

# MarketPlace case study: Art in the Fens



## What is the MarketPlace offer?

MarketPlace is about culture, community and creative conversation in Fenland and the Forest Heath area of West Suffolk. MarketPlace operates within and around the seven market towns of Wisbech, March, Mildenhall, Newmarket, Brandon, Whittlesey and Chatteris. MarketPlace utilises a delivery model of on the ground Creative Agents to provide in-person support and visibility. Through this, it connects and nurtures:

- partnership development,
- community advocates and leaders,
- project delivery,
- community research,
- new creative and artistic experiences,
- artists' ability to meet the needs of local audiences.

When COVID-19 hit and a national lockdown began in March 2020 maintaining community connections, the art infrastructure and support creative opportunities to still happen were the priorities. MarketPlace transferred their way of working into a decisive and clear commissioning model. This tiered commissioning model, 'Creative Conversations in Isolation', enables a culturally democratic leadership approach that has empowered their influence with partners and enabled community groups to have a more direct influence in programming while supporting artists to take risks and deliver new ideas with local relevance and audience focus. One of the first commissions in this model was Art in the Fens with artist Kaitlin Ferguson, trialling new ways of delivery and responding to our new connection with the green spaces on our doorsteps.

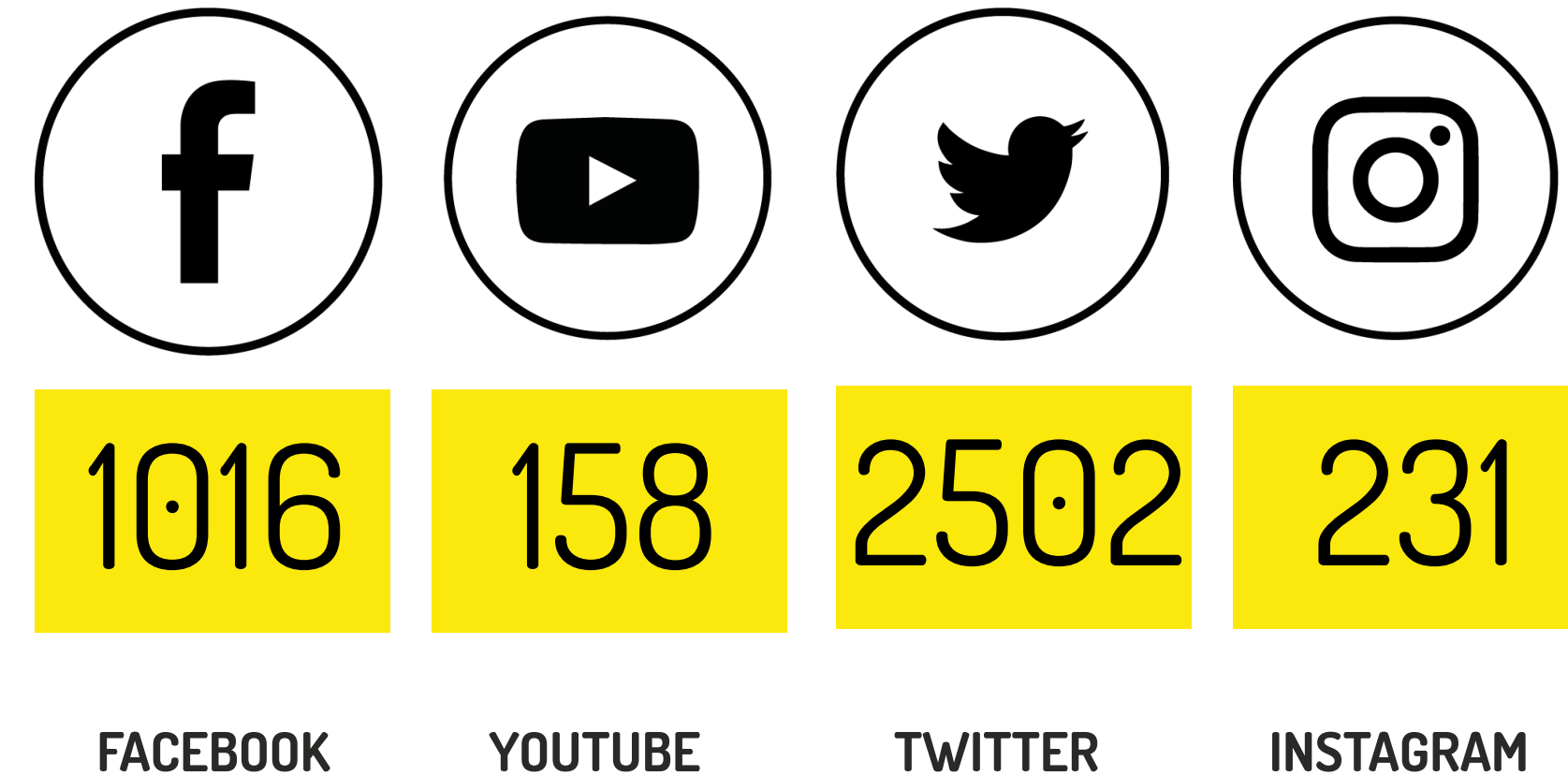
SOW  
Engagement  
Connection

Art in the Fens

# Art in the Fens

The reason that I love the Fens  
is actually for its flatness.

This 'Connect' tier of commission continues the relationship with artist Kaitlin Ferguson from the Brandon Tales and Trails event. As one of the 'Creative Conversations in Isolation' commissions, this was an opportunity to identify new audience potential and themes of work connected to the identity of the Fens and enhance the daily exercise allocation of national lockdown guidelines.



Kaitlin was commissioned to deliver four online tutorials to be disseminated primarily through IGTV on Instagram and promoted through new environmental partner networks that align with current strategic activity in Fenland.

**"These videos will focus on my own practice as an environmental artist and my connection to the Fenland landscape." - Kaitlin Ferguson, artist**

Kaitlin had already begun to enhance and develop her digital skillset in response to the pandemic and a need to change delivery techniques.

**"Working in video format (as opposed to person-to-person 'real-life' delivery) is a new transition for me during the lockdown and in turn has meant I have had to teach myself digital skills e.g video editing, fairly quickly. It's not so much that I am nervous, but I want to ensure these outputs are the best in quality and accessibility (e.g subtitling) as possible. I am aware that I am learning and improving my digital skills all the time so am looking forward to using this as a chance to develop my skills further." - Kaitlin Ferguson, artist**

Having Creative Agent support through this process enabled further development of these skill sets.



**"I'm teaching myself stuff but Colin being an editor gave me critiques to learn from and teach myself to get better at editing and the equipment needs." - Kaitlin Ferguson, artist**

The content was being publicly distributed through native sharing from MarketPlace's own social channels. This meant there was no specific demographic audience targeted for the content beyond adults in Fenland and connecting with the 'Celebrate the Fens' day.



**"I think it is a meaningful response to the pandemic for audiences in the Fenland area, one which doesn't feel rushed or simply a token gesture but an effort to provide long-lasting opportunities for creative engagement.**

**I hope it provides a chance to rest and restore from the uncertainty and intensity of our current global context. The weight of the pandemic is heavy for us all to carry and I hope these videos and activities provide a chance for a break and an opportunity to connect back with nature."**  
**- Kaitlin Ferguson, artist - reflecting on outcomes for the audience**



Additional PDF resources were made to accompany content and create a legacy for this resource beyond initial posting dates.

**"It has been a little hard in all honesty – we're catering towards an adult audience but we don't know who that person at the other end of the screen is – I can't see their faces"**

**– Kaitlin Ferguson, Artist, reflecting upon the challenges of skill-sharing to an unknown audience through social media content creation**

## Action Learning

Initially, this project was targeted at 'Celebrating the Fens' organised by 'Fascinating Fens' mirroring targeting an existing group to ensure engagement.

Supporting partners to understand their roles in disseminating content to their networks proved challenging in this instance, which resulted in the open engagement and networking approach.

There has been no precedent or targets for reach and engagement of digital content for the MarketPlace. As Art in the Fens was the first open engagement content shared on MarketPlace platforms, it has set a benchmark for future content.

The statistics for Youtube and Instagram are the current number of views of the series of videos. Continued engagement and dissemination of this resource means we will track these engagement figures over time.

Developing a digital strategy in the promotion of and targeted engagement for such content will be a key step in the project planning process.

Ensuring that MarketPlace is a conversationalist and engager on social platforms and not just a broadcaster will enable MarketPlace to develop its online communities of interest.

**"I think if there had been more at the front end to build a more solid audience – marketing at the top to build a space for it to exist within would have been good. It feels like the figures are low, did I hit the right note? Are my videos too long? People seem to enjoy the pace – it's calmer slower in terms of my delivery"**  
**– Kaitlin Ferguson, artist**

Without any fixed audience targets and passive engagement the quality of the content is

questioned as we lack reassurance and validation from the audience. This is a reflection of marketplace social transitioning from being broadcasting focussed to an interactive space of exchange.

Combining digital broadcasting of content with dissemination through new and existing networks has enabled new relationships to form.

Cross connecting with niche interests through the Cambridgeshire Geological Society has shown to be a new avenue for connecting with people less engaged with the arts. The project was circulated to 140 members with one member sending feedback

**"I have followed the series of art videos by Kaitlin Ferguson, which are all excellent and have inspired me to set up an activity for my grandsons!"**  
**– audience member from Cambridgeshire Geological Society**

This feedback has highlighted an intergenerational outcome for the project that was not anticipated.



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## Episode 1 - #ArtAndTheFens Kaitlin Ferguson ▾



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#ARTANDTHEFENS

64 views · 1 comment



Photography credits to:

- Kaitlin Ferguson



We Are Frilly is founded on the principles of process-driven participatory practices that extend from co-designing on a project level, strategic planning and cultural accountability through creative evaluation.

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