

**A report to the Business Archives Council, April 2014.**



*Above: The McArthur Warehouse*

**Introduction**

Bristol Record Office and Spike Island Artspace Ltd. were delighted to be selected for the 2014 cataloguing grant of £2000 from the Business Archives Council for a collection related to the arts. Spike Island and Bristol Record Office are near-neighbours, both occupying former industrial buildings close to Bristol's harbourside area, and we were excited by the opportunity to collaborate on this project.

Today, Spike Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art and design within Bristol. Home to a large gallery, café and working spaces for artists, designers and creative businesses, Spike Island now presents a year-round programme of public exhibitions, talks and activities. The building also provides low-cost studio space for over 70 artists, a home for a broad range of creative businesses, facilities which support students and staff from the University of the West of England Fine Art degree programmes, and a network of over 90 Associate members.

At the root of Spike Island is 'Artspace', a pioneering artist-led co-operative established in the mid-1970s which sought out and administered affordable studio spaces for artists within disused warehouses adjacent to Bristol's docks. Throughout the two decades following its inception, Artspace would continue to expand and develop. Responding to the challenges of demand from artists and the insecurity of short-term lets, this period culminated in Artspace obtaining one of the first large grants (just under £1million) in 1996 from the newly formed National Lottery. The grant enabled Artspace to secure a permanent home within a former Brooke Bond tea packing factory, only a short walk from their previous home, the McArthur Warehouse situated behind the dry dock of Brunel's SS Great Britain.

Bristol Record Office already cares for the collections of some of the city's key arts institutions, including the contemporary arts centre Arnolfini, the historic archives of the Theatre Royal (home to Bristol Old Vic) and Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, and the records of St. Paul's Carnival, amongst others. It was very encouraged when Spike Island decided to deposit their archive of material; 41 'store-all' boxes broadly covering the first 25 years of the organisation. Artspace was one of a number of cultural institutions that had played an early, pivotal role in the re-purposing of the docks running through central Bristol and which had closed for commercial shipping in 1975. By seizing the opportunity to occupy disused harbourside buildings, they paved the way for commercial property developers from the 1980s onwards, able to promote their schemes on the back of these innovative cultural initiatives. Not only had Artspace had a huge impact on Bristol's artistic community, it had played a part in transforming Bristol's post-industrial heartland. The collection provides primary evidence demonstrating how Artspace worked both to support artists and to re-invigorate the landscape of Bristol's former docklands.

In 2016, Spike Island will celebrate 40 years since the establishment of their first artist studios and so the organisation was keen for the collection to be catalogued as soon as possible so that it might be used for anniversary preparations. Although the majority of the collection had been deposited at Bristol Record Office in May 2014, the Record Office was already committed to a full programme of work, and did not have the capacity to begin arranging and cataloguing such a large collection in-house for at least the next eighteen months. The opportunity of the grant from the Business Archives Council to enable the collection to be catalogued so that it might be researched and used to inform Spike Island's programme of anniversary events, was therefore very welcome!



Above:(from left to right): project archivist Ellie Finch, artist Emma Stibbon, volunteer and founder Artspace member Novvy Allan, Director of Spike Island Helen Legg, Bristol Record Office archivist Malcolm Boyns, Mike Anson Chair of the Business Archives Council

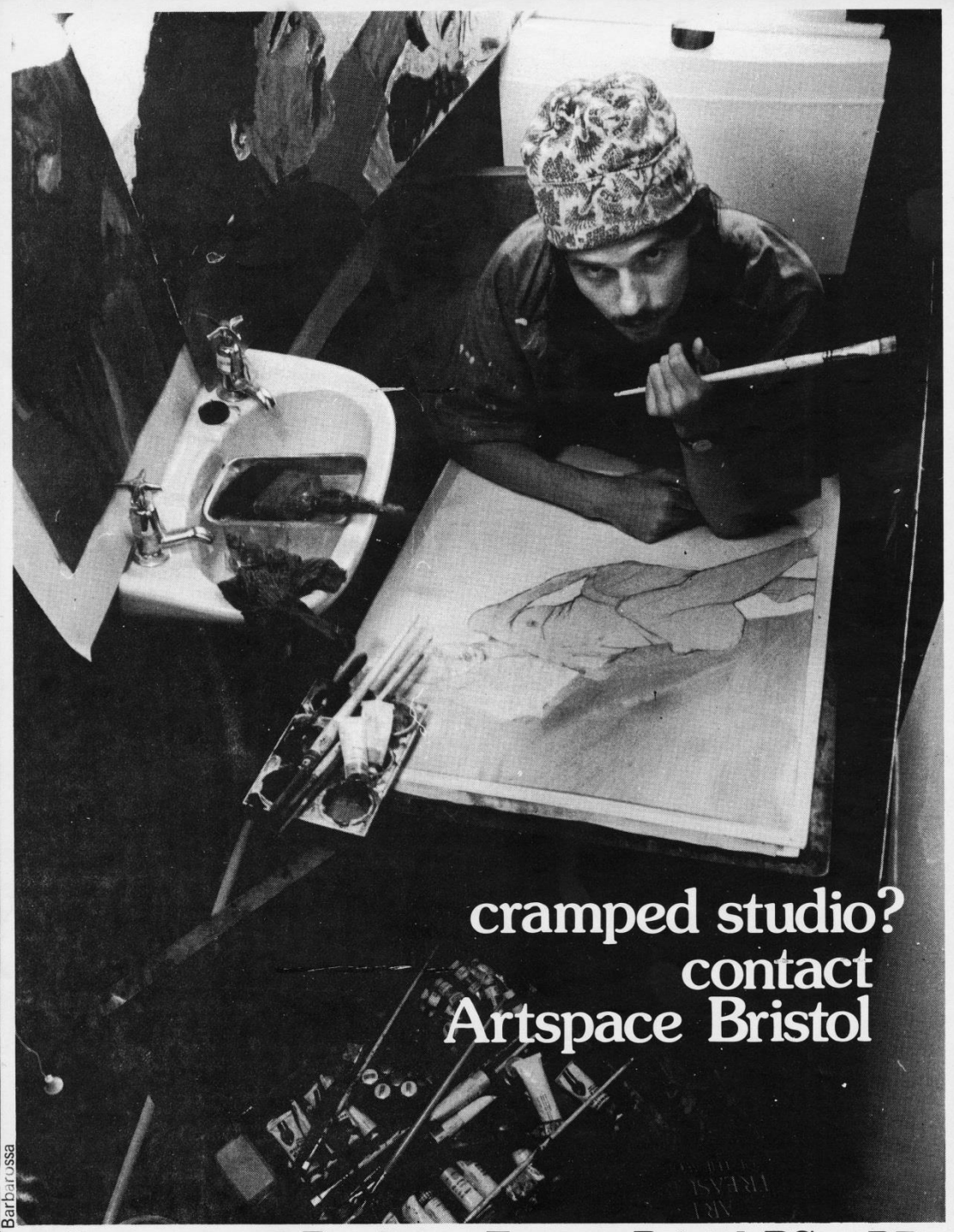
### **Recruitment and Volunteers**

The project partners were fortunate in being able to recruit Ellie Finch as the project archivist. Ellie is a highly experienced archivist who currently works for a private family estate in South Wales. Her academic background is in art history and museum studies, and one of her first jobs having qualified as an archivist from University College, Dublin was with The Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, where she worked cataloguing archives relating to twentieth century artists. Ellie has lived in Bristol since 2007, and was a Spike Island Associate member in 2011 and 2012. During this time she was involved as a volunteer in the creation of a draft box list for the collection (included with the first deposit to Bristol Record Office in 2014), and so has been able to bring her first-hand experience of the organisation, as well as her knowledge and interest in contemporary art practice to the project.

As Ellie works full-time, the original project plan submitted as part of the application was adjusted in order that Ellie was able to work across evenings, weekends and holidays at Bristol Record Office, over a period of four months between November 2014 and March 2015.

Working alongside Ellie throughout the project have been two amazing volunteers, artists Novvy and Bruce Allan, part of the original group of Artspace artists from the 1970s. Novvy, in particular, contributed many hours to the project, repackaging and identifying items, particularly around the various classes of records grouped under 'Artistic Programme'. And as one of the founding group of Artspace artists, Bruce has been able to identify, clarify and provide contextual information

regarding several of the early documents, when it has not been immediately clear. Bristol Record Office and Spike Island are extremely grateful for their contribution.



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### **Appraising, arranging and cataloguing the Collection**

Winning the award prompted three additional deposits, which have been accessioned into the collection. The first of these came from Spike Island, who deposited a further 15 'store-all' boxes in November, and was followed by Novvy and Bruce Allan, who, as founder members of the co-operative, donated two further collections of Artspace records, including early minute books, photographs taken as parts of the McArthur Warehouse began to be converted to artist studios, and posters advertising Artspace opportunities and events.

Whilst undoubtedly this was great for the collection as a whole, as it is now much more comprehensive and, in particular, contains many more records relating to the early years, it presented us with more material than first envisaged – over a third again. This was not ideal in terms of Ellie being able to work through the collection within the limited timeframe. We always knew that, even having a head-start with the box list, it was an ambitious target to try to work through the first deposit within the four week period to ISAD(G) file level, and that it was going to be likely that one of the Record Office archivists would need to spend a few days finishing entering cataloguing information into the collection database at the end of Ellie's time.

Following discussion between Ellie and Bristol Record Office archivists, it was decided that, in order to ensure the best cataloguing arrangement for the collection, consideration would have to be given to the whole of the records now, rather than leaving the additional deposits untouched, even though this might add up to a fortnight of additional work to the project. The risk of not doing this work could result in a compromised catalogue structure that might not readily accommodate the additional records, when listing them at a later date. It was agreed that Ellie would work on appraising all four deposits, identifying the various record series, ordering files chronologically within each series, weeding for duplicates and material from other organisations. (By the 1980s a handful of other arts-related organisations, such as Avon Community Arts Network (ACAN), operated from Artspace premises. Overtime, it is apparent that some of these records had become mixed-up with Artspace records.) Ellie would also draft an administrative history of Artspace, using a chronology of significant dates she had created in order to help her structure the catalogue, but she would not have time to add reference numbers and title each file within the catalogue database, and this work would have to be completed by a member of Record Office staff.

The central cataloguing decision made was to separate the records of Artspace, created prior to the opening of the new premises, from those created by Spike Island subsequently. In December 1998, nine months after opening, 'Artspace Bristol Limited' changed its name to 'Spike Island Artspace Limited', which reflected the new premises and larger operation, and it was agreed amongst the project team that this represented a major transition point in the organisation's operations and culture. The overall collection – The Records of Spike Island Artspace Limited – has therefore been divided into two sub-collections – The Records of Artspace and The Records of Spike Island.

Following this decision, Ellie focussed her efforts on sorting and arranging Artspace records up to and including 1998 and, by the end of the four week period, this work was complete. Bristol Record Office archivist Malcolm Boyns then spent most of the following two weeks creating catalogue records for the files within the Record Office database. The catalogue of the sub-collection 'The

Records of Artspace' consists of 550 individual entries. The collection was submitted to The National Archives at the end of March as part of Bristol Record Office's annual accession return; with a request that it was highlighted as part of their national Arts and Business digest. The catalogue is being published online via the Bristol Record Office online catalogue at the beginning of May (<http://archives.bristol.gov.uk>) and hardcopies are being made available both at Spike Island and Bristol Record Office.

### **Next steps**

The award by the Business Archives Council was very much the start of an ongoing process, and work is set to continue over the coming months. This includes:

- The appraisal, arrangement and cataloguing of more recent 'Spike Island' material, creating an extensible catalogue structure that reflects Spike's key business functions so that future accruals can be accommodated within the cataloguing structure without too much difficulty.
- Compiling the catalogue has revealed that some series of records, including management minutes and annual reports, are only partially complete. Spike Island and Bristol Record Office will work together to see if any of these might be found and added to the collection.
- Continuing to work with volunteers to add more detailed catalogue descriptions and, where possible and appropriate, to create item level descriptions – such as identifying art work and artists within the individual photographs taken to document exhibitions.
- To use Spike Island and Bristol Record Office networks to encourage use of the collection as widely as possible, particularly in the preparation of events to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Artspace.

### **Final Budget**

<b>Income</b>	
BAC Grant	£2,000
Additional Archivist days (BRO)@£500 per week; in-kind	£1,000
Volunteer time: 37 hours@ £12.95 per hour; in-kind	£480
Packaging; in-kind (BRO)	£500
<b>Total</b>	£3,980
<b>Expenditure</b>	
Project Archivist Fee	£2,000
Additional Archivist days (BRO); in-kind	£1,000
Volunteer time: 37 hours total; in-kind	£480
Packaging; in-kind (BRO)	£500
<b>Total</b>	£3,980

Julian Warren City Archivist, Bristol Record Office

Lhosa Daly Deputy Director, Spike Island