

Open Studios at Jamaica Street

BROWSE AND BUY WORK BY BRISTOL ARTISTS AT THE THRIVING JAMAICA STREET OPEN STUDIOS, SAYS LINDSEY HARRAD.

Behind the three-storey façade of Jamaica Street Studios, a former carriage works and Grade II listed building in Stokes Croft, there is a hive of activity underway, as all 43 resident artists are busy executing a wide range of new work in anticipation of the popular annual Open Studio event early next month, from 5 – 7 June.

Fine artists, illustrators, ceramicists, textile artists, sculptors and film makers have spent the last three months working towards this exciting weekend event, but as Louise Gardiner, one of the Jamaica Street artists explains, there's a certain poignancy to the preparations for this year's Open Studios, as it may be the last.

"The landlords want to sell the building," she says. "We either have to find around £800,000 to buy the property from them, or get financial support from the Arts Council, Bristol City Council or even an independent philanthropist in order to continue here. We currently receive no public money, so we are starting the process of fundraising, but it's a lot of money for us to find before Spring 2010, which is our deadline to find a solution."

Jamaica Street Studios is a diamond in the rough of Stokes Croft, a rather neglected quarter of the city that nevertheless inspires fervent community spirit from those who know and love it. There's no denying it's a less than salubrious area of Bristol, surprisingly only a third of a mile from the busy commercial centre of Broadmead and the new Cabot Circus, but Jamaica Street is a thriving example of an independently run artists' co-operative that provides working space and creative support to a hub of local artists of varying disciplines. And the Jamaica Street artists are not just

self-indulgently dabbling with their paint pots here – it's a vibrant, professional environment where many creative entrepreneurs are making their living from their work.

"It's such a disappointment to us that we might lose this building," says Louise. "There is huge potential here, which we've been developing with great success over the last two to three years, and we make an enormous contribution to the creative industry of Bristol. If we can't find the funding to survive in this location, essentially 43 businesses will lose their premises.

"It would be almost impossible to recreate Jamaica Street Artists elsewhere," continues Louise. "There is such a shortage of suitable studio space in the South West, so most of us would probably end up working from home, which can be a rather solitary, lonely life. The value of working in such a creative community with fellow professional artists cannot be underestimated – it helps us all to survive individually."

Jamaica Street Artists are looking for support to continue, from organisations or individuals, and would also like to employ someone with the dynamism, specialist knowledge and fundraising skills to help find the funding they need.

Last year's Open Studio art auction raised £2000, and the artists are hoping to start a 'fighting fund' with this year's proceeds – so go along and bid on works donated by a diverse selection of Bristol's best artists – prices start from just £10, so this is a very affordable way to acquire a stunning piece of art work and also support the survival of this very special artistic community.

"If Jamaica Street Studios had to close, the city would lose a valuable asset, a



real hub of creative enterprise that helps to make Bristol one of the buzziest, artistic cities in Britain!" says Louise. "Come along to our Open Studio event and enjoy some fantastic art, and place a bid or two in the auction to ensure this year isn't our last event." ■

OPEN STUDIO EVENT

Friday 5 June – Opening Night for the public, 6pm – 9pm. Followed by a fundraiser party at The Croft.

Saturday 6 June, studios open from 11am – 6pm.

Sunday 7 June, studios open from 10am – 5pm; Fundraising Art Auction, from 4pm.

Jamaica Street Artists' Studios,
37 – 39 Jamaica Street, Stokes Croft,
Bristol. Tel: 0117 924 1171
www.jamaicastreetartists.co.uk



Top: Embroidery and textile artist Louise Gardiner

Left: Jamaica Street Artists' Studios in Stokes Croft, Bristol, with a selection of resident artists. Photography by Simon.

Right: Painter Andrew Hood

