

STILLS TURNS 40

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It's no secret that recent times haven't all been plain sailing for Edinburgh's Stills Gallery. Following their unsuccessful bid for Regular Funding from Creative Scotland in 2014, just as a new director was finding his feet, the future looked decidedly shaky. Despite this, however, the gallery has admirably soldiered on and now, ahead of their birthday in 2017, we caught up with Ben Harman to discuss how the gallery is faring at 40.

'These are challenging times as we know too well from the recent closure of Inverleith House as a contemporary art space. We have lost a great visual arts venue as well as a huge champion for photography as an art form. Our plan for the future is to adapt, to develop our resources and become more resilient as an organisation so that we can create more opportunities and our work can thrive.'

In addition to grant funding from Creative Scotland and City of Edinburgh Council, the gallery have received support from Foyle Foundation, John Watson's Trust and a range of different sponsors. Alongside these, the Stills team have started to explore more unusual ways of increasing revenue, most recent of which saw the gallery hold its first silent auction. The event brought together the work of established photographers such as David Eustace, and Kennard Philips as well as emerging and amateur photographers and raised over £5000 which will go towards the cost of delivering the gallery's free-to-access exhibitions and learning activities in 2017. As Harman comments 'considering it was our first auction it was a great success. We were overwhelmed by the generosity of artists and photographers that donated works and many other people lent their support.'

Since taking over as director in 2014 Harman and his team have been working towards creating a more inclusive and established Scottish photographic community. Along with Glasgow's Streetlevel, they are one of the driving forces behind the Institute of Photography in Scotland Season of Photography an initiative which Harman explains, 'allows key sector partners to communicate well and provide vital awareness for everything that's going on.' Plus, the gallery's continued support of the Jill Todd Photographic Award, now in its 5th year, helps provide a platform for the support and promotion of emerging photographic artists in Scotland. Along with these the silent auction and other such in-house social events have all played their part in making the gallery a lot more accessible to photographers and supporters alike.

Now about to enter its 40th year, the gallery has gone full circle with their most recent exhibition of work by the late Jo Spence, a key figure from the progressive photography workshop movement of the 1970s out of which, Stills was born. With over 12,000 visitors to the Spence show, the highest visitor figures on record for a Stills exhibition, it seems fitting that this has been one of Stills most popular exhibits to date. With a 40th anniversary programme that will include a range of creative learning activities, strategic partnership projects and exhibitions from large group shows to solo presentations plus a display of material from Stills' archive and a major touring exhibition 2017 look set to be a good year for Team Stills. So here's to the next 40 years and the gallery's continued success.