

CASE STUDY



Supporting the Development of Sustainable Exhibition Practice

By Megan Townshend, Sustainable Exhibitions Assistant Kickstart Intern Aberdeen Archives, Gallery & Museums/ Aberdeen City Council

Becoming More Sustainable

With sustainability and climate change becoming more pressing issues with the government and local councils making initiatives to become more sustainable, especially with Scotland having plans to become Net Zero by 2045. It has become increasingly important for businesses to start planning and initiating their climate plans to start reducing their emissions and become more sustainable.

Recent studies have shown that places and attractions that are open about their sustainability and their aims and goals to improve have bigger tourist boosts due to more people making the conscious effort to be more environmentally friendly. The obvious main goal of developing sustainability goals is to make the venue more environmentally friendly overall however, with the public now actively seeking attractions with environmental aims, it makes them a more desirable visitor location overall.

With the arrival of the British Art Show 9 (organised by Hayward Gallery Touring) at Aberdeen Art Gallery in summer 2020, it gave the perfect opportunity to focus on the sustainability efforts within Aberdeen Archives, Gallery and Museums (AAGM, which is part of Aberdeen City Council) and to look for ways to become more sustainable.

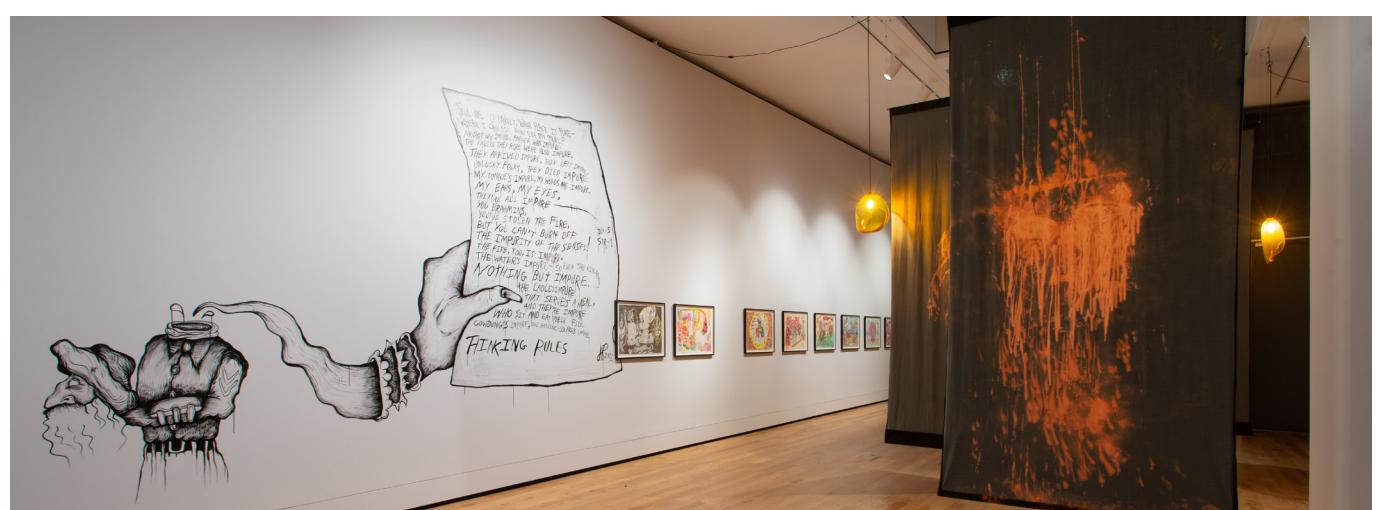
Expectations

With Scotland, and particularly Aberdeen, setting out climate and environmental plans, it means that there was already a gentle layout of things to expect and plans in place for things to be achieved by certain dates and years.

Prior to the British Art Show, the exhibitions team at AAGM had already started looking at some sustainable alternatives. Some of these materials were paint and carpet tiles.

By switching to these materials e.g., carpet tiles means that waste is massively reduced (as it is easier for them to be stored and reused) as well as allowing materials to be reused for future use.

However, with touring exhibitions there was an acknowledgment that not everything would be able to be made sustainable, due in part to artworks requiring specific protection and transportation materials. Although where possible, these materials are reused for the future protection and transportation of the artworks they were made for.



Outcomes and the Experience Gained

As becoming more sustainable was already a goal for AAGM, it meant that there were already some ideas of how the organisation could become more sustainable. Some of these ideas included re-homing reusable materials instead of putting them into a skip; and forming a colleague green champions group where co-workers collaborate on becoming more sustainable both in and out of work.

The idea behind the green champions is to focus on certain tasks to improve an individual's carbon footprint at home eg timing shower length, and looking at alternative travel to reduce car emissions by choosing walking or cycling instead if possible. By focusing on becoming more sustainable at home, it should become easier to be more sustainable within the workplace.

The main outcome that was experienced for AAGM was learning about the process of materials post-construction, following the end of the British Art Show 9 in October 2020. We wanted to ensure that the exhibition materials were being recycled or reused to the maximum.



Post Construction Material Process

British Art Show 9 saw Aberdeen Art Gallery staff liaising with outside companies in particular EIS Waste to discuss the future of the materials used during the BAS9 project. The outcome of this was learning how the materials are disposed of and how they can potentially be regenerated if any facilities allow for that.

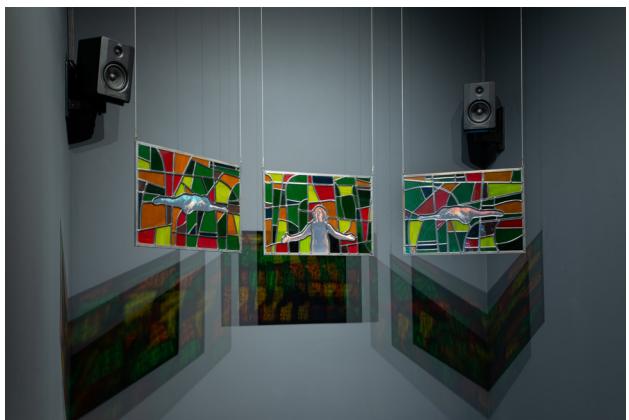
With the materials from the BAS9 being recycled via EIS Waste Facility, it gave the opportunity for the AAGM Exhibitions team to get in touch with them to discuss the post construction material process to discover how sustainable how the materials used are.

In particular, it was important for the team to know what happens to the plasterboard, rockwool, and timber materials as they are the materials that were heavily used throughout the construction of British Art Show 9.

What was learnt was that after these materials are taken to EIS Waste they are separated and the plasterboard is stripped back to gypsum. The gypsum can then get recycled into powder or go through a shredder. Due to its high lime content, it's a good material for stabilising land and therefore it can be sold on to farmers for layering on the ground.

The rockwool will be kept altogether in one skip. It will then get shredded and put onto the line for incineration where it will then be used for energy.

For timber, it gets separated into two categories. Full lengths of timber get put back into stock, whereas cut lengths will go into schools' technical departments to be used by students for various projects.



The issues that were experienced

One issue that popped up was the lack of time. The more lead time is given would allow for deeper research into various products that have a lower carbon footprint and more reusability. However, with the current state of the marketplace due to Covid-19 and Brexit meant that acquiring the products had it's own difficulties never mind trying to find others.

Another major issue is the state of the current marketplace: One of the knock-on effects from both Brexit and Covid-19 was the volatile marketplace that occurred. This meant that it was difficult to acquire the regular products such as timber, never

mind looking into and acquiring products that are more environmentally friendly and potentially more difficult to acquire.

When it comes to artwork, there are only so many ways for them to be protected and in a lot of cases, the artworks require non-sustainable materials to protect them e.g., bubble wrap. However, where possible, it is reused to get the most use out of it as possible.

However, after researching and being in contact with EIS Waste it was learnt that the materials that were acquired for the British Art Show are 100% recyclable or reusable.

