



Executive Summary

Re:Frame

A visual arts analysis and
opportunities report for
Brighton & Hove

Executive Summary

Brighton & Hove's visual arts sector remains one of the city's defining cultural strengths: a highly creative, diverse and dynamic ecology that has been shaped over decades by artists, studios, educational institutions, festivals, museums, commercial galleries and community-led organisations. The **Re:Frame analysis**, commissioned by Brighton & Hove City Council with sector partners and the support of Arts Council England, provides a most comprehensive of the opportunities and challenges facing the sector. It outlines a set of long-term outcomes designed to strengthen the city's visual arts offer regionally, nationally and internationally; support practitioners; and ensure visual arts remain central to Brighton & Hove's cultural, social and economic life.

A distinctive creative ecology

Brighton & Hove benefits from an unusually dense network of visual arts spaces and organisations. Artist-led hubs such as Phoenix Art Space, which is home to over a hundred studios, serve as major centres for production, learning and exhibition. APEC Studios, Red Herring Studios and Brighton Artists Network create affordable workspace and peer networks for artists at different stages of their careers. The city's commercial galleries, including Maureen Paley: Morena di Luna, Kellie Miller Arts, John Marchant Gallery and others, present both local and international artists, contributing to a diverse curatorial landscape.

Festivals and open studio programmes play a vital role in shaping the cultural calendar. Artists Open Houses, which originated in Brighton, now feature nearly two hundred venues each May, drawing large audiences into domestic and independent spaces. Brighton Festival commissions and Dreamy Place generate high-profile interdisciplinary work with international reach, while Photo Fringe and other city-wide initiatives help sustain a year-round contemporary visual arts presence. Brighton & Hove Museums further strengthen this ecology through increasingly contemporary approaches to commissioning, interpretation and public engagement across multiple sites.

A changing landscape

At the same time, the city's visual arts infrastructure has undergone substantial change. The closure of Brighton Centre for Contemporary Arts in 2023 removed a major platform for experimental practice. ONCA closed after a decade of socially engaged arts activity and organisations such as Fabrica and Lighthouse were not included in the 2023–26 Arts Council England National Portfolio. These developments have reduced the number of dedicated contemporary exhibition spaces and placed greater strain on those that remain.

These pressures are compounded by rising costs, competition for funding, and challenges facing the wider creative workforce across the UK. Affordable workspace is the most urgent

issue: artists consistently report difficulty accessing studios, rehearsal space, digital production facilities and temporary exhibition venues. Demand exceeds supply, and the risk of displacement is growing. Cost-of-living pressures, the frozen student fee model for higher education, and declining arts provision in schools all affect the long-term talent pipeline.

Brighton & Hove's higher and further education offer remains strong with the University of Brighton's School of Art and Media, the University of Sussex's leading Art History programmes, Brighton MET and other FE providers. However, the national pressures on creative education threaten recruitment, progression and the long-term vitality of the sector. The city must work deliberately to retain recent graduates and strengthen local career pathways.

Public art, placemaking and commissioning

Brighton & Hove has a distinctive strength in public art, underpinned by its unusual Section 106 planning obligation, which secures permanent artistic elements through development. This is supported by the city's **Public Art Strategy (2022–2032)**. Recent commissions range from the MODA Hove Central scheme to waterfront developments at Black Rock. Community-led initiatives such as the Hove Plinth create high-profile platforms for sculpture, rotating exhibitions and public engagement. The city's festivals demonstrate an appetite for ambitious temporary commissions that animate public space and attract large and diverse audiences.

This combination of planning policy, civic ambition and cultural leadership creates a significant opportunity for Brighton & Hove to become a national leader in public art and culture-led placemaking.

Front cover Lydia Stonehouse at Phoenix Art Space, photo by Alun Callender

Below Postcard Exhibition, Gallery DODO, 2024, photo by Bernard G Mills





Cross-sector value, economy and tourism

Visual arts contribute meaningfully to Brighton & Hove's visitor economy. Festivals and open studios distribute audiences across neighbourhoods, extend seasonal activity and encourage return visitation. The city's creative identity, reinforced through its vibrant street art and independent cultural scene, appeals to a wide range of visitors seeking cultural experiences.

The sector also intersects with education, digital innovation, health and wellbeing, business development and environmental leadership. Creative health programmes, art-science collaborations, modular learning pathways and partnership projects with developers illustrate the breadth of this civic impact.

Seven outcomes for reframing the future

Re:Frame identifies seven outcomes that together provide a long-term framework for strengthening the visual arts in Brighton & Hove:

1. A city that is a high-profile and well-regarded international centre for visual arts with dynamic and integrated arts programming attracting national and international talent, which grows audiences and raises the profile of visual arts in the city.
2. A city which is home to a recognised and successful visual arts marketplace offering coordinated opportunities for exhibition and sales across physical and digital platforms.
3. A city where art is embedded in its life and fabric through coordinated partnerships, shared resources, cross-sector collaboration and visible public-facing platforms.

4. A city attractive for artists to work in, supported by a portfolio of workspace solutions including meanwhile spaces, planning obligations and long-term creative property models.

5. A city with a strong local ecosystem where diverse talent thrives, built on structured pathways, mentoring, business support, residencies and leadership development.

6. A city that is an ambitious and innovative leader in public art, using planning mechanisms and civic collaboration to support landmark and community-led commissioning.

7. A city with a strong and unified vision for visual arts, with coordinated leadership, regional collaboration and advocacy that amplify the city's creative identity.

Brighton & Hove's visual arts sector possesses the core ingredients for renewed prominence: a dense network of practitioners and organisations, high public engagement, a strong educational foundation and a distinctive cultural identity. The city now has a timely opportunity to strengthen coordination, rebuild lost capacity, improve access to space, grow opportunities for artists, and embed visual arts across civic life. The Re:Frame analysis provides a clear direction for achieving this: reinforcing what works, addressing systemic challenges, and investing in collaboration and leadership. With sustained commitment, Brighton & Hove can secure a confident, equitable and internationally recognised future for visual arts.

Left Sophie Abbot at Phoenix Art Space, photo by Rosie Powell