

Dear Helen and Amanda,


For your information, I am writing on behalf of my artist colleagues and Aberdonian friends. I am not a member of Aberdeen Artists Society. Also I will be posting this letter in my website, www.kanitasim.art, in order that it will be easily reached by my colleagues and friends. Apologies for having to cover old ground again but some people may have missed our earlier conversation.

We are concerned about the wellbeing of the Aberdeen Art Society. It has been the core of the art community in Aberdeen for nearly 200 years and it is now in need of some protection in order that it will be allowed to continue its journey, making history for future generations.




Their last exhibition was in 2022 and according to the Gallery, "the Aberdeen Artists Society celebrated its strong tie with the gallery with a large exhibition".

This suggested that the gallery itself acknowledged the importance of "strong tie" between the gallery and AAS (please see excerpt from the gallery's own programme below)

2022:

The Aberdeen Artists Society celebrated its strong ties with the gallery with a large exhibition. 

Ongoing Activities:

- The gallery hosts exhibitions, events, and programs that showcase both historical and contemporary art. 
- It actively engages with the community, promoting art and culture. 
- The gallery continues to evolve, adapting to changing needs while preserving its historical significance. 

Since then, that seems to be the last of the AAS exhibition in the Gallery apart from various small shows. There are also sporadic small exhibitions in various commercial galleries around the town. This, although accessible to a small number of people, will not provide a 'strong tie' between the gallery and the AAS, tie which is vital for the AAS to survive. The society will be in danger of haemorrhaging memberships. Some artists join the Society for the purpose of receiving the ultimate prize which is having their work selected to be on show on the Gallery's wall.

Our gallery was built by local merchants in 1885 for the 'benefit of citizens'. This very fact itself is what makes our Gallery unique and it is a part of our history. And yet we noted that 'for benefit of citizens' has been air brushed from the history of the Gallery's website.

The unelected officials who are employed to care for our affairs have deleted our history and destroyed our heritage by not providing space for our ancient, nearly 200yr old society to exhibit in the gallery. How can this possibly be part of their remit? This is as good as "killing off" our heritage. In order to respect the wishes of those merchants who generously built the gallery for their fellow citizens, may we politely request that the term "for benefits of citizens" be restored as originally described in the gallery's website.

I attended a meeting with Helen Fothergill, the gallery manager and Angela Scott, the chief executive of Aberdeen City Council on 24/10/23. It seemed then that the AAS was offered a Hobson's choice. A lengthy period of exhibition to fit in with the gallery programmes. This did not suit the AAS and its members. There was an impasse, and no compromise was achieved.

Please allow us to suggest, "View of Aberdeen" the current exhibition which runs from 27 May 2023 - 28 May 2028, might be terminated a few weeks prematurely and dovetail in an AAS exhibition for the number of weeks which may be acceptable to the AAS.

This “dovetailing” method could be employed through the years, say every 2-3 years or whatever is acceptable to both parties. This will allow the AAS to continue “strong tie” with the gallery

The AAS has been exhibiting in the gallery since the Gallery was built. Both have been coupled from day one. We do realise that AAS was allowed to exhibit in the Gallery until “they obtain their own collection“ but it has been 140 years since the AAS first exhibited in the gallery .If the Gallery attempt to de-couple them now it will be as good as having the AAS ,as we know it ,terminated as there is no other commercial gallery large enough to accommodate the AAS mixed exhibitions. Given that the Council had already received funding from Camelot to “protect nation’s heritage”. Also contributions came from local citizens and companies, among them BP who contributed £1m towards the refurbishing of the gallery. The AAS should have been accommodated accordingly.

May we invite you to read these two letters which appeared in the Press & Journal’s letter page a few years ago? “. Art gallery paints poor local picture.” And “Shabby treatment of local artists”

Art gallery paints poor local picture

Sir, – I feel compelled to follow up two excellent letters appearing in The P&J recently concerning Aberdeen artists.

I visited Aberdeen Art Gallery very recently and was so disappointed. The shop is so minimal in comparison to the one that was there before refurbishment. There seems to be hardly anything that would interest the majority

The powers that be in the gallery should be reminded that it was built by local merchants – by the people for the people. The ethos stated that it was for the benefits of the citizens of Aberdeen. That is what makes it different from other galleries.

The founders’ ethos seems to have been thrown out, together with the local artists. Any trace of the Aberdeen Artists Society is so minimal it is a disgrace.

Our local artists are evidently being ignored instead of being at the forefront of exhibitions for the enjoyment of local people.

Joannie Fowlie (formerly of Aberdeen and a membership secretary of Aberdeen Art Gallery)

Shabby treatment of local artists

Sir, – I write concerning the deplorable decision to exclude the Aberdeen Artists Society from holding their annual exhibition in the Aberdeen Art Gallery for the foreseeable future.

Formed in 1827 under the governance of James Giles and Archibald Simpson, its many laudable aims included the promotion of the arts in Aberdeen and the north-east.

It is one of the main highlights of our cultural calendar which has been held in the gallery for more than 100 years.

It is also an important source of encouragement for young artists to have their work displayed in the gallery. All this, however, has been ignored by unelected officials within the gallery and with the consent of our council.

I find this development a quite disgraceful treatment of those who have endeavoured to put so much effort and enthusiasm into preserving this cultural gem as part of Aberdeen's rich heritage whose focal point was the art gallery.

In my opinion the council should now take it upon themselves to have this shameful decision rescinded at the earliest opportunity.

**James Sinclair,
Aberdeen.**

These two letters express exactly the feeling of most citizens of Aberdeen and we wish the AAS to be suitably protected and be allowed to continue to make history for future generations.

Please take a leaf from The Royal Scottish Academy (RSA) founded in 1826. They are growing from strength to strength through the years with their exhibitions. For the Artists, the greatest accolade they can receive is to have their work accepted by the RAS and hung on the prestigious gallery's wall. Aberdeen Art Society established in 1827, during the reign of King George IV, a mere one year younger than the RSA. We think the same treatment would be what we expect. We think Aberdeen Artists Society should be encouraged in a similar way.

Please know that this is not just about the art. It is also about our history and heritage which need to be protected for future generations. In the AAS the citizens have much to be proud of and it should have been accommodated accordingly. The Camelot funding "for protection of nation's heritage" was intended for exactly that.

We look forward to having this issue resolved and Aberdonians would be able once more to enjoy their AAS exhibitions, even once every 2-3 years in the gallery that was built for their 'benefit'

Yours sincerely,
Kanita Sim
kanitasim9@gmail.com