



+THREE COUNTIES OPEN ART

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES 2026

Three Counties Open Art

An open-call visual arts exhibition for artists connected to Staffordshire, Cheshire or Shropshire.

Free to enter

- 3 Accessibility
- 4 Welcome
- 5 Key Dates
- 6 Eligibility
- 7 Submission Guidelines
- 8/9 Prizes
- 10 FAQs
- 11 T&Cs
- 12 Photographing your artwork



Accessibility

Please let us know if you have any access needs in submitting your work, need an alternative process or anything else we can do to make the process easier.

These guidelines are available in PDF and Word format. Please let us know if you need an alternative format.

If you require further support with the digital submission, please email open.art@keele.ac.uk

You can also call [+44 1782 734340](tel:+441782734340) and we will be happy to support you in alternative ways of submitting. If we do not answer please leave a message and we will respond within 5 working days.



Welcome

Welcome! Thank you for taking the time to submit your work for **Three Counties Open Art 2026**, which marks our **30th Anniversary year**. We can't wait to see your entries.

We're delighted to share that this year's exhibition returns to the beautiful Fenton Town Hall. Entry to the exhibition remains **free**, as we are committed to removing barriers for artists and supporting an inclusive art community for people of all backgrounds, regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or socio economic background.

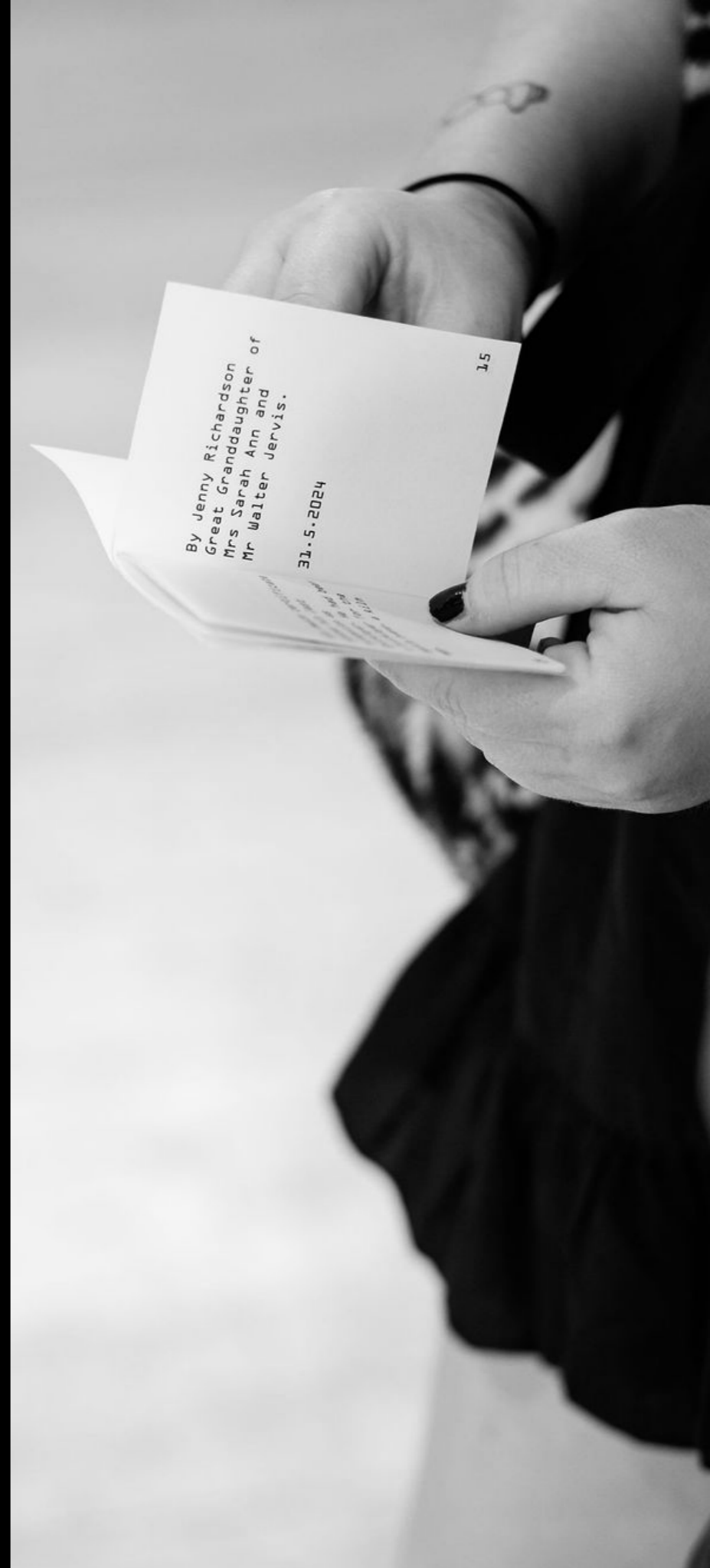
Please contact us at:
open.art@keele.ac.uk

This year, our categories include **2D work, 3D work, Contemporary Art Practice - Live Performance and Installation**.

The exhibition is open, meaning there is no set theme. You are invited to submit the work you most want to be seen, experienced and enjoyed by our visitors.

We are accepting **digital submissions only** (a photograph of the work plus a completed submission form), with physical works delivered only if selected for the exhibition. If you need an alternative submission method, in person, by phone, or another format, please let us know and we will accommodate; this will not affect how your work is judged.

Good luck with your submissions. Three Counties Open is proudly presented by ArtsKeele at Keele University in partnership with **ACAVA Spode Works, Appetite, ArtsKeele, Barewall Gallery, PiCL and Restoke**.



Key dates

Online Submission Open

9am Monday 13 April

Online Submission Close

11:59pm Monday 25 May

Notification of Decision

29 June – 1st July

Delivery of Artwork

Fenton Town Hall

Saturday 1 August, 11am–3pm

Exhibition Launch Day

Saturday 8 August, 11am–3pm

Exhibition Runs

8–29 August, open Tuesday–
Saturday, 11am–3pm

Awards Evening

Saturday 22 August, 6pm

Collection of work post show

Wednesday 2 September



Eligibility

You must be aged 16 and over to enter.

You must be connected to one of the 3 counties (Staffordshire, Cheshire or Shropshire). We will accept entries from people who have moved away from the area but were born and/or subsequently lived, studied, trained or have another connection to one of the three counties as detailed above.

We will accept applications from collectives, and will count this as 1 application, therefore the collective must choose one artwork that the collective most want to show.

Your work must be your own, original art work. We will accept printed editions, you must state if your work is an edition in the submission form.

Please only submit work created within the last 2 years.

Please do not submit work previously shown or submitted at the Three Counties Open Art show.

We want to celebrate art in all its forms, and at all levels. You do not need a qualification, formal training or to have graduated recently from a course. All we ask for is passion and dedication to art. From amateur artist to career artists, we want to see it all.



LEO PERKIN
See Through 2025
Photograph, tulle fabric and thread
Leo considers the body, its expectations and limits.
The connection between the body and the body's form. The

Submission guidelines

Submission opens at 09:00am 13 April and closes on 23:59pm on 25 May 2026.

Number of entries

We are limiting entries to 1 artwork per person or collective, a single piece of work can be made up of more than one part for example a diptych, triptych or series of multiple elements.

If you are applying as a Collective, in the submission form please write the name of the collective in the *First Name* box, and write *Collective* in the surname box.

Categories

- 2D Work (i.e. drawing, painting, printmaking, textiles, photography etc)
- 3D work (i.e. sculpture)
- Contemporary Art Practice - Live/ Performance Art*
- Installation

* For Contemporary Art Practice Please let us know how you imagine your work to be presented during the Open Art Show, whether this be a live sharing on a given date, and if there will be any lasting work on-site during the show.

Scale of work

For 3D Work Please let us know the weight (in kg - max 25kg and height-width-depth dimensions of the work below (question 10). If your work is larger than 1.5m x 1.5m it will be considered an Installation. Please note, that due to space restrictions only a small number of installations will be accepted.

2D Works should not be larger than 2 metres along the longest dimension.

Photography of work

A digital camera or smart-phone will take sufficient photos of your artwork. Please note, you will not be judged on quality of the photograph. A clear, light, uncluttered image will help us in the judging process.

See our separate guide for more info. You must include the frame that your work will be displayed in, if your piece is framed.

Physical work

If your work is selected for the Three Counties Open, it must be delivered ready to be exhibited. If it is framed/ canvas work we require you to add mirror plates.

If your work is unframed please let us know how it should be fixed in the space.

Sending your digital submission

You will enter your artwork by completing a two-part process:

1. Completing the digital entry form
<https://forms.office.com/e/iK7b6cEakL>
2. Send an image of your submission to:
open.art@keele.ac.uk

Image files must be clearly labelled with the artist name and title of entry in the following format:

YourFirstname-Surname_title-of-artwork

All image files must a maximum of 5MB.

Prizes

Arthur Berry Prize Sponsored by New Vic Theatre Archive Fund

£500

This award reflects on the legacy of Arthur Berry, whose work has left an indelible mark on the art world and the cultural heritage of Stoke-on-Trent. This award celebrates artistic excellence.

Three Counties Open Art Prize 2026 Sponsored by Keele University

£400

The Three Counties Open Art Prize 2026 celebrates exceptional artistic talent across all disciplines. Open to artists from Staffordshire, Cheshire, and Shropshire. This prize is £400 plus the opportunity to exhibit work in a space supported by ArtsKeele.

Sustainability Prize Sponsored by North Staffordshire Friends Of The Earth

£75

North Staffs Friends of the Earth is delighted to present the Sustainability Award 2026. This award recognises artists who integrate sustainability into their practice or whose work thoughtfully explores sustainability in all its forms. The award supports artists who creatively address environmental issues, explore sustainable practice, and inspire positive change.

The Art Studio Prize Sponsored by The Art Studio, Newcastle-Under-Lyme.

£75 voucher

The Art Studio Prize will recognise outstanding achievement in two-dimensional art practice.

Best Newcomer Award

£100

Eligibility: Artists who have not exhibited work at the Three Counties Open Art Exhibition previously.

Burslem School of Art Trust Award

£100

The Burslem School of Art Trust is proud to present a special award in recognition of an artist who specialises in three-dimensional art practice. This award celebrates artists who have demonstrated exceptional skill, creativity, and innovation in their work, contributing significantly to the field of 3D art.

Appetite's Audience Choice Award

£250

A shortlist of artists selected by the Appetite Supper Club will be up for the Audience Choice Award, with the winner selected by public vote from visitors to the exhibition during its run. Appetite is part of the Creative People and Places programme, initiated and funded by Arts Council England.

ACAVA Residency Prize

In-residence studio space at ACAA, Spode Works

Open Studio residency at ACAA Spode Works, plus a public engagement outcome for one week at the end of the residency.

Newcastle-under-Lyme BID Award

£200

Where We've Been, Where We Are, and Where We're Going.

Newcastle-under-Lyme BID continues its valued support of the Three Counties Open Art Exhibition with this year's award theme, 'Where We've Been, Where We Are, and Where We're Going.' Inspired by the town-centre focus for 2026, the theme is intentionally broad and invites artists to explore ideas of journey, identity, transition and the passage of time.

This category celebrates artworks that reflect on past, present or future narratives be they personal, social, or entirely imagined. Interpretations may draw on real places or conceptual worlds, offering space for a wide range of creative voices and perspectives.

Urban Wilderness CiC

Photography Award 2026

The Urban Wilderness Photography Award offers a unique opportunity for photographers to hone their skills and gain valuable experience. It is designed to support emerging photographers in their artistic journey, offering them the tools and opportunities to further develop their practice.

Young Artist Award

£100

Sponsored by PiCL (Partners in Creative Learning).

This award celebrates the exceptional work of a young person aged 21 and under.

George Mallalieu Emerging Artist Award (2026-2030)

£500

A new award for 2026! Created in tribute to George Mallalieu. George was a charismatic figure on the local arts scene, a highly respected artist, writer and academic in Staffordshire and

Judge of the Three Counties Open Art Exhibition in 1997 during its early years. This award celebrates George's commitment to nurturing emerging talent across the three counties.

The George Mallalieu Emerging Artist Award supports early career artists who live, work, or have strong connections to the Three Counties region.

For this award, an early career artist is someone still developing their professional practice. This may include artists who have practised for around 10 years or fewer; are building their portfolio and public profile; have begun exhibiting or undertaking commissions but are still establishing their career; are not yet widely recognised or commercially established.

Applicants must be based in, from, or connected to Staffordshire, Cheshire or Shropshire. Connections may include: having lived or worked in the region; producing work or projects linked to the area; maintaining creative or professional ties with local arts communities.

Eligible artists should state:

- their connection to one or more of the Three Counties
- brief details about their artistic background or early career development
- what winning the award would mean to them

This award continues George Mallalieu's legacy by supporting early career artists who reflect the creativity and cultural richness of the Three Counties.



FAQs

How many entries can I submit?

One entry per person or per collective. A diptych/triptych/series of works counts as one work. You can only submit once. Duplicate or multiple submission will not be accepted.

Why are you not accepting physical submissions?

After successful submissions of digital entries of the past 5 years, we found this to be a more efficient way of sorting entries. If you're unable to enter digitally or would like extra support, we'd be more than happy to help you. Please call: **01782 734730** and leave a message. Or send us a email at: **open.art@keele.ac.uk**

What if my work doesn't fit into a category?

We have broadened the categories this year so that we are able to cover a wide range of art forms, if you're unsure, select the one that most resonates with your work.

What if I miss the entry deadline?

No late entries will be accepted. Please prepare your work in enough time. Submissions close on midnight (23:59pm) on 25 May.

What happens if my work is selected?

We will be in contact with you to let you know the next steps and delivery/collection dates for the exhibition.

Can I change my entry once I've submitted?

No - we will not accept changes to an entry after submission, so please think carefully about what you're submitting.

Why wasn't my work selected?

We receive a high number of entries and have a limited space to display the work, and so are not able to show the work of everyone who enters. We are not able to give individual feedback due to the number of entries we receive.

Please read this guide carefully. If we haven't answered your question here or in the guide, please contact us at **open.art@keele.ac.uk**, but please note we will take 5-7 working days to respond to any queries.



T&Cs

By entering the Three Counties Open 2026 you are deemed to have read and accepted all aspects of the rules described on this page.

1. Artists must be aged 16+
2. The Three Counties Open is open to all artists connected to Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire.
3. All work submitted must be solely produced by the artist(s) applying for the show.
4. You agree to your work being used in marketing and online digital platforms.
5. Work must have been completed in the last 2 years.
6. 2D Works should not be larger than 2 metres along the longest dimension.
7. More than two images of the artwork should be supplied where it is necessary to show 3-D work properly.
8. 3D Work weight max 25kg. If your 3D work is larger than 1.5m x 1.5m it will be considered an Installation.
9. Installations is 3D work larger than 1.5m x 1.5m.
10. Entrants must ensure that they have the commercial rights if they are currently represented by a publisher so that there is no conflict of interests.
11. The Three Counties Open respects your rights and does not claim copyright for works you submit to the contest. You will retain full copyright in each entry.
12. Any works sold at the exhibitions will incur a 30% commission. It is the artist's choice if they wish their work to be on sale.
13. The Three Counties Open will not be responsible for any travel or personal expenses to the Three Counties Open exhibition.
14. The winners agree to permit external communication of the artwork, not limited to, but including: publicity; press; website; social media; and any printed or digital material.
15. The judges' decision is final.
16. Artwork submitted for exhibition must be available until the end of the show.
17. Selected work must be delivered ready to exhibit and in good condition. Work may be turned away otherwise.
18. Applicants are responsible for correctly pricing/sizing/describing their artwork. Changes will not be accepted.
19. The artist will be responsible for the delivery and collection of artworks for the exhibition, and also for insurance whilst in transit and for the duration that the artwork is with the Three Counties Open for exhibitions.
20. Although strict handling measures are adhered to in receiving and handling work, for the avoidance of doubt, The Three Counties Open Art can accept no liability whatsoever for any damage or loss to the Art Work whilst in transit or during the show (whilst in the care or being stored by the organisers). Artists who wish to do so should explore insuring their work.
21. You, or a nominated person must deliver your work on the date given. You cannot deliver an alternative piece of work than the one submitted.
22. The placement of your work is decided by a team of experts - our decision placement is final.
23. You must be able to collect your work yourself or a nominated person on the collection date.

Photographing Work

This guide has been created to help you photograph your artwork for submission. A clear image allows the selection panel to review your work accurately. You can take a suitable photograph using a standard digital camera or mobile phone.

All images must be saved as a JPEG or PNG under 5MB. Do not resize after cropping; simply save as a JPEG at quality level 10 (recommended).

Post processing – Crop images tightly so they show only the artwork, with no surrounding walls or props. Include the frame only if the work will be framed in the exhibition.

File name – Save your image using the format:

Firstname Surname_title of artwork

Use the same format as the subject line of your email. If you cannot rename the file on your phone, please still include the filename in the email subject line so we can match it to your online entry form.

Taking Photographs

Below are helpful links on how to take good photographs of artwork.

1. **Guidance from ArtUK** – If you cannot control camera settings, ensure good, even lighting and a straight on angle.

Light – Use flat, even natural light where possible. Avoid shadows from frames and glare from glass.

Camera settings – If adjustable: ISO below 200; aperture f5.6–f11; shutter speed faster than 1/125 to avoid shake. Use a tripod if possible and ensure accurate focus.

Angle – Photograph 2D work straight on. If it's on a wall, keep the camera level. If the work is on a table, stand directly over it or place it on the floor if needed.

1. **Clear mobile phone guide**
<https://www.thesussexcontemporary.co.uk/blog/taking-pictures-of-your-work-with-a-smartphone>
2. **Short YouTube overview (Saatchi Online):**
<https://youtu.be/Vpj28da03JQ>



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