



ART WORK

Setting up an art gallery may draw budding entrepreneurs but to succeed you need to take in the wider picture. **Sue Elliott** reports from a Cambridge gallery marking a major achievement during 2011.

There must be an art to selling art. Listen to the creative sector or study the statistics* and it soon becomes clear that few make it past the first three years of trading.

So as Lynne Strover launches her 21st anniversary season of exhibitions it's clear she has earned her place as one of the leading UK provincial gallery owners. Her passion for British contemporary art is even stronger today than it was when her first show opened in Fen Ditton in 1990.

"It has always been contemporary work for me. I believe in supporting living artists. It may be more stressful – not being sure how new work might be received is like going into the unknown - but it is exciting," said Lynne.

Watching her put the finishing touches to her latest show gives an insight into the way her work makes her feel.

"I am not always quite sure how, but art adds to our lives in a way that nothing else can."

businessfeature

"Hanging a show is both creative and exhausting. I have always had a very strong instinct about the way things look, an atheistic drive. I know when it looks right and I am never happy till it does.

"It is a real privilege handling these fantastic works of art and making friends, good friends, in the art world. My job has given me entry into a world that I never knew existed when I was younger."

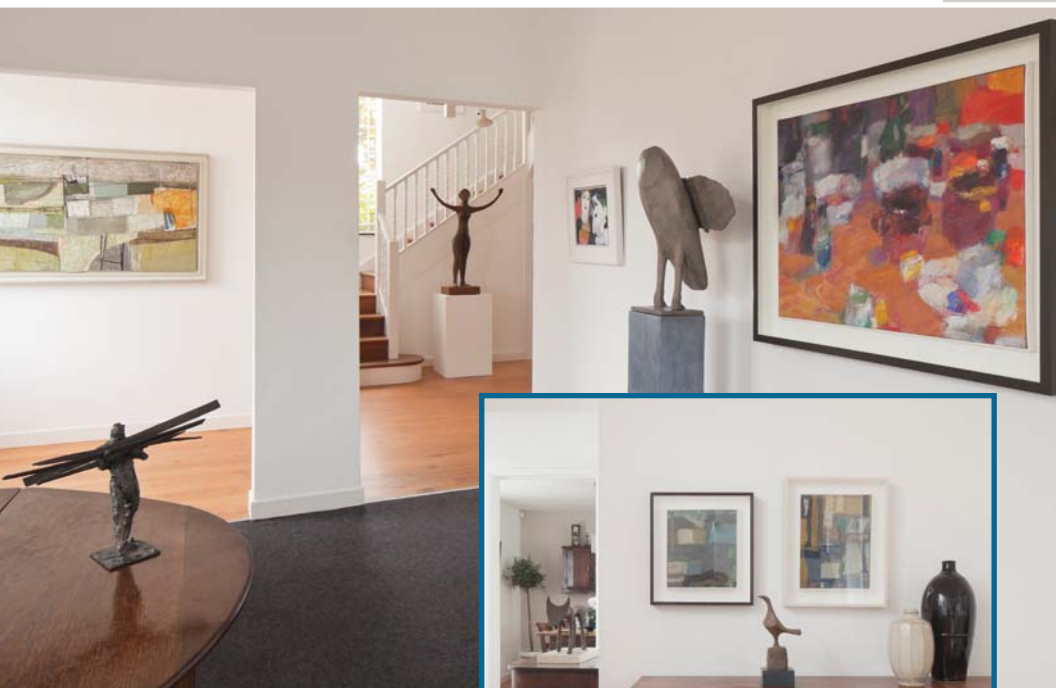
Getting to know talented East Anglian artists such as potter/painter Robin Welch led to shows at her gallery with work by sculptor Laurence Edwards and painter Maggi Hambling. Another turning point came for Lynne when the Tate opened its gallery in St Ives, Cornwall – the long-time home of British contemporary art. She went to have a look and through Robin Welch she met a new circle of artists.

She came back to Cambridge energised with new ideas and works by artists including Breon O'Casey, Kurt Jackson, and Rose Hilton.

"I have noticed that what happens with me is when the going gets tough...I get going."

Just how she arrived at this point is rather creative in itself. Leaving a good co-ed grammar school in her native Lancashire at 18 with a string of qualifications all she really knew was that she didn't want a 9-5 job.

"It wasn't an expected route to this career. I actually failed my art O-level and never went to art exhibitions until I left home."



Top: Entrance dressed with art from the gallery including bronze figures by Laurence Edwards.

Left: Art from the gallery, including bronze bird by Breon O'Casey and pots by Jim Malone.

Main picture: Bronze figure by Breon O'Casey.

Opposite page: Works by Maggi Hambling, Henrietta Dubrey and bronze bird by Breon O'Casey.





But what she did have was a strong northern work ethic – her dad ran his own engineering firm and her parents encouraged her to go to teacher training college. Lynne was good at landing jobs, and never afraid of the idea of working for herself. “It was what the family did,” she said.

Jobs that held her interest were another matter. She tried teacher training, nursing (qualifying as a State Registered nurse) and cooking, which eventually took her from one side of the UK to the other.

“It was the 1970s, I loved the cooking after all that is very creative and I ended up at Cranks restaurant in London when vegetarianism was almost like a new religion.”

Tiring of city life she began working for the Youth Hostel Association as a warden/cook and moved to Saffron Walden. While working there she met the man she married and helped him with his antique business, which was then based in Cambridge.

She was 40, the mum of two young sons and newly divorced, when she had to find a new way of earning a living. Her main business asset was part of her home, a former Victorian school building which had a space suitable for a gallery – or a restaurant. The gallery won, influenced by the style of Kettle’s Yard gallery, in Cambridge.

“It was out with the rag-rolled décor and antiques, I felt more comfortable and inspired by the white walls and clean lines of Kettle’s Yard after a friend suggested a visit one day.

"I launched around 1989-90, a recession then too and perhaps a dangerous time to start your own business. For the first few years it was just hard work. There was a lot to learn. But what began as a means to an end has become my way of life – an end in itself."

She puts down some of her success to making a real connection with people who want to buy art. "Sometimes they know what they want while others need to build up more confidence before spending what could be a substantial amount. I never tire of the buzz people get from buying a piece of art."

"Art is worth the investment for what it adds to our life, whether you buy it for your home or where you work. I don't mind giving advice about whether a piece is right for a space, these are important purchases so it is relevant."

In February she took part in the 20/21 International Art Fair at the RCA in Kensington and has five major shows this year to celebrate the wealth of talent she represents in this part of the UK, including iconic blackened oak sculptural benches by Jim Partridge now in public collections around the world including the V&A in London and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; hand dyed Navaho-style rugs by Stella Benjamin who was shortlisted for the Jerwood Prize; paintings and sculpture by Breon O'Casey, who once worked as an assistant to Dame Barbara Hepworth.

"We owe it to artists to support and encourage their work, and they have to eat. It's a big responsibility and an important aspect of my job."

"I believe art is what makes the world go round and it's why I can't ever see myself not working."

Lynne Stover Gallery hosts Ann Armitage's first one-man show of landscapes and still life in May and is profiling work this year from new artist Rosemary Vanns.

The gallery is at 23 High Street, Fen Ditton, Cambridge, CB5 8ST or visit www.stovergallery.co.uk An expanded art consultancy service for corporate or home appointments is now available 01223 295264.

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(*Sources: Creative firms had an average survival rate of three years, The Creative Economy Programme, National Campaign for the Arts 2007; Seventy-five per cent of all new businesses fail within the first three years, Dun and Bradstreet)



Lynne Stover in her gallery at Fen Ditton