

CREATIVE HUB

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## SEPTEMBER EDITION

Welcome to your monthly update on all things creative in Exeter!

### What have you been up to this month?

Have a piece of creative news or an opportunity you'd like to be shared? Send us a message on our social media channels and we'll include what we can in future editions.

### Want more updates, opportunities and creative news?

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## Exeter Contemporary Open Artist: Sophie Wake



Exeter Contemporary Open is an annual exhibition, selected from hundreds of entries from across the UK. This year's shortlist showcases the work of fourteen contemporary visual artists who work across painting, sculpture, photography and video. We asked some of the artists practicing across the South West about what they're looking forward to and found out more about their practices.

### Tell us a bit about your practice

It's all about the inner journey; allowing creativity to express freely, intuitively and spontaneously best I can. My fine art practice responds to the rhythms of meditation and ancient tree tea ceremony which has become a fundamental

companion to my creative approach. In the the last year I have taken to ceramics along side my painting practise which feels a very natural and exciting progression

### What are you most looking forward to about exhibiting in the Exeter Contemporary Open?

I'm excited about it all. Seeing my work in the space, meeting the artists and curators and of course the private view.

### What advice would you give to artists developing their practice in the South West?

Always do what you love, practise what makes your heart sing and spirit soar. Be authentic and true to yourself and create what brings you the highest joy and doors will open

### What's the best bit of work you've seen in the South West?

Spencer Shakespeare's Pink Moon exhibition at Projects Twenty Two, last year in Cornwall.

[Exeter Contemporary Open](#) runs from Fri 12 Sep - Sat 01 Nov, and you can find out more about Sophie's practice [here](#).



## Hell Tor Festival



[Hell Tor Festival](#) returns to Exeter Phoenix this September. Celebrating Devon's heritage of horrors with screenings, special guests and lectures on the magical, the macabre and our connection with Ghosts, and the ghosts of our lives... Our Film Programme Assistant Robyn asked Hell Tor organisers about the festivals highlights!

### Where did the idea behind Hell Tor come from?

It all stemmed from touring my first feature 'Borley Rectory' around various festivals really. Sue joined me on a few and for all the fantastic ones like Celluloid Screams, Grimmfest and Night Visions in Helsinki, there were the - shall we say - less 'salubrious' ones that were poorly executed and seriously lacking in the hospitality department and we thought, Christ we could do better than this! We'd always felt as if the South West was lacking a serious genre festival that celebrated our regions heritage of horrors so we thought if you want something done, you'd better do it yourself.

### Hell Tor is steeped in local history- what makes Devon so spooky?

The South West is so steeped in history isn't it? It's all around us. Dartmoor alone is prehistoric, marbled soils alive with ancient stories: corpse roads and witches, smugglers and gibbeted highwaymen, the winds of time picking at their bones in whispers. Everywhere in Devon has a story to tell. There's quite literally a ghost on every corner.

### What was your highlight from last years festival?

There were so many but I think seeing the audience at the bar talking to guests like Caroline Munro, seeing Reece Shearsmith getting to have a drink and catch up with old friends like Jonathan Rigby and let his hair down in a way he probably doesn't get to do that often in public and local filmmakers getting to inclusively be part of that.

### If you were to recommend an event for someone who wants to dip their toe in the horror world what would you suggest?

I would suggest our festival finale '[Ghosts of my life](#)' event with Stephen Volk (Ghostwatch, Afterlife) wherein an esteemed panel of horror enthusiasts discuss their favourite ghostly moments from TV and film and why they continue to resonate. It's a fantastic opportunity to both experience the best the genre has to offer whilst hearing experts in the field dissect how and why they work so well.



## Exeter Contemporary Open Artist: Helen Acklam



### Tell us a bit about your practice

The submitted three works are part of a current body of work exploring sprawling connections between land and body, across feminist practices, somatics and personal mythology. The title (what3words) '///voices.betraying.applauded' locates an area in the Garw Valley, part of the South Wales Coalfield, where the rocks and I are from.

The title is more than geographic; it's a tether to a particular time, place and culture, and a turning point in both my life and practice. Returning to the Garw Valley during the pandemic in 2021 without a plan, I found that my body already knew how to respond, and over time, to communicate the intimate,

interwoven feelings of past and present. Today my practice is fundamentally embodied and rooted in direct engagement with the already meaningful materials of this land - the earth, coal, and rock.

This return marked a fundamental change in my practice. Although it was multidisciplinary, I would mainly have referred to myself as a painter. Digging into the earth and into my past fundamentally changed all that. It's changed the way I approach the next step in my work, how I make decisions, or don't, and the communal way I now live life and practice. It's made me realise my inter and intra connection to all my surroundings and how I've shaped and been shaped by place, time and culture.

### What are you most looking forward to about exhibiting in the Exeter Contemporary Open?

I'm thrilled to be included in this year's Exeter Contemporary Open. I recognise the work and themes of many of the artists I'll be joining this year and can't wait to see how this will sit and talk together. I've been to many exhibitions and Opens, and artist talks at Exeter Phoenix, and always appreciate the integrity and value of the work being shown, the attention to how that's presented, and the respectful connection between the people involved - be it curator, artist, writer.. It always feels so genuine.

## What advice would you give to artists in the South West?

There are a lot of artists in the SW - which gives it the creative energy it has. Think about what you want - what's important. I think it's easy to spend time doing things that may not serve you. There's such a pressure (via the channels we all know too well) to get out there, see lots, meet lots.

I love collaborating with artists from different practices, and mixing it up - be that age, practice etc. That opens my mind to other ways to think about things.

Find people who you like and that excite you, who's work you like - through local and/or national organisations - and develop those relationships. They're two way and invaluable. I have a few trusted people in Bristol who I share ideas and work with. They know my work and me, and I know they'll be honest with me - as I am with them. I don't believe in a separation between art and life so it's within those relationships and my work that I find out about myself. I've also participated in some group mentoring schemes - lasting 6 months to a year, and benefitted hugely by learning from and sharing with my peers as much as the facilitator/mentor leading the course.

Don't wait to be invited/seen. Invite people that you are interested

in - other artists, mentors, curators - to your studio, and be yourself. I've had great and unexpected experiences - even if I haven't noticed anything particular at the time, things percolate and trickle through at another time.

Get involved in art organisations - I joined Spike Associates in Bristol when I first arrived (2015), volunteered in the gallery and have access to Associates workshops and events, meeting other artists and things happening in Bristol. Most, like Spike, also have



information and resources on operating professionally as an artist and can support and advise if you have a specific issue. VASW is a brilliant resource for SW artists - very user friendly, keeping you up to date with opportunities, exhibitions and events in the South West, in all areas of practice and research, and also up to date information on the art ecology generally. They are very focused on supporting and promoting artists and the organisations and frameworks needed for artists to develop.

### **What's the best bit of work you've seen in the South West?**

There's been so many inspiring and powerful things I've seen this year! If it's just one - it would have to be Louisa Fairclough. So worth the trip.. Louisa Fairclough (Mirror, Plymouth) - raising awareness around mental health and loss in a tender, honest and beautiful way - wonderfully executed. Or Phyllida Barlow (Hauser and wirth) - materials and process, and raw energy.

You can see Helen's work in this year's [Exeter Contemporary Open](#), which runs from Fri 12 Sep - Sat 01 Nov, or find out more about her practice [here](#).





## Scratch Night Collaboration with Exeter Northcott



For the first time we will be partnering with Exeter Northcott on our Scratch Night as part of their Elevate Festival. Hear from performance programmer Katy Danbury about how the collaboration started and what's to come!

### How did this collaboration come about?

Katy Danbury: Since 2022 Exeter Phoenix has hosted regular Scratch Nights. As the years have passed the demand for this platform has continued to grow. Since Sam Parker was appointed as Exeter Northcott's Artist Development Producer we have worked very closely together to enhance the local offer for South West artists at all stages of their practice. Whether that be co-hosting social events with no agenda beyond meeting fellow creatives, attending R&D sharings by each of our supported artists and offering feedback, or generally meeting to discuss strategy for year-round artist development events and opportunities. While each of our venues has a distinct artistic offering, we share a

desire to platform artists throughout their creative journeys. It was important to us that there were clear stepping stones to opportunities in Exeter and beyond, and that we were each able to signpost artists appropriately, whether that be to each other or elsewhere. As applications for each Scratch Night increased, the need was made very clear, and it made sense to pool our resources and platform this offer across both of our venues by including it in this year's Elevate Festival programme.

### What do you hope the Scratch Nights will provide for emerging artists in the South West?

Will Adamsdale: I hope that Scratch Nights (and the Scratch programme in general) will be a real focal point for South West artists to cluster their energies around, to develop their own work and watch and help the work of others. I hope this collaboration between Exeter Phoenix and Exeter Northcott can be a big part of this, and be part of a lot of collaboration between creative centres across the city and the South West. Let's try stuff and improvise and prioritise proactivity and saying yes! I hope we'll look back on this as a brilliant period of energy and creativity; it's what these crazy times need.

Katy Danbury: Two crucial parts of the Scratch Night offer are 1) rehearsal space, and 2) a seed commission of £150. People know that resources are tight wherever we are in the country, and the best way for venues to sustain and grow their current artist development offers right now is to partner up and make it clear to artists that – no matter what – this is a priority to us. We want to



open our doors and meet as many artists as possible. Even on the occasion that we are not able to offer you a Scratch Night slot, we still want to hear more about your work and potentially see it in another context, which could include coming along to Exeter Phoenix's free-to-attend monthly Little Scratch sessions and talking us through your ideas or sharing an extract. We hope that by extending this invitation and marking out a clear pathway for artists we can help demystify the process of getting your work seen and moving to the next stage of its development. Ultimately, Scratch Nights should be a celebration of local talent and, going forward, they will serve as a declaration from Exeter's two leading performance venues that we are here to support artists from the early ideas stage to the big stage.

### **What's next after the October Scratch?**

Katy Danbury: The hope is for us to each be connected to artists that we might not normally have reached had this collaboration not come about. The Performance Programme is just one of many components that make up Exeter Phoenix, and some performance-makers may not necessarily have been aware that we platform theatre and dance, as well as film, visual art, comedy and live music. Similarly, some interdisciplinary artists may not be aware of the Northcott's takeover of Barnfield Theatre and the opportunity to access small Studio spaces beyond Exeter Phoenix, or know about Northcott's Elevate offer. Our plan is to co-present 4 Scratch Nights throughout 2026, with two taking place at each of our



venues. Selected artists will be able to access in-kind rehearsal space at both Exeter Phoenix and Barnfield Theatre, as well as dramaturgical support from Sam Parker, and we will have a rolling submission window with the next opening as soon as the previous one closes so artists do not feel the pressure to apply before they're ready.

Join us on Mon 13 Oct for our [Scratch Night](#) in Collaboration with Exeter Northcott.

Want to get involved? Applications to perform close at 10am on Monday 15th September. See the opportunities section for more details.

## In Conversation with Jon Nash



**You have been very active in the South West scene for a number of years, from setting up the Playwright's Café at Exeter Phoenix to supporting R&D projects with other local artists. Can you tell us a bit about your experiences of making creative things happen in the region, alongside your own work? Do you have any favourite moments?**

I'm always meeting new talented people here in the South West with great ideas and it has always been important to me to help build more opportunities.

I'm especially a fan of building projects that are a bit different. Two stand outs for this have been:

'Queer and There' which got writers and illustrators to collaborate about local LGBTQ history, creating and publishing a zine (and walking guide) to Plymouth with poems, articles, comics, photos and audio. And -

'A Whatsapp To The Curious' which turned 2020 Covid restrictions into a chance to make something a bit bonkers. We teamed up writers and actors to create five Christmas ghost stories told through Whatsapp groups using text, audio and images.

**What inspires you when you're writing? Do you have a routine? What advice would you give to any aspiring playwrights?**

My writing often begins with a strong image. For example I'm writing a play which began with an image of a woman screaming at a tree and grew from there! 'Is Anybody There' came from reading about a real experiment and having LOADS of questions about what actually happened! Then there's some reading and pondering-I also find music can really be inspiring for the feel of the play. I have a mixed routine! I try to write at home every day, but I often write best on trains which seems to help my brain somehow!

For aspiring playwrights I would say read and see as many plays as you can, hear your stuff read out loud and write what you want to not what you think someone else wants (that means make it as weird/unique to you as it needs to be!).

**What is the last thing you saw that inspired you?**

The last show I saw that inspired me was 'Delay' by Tim X Atack at Bristol Old Vic. A kind of gay sci-fi love story that was really heart breaking but also made really good use of audio as well as a live performer. Left me thinking a lot about the theme of how you really tell someone how you feel as well as some inspiration in the kind of way it played with audio voice messages too.

[Is Anybody Out There?](#) Comes to Exeter Phoenix on Fri 26 Sep.

## **Scratch Night in collaboration with Exeter Northcott | Deadline: 10am, Mon 15 Sep**

Got an idea that needs a platform?

Exeter Phoenix Scratch Night in collaboration with Exeter Northcott offers South West based artists in need of an audience a chance to stretch their ideas and the opportunity to test their work in the Exeter Phoenix Auditorium, along with £150 to help develop their idea and a small amount of rehearsal space before the Scratch Night.

Scratch Night will take place on Monday 13th October, 7.30pm - 9.30pm.

[Find out more and apply](#)

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## **Theatre Alibi: Creative Classrooms Project Facilitator | Mon 15 Sep**

We are looking for a team of between 2 and 4 freelance Facilitators to join us here at Alibi to support the delivery of an exciting new project in Exeter Primary Schools supported by funding from the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. You'll have experience of working within a Primary School setting and be committed to supporting the development and delivery of this exciting new programme of work.

[Find out more and apply here](#)

## **EarthSonic Local**

Exeter Phoenix is excited to be part of EarthSonic Local – a new project funded by Arts Council England, which brings together eight local Arts Venues and the Music Venue Trust to empower young people aged 18 - 30 to create music inspired by nature and climate action.

[Find out more and apply](#)

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## **Exeter Artnership Fundraising Workshops | Free fundraising workshops for arts, culture and heritage organisations and practitioners through the Exeter Artnership.**

This programme of FREE fundraising workshops is designed to support our creative community to develop skills, share knowledge and generate ideas to support the local cultural scene to thrive. We will learn together, bringing in fundraising experts and experience from across the country, so that we can all build resilience and sustainability, and nurture a culture of generosity, collaboration and trust within Exeter's vibrant cultural scene.

[Find out more](#)

# OPPORTUNITIES

# EVENTS IN EXETER



## Networking

- [Playwrights Cafe Exeter](#) | First Thursday of the month | Exeter Phoenix | £6 OTD
- [DOCLAB](#) | Wed 10 Sep, 7 – 9pm, Workshop
- [Little Scratch](#) | Wed 24 Sep, 5.30pm - 7.30pm

## Professional Development

- Physical Theatre & Dance Exploration with South West Dance Hub | Tuesdays, 3.30pm - 5pm | [Find out more](#)
- [Exeter Artnership](#) | Throughout Sep and Oct | Various venues across Exeter

## Recommended Events

- Spork! The Not Dead Poets Society – last Tuesday of each month, 5:30pm – Exeter Library, free, drop-in.

Have a piece of creative news or an opportunity you'd like to be shared? Send us a message on the [Creative Hub Facebook page](#) and we'll include what we can in future editions.



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