Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft: adapting in



Now open again, Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft discovered new ways to engage communities and increase resilience during lockdown.

Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft tells the story of the artists and craftspeople who made the East Sussex village a creative hub in the 20th century. Over the last few months, the museum has been particularly creative in adapting to unprecedented times.

A boost from emergency funding

A small, independent museum, Ditchling began losing money after it closed due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The museum successfully applied to our Heritage Emergency Fund and received £60,100. Steph Fuller, Director and CEO at Ditchling, says the emergency funding has been a “massive boost”:

“We have been able to bring all our staff back from furlough, install a new exhibition and open the museum on 16th July. It’s taken the risk out of reopening with low visitor numbers, and helped pay for the special measures we have had to put in place because of COVID-19.”



Connecting through craft

During lockdown, Ditchling developed a programme to keep in touch with visitors online. #CreateToRelate encouraged people to make art and craft pieces and share their creations on social media. Abby Butcher, Communications Manager at the museum, explains:

“A lot of the work we do at the museum is around finding purpose through craft, and looking at ways it can support wellbeing. We thought this was a great opportunity to take this intent online, and launched #CreateToRelate as a way to keep our online community connected and inspired.”

Engaging followers online

The programme included a weekly virtual museum club for children, and IGTV videos of craftspeople teaching skills. Ditchling sent their members regular long-reads from leaders in the arts and crafts to help them stay close to the museum’s collection.

Abby continues: “We’ll be continuing this work for the summer, as we know a lot of people still won't be able to visit us. Engagement has been high across all platforms, and we have seen significant follower growth.”

Becoming more resilient

#CreatetoRelate was launched alongside the museum's online donation platform, encouraging people to donate if they enjoyed the content.

With support from a previous National Lottery Heritage Fund grant, Ditchling have taken steps to increase their income through commercial activities and individual giving. Just before lockdown they had redeveloped their website, including online retail and donations.

Reaching a wider range of people

With a strong track record of outreach work, Ditchling are looking to restart in-person activities where possible. They are working to make their offer more accessible and inclusive. This includes uncovering LGBTQ+ and disability stories in their collection, object handling opportunities, taking material off site and making more of their collection available online.



Human Nature Table by John Newling, from the new exhibition, tilling

Learning from lockdown

Museums face difficult challenges as a result of COVID-19, but some positives have emerged. As Steph points out:

“The increased use of digital communication has demonstrated that working remotely is in many cases very possible. That could have positive benefits in terms of inclusion and access for museum employees as well as visitors.

“The enforced pause has enabled a period of reflection in which many people have had time to think about their values and mission, and whether they are delivering on their social agenda.”





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When the museums open up again