



Caroline Worthington, Director's report

It's very good to "see" you – wherever you are and thank you for tuning into this year's AGM. A warm welcome to all of you.

Our year started with the thrilling news that His Majesty The King had accepted our offer of continued Patronage of the Society. It had been a long and nerve wracking wait.

Lorraine, Maria and I have been as busy as ever this year striving to support you in your practice – whether that's moving away from Parker Harris to hopefully the more user friendly Curatorspace to finding opportunities residencies and exhibitions – and I hope you have made the most of your membership.

Our Behind the Studio Doors programme so engagingly hosted by Isabel de Vasconcellos has continued to shine a spotlight on our international members. If you have missed an episode you can find the hour long films on the website.

At Dora House we kicked off the year with the Gilbert Bayes Award 2023 cohort show curated by Harry Yeffs – aka Reeps 100. We were delighted to deepen our partnership with the Art House in Wakefield where the opening on 23 May coincided with a member visit to The Hepworth to see Kim Lim's exhibition.

Our second exhibition of the year presented Madi Acharya-Baskerville's first public art commission, "Double Act", on the sculpture terrace in front of Dora House. Madi was the winner of First Plinth: Public Art Award 2023 which is generously funded by the Mirisch & Lebenheim Charitable Foundation. This was supported by her exhibition, "Caught in the Act", with Sarah Ryder. An accompanying essay was written by curator and writer, Jes Fernie, who also hosted an in conversation event with both artists in June.

The 2024 summer show this year was selected and curated by Dr David McAlmont who chose 45 works from a bumper 270 submissions. The theme was "Reality Check". David worked tirelessly to promote the exhibition bringing visitors, using his social media accounts and giving an interview to BBC Radio London. We were thrilled to offer a new Marsh Charitable Trust prize of £1,000 for best in show selected by the curator and awarded to Steve Johnson FRSS for "Façade".



Dr David McAlmont opening the summer exhibition 2024

The German Ambassador, Miguel Berger, and Director of the Goethe-Institut London, Dr Katharina von Ruckteschell-Katte, visited in early 2 August hosted by our Vice President, Almuth Tebbenhoff and Trustees, Barbara Beyer MRSS and Andrea Geile FRSS.

In the autumn we opened “Assembly: Abraham Cruzvillegas & Celeste”. The show was born out of a research trip I made to Mexico City in February and generously funded by the Art Fund’s Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial Grants Programme. It was great to catch up with our Mexico based members while I was there as well as visit both Zona Maco and Material art fairs.

The exhibition was Abraham’s first in London for nearly 10 years and the artist duo, Celeste’s debut. We worked in partnership with Thomas Dane Gallery and Canopy Collections and were delighted that all three artists were present for the private view on Saturday 5 October where Abraham performed poetry and music. Later that evening we hosted a dinner for 30 collectors and curators in the studio gallery and the following day there were two in conversation events with the artists which drew a big crowd given it was the Sunday before Frieze art fair.



Assembly dinner for collectors and curators, autumn 2024

Our October events programme was themed around Mexican life and culture and supported by a grant from the Circles of Art. We worked with Mexico born-London based artist, Tiz Creel, who built a Day of the Dead altar dedicated to Cecil Thomas in the foyer of Dora House. We also partnered with Brompton Cemetery artist in residence, Rachel Goodison, on a collective response to the Day of the Dead festivities resulting in a weekend of exhibitions and events involving over 200 local school children and adults.

Throughout the year, our monthly creative workshops – or Third Thursdays as we call them where crafts such as pyrography, miniature ceramics, making terrariums, embroidery were enjoyed.

Perhaps one of the most nerve wracking visits of the year was from the Chair of the Charity Commission – Orlando Fraser KC – who came along to understand the work we do, our funding model and our governance.

In total, there were 10,434 visitors to Dora House between February and December. A huge achievement given that the galleries were closed for January and May.

Beyond Dora House, we took part in International Sculpture Day, Kensington and Chelsea Art Week, London Sculpture Week and the Great Exhibition Road

Festival in June. We had so many people take part in our workshop that it broke the counting clicker but we got up to at least 1,000 over the weekend.

And in a wonderful surprise at the end of the year, we were notified by the Big Draw that our autumn 2023 programme had won the Big Draw's Clubs and Societies award.

Perhaps some of the most exciting – if tiring – days of this year were spent at Thomas Dane Gallery which hosted a special fundraising exhibition - the 10gram challenge - in their Mayfair, London gallery on Wednesday 23 and Thursday 24 October.

Over 40 leading artists generously responded to the challenge of creating a tiny sculpture from a 10gram block of wax which was then cast in bronze by Alex Davies MRSS at Milwyn Foundry who also had the original concept.

Participating artists included Antony Gormley, Grayson Perry, Conrad Shawcross, Michael Craig-Martin, Rana Begum, Sokari Douglas Camp, Cathie Pilkington and many more.

Over 150 people visited across the two days and the exhibition was featured in the Financial Times. It raised £64,000 !

Huge thanks must go to Trustee Edwina Sassoon and President Laura Ford for masterminding the project and to Darbyshire, Artelium and Alex Davies MRSS for their generous support.

Before I look to the future, I would like to pause here and pay tribute to Lorraine Pajak, Maria Maro-Perera and Andrea Arnold who work so hard day in day out. They keep many plates spinning and visitors are constantly surprised that there are only four of us.

I would like to pay tribute to the Board for all their hard work. I offer hearty thanks to Barbara Beyer MRSS and Rebecca Newnham FRSS who have completed their terms as Trustees, but who have proved to be remarkably driven and committed zoom group leaders. The Board really does have the Society's best interests at heart.

But looking forward, you might recall this time last year Laura and I announced Creating a Home for Sculptors. Those of you who have read the special Members' News or joined the zoom with architects, TiggColl, will know how far we have come in the past 12 months.

We have received listed building consent, been granted planning permission and run the tender process for the works. It's incredibly exciting – if daunting – to embark on this project but the state of the basement is so poor that we cannot

leave it any longer. Wonderful support from trusts and foundations, individuals as those 10gram challenge sales mean we are nearly at our fundraising target.

The project will be overseen by our building committee chaired by Gordon Watson, along with Laura and Edwina as well as Clare Burnett, Amy Stephens, Bill Price and Mark Burch. The committee really should be applauded for their work – they meet monthly, sometimes more to keep Creating a Home for Sculptors on track and on budget.

Work will start at Dora House in July and we will be finished in spring 2026 – in time to mark the 50th anniversary of Cecil Thomas' gift of his home to the Society. We have exciting plans to celebrate the anniversary, but more of that later in the year.

Caroline Worthington, Director May 2025