



ART ANGEL  
Creative Evaluation  
2023/24



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## ABOUT

Art Angel was born as an arts project, created by and dedicated to people who experience mental ill health.

For almost thirty years it has managed to identify the individual needs of its participants and, through the arts, has found a way to offer hope.

Art Angel is a vision turned into reality, a pioneer of its kind, it overturned all expectations and broke existing beliefs, starting a personal campaign against preconceptions simply by demonstrating the project's validity with results.

Year after year, one person at a time, Art Angel has grown with its people and for its people, continuing to change lives.

But Art Angel is this and more.

Is asking how much sugar you want, if you want it, in your hot drink; is to prepare a room with pillows and soft light to relieve excessive stimuli; is that if you can't come or you're late it doesn't matter because your place is there; is that you belong to the group no matter what; is not imposing any deadline; is its people coming for many years; is its people starting new jobs while still participating; is seeing people wanting to give back the love and trust by volunteering within Art Angel; is that there is always someone there to listen; is that there is no right way but your way.

Art Angel is the result of years of listening and evaluation; it is the priceless feeling of having a place to go that is safe and feels like Home, in the more holistic sense of the term.

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possibility of learning and regaining control of their lives and that hope is not a fairy tale, but a real anchor



# ART ANGEL AIMS

We are an arts project

We are an arts project dedicated to people suffering from mental-ill health

We are an arts project dedicated to people suffering from mental-ill health with many years experience allowing us to know that through our project, people with mental illness can experience:

- Enhanced physical and mental wellbeing, leading to stability, increased resilience and reduced need for NHS services. Participants regularly tell us that coming to Art Angel acts as a vital barrier to spiralling, maladaptive coping mechanisms.
- Creative development and confidence in individual expression, leading to increased confidence and self-esteem in other aspects of their lives. Participants feel better able to express their needs both within Art Angel and their individual communities.
- Long-term involvement reduces need for inpatient care, keeping people well enough to remain in their communities.
- A sense of belonging, acceptance, and understanding that they are valued and respected members of a creative community.
- Whilst participants are focussed and engaged in creative activity, there is a tacit understanding between everyone and as such, peer support, friendship and mutual respect develop.
- The ability to play, create and have fun.
- They have an expanded understanding of art skills. Skills will develop and participants will stretch their ability by producing ambitious work.
- Through attending regularly, Art Angel becomes part of their routine. Having a structure and a reason to leave the house supports recovery and stability.
- A greater connection to cultural organisations in Dundee.
- Opportunities for personal growth, including further education and employment. We have strong ties with DJCAD at the University of Dundee, and in 2018, nine former participants graduated with honours degrees.



Generator Exhibition



Zine Fair, Art Angel



Dundee Botanics Project

We cannot say we can magically resolve all the problems of our participants; we are not a cure for everything but we have years of experience and this gives us the confidence to know that what we do has a strong, positive impact on people. How do we know? Because they told us and we were listening. Together with the support from other organisations and a continued refined accuracy in signposting the right help, recovery can be real.

Our aim is to change the perception and attitudes of the public toward those with long term mental health issues and to empower and enrich the lives of those who live with such challenges; to promote and encourage a positive approach which goes beyond deep-rooted stereotypes and which sees people suffering from mental health problems having the same chances as any other person; that there is the possibility of learning and regaining control of their lives and that hope is not a fairytale, but a real anchor.



## ACHIEVEMENTS 2023/24

What an incredible year we just had!

There are so many results and collaborations that we wish to mention them all.

We hope that the chronological order will make you perceive the buzzing, dynamic succession of those many happenings.

In March 2023 we were at the final stage of the innovative and very successful project, 'The Collective' which saw a selected group of artists from our art classes working for six months in a self directed mode in a dedicated studio space.

The same month we collaborated with the European Solidarity Corps, working with refugees and welcoming two of them into our art courses. One of them is still a regular participant.

We also had a remote collaboration with Inuti, an organisation focussing on people with special needs based in Stockholm. The result was a joint exhibition held first in Sweden and then at Art Angel, showcasing pieces made by both parties.

And again in March, thanks to Julie Moore, the Learning Manager at V&A Dundee, our participants had free access to the Tartan exhibition, with an exhibition box lent to us with different specimens of tartan objects, to reach those people who couldn't make it to the show.

In April Dundee Rep Theatre hosted us for a photography exhibition.

The Wellbeing Fund selected Art Angel and our Botanic Project as a case study for the Scottish Government and produced a short statement that was then published in July, available online.

In May the students from Craigie High School in Dundee picked Art Angel as a chosen charity for the YPA Challenge.

In June Dundonald Centre came to Art Angel to have a chat and find out about our project, to have a better understanding of our aims and ethics.

For the second year, across Spring and Summer, we ran a project held at the Dundee Botanic Garden in collaboration with the University of Dundee and we had an exhibition in situ in July.

Along with it, we celebrated the end of 'The Collective' project and displayed the amazing artworks produced during the six months in two successful exhibitions: one week at DJCAD foyer and then one month at the Keiller Center.



## ACHIEVEMENTS (contd)

Still in Summer, Le Freak Records in Dundee organised their annual Pier Party, asking our participants to create decorations. They raised a whopping £3000 donated to Art Angel and Sistema Scotland. Thank you Le Freak!

Another friend of ours, Hilltown Disco, sell their electronic music online and donate to us all year round. Thank you Hilltown Disco!

Murray Royal Hospital, Perth, approached us in September to find out more about Art Angel.

Autumn saw our ethics and mission being part of a couple of dissertation researches from students at DJCAD, Alice and Alissa.

Through the University of Dundee, Levent Piskine, as voice of Human Rights Defenders, asked us to provide weekly clay workshops for their students and activists as recreational activity to alleviate the pressure on them. The feedback was very warm and the participants said that they felt safe and immediately part of the group; they felt 'Home'.

In November, during the break, we welcomed Dundee Zine Festival in our premises, led by one of our tutors.

At the beginning of the New Year we took over Generator Project's space for an exhibition throughout January. You can see some of the lovely feedback in this booklet.

Change-Mental Health, a charity that provides information about mental health, asked us to give a contribution. Ed and Michelle were happy to open up and share their experience with them which will be available on the NHS information site.

Continuing on the trail of personal involvement from our participants, Dylan worked with young people who were patients at the Young Person's Unit in Dudhope House over the space of one year, creating an admissions film which explained what it means to be admitted.

In March we ended this incredible year hosting the Human Rights Defenders on the last Sunday of their time here in Scotland, organising a yoga, a zine workshop run by two of our tutors and a Ceilidh dance, thanks to the energetic contribution of Morag and the Fiddling Friends Ceilidh Band.

Last, but not least, an outstanding achievement was ensuring funds for the third Botanic project in a row with the great difference it will last three years, non stop. It will be exciting to see the seasons changing in the beautiful gardens and the young group's response to it.



## STAFF TRAINING

- Collective meetings and individual one-to-one.
- Safeguarding and Trauma training.
- A series of nights where we showed Luna films, the very origins of what we know as Art Angel.
- The possibility to enrol for free online courses on mental health. A couple of staff completed the Equality and Diversity level 2, three completed the Counselling Skills level 2, one completed First Aid Mental Health level 2. This is an ongoing programme, open whenever our staff feel ready.

## DEVELOPMENTS

- Introduction of two part-time Studio Managers
- Introduction of two new volunteers from DJCAD and Perth College.
- Development worker to be employed.

## WHAT DOES THE EVALUATION MEAN?

In general, evaluation is an extremely useful tool for understanding the actual impact that any type of activity has on the people involved.

In our case it is essential to maintain our ethos of a person-centred project, the aim of which is to consider each participant as a unique individual with unique needs and ideas, finding ways to reach everyone personally.

We never stop listening; whether it is an informal chat in the kitchen while preparing tea, something said in the classes in a more formal way, we are there and we are listening.

How do we do this? We use different evaluation methods combined, for more in-depth and truthful results and, moreover, we make sure everyone has the chance to talk and express their point of view, participants and staff, because we believe in an environment that is safe for all. We believe that a healthy workplace is essential and very much in line with our ethos.

We invite all project members to come to us with any questions or needs. We understand the importance of listening, therefore we maintain an open door policy, promoting it to new people and making them understand that our support is tailored to their individual needs. By doing this, after a while we begin to gain their trust, creating an honest cycle of mutual respect. We actively offer the possibility of an individual chat, treated confidentially, provided by our specially trained staff.

We have feedback boxes in every room where people can write suggestions and thoughts, anonymously or not. Importantly, we check them regularly.

At the end of each group, our main tutor fills out the evaluation form, highlighting the most important events of the day. At the end of each block, tutors help fill in relevant aspects, such as personal achievements, goals and developments.

Every two years we hold a Creative Evaluation Day, offering a series of events to invite people to contribute their insights and feedback in a fun and creative way. We know all people are different, so we propose an array of different media to play with: we have short workshops of writing, playwriting, photography and drama; visual 'before and after' activities; pie charts; graffiti wall; for those who are not inclined to leave a written opinion or work on a drawing, we offer the possibility of expressing oral comments which are recorded, leaving the participant the choice of being seen, only heard or read within a transcription of their verbal contribution.

We make the day open to all those participating in the project, operating a drop-in policy, giving everyone the freedom to choose the time and duration of their involvement.

On top of all of this, we never stop listening to everyone and intervene promptly if necessary.

This is not only fundamental to our growth, allowing us to understand where and how we need to make changes and/or improvements, but it becomes fundamental in presenting ourselves to funders, making our objectives and our ethics coherent, and therefore, reliable.

In the eyes of existing and potential funders, we demonstrate a deep understanding of the community and our great sense of responsibility, using public money for what it needs to be used for.



# WISH TREE

HAVE YOUR SAY:

→ WRITE YOUR HOPES,

DREAMS, WISHES ON A

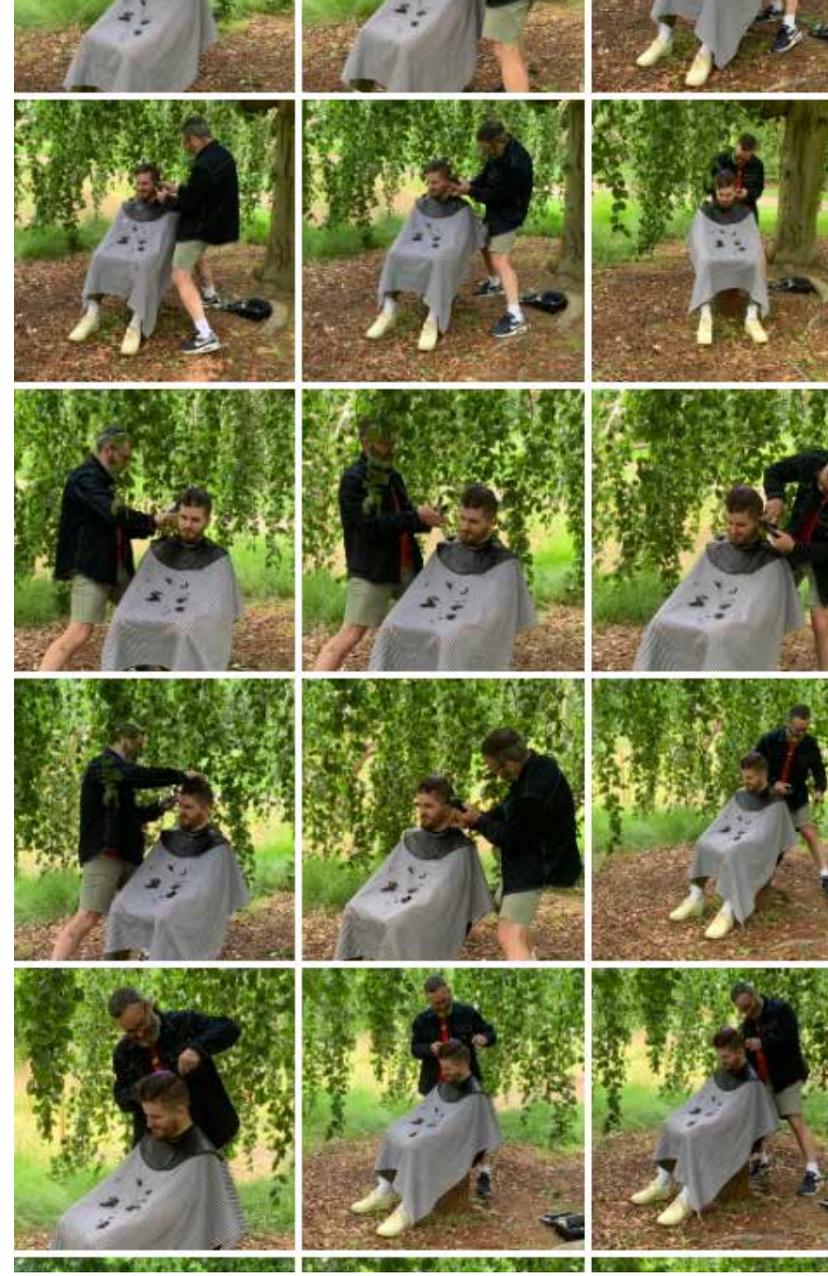
HEART ♥ AND ADD IT TO THE TREE!



Your Story 36m



# Don't Panic Get Botanic





## TESTIMONIES

"That's what brought me to Dundee, Scotland in 2018 to visit a project called Art Angel. It was founded in 1997 to help people with mental health difficulties find their voice through the arts. In the book, I describe how Art Angel offers an alternative, an antidote, even, to mainstream psychiatric treatment, which many people experience as disempowering to say the least. At Art Angel, people receive the personal warmth and connection that should be part of all psychiatric care: being part of a community, and the chance to create something tangible and meaningful. Art Angel participants are not called 'patients' or 'clients' - they are 'artists' because being an artist is a sign of being human and allows someone who has lost the ability to make decisions to make them again. In Dundee, I saw what could happen when the contraction of the imagination starts to go back the other way. If there's any role that we need to be playing, it's to create these spaces of safety and hope."

"The work of Art Angel is extraordinary. As a project for, and run by, people with mental health problems, what I witnessed there was the power of art to rekindle people's shattered self-belief and neglected imaginations. In every talk I give across Europe, I talk about Art Angel as the first place I saw what it looks like, and feels like, when the right conditions are created for the healing of people's imagination, their sense that life, and the world, could be different. People told me of how they were reimagining who they are and their place in the world. Every place needs an Art Angel, and in this most precarious time of imaginative poverty, Art Angel has hit upon something utterly vital to wider society. I, and many others, owe them a huge debt of gratitude."

Rob Hopkins - Activist and writer on Environmental issues.

## EXPERIENCES

"I have been a therapist in mental health services for adults and then latterly with teenagers across the UK for nearly 30 years. This has meant getting to know about hundreds of services intended for those with mental health challenges. So I know there is nowhere/no one else like the Art Angel project. The fact they are in Dundee is one of my more selfish reasons for remaining in post as the Occupational Therapist in the UK's most northerly inpatient unit. Whatever the young people I work with needed creatively Art Angel has been able to provide; I would go as far as to say that they put the Be in Bespoke. As I write a montage of images is playing through my mind which includes some of the artwork that young people have created when we have supported them to attend the project directly and a memory of myself dressed as a fright wig-wearing Zombie for the film MADS in which staff eat infected soup and can only be cured by being hit with NHS trifles thrown by young people. The whole project was young people-led and even those who were too shy to go in front of the camera learned skills that they took with them into adulthood. 'I never knew projects like this existed', was one of the pieces of feedback from that first joint project that stayed in my mind. 'Neither did I and isn't it great', was my response and great it has continued to be with a further three films under our belts together and hours of attendance in groups at the Art Angel premises clocked up by our young people. Also there is the individual reach from tutors in photography and creative writing. Art Angel understand (sometimes it can feel uniquely), that young people are not mini adults and it is not about scaling things down it is about building things and the people involved in them up, putting art at the centre, while at the same time recognising and managing that on some days the art is 'Art' with a big A but on other days even with the same people the art has a small a because of what people are experiencing then and there. No one comes even close to doing that and on top of that they make it look easy which it's not, especially when you have to spend a lot of time looking for funding from multiple sources to keep afloat. Young people sometimes tell me that I am good at my job and if this is true Art Angel certainly make it easier for me both in terms of what I can link young people into through them but also in terms of what I have learned about working with people in a truly person-centred way."

Susan Coyne - Senior O.T. for the Young Person's Unit at Dudhope House.



Art Angel Disco







## MORE VOICES

"I didn't have any expectations, I was just glad to have somewhere to go. I hadn't any experience of anything like that before." (A)

"It helps you focus on things and notice things, I didn't really see anything before and now I look, I see in front of me more. I'm lost for words here, I can't describe this but there is a feeling about art, people need art, especially people in the situation I'm in..." (A)

"I started on papier mache balls, because I was trying to bind myself to something. So it would be, if I felt I was losing the place, I could do papier mache balls because one ball has a finishing, you know? It's a finished object...a boundary."(R)

"Art Angel is like no other place, it's accepting of me as I am, understanding, supportive, inspiring and always there."  
Ann Marie

"I can't imagine my life without Art Angel. I tried so many other places before I found this. It's a lifeline, staff listen to you and don't judge you. It has kept me stable for ages." Shona

"One day I came across Art Angel, I haven't looked back. Everyone really helps you, respects you and supports you. I love Art Angel." Jen

"You get a chance to know everyone and not feel alone anymore. I go for coffee with friends now. Before I was always on my own. I'm so grateful." Jim

"Art Angel means life, doing things with other people in a good place. Even when I feel terrible, I go to Art Angel and feel better at the end." Marcus



"Where do I start? Art Angel has given me hope, love, inspiration." Alice

"When no one else would hear me, see me, Art Angel did. I was welcomed and given support. I now have a few pals and do paintings. Thank you." Andy

"Thank you, Thank you, Thank you.

We have started to see the old K again and I'm not sure we would have without your help. He certainly didn't want our help. The help you have given K has been invaluable. You have supported him through his depression and given him motivation to go out of the house, when we as a family couldn't get him out. He has found friendship, interest in film and sound and has enjoyed your activities very much..." (K's family)





"This is no ordinary Christmas card, it is also a thank you card for everything you have all done for me this year. Honestly, it might not seem like it, but if it wasn't for you all I genuinely don't think I would be here. I was so close to giving up this year but you all stepped in and pulled me back up. You all listened to me when no one else would, you took me seriously when professionals wouldn't, you cheered me up when I was low. You all would never bore of my conversations no matter how long they were and most of all you checked up on me more than almost everyone in my life while I was in hospital. You are all so caring and incredible! Thank you for everything."

Chelsea



Creative Evaluation

Botanics Exhibition

# COMMENTS FROM GENERATOR PROJECTS

## JANUARY 2024

A lovely display of different work. Such a vibrant environment!

I am staggered at the range and quality of the artwork. There is so much of interest to see. Well done everyone.

Thank you! Fantastic to get a sense of the Art Angel community and its impact on people's lives.

Recommended by V&A and Gallery 48.

Fantastic work; stunning!

Great exhibition and can see how much effort has been put into it! So amazing!

Work is outstanding and fascinating. Makes me want to be part of it all.

I love the unicorn!

Loved the vibrancy of the entire gallery...how it all came together as one collective. Bright colours, amazing talent. Be proud. You are all fantastic.

Well worth the visit!

Fantastic work by all. Super impressed by all. Everything looks very professional.

To all the artists, thank you so much for expressing and sharing with us. It takes great courage. The insight and emotion is compelling. Well done!





Generator Exhibition

Amazing work. Totally inspired to go home, start painting and drawing. Thank you so much.

Very nice displays, very interesting and I felt every bit we saw. Amazing work by all.

Rachel - we are amazed by your talent. Your picture expresses your inner being so well. Expressing yourself through your art is a great expression of your interest and being. We admire you totally.

Amazing work, loved this exhibition, everyone should be so proud of themselves.

Hi Art Angels, I am so proud of everyone, well done.

Really impressive work, thought provoking, moving. Thanks for letting us see your work.

Every show is better than the last (and I have been to eight now!). Power to all of you.

Thanks for the real art, with love from Hungary.

Such an amazing selection of work by everyone. I am very inspired. Should all be very proud.

An amazing array of artwork and loads of amazing artists, whether it be art or creative writing.

Amazing work!

Really enjoyed the show. Very glad we stumbled across it. So much talent. Thanks.

## WE ARE LISTENING

We looked back at our previous Creative Evaluation document and noticed a significant 95% positive feedback in relation to one-off workshops. We therefore decided to use our new temporary project, The Collective, as a 'gym' to see how well people in the group followed pop-up classes focussed on sharing techniques and talks from the artists themselves.

Our approach to people promoted freedom to participate, without any sense of obligation, with the options not to take part, to simply watch for further inspiration or to participate actively.

The result was extraordinary: almost everyone took part, and on more than one occasion, the participants made the skills they had just learned their own, taking them to another level in their personal practice.

The artists' interventions were also well received, giving rise to interesting conversations between the people of the project.

As before, and by adding the fact that we have a new writing class in the weekly schedule, Art Angel is even closer to full capacity than before and we don't want to change the beautiful balance and energy that we have managed to achieve all these years, along with the great sense of security that comes from it.

That said, we always want to do better, so here are some of the improvements we are trying to achieve in the foreseeable future and which we are already working on:

- Reduce the length of the winter break
- Increase the duration of all two hour classes
- Maintain our visibility outwith Dundee through exhibitions
- Outreach the community, making available our experience and skills outside Art Angel
- Tailoring new groups - only women or elderly
- More studio space opportunities
- More training for staff
- Pop-up workshops
- Build capacity and enhance staff structure
- Expand the artistic offerings to participants

These are some of the aspects you asked us to look at. We will always be open to new needs and ideas; changes are important to keep Art Angel up to expectation, to grow and thrive.

We will do so by treasuring the precious environment that protects us every day, being careful to offer the same sense of belonging as ever, to new and existing people.

We are, and always will be, listening.

Creative Evaluation - Before and After drawing task.

When the image speaks a thousand words. This was one of the activities proposed to participants during the Evaluation Day to indicate how they see themselves before and after joining the project.





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## IN PARTNERSHIP:

Young People's Unit  
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (C.A.M.H.S)  
Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art Dundee  
V&A  
School of Medicine, University of Dundee  
Dundee Rep Theatre  
Dundee Contemporary Arts  
Creative Scotland  
Dundee Ceramic Workshop  
The Corner  
NHS Tayside (Joint Integrated Fund)  
The Big Lottery  
Awards for All  
Al-Mushkah - Together Project  
The Cooper Gallery, DJCAD  
The Matthew Gallery, DJCAD  
Hot Chocolate  
Murray Royal Hospital  
Arika  
Perth College  
Inuti  
Craigie High School  
Rosebank Primary School  
European Solidarity Corps  
DVVA  
University of Dundee Botanic Gardens  
Veterans First Point  
Change Mental Health  
Dundonald Centre (NHS)  
Generator Project  
Keillet Centre  
Hilltown Disco  
Le Freak  
Fiddling Friends Ceilidh Band  
Mick Duke - Playwright

# CONCLUSION

The Creative Evaluation Day is like a snapshot of a journey in time where the feedback received is not the exception of a special day but a confirmation of what the entire journey is.

It is a journey that has no fixed duration, it is a journey together rather than with, and more importantly it is the quality of the journey which is precious, not the departure or the arrival. Only the participants have the power to decide when.

The response we received from the last Creative Evaluation Day is warm and emotional, as usual, and suggests once again that we are on the right track. Despite this, our commitment is continuous and our hearts and minds are always ready to listen and learn.

## **How people responded to some key aspects since attending Art Angel:**

- \* Wellbeing - 92% feel their wellbeing improved
- \* Confidence - 85% feel more confident
- \* Recovery - 87% improved their recovery
- \* Self-Esteem - 85% self-esteem improved
- \* Respect - 83% feel respected
- \* Skills - 85% have learnt new skills and/or improved their existing ones
- \* Equality - 77% feel a greater sense of equality

We know that none of this would be possible without the joint effort of everyone involved.

Our precious staff are always mentioned in feedback and cards and we are proud to work with them.

- "Thank you to everyone at Art Angel, you are all true Angels."(Anne-Marie)
- "Absolutely fabulous feelings within Art Angel. Thank you."
- I love this place. It has been a huge part of my recovery and in building my confidence. Thank you so much."
- "Friendly, open, enthusiastic, AWESOME."
- "I don't know where I'd be without Art Angel."

Our gratitude goes to all the participants who trust and grow with us, the extremely valuable staff, the priceless volunteers, the Board of Directors, always committed for the good of Art Angel, accountant, bookkeeper, those who donate and support us, embracing and believing in our project and ethos.

In light of all of this, a heartfelt **thank you** to everyone is owed.





Lenny Gardner