



RURAL RESPONSES

With half the UK's population residing outwith urban conurbations, and regional and arts and cultural policies prioritising local engagement, locations often regarded as countryside are strategically raising their art world profile through imaginative programmes and projects.

Opens

Berwick Gymnasium Gallery calls for local artists living and working in the North East of England and the Scottish Borders to take part in amongst this month's crop of open exhibitions – see listing on page 29. Designed to build upon the success of last year's show that exhibited the work of eighty six artists, organisers are looking to represent a diversity of artistic practices including painting, sculpture, illustration, furniture, video and craft/design. The event builds on the success of the annual Berwick Fellowships. Previous recipients include Turner Prize nominees Mike Nelson and Jane and Louise Wilson. 2008/09 artists Jason Minsky, Kim Pace and William Cobbing start fellowships in October.

Meanwhile, a new annual open competition and exhibition in Gloucestershire is inviting submissions from national and international artists in all art forms, deadline 31 October. Organised by Lyn Cluer Coleman and Sarah Goodwin, the open will create an exhibition by up to thirty shortlisted artists, which will be held in Cheltenham 21 February to 27 March 2009 across the Summerfield Gallery, Pitville Studios and Cheltenham Art Gallery & Museum. A first prize of £2,000 and two £500 prizes will be awarded by selectors including Lyn Cluer Coleman (Stroud House Gallery), Sarah Goodwin, Zekda Cheate (WVG Photography Fund) and Richard Cox (artist and director of Howard Gardens Gallery Cardiff).

Chichester-based The National Open Art Competition 2008 has a record £26,000 of prize money on offer thanks to their generous sponsors. Judges Maurice Cockrill, Richard Cork and Gavin Turk will be asked to select 150 artworks from an open submission. Successful entrants will have their work showcased at the Minerva Chichester Festival Theatre for two weeks before two showings at The Arts Club, Dover Street, London and Pallant House Gallery in Chichester itself.

Commissions

Based in rural North Northamptonshire, Fermynwoods Contemporary Art has opened an offsite programme. In partnership with the Forestry Commission, two refurbished cottages within nearby woods are providing a home for international artist residencies, education and collaboration. First up is Richard Woods' temporary commission for the exterior of Sudborough Green Lodge Cottages. The artist who has gained an international reputation for works that reactivate social structures of urban and rural



spaces is cladding the exterior of the cottages in a candy-coloured faux stone cladding makeover. Presented 18 October – 2 January, the work is a hyper version of reality deposited like some alien object and clashes with the environment in which it is placed.

Sudborough Green Lodge Cottages can be reached on foot in 55mins from Fermynwoods Contemporary Art's Water Tower or in 45mins from Fermynwoods Country Park.

A year ago, Arts Council of Wales announced their largest capital lottery award to date for public art. The £200k grant for a community-based project in Bala – an extensively rural part of Gwynedd, North Wales – has been developed by Antur Penllyn, and entails the Canolfan Cywain, £2.3m European-funded rural life centre. Artworks commissioned for it arose from a public art strategy developed by lead artists Howard Bowcott and Angharad Pearce Jones working with Safie and include Howard Bowcott's Plough Shares in corten steel, and Angharad Pearce Jones' steel haybarn screen inspired by the tradition of hedge laying. Amongst commissions still in development is Pearce Jones' group of giant 'stick chairs' in steel.

Artists' development

A contemporary visual arts gallery deep in the New Forest on the south coast of England, ArtSway has held solo exhibitions by Richard Billingham, Anne Hardy, Simon Faithfull, Beate Gutschow, Ma Yongfeng, Alex Frost, Hannah Maybank, Frank Bowling and Jarrie Shovelin, with Diru Li, Jordan Baseman, Gayle Chong Kwan and Eamon O'Kane appearing next. The Residency Production scheme provides artists with critical advice, financial resources and professional support to make and develop new work for exhibition. ArtSway's partners include Autograph ABP, Goethe Institute, Chinese Art Centre, The Photographers' Gallery and the Arts Institute at Bournemouth.

While situated in a rural environment, ArtSway works both locally and internationally, as reflected in the recent installation of Phyllida Barlow's sculpture *Fence*, sited near a public path within the Beaulieu Estate and the New Forest Pavilion presentations, most recently at the 2007 Venice Biennale. Thanks to three-year funding from Leverhulme Trust, ArtSway's Associates programme will provide legacy support, training and network events to a selection of previous residency artists.

Situated in the centre of Newtown, a small market town in the Severn Valley, Oriol Davies is the main visual arts venue for the Welsh Borders region. The area is highly rural, the closest city being over seventy miles away. Each year, the gallery curates and presents between six and seven major exhibitions of contemporary art and craft from Wales, the UK and beyond. The exhibition programme includes artists who represented Wales at the last two Venice Biennales, solo shows by artists such as Philippa Lawrence and William Roberts, and group exhibitions such as *Comfort Zones* and *Folk Art and Fairy Tales* that tour throughout the UK. Amongst recent commissions are Simon Grennan and Christopher Sparrow's *Becoming Modern* and Yvonne