

Selling your art

ALTERNATIVE ART SPACES

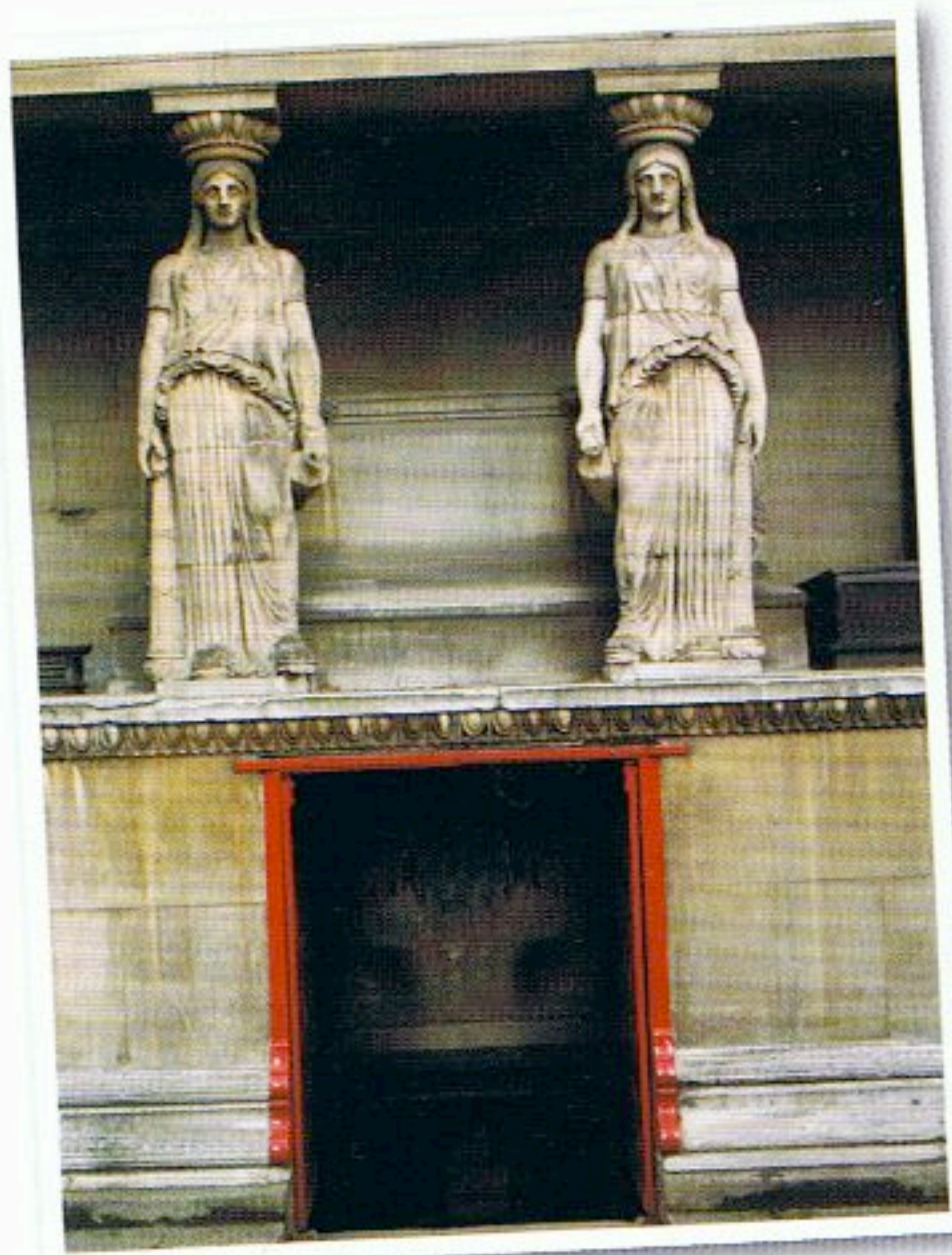


Art needs to be seen to be appreciated. However, you don't need to be taken on by a major gallery to reach potential buyers with plenty of independent curators available to help. Words: Deborah Harris

VISITING WELL-KNOWN art galleries can be an unforgettable experience, but seeing art in less-conventional spaces has a unique appeal of its own. These types of exhibition are more commonly organised by independent curators, who have the flexibility to select alternative locations for each show.

One such independent curator is Flora Fairbairn, who has organised exhibitions in venues ranging from church crypts to former abattoirs.

"To a non-gallery-goer, alternative spaces can be less intimidating than a conventional museum or gallery," she says. "Such shows attract normal collectors as well as people who would not normally buy works, as they are less intimidating and more inclusive. It's great to see the reaction of people seeing extraordinary places for the first time."



TOP Fairbairn's *Avatar of Sacred Discontent* exhibition at the Port Eliot LitFest, Cornwall, 2007

ABOVE The *Dunkelheit* exhibition in the crypt of London's St Pancras Church last October

For Fairbairn, a background in architecture has provided her with the know-how to find interesting buildings that are on offer as venues for events such as art exhibitions.

"They are often in an 'in-between' stage, and on the verge of being renovated, for example," she says.

One building Fairbairn reused for a creative purpose was an old abattoir in Clerkenwell, London, in which she produced the show *We Love To Kill What We Love* in 2003.

Incorporating history

The Clerkenwell exhibition was produced in collaboration with Measure, an organisation whose primary objective is to hold art shows in empty buildings and hidden spaces.

"It came together in a pub called the Old Coffee House on Beak Street in March 2000, over a few pints," says co-founder Simon Day, who formed Measure with Jon Scott.

"We wanted to be independently creative outside of our day jobs and fuse our interests in art, design, history and architecture. Jon studied design at Falmouth and I had completed a degree in sculpture at Wimbledon a few years earlier. We wanted to work with artworks by up-and-coming artists – made for old, forgotten buildings and placed in context in the space by including information about the history of the building."

Fairbairn and Day agree that it is more usual for the artwork to be led by the venue, but Day says there's been a recent shift in emphasis for Measure.

"For the moment we've moved into producing solo shows rather than our traditional group projects. So we have been working with a couple of artists on ideas for

shows, and as the ideas develop we begin to look for a space, or a few buildings, or just a area to search in. The history of the building is also an important factor in our decision, and whether the artist feels they can work with the building and its context."

An example of how a building and an art exhibition can be integrated was Measure's second show with Fairbairn, *Mementoes & Other Curiosities*, at the Farmiloe Building in East London in 2004.

"This set a new benchmark for working with a space," says Day. "The show was set in the original Victorian offices that have survived in the building. The artworks were installed in various places throughout the floor. We played with scale, storytelling and juxtaposition, using the many old pieces of furniture and artifacts we had found in the building's vast attic, which we brought down to dress the show. The idea was to make it very unclear what was art and what wasn't. In the end it all blended into an intriguing curiosity of a show."

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Other unusual venues at which Fairbairn has recently curated art exhibitions include the Sir John Soane Dining Room at the Port Eliot LitFest in Cornwall with *Avatar of Sacred Discontent*, and *Dunkelheit* in the crypt of London's St Pancras Church. Day and Scott are working on several projects this year, including *Drawing Dalston*, in which artist Dan Dixon-Spain is collaborating with two East London communities to produce drawings that will be displayed on local billboards, proving that even traditional draughtsmanship can find a new home.

Contact Flora at flora.fairbairn@zoom.co.uk, and the Measure team through www.measure.org.uk. 