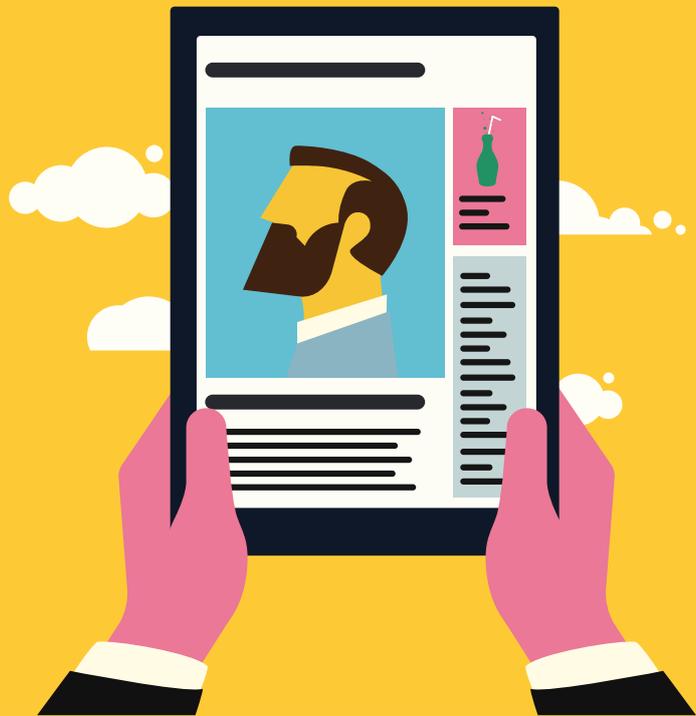


THE COMMUTER CLUB



Meet Leyden Gallery's Adriana and Lindsay: nomadic gallerists with Aldgate roots.

Across London, art and culture are playing a key role in attracting people back into the heart of the capital, and as people begin returning to galleries, museums and theatres, groups like the Lord Mayor's Culture and Commerce Taskforce are looking at how the arts can help to boost the economy.

Art is helping to activate spaces and welcome visitors and workers back to the city: over the summer, artwork from students of the University of the Arts London took over vacant spaces and shop windows, filling many parts of the City with colour and creativity in a project supported by Cheapside BA, the EC Partnership and the Northbank BID.

In Aldgate, a local gallery has used the pandemic, and the temporarily vacant spaces it has created, as a catalyst for innovation – teaming up with partners across the area to bring the work of emerging artists to new and interesting places.

The Leyden Gallery, run by Lindsay Moran and Adriana Cerne, is currently hosting a vibrant

exhibition titled 'Well, well, well' in Aldgate House, bringing a cohort of emerging artists to the space in a timely exploration of mental health, wellbeing and recovery.

Lindsay's background is in art and performance: he spent over 15 years performing in cabaret, film and TV (occasionally in a pink tutu), and as an artist, he has exhibited his paintings in London, Edinburgh, New York, Japan, South Korea and St Lucia. Adriana worked as a lecturer at the University of the Arts London and the Royal College of Art for twenty years, and her experience as a feminist academic plays a key role in her work as a gallerist. The pair first opened their gallery in 2013, bringing their wealth of experience and innovative approach to art to Leyden Street in Aldgate.

Lindsay and Adriana have long had a connection to Aldgate - in fact, they each had ties to the area before they had even met. As a teenager, Adriana would catch the bus from her home in Tottenham down to Aldgate, where she would work at the markets on and around Middlesex Street each Sunday.

"I worked on everything from ice cream vans to clothes stalls – although I much preferred working on the fashion stalls as it meant I could get discounts on my clothes! That was my first connection to the area, and in the years after that I'd often come down to visit."

Lindsay found himself moving to Aldgate in 1975 thanks to Acme Studios, a housing association set up by art graduates David Panton and Jonathan Harvey. During a time when many properties in the East End were boarded up and unused due to the economic downturn, Acme approached the Greater London Council and struck a deal to fill the empty properties with artists. Much like the Leyden Gallery's current incarnation as a nomadic gallery filling vacant spaces, artists were given the opportunity to turn disused and derelict buildings into residential and studio space all over the East End.

Lindsay's flat, which he still lives in today, was right in the centre of Aldgate: "The market was buzzing then, but lots of places were quite derelict. I had to go through a derelict block of flats, then through a derelict courtyard to get to my block, which had probably been built in the late fifties or early sixties. The whole area had been badly bombed during the Second World War – my flat overlooked a concrete football pitch, which was obviously a space where a building had once stood. Much of the area was quite bare and desolate, but the market was the centre of everything -you knew everyone down there. There was also a fantastic mix of cultures – a big Bangladeshi community, lots of Jewish families... it was a vibrant community."

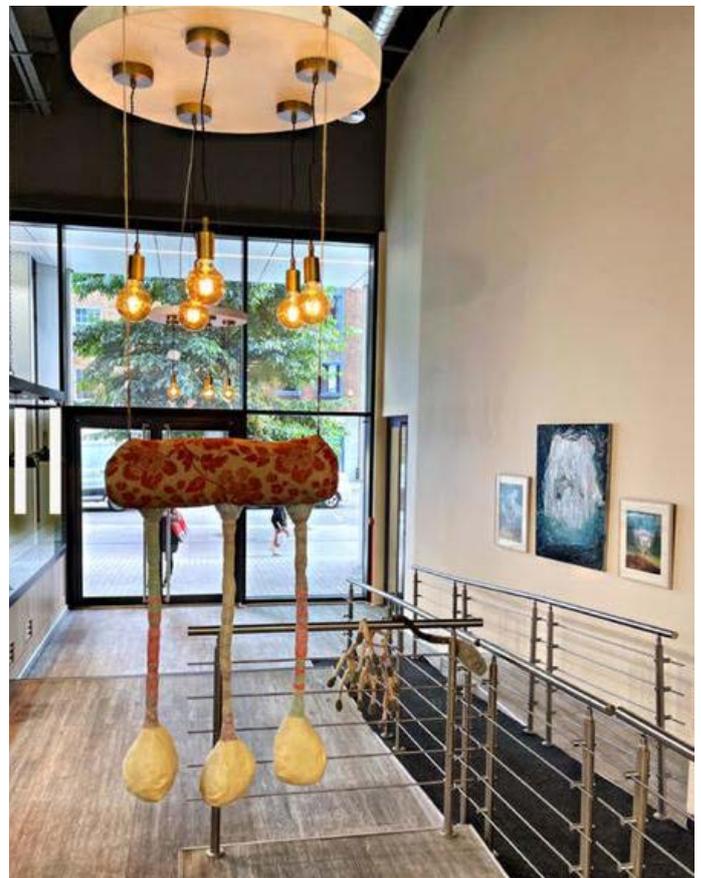
When the Leyden Gallery first opened its doors in 2013, Adriana and Lindsay were keen to draw on their local connection. The gallery's opening show referenced seamstresses and tailors, a nod to the area's 300-year-old connection to the clothes trade – the East End has been home to the 'Rag Trade' since the arrival of the Huguenots and their skilled weavers, and even today tailors and fabric shops can be found throughout the area. For the exhibition, Adriana selected a ground-breaking 1979 film by Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling, which explored the position of women working in the clothes trade in London in the 1840s, the history of unionisation and the craft of seamstresses and tailors.

Adriana and Lindsay were also keen to focus on poignant issues with a local connection through their work at the gallery. In 2017, they were approached by local group Acid Survivors

Trust to work with photographer Ann-Christine Woehrl, who had travelled across Asia and Africa to interview women who had been scarred in acid attacks.

An exhibition of the photographs, titled IN/ VISIBLE, went on display at the Leyden Gallery, garnering national and international interest. For Adriana, the Acid Survivors Trust was an important group to give a platform to: "As a feminist art historian, I have always wanted to support women artists, and we continue to do so. This particular issue also felt very key at that point, as that was something that had been happening in and around East London – it felt like a local and an international issue."

Aside from countless exhibitions and shows, the Leyden Gallery also played host to regular events, something that Adriana and Lindsay have continued with the nomadic gallery. When the gallery first opened, the pair decided to bring their love of cabaret to their bar, where they held a monthly event called Sybarite Nights. Adriana notes, "We really wanted something that referenced the area and was inter-generational. It crossed all boundaries. It wasn't just a space for thirty-somethings or fifty-somethings."



'Well,well,well', Leyden Gallery's exhibition at Aldgate House

The monthly cabaret shows saw opera singers, magicians, musicians, poets, spoken word, performance artists, comics, storytellers and more all coming together on the same bill. As well as being multi-disciplinary, the line-ups brought together local people and international performers and artists. Lindsay says, “People that were performing at places like Wigmore Hall would come along and perform at the show, which was amazing. But then on the same night we’d have Martin, a man in his eighties who lived across the road, coming in and performing old-time music hall songs – the local angle was important to us.”

Making art and the spaces it occupies feel accessible is clearly something of a mission for Lindsay and Adriana. They’ve focused on creating a community hub, where people feel comfortable to pop in for a chat in a welcoming environment. The gallery space in the original Leyden Gallery was in two parts, with a bridge connecting the two – and for Adriana, this reflected the gallery’s place in the city: “I always thought of it as being Aldgate on one side and the City on the other. That’s who we are: we can be the East End, but we can be the City too. Our art is like that as well. It’s international, but it’s local; it’s about women, but it’s about everyone. We have always wanted our space to be somewhere for everyone to come and feel welcome. For me, the ethos is to create an international gallery full of serious, great art, but at the same time, it’s a space where you can host a drag queen night!”

“Good art can change your life.”

Lindsay adds, “Art galleries are often spaces that people are frightened to enter – they don’t feel that it’s about them, or they’re scared of being hustled, or it’s too expensive. We’d initially get people standing at the door, nervous to come in. But we’d say come in, sit down, have a coffee! We had people coming in and saying, ‘I’d like to be a collector, but I don’t understand how it works, I don’t know how you buy art’. We would talk to them about art and what it meant to them. Good art can change your life. The main thing for us was to get people in, to get them to see the art and experience it for themselves.”



Adriana and Lindsay

The Leyden Gallery’s Drink and Draw classes were another way to break down the gallery wall and bring people in to engage with and enjoy art. Participants of all levels were invited along to the gallery to take part in life-drawing classes, guided by Lindsay, accompanied by a fine selection of wines. The classes had a fantastic response throughout the gallery’s lifetime - so much so that they continued virtually during the pandemic, after Lindsay and Adriana had left the gallery space on Leyden Street.

“We wanted to find a way to help people feel more connected during the pandemic, and the Drink and Draw classes felt like the perfect fit. We’ve now done over 80 of them – we do them every week, and we have a regular group that want to keep coming. Some members of the class are even featured in our current show!”

The Leyden Gallery became nomadic just before the pandemic hit, with Lindsay and Adriana leaving the gallery in September 2019. They’ve since continued with virtual events, as well as hosting pop-up exhibitions in different spaces across the area. Lindsay says, “We knew that we wanted to leave this white-walled gallery space. The nomadic gallery concept is very different, and it’s different for artists as well. Getting artists away from the square box and responding to these odd spaces makes it interesting for people coming to see the exhibition.”



Adriana outside Leyden Gallery's current home, Aldgate House

In November 2020, the pair held a pop-up exhibition at 33 Creechurch Lane, bringing the work of eight artists to a new space in Aldgate. 'Ghost Spaces', which was hosted by Merchant Land with Aldgate Connect BID, was inspired by the absence of large numbers of office workers during the lockdown. Adriana and Lindsay wanted to reimagine and repurpose these empty spaces, filling them with work by emerging artists.

The success of 'Ghost Spaces' has led to Leyden Gallery's latest show - the team from Aldgate House were impressed by last year's exhibition and sourced a new temporary space for the gallery, right in the heart of Aldgate.

"We've called the new show 'Well, well, well', which is looking at that idea of wellness, of feeling better after everything that has happened. We approached artists with this theme of wellness and relief and we've had a really interesting response. One of them, Claire Mont Smith, is the partner of David Panton, who started Acme Housing back in the 70s. She's now President of East London Printmakers, which is key to this part of London. Even without meaning to, there's always something linking the gallery to the area!"

You can visit Leyden Gallery's 'Well, well, well' exhibition now, from Wednesday to Saturday, 12pm to 6pm at Aldgate House, EC3N 1AH.

