

ARTTECHSPACE

CONNECTING THE PEOPLE THAT MAKE ART HAPPEN



Art Technical Training in the East Midlands Report & Meeting 9 March 2022



INTRODUCTION

In 2021, Coventry University and ArtTechSpace Ltd developed and delivered an Art Technician training course to address the art technical skills shortage in the Coventry area. The training was created to introduce local Coventry people to the art technical profession, with the aim of creating a larger pool of skilled art technicians to address the skills shortage for cultural institutions within the area. 16 new technicians went through the training and have been supported with work experience from the initial partners The Mead Gallery and The Herbert Gallery, as well as other institutions since the training.

The initial need for the training was recognised in the study conducted by Coventry Arts Forum on 20.01.20 see [document](#)

The findings of the study recognised that the Coventry area was in need of 20 technicians to cover works taking place such as the City of Culture, the Mead Gallery reopening, The Herbert gallery hosting the Turner prize, etc. It was recognised that technicians needed basic skills such as packing and installing as well as advanced skills such as wall building, exhibition furniture making, lighting and audiovisual installation.



NEED IN COVENTRY

Art technicians are predominately artists or makers and use working as freelance technicians to fund their artistic practice, whilst giving them the flexibility to maintain an artistic practise or other pursuits.

It can be extremely beneficial for artists and makers to work as art technicians as it informs their practices and increases their professionalism in the understanding of materials, processes, packing and means of installation as well as gives them an understanding of how the artworld operates.

Arts institutions in the Coventry region had struggled for some time to find and employ skilled art technicians on a freelance basis because

- There are not enough people working in the Coventry area to cover the show changes when they happened because of concurrent scheduling of showchanges
- There is a general lack of experience and expertise in the pool of freelancers available in the region
- Low wages not attracting freelancers from other areas of the UK as happens in London

COVENTRY WORKING COMMITTEE



A meeting between representatives from Coventry University, The Mead Gallery, the Herbert gallery, Plane Structures, ArtTechSpace and Acquismedia was held to be a working committee to discuss the needs of the institutions, how the training program should work and how to create this program.

Processes were then set up for the application process and it was all turned around very quickly but had a very good intake considering we were asking them to commit a whole week to complete the training for free. The course was offered at no cost to the students and they received an expenses allowance.

WHAT WE DID IN COVENTRY

ArtTechSpace Ltd was chosen as the provider of the training, and we delivered a basic training program for one week (5 days) for 20 applicants from the Coventry area to train new art technicians for the region in August 2021. An advanced training program is planned to happen sometimes in 2022 with ArtTechSpace working in conjunction with service providers in the West Midlands to provide the training.

The partner galleries agreed to then support the trainee art technicians who came out of the Basic Training Course with on the job training by providing paid work experience. It was agreed that the institutions would provide technicians who would be trainers for these students so they would present best practice when working in their institutions. Without the support of the local institutions it was pointless doing the training as it takes such a long time to create competent art technicians.



WHAT WE TAUGHT...



The main concern in handling artwork is the safety of the artwork and the people handling them - when art handling we are risk managers. The aim of this training is to minimize the risks involved - to the artworks, our environments and ourselves and those around us.

6 modules were completed with a mix of theory and practical

- Manual handling - health and safety, lifting and moving safely as individuals and in pairs
- Art handling- different artistic mediums
- Moving art- route planning, knowing weights/dimensions
- Packing - materials, types of packaging - travel frame, cavity pack, case, soft wrap with polythene, cardwrap
- Condition reporting
- Installing art - fixings, adding fixings, measuring accurately, installation guides, making good walls

WHAT WE TAUGHT...



Each module was presented in a PowerPoint presentation followed by one or two practical exercises. The final day was a practical experience installing and de-installing an exhibition as a crew of art technicians from start to finish. At the end of the training, a test was completed by the students to gauge their understanding but predominantly reinforce concepts and best practices covered on the training course.

Unfortunately, as a day was lost because of the covid issue we lost a lot of practical exercise time and had to modify the training so that students were not working in close proximity to one another.



TRAINING OUTCOMES



The percentages are of those that answered that they felt confident (4) and very confident (5).

The increases in confidence levels were as follows in the following areas:

#	ACTIVITY	BEFORE	AFTER	INCREASE %
1	Manual Handling	79%	93%	14%
2	Using hand tools	74%	94%	20%
3	Handling Artworks	63%	93%	30%
4	Moving artwork by yourself	42%	93%	51%
5	Moving artwork with another person	58%	93%	35%
6	Moving artwork with equipment	47%	87%	39%
7	Condition reporting an artwork	11%	93%	83%
8	Completing a route plan	11%	93%	83%
9	Understanding artistic mediums	53%	93%	41%
10	Understanding artistic mediums and their handling considerations	37%	87%	50%



TRAINING OUTCOMES



#	ACTIVITY	BEFORE	AFTER	INCREASE %
11	Packing an artwork	37%	87%	50%
12	Understand the right materials to use to pack for a specific medium	26%	80%	54%
13	Difference in packing materials for short term vs. long term storage or transport	26%	87%	60%
14	Measuring artworks accurately	32%	100%	68%
15	Installing 2D artworks	42%	93%	51%
16	Installing 3D artworks (only 5 completed)	32%	53%	22%
17	Installing new media artworks (not completed)	21%	53%	32%
18	Rewire a plug (not completed)	53%	53%	0%
19	Make good a wall	37%	67%	30%



WORK PLACEMENTS

It was agreed with the partners Mead Gallery and Herbert Gallery that they would have trainees at a rate of £15 an hour for work where they would be supported by inhouse staff.

Directly following the Basic Training course both institutions requested # of technicians which was administered by Coventry University reaching out to the students and asking their availability for the dates requested and so based on the assessment and availability a number of students were placed in these institutions for paid work.

Since then IKon Gallery in Birmingham have taken trainees with very positive feedback from the institution and the students and we are in talks with Compton Verney to take trainees also.

A panel of arts institutions from Coventry and the surrounding area met last week to discuss the continued support of these trainees as well as get feedback from the trainees themselves. We intend to have open, ongoing dialogues with these institutions in the area to help support them and these trainees but also discuss how to address the shortages in more specialised areas art technical areas such as AV and Sound, wall building, and fabrication.




WHAT WE WANTED TO KNOW

[CVAN EM](#) approached us about doing a similar course in the East Midlands. Before we look to develop and potentially deliver an East Midlands Art Technician course we wanted to gauge the need and check that art institutions in the East Midlands were experiencing a similar skills shortage. If we create a program we need to make sure that there is a need so CVAN, ATS and Coventry University carried out a survey of local East Midlands art institutions to understand:

- Is there a need for more skilled freelance art technicians in the East Midlands?
- Is there ongoing work that could potentially sustain a career or part-time, freelance roles for trainees?
- If new technicians were introduced to the industry is there work experience available to support this training in the East Midlands?
- Is upskilling required for those already working in the profession?




FINDINGS

- Nearly all of the institutions we surveyed (11 out of 12) use freelance art technicians.
 - Half of these institutions struggle to find skilled freelancers, with 8 out of 12 (67%) find it even harder to find skilled *local* people. The total number of freelance art technicians used by the institutions a year is 53.
 - The main issues to sourcing freelancers were the concurrent scheduling of show changes therefore, using the limited pool of people all at the same times. Unitemps was stated as a recurring issue for sourcing freelancers as well due to the poor pay.
 - There is work available across the East Midlands, with at least 67 shows a year, that have a minimum total of 134 weeks (52 weeks in a year) of show change work plus quite a lot of other work available with 81% of institutions stating they require additional art technical assistance, such as collection management, maintenance, special projects, exhibition furniture making, etc
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FINDINGS

- Due to concurrent scheduling of work it can be assumed there are often floods and droughts of work for freelancers in the area.
 - There is an appetite from East Midlands art institutions for a training program for art technicians, with 9 out of 12 institutions (75%) saying they'd support the program by offering work experience to the trainees.
 - Furthermore, 5 institutions said they would have competent technicians to support their development by exhibiting best practice in their workplace, and a further 4 institutions said that it would depend on the project, scale of the installation and the general requirements of the project.
 - 8 institutions (73%) could also see the benefit for their in-house staff to refresh the skills they have and encourage best practice.
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FINDINGS

- There is a clear need for training of technicians in the East Midlands to bring in new people to the industry and also to upskill those already working within the industry.
- The greatest need was for general art handling and AV / new media installation skills (7 institutions), although there appears to be a need across the board of all art technical disciplines.





ATS RECOMMENDATIONS based on survey findings



1. Increase the number of skilled art technicians in the East Midlands by developing and delivering an East Midlands Art Technician training programme. This training should start with general art handling and AV / new media installation, and look to then extend to other areas.
2. A focus should be on upskilling those already in the industry and then a discussion should be had with the institutions in the area as to what they think their requirements would be for new technicians
3. If this training was to be carried out those already working in the industry should be upskilled before creating new technicians through a basic training program as there is such limited support for on the job training of brand new technicians.
4. An alternative to Unitemps for sourcing freelancers should be investigated.
5. Investigate a solution to eliminate concurrent scheduling of institutions so as not to dramatically decrease the accessibility to freelance technicians.
6. Survey art technicians in the region to understand what the issues may be for them and what they feel is needed and what they would like to happen.