

triparks

*a project of Aune Head Arts
with Somerset Art Week and Allenheads Contemporary Arts*

Rural communities are re-making and re-defining themselves in ways that challenge many fundamentals about life in the countryside. Traditional agriculture is under threat of extinction, while small specialist food producers thrive and take back the means of distributing their produce. This is a period of destruction and re-building that leaves many voices unheard and villages and communities feeling vulnerable and uncertain about their futures.

Art can rarely solve these issues, but it can highlight them. Six artists will spend several weeks in the parks from which they will develop a series of artworks reflecting some aspect(s) of the places and lives they encounter. Artists are chosen not only for the quality of their work but for their ability to work engagingly and sensitively with people and with communities. This project is unique in looking at three diverse rural places, defined by political boundaries. Each place is distinctive, and the project will open a window on the differences and similarities of working and living within a protected landscape.

Context and Background

Aune Head Arts is a not-for-profit rural arts organisation, established in 1997, making and commissioning contemporary arts projects about contemporary life on Dartmoor. The core of AHA's work lies in its relationship with the residents and communities of Dartmoor, its focus on the creation of new contemporary artworks, and on providing professional opportunities for artists across the UK.

SAW (Somerset Artweek Ltd) exists to promote the visual arts and create opportunities for visual artists and makers in Somerset through advocacy, promotion and development. Somerset Artweeks is a two-week visual arts festival which has been running every two years since 1994. In recent years it has also been developing residencies and other arts projects beyond the biennial event, amongst these have been a series of projects within Exmoor National Park.

Allenheads Contemporary Arts (ACA) provides opportunities for the development of new ideas and work. Their base at the Old Schoolhouse is used as a laboratory and meeting place for artists, scientists and curators wanting to collaborate on ambitious projects involving both international and regional elements. ACA aims to build up a varied interpretation of the environment through a wide ranging programme of research. Invariably the local community will make an essential contribution to a project, helping ensure that the programme is developed with a sensitive regard for all social, historical and natural elements.

All the organisations have extensive experience in developing and managing contemporary arts projects in every area of visual arts, from craft-based work, to high technology and digital projects. They are dedicated to creating and supporting artists' practice in and about rural locations.

The Project

Project Aims

- to explore and highlight, through six artist residencies, the differences and commonalities between three English National Parks: Dartmoor, Exmoor and Northumberland
- to create new contemporary artwork about the parks
- to document and disseminate the project outcomes through web-based programmes, publication, exhibition, seminar and presentations.

Project Objectives

- to provide through the residencies a rich experience in looking, feeling, making, and sharing for artists, park officers, individuals and communities within the parks, and visitors
- to create an opportunity to bring the three parks together to share aspirations and build new relationships
- to demonstrate, through the residencies and the exhibitions/documentation, ways in which the arts can contribute to the current and future aspirations of the National Parks, including such areas as sustainability, community networks and interpretation

The project has two main phases: the **residency** phase, and an **exhibition/touring** phase. The form, timing and scope of the latter will be determined by the former.

The Residencies

Three established artists working in any artform will be appointed to undertake a residency each, via a UK-wide call. They will be paired with three early career artists, recruited from each of the three park regions (i.e. the South West and the North East).

Each park will host one pair of artists (one established artist, and one early career artist), who would be resident in the park for 25 days. Each artist will then have a further 10 days studio time to develop and finish their work.

Each artist will make at least one major work that explores **people-place-time**, and which **provokes-relates-reveals**. A core aim is that this work **involve and engage** those who experience it (resident and visitor alike).

In recruiting the artists, a track record in creative interaction with people and places will be specifically looked for. The ability to work closely and sensitively with people and communities and where appropriate, to engage them in the creative process are key aspects of the residency brief and process.

The starting point for the artist is to gain an understanding of the social and economic topography of their park, and to engage with local residents and community groups. The artists will be supported by the host arts organisation or the National Park Authority to meet with community groups, key organisations and individuals within their district.

The process of each residency will vary, as the nature of each park varies, but broadly speaking the artists will be encouraged to:

- explore issues peculiar to each park and investigate particular issues that seem to be at the top of the emotional agenda (eg housing, agricultural pressures, transport, etc).
- explore the experiences and relationships the communities of each park have with their landscape, and the special protection afforded it
- explore specific areas of work within the parks through the opportunity to shadow a particular department (Archaeology, Rangers, Planning, Environment, Agriculture etc) or with a community specialist (eg parish lengthsmen, police officer, sheep breeder).

Training and Mentoring

- we expect that some mutual mentoring will take place between the established and early career artistic teams, who may or may not choose to develop work collaboratively
- training needs for individuals and the group as a whole will be addressed as they emerge throughout the project (this might be anything from local history sessions to IT skills) and training/mentoring will be provided in the most appropriate form
- three whole-team meetings will take place, one at the beginning of the project, one half way through and one towards the end. Two meetings will be hosted in the South West, and one in the North East. These meetings will provide opportunities for co-mentoring and to share work in progress.

Sharing Process

Part of the artists' brief is to develop creative ways to communicate with each other and with the different park communities throughout the residencies. This will create opportunities for

- the artists to share similarities and differences between the landscapes discovered and the ways these landscapes are inhabited by local people
- the artists to make contributions to one another's process and perhaps final artworks
- the artists to benefit from peer mentoring throughout the project
- the collation of documentation of process
- communities to continue to be engaged throughout the term of the project

Artists will be free to develop their own methods and means of communication. However, a project website will be set up, which can host blogs, e-mails, short videos and the like. A webspace of this type will place the creative process in the public domain and will provide the opportunity for others to contribute (whether that be the host organisations or individuals with whom the artists work).

Issues of data protection, and sensitivity to personal privacy will be addressed by the whole team in setting up the communication system, particularly with regard to web-based material.

Sustainability

Through AHA and SAW's experience of developing projects in communities, it is important to ensure that any artmaking project that finds its home within a community doesn't leave a huge hole when it leaves. The artists will be encouraged to develop work that is not only sensitive to the community, but which may continue to evolve over time. We anticipate that the project will create opportunities for communities to meet one another, with possibilities to continue relationships once the project term is complete.

A key aim of Triparks is to ensure that the three residencies are not just one off projects. The presentation phase of the project (through exhibition, seminar and general advocacy) aims to provide a long term legacy for the project, disseminating the practice widely to inspire others to develop their own projects in their own organisations and communities.

The use of public transport wherever possible will be a high priority during the project. Artists will be encouraged to consider sustainable transport as part of their modus operandi during their time in the parks. (eg Northumberland has a scheme where rural postal vans double as a local bus service).

The Exhibitions

A series of exhibitions will be developed from the project. Some may be local, site-specific, and time-limited. The primary exhibition however (see "Curator" below) will tour to a broad variety of arts and non-arts spaces within each of the parks, and potentially beyond. This touring exhibition will be designed in such a way that it can be re-configured for many different kinds of venues, from large art galleries to village halls to pubs and supermarkets. We plan to reach an actual audience of at least 75,000, as well as web and broadcast audiences.

We believe it is important to show work in a wide variety of venues, from rural village halls to urban art galleries. The work must reach, literally and metaphorically, a wide cross-section. We believe that contemporary art is often received better when it is encountered in places where it "should not be" than when it is placed within art-designated spaces. Art in a supermarket, for example, is far more transgressive and controversial than art in an art gallery. If the work itself engages and carries meaning, then its appearance in the general public domain is a cause for interest and engagement not for mistrust and abuse. Our previous experience has shown this to be true (AHA's "Focus on Farmers" exhibition was seen by an audience in excess of

50,000 across Devon and Somerset, and elicited some quite extraordinary feedback.)

Curator

An experienced curator will design the touring show, working closely with the artists from the middle of the making process, as well as with AHA and SAW.

Legacy

There are an increasing number of artists who not only celebrate and record our complex and rich variety of landscape, but who work closely with the people who live in these landscapes, and the issues which affect their everyday lives. The arts are increasingly being seen as of value in stimulating debate around rural cultures, and in providing a critical response as valid as any other to the difficulties facing rural people and rural economies. Triparks should be seen in this context.

A key legacy of the project is to aim to build structures that can be replicated elsewhere, in forms appropriate to their particular context. More importantly, the artwork itself should leave some kind of longterm trace. This may not be physical, but may instead be about shifting perceptions about rural living, about bringing people together, about salving the wounds arising from the current fractures in many rural communities. If the artwork arising from this project touches the lives of the people who view it or take part in it, then the project is a success; if the project raises questions that begin to be addressed, or brings new people together, or provides a possible model for future working, then it has a powerful legacy of which we will all feel proud.