

Bucks Art Weeks Artists and Makers Handbook

A practical guide to help you make the most of your Bucks Art Weeks experience

Introduction

Bucks Art Weeks is Buckinghamshire's largest visual arts festival and one of the biggest open studios events in the UK. Each June, around 400 artists and makers open their studios, homes and pop-up venues to the public, welcoming over 40,000 visitors from across the county and beyond.

For many artists, Bucks Art Weeks is a highlight of the year: an opportunity to show work, meet new audiences, generate sales and commissions, and build long-term connections. Whether this is your first time taking part or you are a returning participant, this handbook is designed to help you plan confidently and get the best possible experience from the event.

The guidance that follows is drawn from the experience of long-standing exhibitors and the Visual Images Group (VIG) committee. Use it as a toolkit: not everything will be relevant to everyone, but every section contains ideas worth considering.

One key message

If there is one thing to remember, it is this:

The more you put in, the more you get out.

Bucks Art Weeks provides strong county-wide marketing through the printed directory, website, PR, social media, signage and flyers. However, with hundreds of artists and venues taking part, individual promotion is ultimately most effective when it happens locally and personally. Artists who actively promote their own event, year after year, consistently see stronger visitor numbers and sales.

Think of Bucks Art Weeks as a shared endeavour. Your efforts benefit not only you, but neighbouring artists too – and theirs will benefit you in return.

Your commitment as a participant

By registering for Bucks Art Weeks you agree to:

- Collect directories, signs and materials on time, as instructed
- Distribute directories locally, following the guidance in this handbook
- Only exhibit with, or promote, fellow Visual Images Group members during Bucks Art Weeks
- Open on the days and at the times listed in your directory entry
- Support the loyalty card scheme by displaying cards, offering to stamp them, and encouraging visitors to explore other venues

These commitments help ensure a high-quality, reliable experience for visitors and artists alike.

Defining success for you

Before you begin planning, take a moment to decide what success looks like for you.

- Are you aiming for sales, commissions, or future enquiries?
- Do you want high footfall, or fewer but highly targeted visitors?
- Are you focused on feedback, profile-building, or professional connections?

Having clear personal goals will help you make decisions about publicity, display, pricing and how you engage with visitors.

Using the Bucks Art Weeks brand

Bucks Art Weeks is a well-established and trusted brand. Using the logo and name consistently helps visitors recognise and trust your event.

- Download official logos and materials from the members' area of the website
- Use the logo on flyers, posters, social media, email signatures and press releases

Standard description text (you may want to copy and use this):

Bucks Art Weeks is Buckinghamshire's largest visual arts festival and open studios event. Held each June, this 16-day not-for-profit celebration showcases the county's creative talent, with artists and makers opening their studios and exhibition spaces to the public. Over 40,000 people visit each year, supporting local creativity and craftsmanship. More at www.bucksartweeks.org.uk

Your planning timeline

March

- Complete and update your gallery page on the Bucks Art Weeks website - visitors use this when deciding who to visit!
- Ensure images are high quality and representative of your current work
- Follow and engage with Bucks Art Weeks on social media: @bucksartweeksofficial

April

- Plan your local publicity strategy - who will you tell about your show, and how?
- Collect your directories, posters and signs when notified
- Distribute directories widely in your local area, for example:
 - Libraries
 - Cafés
 - Pubs and bars
 - Shops
 - Gyms
 - Waiting rooms - doctors, dentists, opticians, hairdressers
 - Yoga and dance studios
 - Staffrooms at workplaces
 - Galleries
 - Hotel reception areas
 - Community centres
 - Churches
 - Schools
 - Scouts/guides groups
 - Arts and crafts clubs
 - Dog training classes
 - Craft fairs and fetes
 - Open gardens events
 - Theatres, museums and heritage sites
- Consider creating a personalised flyer for your own venue - you can distribute it with the directory
- Take good quality publicity photographs of your work and studio - consider how much to show online in advance and how much to hold back for in-person visitors
- Contact parish magazines and local newsletters and websites to tell them about your event
- Add your Bucks Art Weeks details to your email signature
- Explore or help create a local art trail - see how in our separate note
- Consider hosting a small private view or opening event. This will help with word of mouth promotion - invite people 4 weeks in advance, invite everyone you can and ask them to bring a friend! 2 hours maximum, small(!) glasses of wine, soft drinks and nibbles - keep the budget down!
- Start using the #bucksartweeksofficial hashtag on social media

- Consider printing business cards or something that visitors can take away with them

May / Early June

- Tell the Bucks Art Weeks team if you have a personal story or something newsworthy - they can write a press release about your event
 - Share 'save the date' posts and send personal invitations by email to anyone you think will want to see your show
 - Publicise your event in local online groups and community listings e.g. Facebook village/town groups, Nextdoor, MumsNet, Eventbrite
 - Put up posters
 - Decide what work you will show and set clear prices:
 - Include new material as well as older work
 - Demonstrate your process with sketchbooks, materials or work in progress
 - Measure the space available and plan to fit it
 - Prepare a range of price points e.g. bookmarks/cards as well as substantial pieces
 - Organise display equipment and check venue permissions e.g. can you use nails in the walls
 - Arrange public liability insurance
 - Decide how you will take payments and keep records: card reader? Price labels? Cash box and float?
 - Visit or contact nearby artists so you can recommend each other
 - Make sure you know about food/drink, petrol stations, shops and other amenities in the area so that you can answer questions from visitors
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One week to go

Signage

Clear signage is one of the most important factors in visitor numbers.

- Position large yellow boards a week before opening from the closest main routes
- Add arrows on opening day
- Always include your directory number on signage (use the sticker provided)
- Fix signs safely and legally (not to street furniture)
- Check visibility by following the route yourself

Final preparations

- Restock directories and flyers locally
- Prepare an information sheet about you and your work, to display or for people to take away with them
- Plan parking and notify neighbours if needed (and invite them!)
- Assemble practical supplies you might need:

- Labels
 - Tools
 - Packaging
 - Float
 - Phone charger
 - Paper and pens
 - Red dots
 - Scissors
 - Sellotape
 - Blu tak
 - Hooks, wire, string, pins
 - Bags
 - Marker pen
 - Lights
 - Extension leads
 - Tape measure
 - Gaffer tape
 - ...
- Practise your display layout in advance and take a photo so you can replicate it easily
 - Prepare a visitors' book or feedback method - collecting names and emails of visitors is a great way to stay in touch, tell them your news and invite them to other events. Make sure you have a privacy notice if you're collecting personal details (<https://ico.org.uk/create-your-own-privacy-notice>)
 - Plan how to welcome visitors - will you have music playing? Does the display flow naturally? What will you say to them and when? Remember to smile, ask questions and not to talk *at* them!
 - Schedule social media posts for the event such as:
 - You're open
 - Your gallery page on the Bucks Art Weeks website
 - Your directory entry
 - Sharing Bucks Art Weeks and other artists' posts
 - Pictures of your work every day or few days
 - Asking people to share the event with their friends
 - Happy customers (if they consent!)
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The day before opening

- Set up your display with prices clearly shown
- Check cleanliness, safety and access routes
- Put up final arrows and signs at the appropriate time
- Prepare how you will talk about your work: clearly, warmly and without jargon or a hard sell

During the event

- Check signage daily
- Welcome visitors warmly and let them browse at their own pace
- Keep accurate visitor tallies for your own records and post-event feedback
- Encourage visitors to complete the Bucks Art Weeks visitor survey
- Keep work priced and secure
- Stay open during advertised hours
- Manage refreshments carefully and safely (don't leave your work/valuables unattended, any cakes or treats shouldn't contain nuts, and be aware that unless you are asking for a charitable donation you must be licensed to sell refreshments)
- Take photos or short videos for social media
- Send every visitor to visit another nearby venue after yours - give out and stamp loyalty cards

After the event

Immediately

- Remove all signage promptly and store it carefully
- Return signs if you are not participating the following year

Shortly afterwards

- Complete your participant survey which we'll email to you
- Review what worked well and what you would change next time
- Follow up with contacts and enquiries while the event is fresh

Safety and practical advice

Personal safety

- Let someone know where you are and when you'll be back, if working alone
- Keep your phone charged and accessible
- Do not leave cash or valuable work unattended

Advertising cautions

- Be cautious about paid editorial features
- Print advertising can be expensive, and hard to measure

Finally

Bucks Art Weeks thrives because of the generosity, energy and professionalism of its artists and makers. By preparing well, supporting each other and engaging openly with visitors, you help ensure the festival remains welcoming, inspiring and successful for everyone.

If you have questions at any stage, please ask.

We wish you a rewarding and enjoyable Bucks Art Weeks!