

Open Houses or how I gave up worrying about exhibiting and learned to love my home

by Bill Black



Bill Black

So, you're an artist living in or around Brighton. You've visited some of the Open Houses during the Festival and thought to yourself, 'I can do that.' So what do you do next?

Well, there are many options. I'll cover the main ones here, give you some recommendations and then point out some things to bear in mind.

As I explained last week, there are over a dozen different trails in Brighton and for guaranteed best exposure, I would strongly recommend that you join one of them.

Which one? Well, the best way is to see which group your home address falls in. The quickest way to do that is have a look in our maps section and see which trail is nearest your home. Then go to that trail's individual website and obtain their contact details there.

As most trails evolved around the Fiveways template of a 'walking trail' for visitors, the distinctions are, for the most part, clear and obvious. There are some overlapping areas, in which case we would advise you to approach both trails and see which one you like best.

However, do bear in mind when approaching them that different groups have different rules and costs, so make sure you are clear on what these are before you join up.

Alternatively, if you are reading this during the Festival, ask any open house owner when you visit their home. They'll be happy to help.

So, why do we advise joining a trail? It is simply the best way to ensure you get the maximum number of visitors to your home. People still tend to walk the trails, either with our maps or the AOH brochure (more of which later). Last year, I was exhibiting in an independent house right in the middle of the Fiveways trail. It became a frustrating inevitability watching people walk straight past our house while staring at a map of the Fiveways trail.

Fiveways is a good example of the differences between trails. If your house is in their catchment area and you want to join them for the first year, you can't. You are required to

open house
online

www.openhouseonline.co.uk

Liquid 6
Image Design

open your house independently and be inspected by a senior member of the group before they decide whether to invite you to join them – or not.

‘How dare they!’ you cry?

Well, don’t cry too loudly. Fiveways is the grand-daddy of them all, the most established trail in Brighton. To suggest that a trail – and not just Fiveways - shouldn’t operate quality control for houses entering it is unfair. They all have a reputation to maintain and if maintaining it means ensuring that the quality of art exhibited in its houses is kept at a consistently high level, then surely that is better for the Open House visitor, in the end?

Discuss...

Many houses do open independently though, so don’t dismiss the idea. In my opinion though, there are more benefits associated with being in a group. I can already hear the clicking of fingers on keyboards starting the barrage of emails I’m going to get for that one! So where do people visiting the Open Houses in Brighton get their information from? This venerable website is one place and, indeed, the only place where a visitor can search for who and what they want by name, media and trail and have all the details printed out for them with highlighted street maps. The AOH brochure is another one. Last year, the Open Houses split from the Brighton Festival Fringe and produced their own brochure and the majority of Open Houses are represented in there. However, the Brighton Festival Fringe still maintains a healthy Open House section and as the more established institution, receives more press and publicity. We cover both on this site as OHO exists to promote all visual artists exhibiting during the Brighton Festival. For the moment, you pays your money, you makes your choice.

However, given that we’ve advised you that it’s best to join a trail and most of the major trails appear in the AOH brochure, then we’d recommend that you have a spot in there – but talk to both parties. The costs and commitments involved are different for both of them with the BFF being cheaper and having greater coverage. It’s a highly fluid situation and could change again in the future.

So there you have it and if you’re more confused now than when you started, don’t blame me!

Next week, I’ll cover the nitty-gritty of what you do with your home, your furniture and your children for those four weekends in May and also the topic you’ve all been waiting for – how to deal with difficult artists without resorting to a chair and a whip.

See you next week.

Copyright 2006 Bill Black