

How do you operate as a group?

⟨...⟩ Gaada was established in 2018 and is constituted as a Community Interest Company ... it is based in Burra Isle, Shetland (pop. 23,000) ... from our workshop we run an ambitious visual arts programme which includes exhibitions, printmaking workshops, creating editions, and developing local resources ... as a CIC we can grow and add people in..... the executive directors are me and Daniel, we have a background in printmaking ... and then we also have three non executive directors ... in addition, we have a voluntary advisory board ... folk who we can call on when we need help or advice ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ We apply for funding every year through the Open Fund, and we introduced paid staff with this support in June 2021 ... we are trying to become a regularly funded organisation to reduce the stress of continually writing funding applications ... we're both dyslexic, so it can be hard ... we also receive funds from Shetland Charitable Trust and earn income from workshops and creative projects ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ We don't really see ourselves as a collective, although we are a type of collective ... we collaborate in different ways, not necessarily all together all the time ... so it's kind of messy ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ SO:AR are a relatively new collective ... all from different art forms, based on the Isle of Jura, Inner Hebrides (pop. 200) ... we came together as a voluntary group in 2021 ... we are not officially constituted, although we have a business bank account and received grant funding from CHARTS in 2021 ... we approach it as self employed artists and use the collaboration as a sort of portfolio building project ... we support each other as individual artists ... at the moment, we're not providing a regular programme ⟨...⟩

How do you build communities around art in rural areas?

⟨...⟩ Gaada means gaps ... there are so many gaps in the art world on Shetland, but I think there is everywhere, from an artist who has just left art school up to a professional ... they don't have the real support they need ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ We have so many projects and we do so many things ... which is very much a way of living on an island. It's very traditional to work this way ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ Our project, We Axe For What We Want was part of the Weemin's Wark programme ... it's a good example of community art that represents a community who maybe aren't always considered in contemporary Shetland culture ... it was focused on activism around equality for women who are not represented at the annual Up Helly Aa festival ... we wanted to represent all the activists ... the groups had been working for years under different names ... the project collected all their ideas into one print archive ... this is a form of creative brokerage, ... we are makers and we connect folk ... we support them ... there is a genuine outcome for the community. ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ We host regular one-to-one workshops every week, sometimes traveling to the people with mobility barriers – use of language is important, how we encourage participation ... just saying you're welcome here ... we try to support people who need that extra support and we do need to speak about disabilities. ... we share things on social media that maybe makes people feel part of things, we always try to make posts when folks are in here making work to say this person was here ... we try to celebrate them ... It's about open community ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ It's a privilege to use your connections and culture and dialect on the islands to bring people together and open up local opportunities ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ Embracing the messy and difficult within small communities and the porous borders between ages and interest groups ... SO:AR also provide platforms for newcomers to the island ... island life makes many demands of you and community bonds are important ... coming together is the real art of a community ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ Resourcefulness and material respect play a big part in this process for me, so I no longer see my making practice as existing separately from my people practice, they're co-dependent ... participatory art thrives in liminal space and on margins and borders and it demands that we think, feel, talk and share in new ways with other people ⟨...⟩

How do you build a creative career for yourself and other artists?

⟨...⟩ Sometimes it is important to us to create a development opportunity for an individual ... but how do you get experience if you live remotely? ... Gaada's school mural artist's commission offered a development opportunity for local artists with mural mentorship with Cobolt Collective ... this also gives us an insight into other technical processes as an organisation, this is like educating artists and educating communities ... How can we make partnerships, so that Shetland is a place that you can thrive and you don't have to leave to get experience? ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ Island artists are directly supported by Peer Group – a regular in person meet-up to share work in progress and online invited artists talks ... this is a way to share personal work from individual work spaces ... through a lens of curiosity ... I believe this is one of the healthiest way to develop as a practitioner and encourage an ongoing dialogue with creative people who meet you half way ... work with people who make you feel happy and good ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ Often artists that we're working with on a regular basis might need support ... we're able to use our technical support to create products or opportunities ... and then we go 50:50 on the product sales with artists ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ SO:AR have shared interests in community-based work and recognise that no one else was going to do it ... during lockdown we used a physical drop box in the landscape with push notifications, this 'slow media' was routed in sharing and care and the need for time to walk and think individually ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ SO:AR also collaborates with another island based organisation on Tiree called Screen Argyll ... this provides opportunities for remote communities to connect through film and support its venues to engage with a wider audience ... we use our village hall ... we recently curated weekend films based around island slowness, travel time and time travel, with supporting themed workshops ... we found that putting films on is a real gateway to conversations about wider creative ideas... it can be a more accessible art form ⟨...⟩

What are the additional barriers for you and your audience?

⟨...⟩ Smaller communities are really fatigued, because there's less people to do everything ... islanders balance many employment strands and roles ... there's a misconception that it's a slow pace of life ... I do need to remember I'm a creative practitioner and finding the boundaries between these roles is hard ... SO:AR has limited capacity and is very responsive and we can't see that changing due to the size of our community ... however, I have found that outside collaboration, particularly with other islands, really helps, as long as you've got someone on the ground that knows the core community ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ It's very challenging to find and establish boundaries ... professional work versus general doing your bit and what people see as professional and what people see as responsibility or civic duty ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ There is often a wider perception of deficit of talent and professionalism in rural communities and we battle with those urban ideas of career success ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ It's difficult to use attendance numbers as a measure of success because that just doesn't represent success where we are ... for us it can be the conversations that came out of the whole experience and connecting with different demographics ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ Shetland is geographically big, folk are spread out and transport links can be difficult ... we're the only workshop and there is no studio provider ... so when artists make the effort to come together they mean business ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ SO:AR don't have a building and there is a general lack of housing and business space on Jura ... this lack of basic infrastructure requires the need for creative problem solving and so we use the methodology of 'meeting people where they are'... the Lay-by Café provided gentle outside socialising during the pandemic and a meeting point for the community ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ Mainland visitors are welcomed and play an important part of building a peer network – however requests to connect sometimes don't offer any value to the community and can be extractive ... there are some outside assumptions that there are Shetland communities that Gaada can just tap into and it actually requires a lot of work ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ There are difficult people and blockers within all communities, but you are more visible in small communities and it can be harder to speak out ... we need external support at times ⟨...⟩

How do you maintain your own identity?

⟨...⟩ You need to know how people communicate ... we sometimes use Deep Mapping to unlock the subtle and nuanced differences to help us get to know the communication channels and layers of a place; this leads to very direct approaches via phone calls, knocking on doors and using the local newsletter ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ It's a sensitive and difficult thing to navigate sometimes, it's about how you remain open and accessible ⟨...⟩

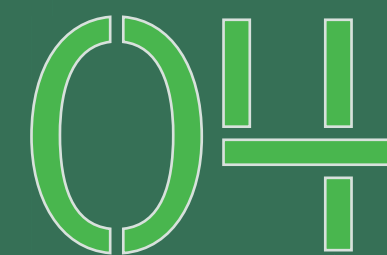
⟨...⟩ We said that initially Gaada was just projects and we were everywhere ... but in this island location the building is important – folk can better understand your activity ... I think it does bring credibility, I think it's easier for folk to understand what we are ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ I think being homesick is really good for you ... I realised that actually I really missed my culture, my Shetland culture ... I missed storytelling and being part of something ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ Rural locations can be the site for very complex dynamic interventions... we need to relook at how we filter, ... understand what's important ... a location is simply space until we engage with it and give it some social context ⟨...⟩

⟨...⟩ Keeping networks open is really important. I seek it out all the time ... you need to keep connected and aware of the national group discussions – you can be an islander anywhere you are, but you're a valuable part of any conversation here ⟨...⟩

ONE SHARED OWNER



ARTISTS TALKING ABOUT CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

This is one of six posters. Each poster captures a number of questions that arose from a series of artist conversations that focused on the running of artist-led projects.

The posters are part of a larger research, survey and mapping project designed to create a stronger understanding and greater visibility of the range and uniqueness of collective artist-led practice across Scotland.

Alongside the Scottish Artists Union Learning Programme this conversation about connecting communities was led by Amy Gear (Gaada, Shetland) and Amy Dunnachie (SO:AR, Isle of Jura) who explored strategies for broader community work and supporting an artists' community within the specific context of rural island life.

Amy and Amy discussed how they had both moved away to study and then returned home with a changed perspective of their communities; questioning the competition and commercial judgement of the art sector they were emerging into and missing the collaboration, storytelling and culture of home.

We hope that these focused thoughts will act as a point of self reflection for individual artists, or as a catalyst for future artist groups to openly share and build their own ideas.



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL



REGIONS	Artist-Led Organisations
Aberdeen & NE	19
Aberdeen City	13
Aberdeenshire	4
Moray	2
Highland & Islands	48
Argyle & Bute	7
Western Isles/Nà h-Eileanan Siar	14
Highland	18
Orkney	6
Shetland	3
Tayside, Central & Fife	48
Angus	2
Dundee City	12
Falkirk	4
Fife	22
Perth and Kinross	7
Stirling	1
Edinburgh & Lothians	44
City of Edinburgh	37
East Lothian	3
Midlothian	1
West Lothian	3
Glasgow & Strathclyde	69
Glasgow City	57
North Ayrshire	1
South Ayrshire	6
Renfrewshire	4
West Dunbartonshire	1
Scotland South	20
Dumfries and Galloway	14
Scottish Borders	6
	248

Approximate regional numbers identified in 2021/22 during
Creative Scotland & Scottish Artists Union research

ARTIST-LED ORGANISARIONS IN SCOTLAND

