival presented and hosted by multiple venues across the region. R-Space Gallery initiated and coordinated this three month festival of heritage, arts, craft and design, including exhibitions and installations, conference, master-classes, and performances under the key themes of Recall, Rethink and Reform. Through massive volunteer effort, supported by very limited free-lance project management specialists plus extensive partnership collaborations, over 50 opportunities were promoted for direct community and public engagement. The festival increased opportunities for both artists and the public to access heritage and the arts through engagement with and participation in creative and enriching artistic activities and events spread across both urban and rural communities. Venues ranged from art galleries in Portaferry to Portadown and Banbridge, community spaces in Randalstown to Conway Mill in West Belfast, museum spaces including the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum, Ulster Museum, Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, Ulster American Folk Park, and also a cross border link with Monaghan Museum. Other public venues included for

example The Linen Hall Library, Belfast Central Library, PRONI and Lisburn Cathedral as well as private venues from artists / makers studios to William Clark & Son of Upperlands and Thomas Ferguson Irish Linen Factory Banbridge, both of which offer access to the public to learn about their rich linen history and contemporary design ethos.

The significant output of the organisation would not have been possible without the support and financial commitment of a cocktail of funding partners, with particular appreciation to core funder Arts Council NI in association with Big Lottery Fund. For two years the British Council had the faith and conviction to believe that R-Space Gallery could bring forward the first ever Linen Biennale International Festival of Linen based in Northern Ireland. This support was based on funding incremental phases of research and concept evolution that evolved into a network of contacts bringing goodwill and support from a huge range of organisations across the UK, Europe and North America. The culmination of this international dimension was the delivery of the Linen Biennale International Conference, supported predominantly by Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council and presented at The Island Civic Centre, Lagan Valley Island, being the Council's impressive conference venue. Other key financial funding partners included The Heritage Lottery Fund, Arts & Business NI, Invest NI and Belfast Central Business District. The community outreach programme would not have been the success that it was without the collaboration of so many wonderfully varied venues and organisations plus artists and individuals who collectively volunteered space, time and boundless energy and enthusiasm to bring the spirit of Linen, past, present and future back into public consciousness. Work continues on cultivating the valuable relationships that materialised from this first Linen Biennale, and when taken with the evaluation and review exercise together sets the tone for the vision and planning already emerging for the next Linen Biennale Festival in 2020.

The achievement of registration with the Charity Commission NI in 2018 has brought a renewed focus on corporate governance by the current small Trustee Board and it was particularly pleasing to win an award from Volunteer Now Foundation that recognised R-Space Gallery's commitment to corporate governance, and especially the transition from a community interest company to a registered charity. Part of the £1,000 prize fund has been used to engage appropriate professional support to update the organisations' vision and mission statement and help the Board to determine the future direction for the charity. Also in this regard membership of CO3 has been invaluable in providing a source of mentoring and support, especially for the role of Chairman, and going forward our Trustees will also avail of learning and support from this voluntary network organisation.

In the current climate of contracting core funding from the Arts Council NI in particular, R-Space Gallery has not been immune, and has had to adopt programming activity to reflect these changes. However, having foreseen this potential dilemma, R-Space Gallery started over two years ago to explore a new and exciting programming direction to compliment the core gallery exhibitions, and are delighted that sufficient funding emerged in 2018 to run the first pilot Linen Biennale Festival 2018 as referred to above, which required very careful management of grant revenue resources from the cocktail of funding partners. The Board as part of their vision for the future most continue to explore the potential to source and generate unrestricted income in order to keep the organisation sustainable.

Last but not least enormous thanks must go to the small part-time free-lance team and all the volunteers and Board Members whose dedication, skills and expertise, genuine enthusiasm and sheer commitment to R-Space Gallery has brought this new charity through an amazing period of enhanced community outreach and generated new avenues of public benefit.

January 2019

Charity Commission NI Registration 106350