

Oriel Davies: Litmus

Background

Following a successful funding bid to the Arts Council of Wales Lottery, Oriel Davies is embarking on **Litmus**, a new creative programme launching in 2017.

Litmus is a 12-month long programme of new artists' commissions, resulting in a minimum of 5 new exhibitions and related works, all of which will show at Oriel Davies between May 2017 and May 2018.

Litmus is a new initiative that will commission artists based in Wales and the Welsh Borders to make new work to show in a special season of innovative exhibitions at Oriel Davies. It is an exciting opportunity for artists to create and exhibit new work; for enabling professional development for emerging visual artists and the Artist Curator; support access and inclusivity; and for widening the gallery's audiences for new, innovative and experimental contemporary visual art. The **Litmus** programme will be supported and promoted via the gallery's marketing and publicity.

The **Litmus** artists' commission programme will be developed with an Artist Curator, who will work alongside and be supported by Oriel Davies Curator, Alex Boyd Jones, and other members of the gallery's team. At least 5 artists will be commissioned to create new work, and an important focus of the programme will be to support all those involved in continuous professional development.

For the commissioned artists, this will include supporting them to plan, develop, create and display their new work for exhibition. For the Artist Curator, Oriel Davies will strongly support them in helping to develop their curatorial skills and expertise all relevant areas, with a particular emphasis upon strong and effective and inclusive communication with audiences, including exploring new methods of interpretation, and building awareness and understanding of audiences' needs, including those with protected characteristics.

The commissioned work will make use of the gallery's **TestBed** space, but could also show off-site and in Oriel Davies other gallery spaces if appropriate.

All the commissioned artists will be recruited via Open Call asking for expressions of interest, proposals and supporting material to be submitted. The candidates will be shortlisted by the Artist Curator and the gallery's Curator, and final selection will be decided by face-to-face interview.

All commissioned artists will receive a £600 commission fee and £400 towards production and expenses. The Artist Curator will work on a freelance basis, throughout the 12 month period, amounting to some 25 days in total and will receive a fee of £5000 (daily fee £200).

Litmus will seek to build close connections and develop networks with programmes and galleries in Wales which have similar aims in order to offer direct liaison with such organisations and arts professionals, which can be undertaken as visits out to these organisations and / or inviting arts professionals attached to these organisations to visit Oriel Davies. In either case, the aim is to provide mentoring and connections for the emerging Artist Curator, Oriel Davies' Curator and the artists.

Litmus builds strongly upon the legacy of the gallery's previous initiatives - **TestBed** and **In Focus** - which has provided opportunity for artists from Wales and the Borders to exhibit work in and around our third exhibition space. These previous initiatives have resulted in the furthering of numerous artists' careers, and have been an important and well-recognised springboard for emerging artists to move their careers on to the next level. Some of the artists who have shown in the space in recent years include: Anne-Mie Melis, Alex Duncan; Antonia Dewhurst; Anna Falcini; Amy Sterly & Tom Snell; Kelly Best; Morgan Griffiths; Thomas Goddard; Mai Thomas; Alana Tyson; Seán Vicary. Many of these artists have subsequently been invited back to Oriel Davies to show in major solo or large group exhibitions, and all have continued to develop and push on their practice, and have gone on to exhibit both in and beyond Wales.

We believe that the **Litmus** programme will greatly benefit the public through bringing innovative and experimental new art work to the gallery. We expect the resulting exhibitions to challenge and excite audiences through experimental use of Oriel Davies' **TestBed** gallery and other exhibition or non-exhibition spaces. In **Litmus** we will encourage work that presents a very varied approach to the visual arts, and expect to include aspects of sound art, installation, kinetic work, performance art, video and projection within the artists' practices we promote.

The Artist Curator will work closely with the Curator to devise ways in which audience access to the work can be broadened and increased. This will include: ensuring the devising and production of clear, easy to understand text for interpretation material; exploring of alternative methods of interpretation to the written word, such as sound and AV, and working closely with the commissioned artists to broaden and facilitate a wider understanding of their work. This will include the commissioned artists and the Artist Curator giving talks / presentations on their work as part of their fee.

Each of the exhibitions will be supported by at least one artist's talk or presentation and the emphasis upon these presentations will be that of promoting understanding of the artists' concepts, aims, technical approaches and use of materials.

In the **Litmus** Programme we will have a particular focus upon encouraging and developing new audiences amongst young people, age 14-26, with an aim to increase engagement from this group by 10% over the 12-month period of the project.

We will also be focusing upon increasing access for those audiences with protected characteristics to the Litmus exhibitions, with a particular emphasis upon reaching BPSP (blind and partially sighted people) audiences.

Oriel Davies' Curator and Learning staff will work with the Artist Curator to create new audio description guides, which will be relate specifically to each of the **Litmus** exhibitions. These could also include background information on the artists and other relevant information, and we would also explore, where possible, using the artists' own voices to record description and interpretation on their work. All audio description and audio / visual interpretation material will be delivered in both Welsh and English.

The success of this will also be assessed by on-going interaction with our audiences via visitor surveys, direct feedback both verbally and via the gallery's comments board.

Litmus is supported the Arts Council of Wales