

# RAVEN STUDIOS



**MAKESPACE ARTS & WELLBEING CIC**  
**2019-21**

MakeSpace Arts & Well-Being CIC  
Company no. 11816387

## **Raven Studios**

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# WELCOME TO RAVEN STUDIOS!

Here follows a brief summary of the activities of the group of artists based at Riverside Centre Unit 56 (First Floor), Smithfield Rd, Shrewsbury, since their formation in early 2019.

Alongside the basic provision of affordable studio space for artists, our mission has been to reinvigorate and enliven the Shrewsbury art scene, with the hope of eventually building links and connections right across Shropshire.

The Covid pandemic has ironically provided the kickstart we needed, gifting us a business grant that has enabled us to do what we wanted to do at a time when it has been needed the most.

It has been and still is a privilege to work alongside so many talented individuals, both resident studio members and those who have visited or used our space for a short while, not to mention all our bursary and commission recipients and Instagram followers!

Raven Studios is hugely grateful for all the help and support they have given along the way, without which we wouldn't be where we are.

Jancis Vaughan & James Smith  
Directors

# YEAR ONE

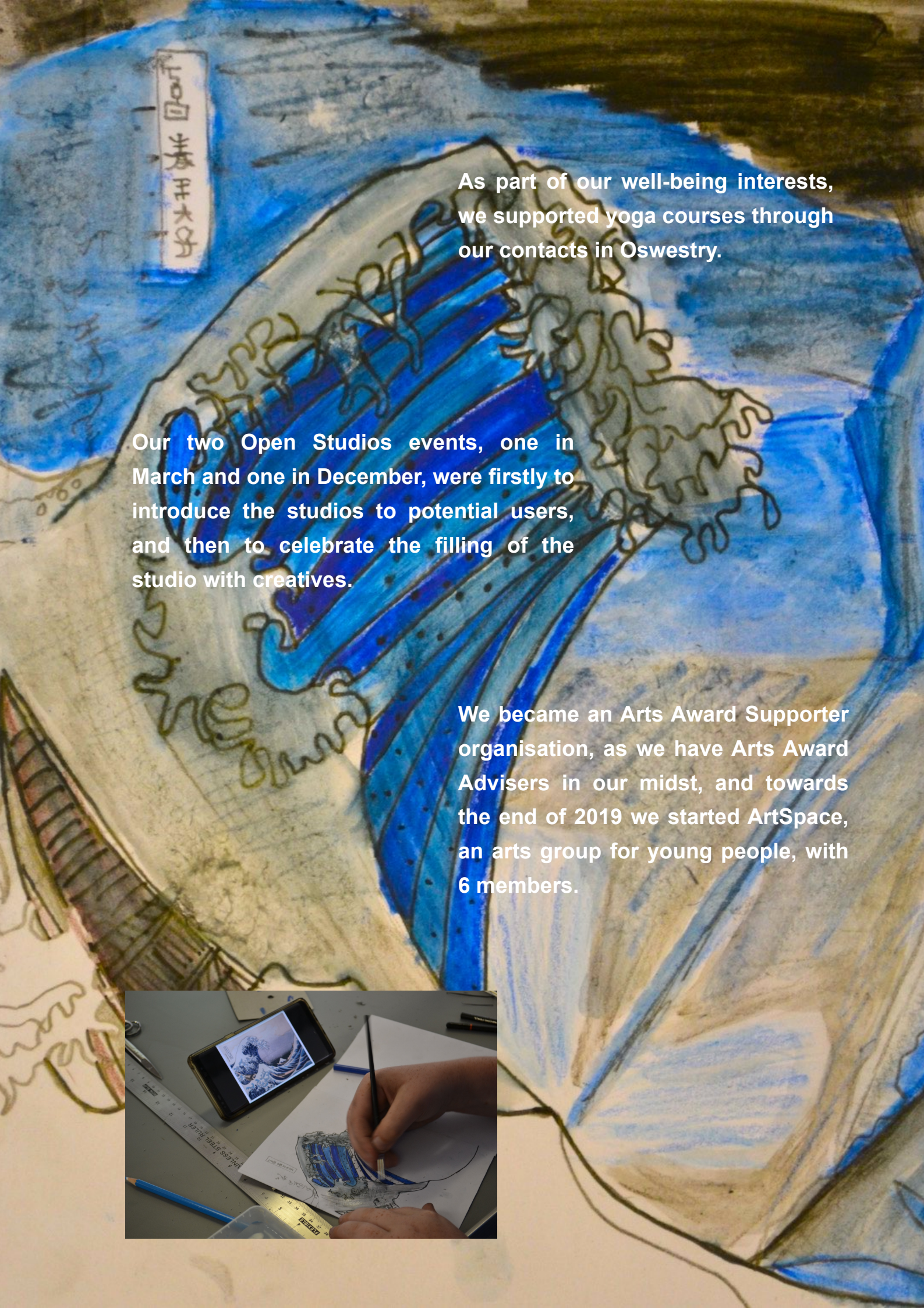


In late 2018 Emily Wilkinson and Jancis Vaughan teamed up to find artist studio space in Shrewsbury, and were fortunate to be offered a vacant office space in the Riverside Centre - fortunate, because with its central location, elevated position (think floods) and lots of natural light, the space was ideal. MakeSpace Arts & Well-Being CIC was formed in early 2019, a community interest company with the primary aim of providing affordable studio space to local artists. Raven Studios, named after the Norse ravens Thought and Memory, soon became home to 9 creatives, whose practices covered painting, architecture, printmaking, illustration, music and iconography.



In addition to this, the studio was able to provide 8 weeks of guest artist space hire, 41 days of workshop space hire, including a weekly drawing group, and 9 workshop days by resident artists.

We were the host for the Encounters 2019 art & poetry group meeting, supported a week of summer art school for 4 young people, and were listed as one of Shropshire's Cultural Providers.



As part of our well-being interests, we supported yoga courses through our contacts in Oswestry.

Our two Open Studios events, one in March and one in December, were firstly to introduce the studios to potential users, and then to celebrate the filling of the studio with creatives.

We became an Arts Award Supporter organisation, as we have Arts Award Advisers in our midst, and towards the end of 2019 we started ArtSpace, an arts group for young people, with 6 members.



At the beginning of 2020 we had plans to start outreach arts and wellbeing activities, to attract more young people to our bi-weekly ArtSpace group on Saturday, to run mini events, workshops and talks, to offer an Easter art school week and an Arts Award programme.



Then Covid-19 arrived.

# YEAR TWO



At the end of our second year we were home to 7 permanent resident artists, having said farewell to Hannah Hull in September and Emily Wilkinson in October 2020. James Smith replaced Emily as director.

We had a short term resident, Daisy Pooley-Tolkien, for the last 5 months of year 2 - she was a recent graduate who we were able to support with a discounted studio space and a window illustration commission.

## Workshops

Covid restrictions meant workshops and hosted events were unable to take place at the studio. This was therefore the end for our fledgling Saturday morning ArtSpace sessions and our planned Easter and Summer art schools.

However, funding was awarded by Shropshire Council to commission 6 downloadable Art Plans for the website from Sam Pooley-Stride. These were downloaded during the summer holidays, and again in the autumn with an additional 6 plans added to coincide with half term. The Art Plans remain on our website to access for free.

Another casualty to Covid restrictions was our weekly studio-based drawing group led by Jancis Vaughan, but this was reformed online, on Zoom, as Social Studios, a place for isolated artists to make work in the comfort of their own home and in the company of others. As a result attendance to the group increased from 3 to 6, including members from outside Shrewsbury, and the sessions continue in online form despite the easing of restrictions. A promotional film was made for the website and Instagram.

# Bursaries and Commissions

In the summer of 2020 we were amazingly fortunate to be awarded a business Covid grant from Shropshire Council, which we decided to use for a number of small bursaries and commissions.

We offered 6 bursaries of £250 to local artists to support them with various projects, which were the following:

*Andrew Howe* - towards the printing of a booklet, 'Frankwell In View', sold in aid of the Shrewsbury Food Hub.

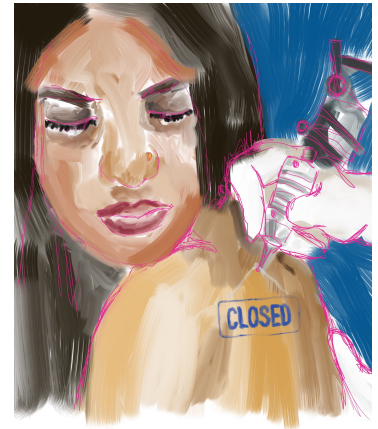
*Martina Risaliti* - for the development of illustrations for a book about early motherhood.

*Kathryn Marshall* - for the writing of a poetry pamphlet about a suicide in the family.

*Jamila Walker* - for the development of digital artworks on the theme of guilt in Covid times.

*Megan Elliot and Emily Edwards* - for the production of scaef, an art zine about people's experience of the landscape.

*Zoe Needle* - for the development of new printworks.



Given the impact of Covid on artists' livelihoods, all resident studio artists were also given a £500 bursary from the Covid grant, which was used variously for courses, the purchase of materials and equipment, and mentoring sessions. The funding also enabled other projects. With a busy road running past the front of the studio we were keen to advertise our presence and provide interesting and positive visual art for a public unable to go to indoor galleries.



In partnership with the Shropshire Cycle Hub, we built 8 display boards to provide an exhibition display area using their road facing windows, and then commissioned Julie Harrison to create an installation for the exhibition space. The installation of this was delayed due to the second lockdown, but was put in place in the spring.



We were lucky to have two giant ravens painted on the building walls by Matt Sewell, a well-known local artist and bird illustrator, which has got us noticed!

We commissioned Daisy Pooley-Tolkien to make a series of illustrative window vinyls celebrating Shropshire tales and legends, which also has an accompanying booklet.



# YEAR THREE



The two painted ravens on the studio walls gave us all a great lift in difficult times, and hopefully did the same for the public. We then undertook a marketing campaign for 6 months which has raised our profile, filled all our studio spaces, thereby stabilising our income and putting us in a healthy position to continue contributing to and supporting our local art scene.

## Current projects

### Space hire

Towards the end of year 3 we have 11 studio spaces occupied, some more permanently than others. We are also providing a base for Participate Contemporary Art, which has now moved out of the Riverside Centre, thus enabling us to retain connections and collaboration possibilities with other groups of artists in the area.

We have maintained a space throughout for short term hire, both to enable creatives with the need for project space, and to keep our studio community lively with the regular introduction of new people.

As we are now focussed on providing studio space, bursaries/commissions and art community support, and Covid remains an issue, studio-based public activities are few. However, Raven Studios took part in a new Arts Trail event in Shrewsbury in June 2021, involving an Open Studios day with an exhibition around the studio of resident and visiting artists' work, which we hope will be repeated. Some studio members also donated work to an art auction fundraiser for local charity Village Water, which raised over £4,000.

### Social Studios

This group continues online, albeit with reduced numbers, possibly due to general financial concerns (energy prices, tax rises, etc).

### Art Plans

We continue to promote these free downloadable art activities to coincide with half terms and holidays.





## The Window Gallery

Emma Williams was commissioned to paint a bold, colourful, cycle themed mural on the Shropshire Cycle Hub windows, next to our exhibition windows.

Amy Smith was commissioned to install a summery bike related display in our exhibition windows, which was also suitably bold and colourful.

We have now advertised the space as free for artists who wish to display their work, with a small commission for the studio on any resulting sales.

Work by resident artists has been followed by an exhibition by a local painter, Damien Barton.

We also have plans for two further commissions, a winter and a summer, and are advertising locally.

## Enabler Bursaries

The second round of small bursaries has been advertised, and the first two awarded:

*Joseph Schneider* - for the Shrewsbury section of a public drawing project, to be based on the area around Raven Studios.

*Lewis Davies and Saffron Russell* - for the publication of a poetry pamphlet with illustrations.

## Art Scene Shropshire

We are very aware of the difficulties, in a large rural county, of networking and communicating with fellow artists. With local Council services stretched,

we are collaborating with Participate to commission Clare Roberts ([www.pinkmash.co.uk](http://www.pinkmash.co.uk)) to create a digital map of the visual arts in Shropshire.

This will enable the general public as well as artists to find out what Shropshire has to offer, and aims to be the go-to place online for those looking for visual art.

The project is due to be completed at the end of November, from which point the map can be distributed and new additions made accordingly.

# THE FUTURE



Our future is close, in that we have never expected to be able to inhabit our space for very long, but neither is there a definite end date. Either way, we will be looking for a new home, though finding another one that has the central location and the large amounts of natural light that we have been enjoying here will be difficult.

We may have to exist in another format, perhaps one without a geographical location, but all those who have used our space have appreciated the opportunity to work alongside others, the connections they have been able to make, and the inspirational creativity they have been a part of.

Jancis Vaughan & James Smith  
Directors

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WORKSHOP SPACE

