



**Windsor Contemporary Art Fair 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> November 2014  
Royal Windsor Racecourse**

***WCAF Interview - The True Value of Art***

Celebrating their landmark tenth anniversary this year, the Windsor Contemporary Art Fair is elevating the experience and coming up with something quite special to celebrate; something that may well change art fairs in the future.

After a decade of success they are one of only a handful of truly influential art fairs in the country.

Every year the event has gone from strength to strength, and the secret to the fair's success is the dedication of the co-founders and co-directors, Sarah McAllister and Deborah James, to their passion for art.

They started out with just 25 stands; this year there will be 135, featuring over 150 curated artists, printmakers, photographers, sculptors, ceramicists, and selected galleries; bringing together a vast amount of art from all over the country and abroad and creating a powerful emotional experience.

These two women revolutionised the art fair by including artists alongside galleries, and they are still here; when some have come and gone, their vision to produce a distinctive experience is still exhilarating; part educational, on some level edgy, and always exciting,

"We believe art isn't just something to put in your home, it makes us notice the world around us. We are trying to show an array of choices and styles that make us think and feel," says Sarah.

Deborah says, "You have a response to any art and when we see someone's face light up with wonder and joy we know we have got it right. "

Both women bring formidable credibility to their enterprise: Deborah has an economic history degree and worked with the very first micro-computers. She started out in international trade importing hazelnuts from Turkey and was delighted to be asked to source art in the UK for a gallery in Spain.

A pioneer from the start, Deborah then opened a gallery in Windsor specialising in photography; her uncle was head of photography at the Tate at the time so it was natural to see its value as equal to any other art form. However, she was one of only a handful brave enough to hang photography alongside work by Sir Terry Frost, Sandra Blow and Anita Klein.

Studying a History of Art degree at the University of East Anglia, Sarah was surrounded by art working in Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts there, a groundbreaking place of visual communication in a building specially commissioned from Norman Foster. She went on to work in Christie's Contemporary Art Galleries, the world's leading publishers and galleries specialising in original limited-edition prints.

Sarah brings to the Windsor Contemporary Art Fair her ethos of wanting to make genuine, high-quality, contemporary art accessible and affordable to the wider community.

It all began for them on the side of a rugby pitch, watching their sons play an away match. They found their passions and combined experience a natural fit; they had both owned galleries, and Sarah brought framing to the enterprise which she still does, and they haven't looked back since.

They had both noticed that many more artists needed a gallery space than was available, and they plunged into creating a place for more artists to show.

They apply the same high standards of curation to the Art Fair as they would to their gallery spaces: "We both still get excited about art, and we take what our Art Fair offers very seriously. It has to be right for the artist and an interesting, fresh mix for our visitors so that both get the best experience. We actively look for new talent, support emerging work, and appreciate the value of established, well-loved artists," says Sarah.

"It is 100% our choice and our instincts have proved right over a decade, year on year the show gets better. The fact that we're still here proves we know what we are doing," says Deborah.

Their relationships with their artists is one of their underappreciated talents; they have launched careers while attracting successes back year after year, because they are just as caring about the artists themselves. "We are always aware we are dealing with people, and we carefully look for the fit. We are also trying to get the best out of people," says Sarah.

In a world focused on the bottom line, maximizing profits, and stripping costs, people who are truly passionate about what they do, and what they believe in,

have a special feeling and ownership of a company. There is an integrity and sense of purpose that creates a different philosophy and culture.

"We treat people with respect, which is fundamentally necessary to benefit from how they deal with you. We don't take things for granted and always consider the relationship important," adds Deborah.

This same belief underpins all their relationships, from the artists to the buyers, to their staff, the contractors and the venues, local schools and the art community. It's what makes them stand out. They are balancing all these different areas with a value for the relationship.

"We like to think that integrity develops trust, building a solid relationship base into the future. This is necessary to build solid, mutually beneficial partnerships."

The secret to their success may be as simple as their attention to detail; they are very hands-on, visible to the artists, staff, contractors, venues. They invest in better quality for every area of the event, they have high expectations, and they want what is right; all underpinned by traditional values of respect, fairness, and integrity.

"We are always working to improve the experience for all, and we're evolving in the art market; we are not in competition with other fairs, we are doing what is interesting for us and best for our artists and visitors with a long-term view."

It may seem old-fashioned but, Sarah and Deborah believe that any enterprise should add value to the world. They have structured and designed their whole venture to have a positive impact. Their event is visionary and participatory, it supports the Prince's Trust, raising over £45,000 so far, it includes the local schools in a meaningful way, and offers educational workshops and inclusive experiences; while being successful for their artists, and a truly great day out and an exciting shopping experience for their visitors;

They really are passionate about art, and they want us to love art too. Their approach is probably in some sense bordering on philosophy and spirituality, but they have undoubtedly created a national space for a gathering of artists and art lovers, full of colour, energy and affirmation of what has meaning for us all. They have created the world they want to live in.

To mark the tenth anniversary this year the show will host a programme of talks and workshops including renowned artist and "tweeter" Moose Allain who will be talking about his eclectic 'art' practice which has expanded from drawing to include comedy writing, cartooning, stand up, animation, filmmaking and the interior of a Mexican Waxing salon!

And you are invited.

[www.windsorcontemporaryartfair.co.uk](http://www.windsorcontemporaryartfair.co.uk)

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**When:** Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> November 10am-6pm  
Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> November 10am-5pm

**Where:** Royal Windsor Racecourse, Maidenhead Rd, Windsor SL4 5JJ

**Private View and VIP opening by Adam Afriyie MP Friday 7<sup>th</sup> November  
6pm-9pm  
(Invitation only – see website for details)**



Press enquiries contact Deborah James 01753 591892 or 07771 802603  
[info@windsorcontemporaryartfair.co.uk](mailto:info@windsorcontemporaryartfair.co.uk)

*Image: Jimena by Edy Gosselin ©*