

Arts & Minds Newsletter

Winter 2025

www.artsandmindsnetwork.org.uk

CONTENTS

4. A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the Winter 2025 Arts & Minds newsletter

5. EXPLORING THE MAGIC OF ART WITH “THE OPTIMISTIC AUTISTIC”

Paul discusses Autism and Art with Leeds-based artist Jess Lee Mitchell, otherwise known as “The Optimistic Autistic”

11. CREATIVITY TO COMBAT WINTER BLUES

Dave explores the role of photography and poetry in lifting mood through the Winter months

14. MEMBER CHAT: DANIEL WHITE - POET

Fe chats to Arts & Minds member and poet, Daniel White

22. A COLOURFUL COMMUNITY STORY

Paul reviews W. Y. Vivian Yeung’s Cultural Connection Project - “Harmony in Colours”

26. WHAT’S ON

Events and opportunities for Arts & Minds members



A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the Winter 2025 edition of the Arts & Minds newsletter! We've had a wonderful last couple of months of 2025 here at Arts & Minds, running Connect & Create sessions and our fantastic Rag Wreath making event at Abbey House Museum - thank you so much to Pat and Sarah at Abbey House for showing us round and facilitating the session. Another highlight included running a foil embossing craft session during Synergi / Remembering What's Forgotten's photography exhibition - the themes of which were race and mental health. During the session, we asked people to emboss a word or words into foil which summed up how they felt about the exhibition. We then hung the foil artwork up as it was created. It was amazing to see the feedback appearing as the event went on in real time and it was wonderful to connect with so many community leaders and professionals. We were also treated to a poetry reading from Remembering What's Forgotten's first lived-experience poet-in-residence, Omari Swanston - Jeffers. Thank you so much to Briony from Synergi for inviting us along and creating such a memorable exhibition.

Now we're into 2026 and excited for what's ahead. Please see the 'What's On' section on [page 26](#) for details about our monthly Connect & Create group that meets at Leeds Discovery Centre and our upcoming quarterly event at TCV Skelton Grange. If you want to find out more about Arts & Minds and what we do, you can email us at: info@artsandmindsnetwork.org.uk. You can also check the Arts & Minds e-bulletin and website for more information.

Sarah Bradley

EXPLORING THE MAGIC OF ART WITH "THE OPTIMISTIC AUTISTIC"



Recently there has been plenty of media coverage about Autism and its relationship with art, in view to it either being a major influence for creativity or a challenge to focus consistently.

Intrigued by what I've read, but not being very knowledgeable on the subject of Autism and its challenges I decided to discuss it with Leeds-based artist **Jess Lee Mitchell** also known as **The Optimistic Autistic** to enlighten me.

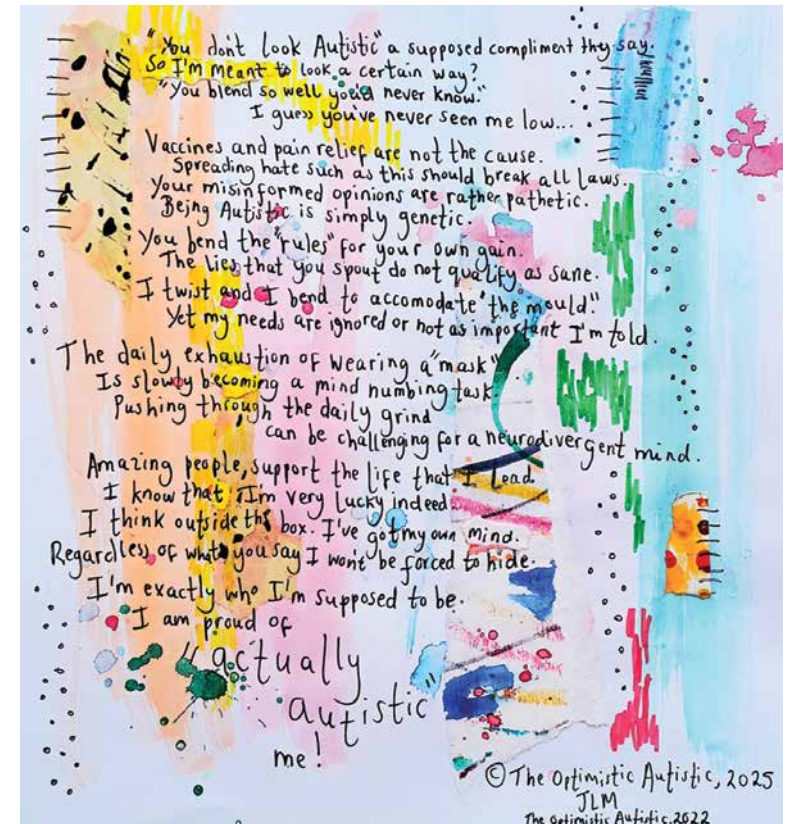
My first question was: "How has autism influenced your art?"

Jess: "I've always been a doodle fan! I'd scribble as a child while listening to instructions and still do! It has always grounded me, provides focus and is my safe space. I guess it is a tool for self-regulation when the world is too loud, bright or busy. The Optimistic Autistic is my passion project a space for quiet reflection - my own imaginative bubble that protects me from overwhelming sensory stimulation. Don't get me wrong - I like the world but sometimes as an Autistic person it can feel that the world doesn't understand me.



Following on my next question was "Do you see Autism as a help or hinderance to your artistic plans?"

Jess: "Being Autistic is not an hinderance to anything - but false narratives and perceptions are. They generate fear, hate and lack of understanding. This is the hinderance of progress and potential. Being forced to fit into a neurotypical society when you are neurodivergent is damaging. It can delete self-worth and destroy mental health and wellbeing. It's okay to be wired a different



way. Difference needs embracing as sometimes not all ideas work, as they might require a unique point of view. Sometimes it's worth colouring outside the lines if it does

not serve its purpose or consider the diversity of society.

We then moved on to: “How does art help your mental health and wellbeing?”

Jess: I view art as an exceptional tool for connectivity and wellbeing. To create is a human response. It can be playful and experimental – an escape from unhealthy pressures and demands. Societal expectations can be rather unrealistic. The need to always be switched on has made us all sleep deprived, anxiety ridden and major overthinkers! Art for me is my “safe place” I am my authentic self. I am not driven by likes, follows or profit – just creativity!



And finally, I asked Jess, “what can society do to help neurodivergent people achieve their potential and thrive?”

Jess: “Actually listen to us! We know ourselves more than any textbook or qualification could tell you. It is brilliant

and appreciated when people educate themselves in order to be an ally to others, but sometimes some of that knowledge only comes from lived experience. It is often stated that inclusive spaces are beneficial for ALL to thrive.



These environments are accessible, embrace diversity, consider differentiation and are welcoming. It is good to feel included. To feel considered. To be acknowledged. To be a valued member of society. Educating on difference from a young age and embedding inclusive practice will help foster a culture of acceptance and understanding”.

“Educating on difference from a young age and embedding inclusive practice will help foster a culture of acceptance and understanding”



Many thanks to Jess for such an enlightening interview and for more details of her work please visit her Facebook page, **“The Optimistic Autistic”**. Jess is looking forward to embracing further creative opportunities in the future.

Her amazing cards are available at the following outlets and Jess would like to thank both venues for their valued support.

The Mill Gallery - www.themillgallery.co.uk

Stormcrow Records - www.facebook.com/stormcrowrecords

Article by **Paul Abraham** - (www.theartfulrambler.com)
Artwork by **Jess Lee Mitchell** - “The Optimistic Autistic”

CREATIVITY TO BEAT THE WINTER BLUES



With the nights drawing in towards the end of the year, it can be tricky to adjust. It's funny how this hits me every year, as if it's never happened before. But I've actually been enjoying the colder weather and getting out to take photos and making photo-manipulation artwork from time to time. The Autumn colours have cheered me up, and as it's been getting darker earlier, I've tried using the time to focus on recording and filming for a music project once the sun sets.

I seem to have a kind of reverse form of seasonal affective disorder. The summer actually really stresses me out to a point of really severe depression and anxiety, and my mood tends to lift in Autumn. I'm still enjoying the colours of the leaves, and the temperature has rarely been too cold to want to get out and about. That said, there have still been some challenges with low mood. Occasionally I've found myself sinking a bit, and it never ceases to amaze me how much creativity can help.

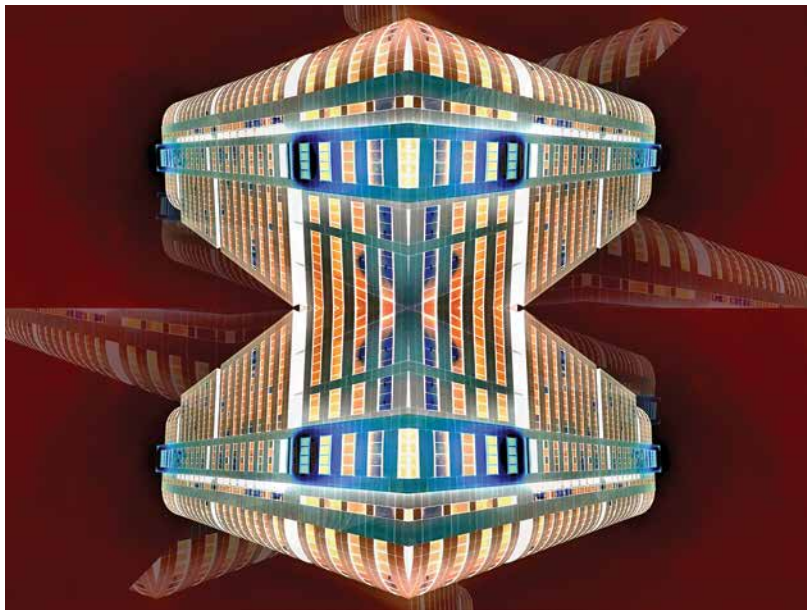


Photo Manipulation Image of Bridgewater Place, Leeds

I've had a really interesting time working on a poetry project with Arts & Minds in the middle of all this. Poetry written by members based on John Atkinson Grimshaw has recently been featured in an exhibition in Leeds Art Gallery, and

that's been a really inspiring thing to be a part of. Writing poetry based on art is something I've never actually done before. When I've written songs in the past I've had music to work with, so this was very different for me. It's even sparked a desire to finish writing lyrics to songs I'd left unfinished all year, so that's another thing to have lined up.



I feel really lucky to be tapped into creativity in such a way, and having projects with other organisations means I'm never lacking in ideas. It's really reminded me how beneficial it all is, and it's quite exciting to have more to look forward to next year.

Article, photos and photo manipulation art by **Dave Lynch**

MEMBER CHAT: DANIEL WHITE - POET



I interviewed prolific poetry writer, Daniel White, in the Leeds Art Gallery, amongst the heritage and artistic beauty of the Burmantofts tiles in The Tiled Hall Cafe.

What do you love about writing poetry?

I love being able to express myself in poetry and writing in generally. Not only do I write poetry, but I keep a journal sometimes. I find it's a good way to clarify feelings. It's a good way to communicate with people and the good thing about it is, that you wouldn't just go up to somebody and say "I'm really

happy", or "I'm really depressed" but you could give them a poem that might explain it in a roundabout way of expressing yourself. It gets that energy out there.

Can you remember your first ever poem?

That's a good question. Let me think. I've got a vague recollection of doing something, maybe in the late 1990's and it was some kind of music poem. I have Aspergers syndrome and I used to go to Mabgate Resource Centre and they had a music session in there and I think I did some kind of poem for the session. One I can remember more clearly was in 2001, I got really into poetry. I used to do some publications, called Successful Living. It was like positive poetry, positive thinking and ideas and there was a lot of, or maybe a couple of romantic ones on there at the time, as I was single at the time and felt a bit depressed about that. It was good therapy to do that and do lots of positive thinking type poems.

Where do you get your inspiration to write your poetry?

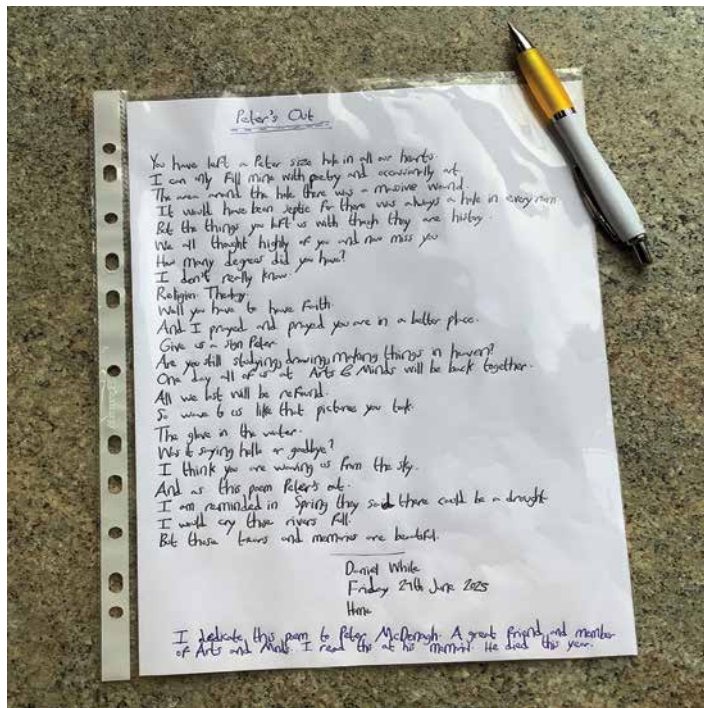
Recently it's been through poetry books. I'm doing an A to Z of poetry in Leeds Central Library. For example 'A' Simon Armitage, 'B' for Emily Bronte, etc and the idea was to choose three or five different poets for each letter and write something either in their style, or take a line of their poetry and make something out of it. Music is an inspiration as well. Especially soppy music like Phil Collins.

Which of your poems is your favourite or most meaningful poem?

That's a really tricky one. I've bought a selection of my poems with me today, so let's have a look. I think at the

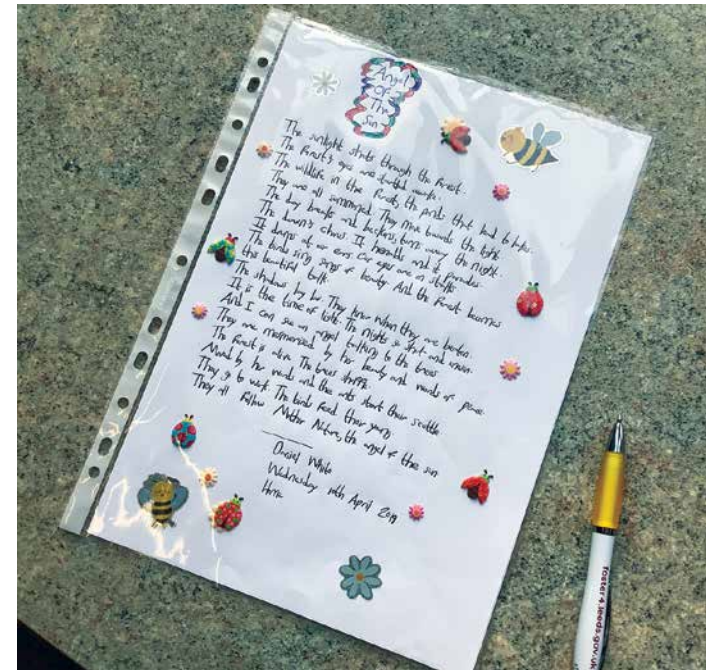
moment, what comes to mind is this one called 'Peter's Out', which is about a good friend called Peter McDonagh who passed away earlier this year. I did a poem to express how I was feeling and I also read it out at his memorial. I like the wordplay in it as well - near the end...

*And as this poem Peter's Out
I'm reminded in Spring they said there would be a draught
I would cry these rivers full
But these tears and memories are beautiful*



Also this one, 'Angel of The Sun'. I didn't know this at the time, but a neighbour passed away on that day, so maybe

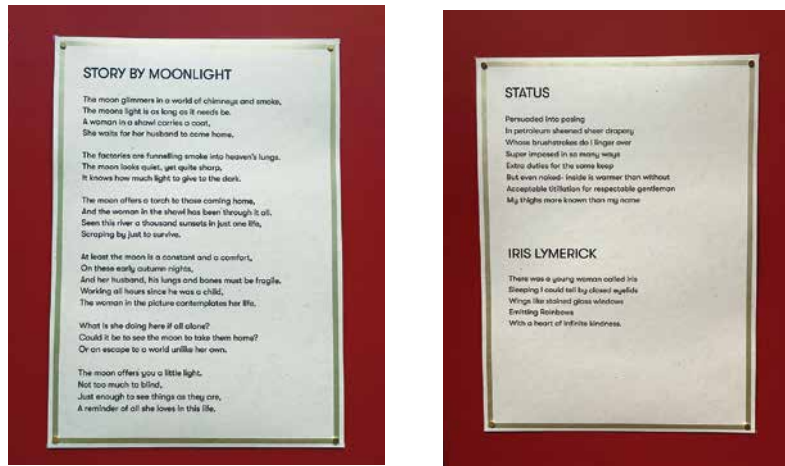
her spirit was somewhere with me on that day when I was writing it.



You've had some of your poetry placed in an exhibition at Leeds Art Gallery. Tell us about that experience.

There's an Irish limerick, called "Iris Limerick" and a poem called "Story by Moonlight". The Irish limerick was inspired by Iris and bright colours. I really like bright colours and rainbows, as they've been more in my consciousness over the last five years. Also, having Asperger syndrome, it represents being on the Autistic spectrum of light. "Story by Moonlight" was inspired by the reflections on the River Aire and of a woman in a shawl waiting for her husband to come, so I'd say the artwork inspired me and whatever I was feeling at the time. I made the poems quite emotive,

especially "Story by Moonlight", which my mum loves. I read all of my poems to my mum and if she thinks it's a good one, I share it with people. She's my litmus test.



What was the name of the project the exhibition emerged from?

Don't Ask For The Moon. Which was inspired from a line from a film with Bette Davis.

Was this your first time doing an exhibition?

Not my first. I did a project/exhibition in 2023 with the poet Rommi Smith. This is my second exhibition.

Have you grown in confidence?

Yeah. My first exhibition I was very excited. You know when you meet new people, I was like a kid in a sweet shop. I wanted to give out my poetry to everybody. I managed not to do that so much on this project. I really enjoyed it. I do love sharing my poetry with people.

How many poems do you think you've written, thus far?

Well, I would guesstimate... I'm going to say, probably between 5000 and 7000, but they're not all good - obviously and they're more prolific than terrific. I'd say about 400 to 500 good ones over the years.



Have you had any of your poems published in a book?

Yes, we produced a book with the project with Rommi Smith. I have about seven poems in that one. The book is called Reflections.

What does writing poetry do for you?

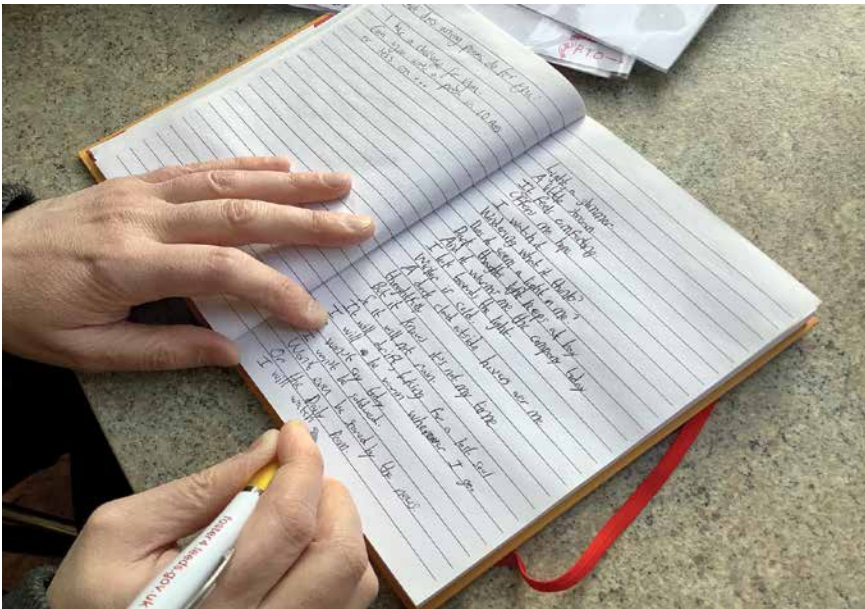
I find it brilliant. I find it's a good use of time, a good way of mixing and bonding with people. It's a way to be kind to people, because I give people my poetry. I have pen-friends I write to and I share my poetry with them. I like the idea of doing kind things to people, even if I don't ever

meet the people. Maybe one day, I'll get a book of just my poetry published. I know I might never meet the people who read the poems, but it's a good way to connect with these people in some way. It's a bit like a message in a bottle. I have, maybe a romantic view of the world. Being able to mix with people indirectly is good.

Okay, I have a challenge for you. Can you write a poem in under ten minutes about light in the winter darkness?

Okay, yeah. I can do that.

Your time starts now!



TEN MINUTES LATER... I've called it Light in the Darkness.

Light In The Darkness

Light in glimmer
 A little stream
 It feels comforting
 Offers me hope
 I watch it
 Wondering what it thinks?
 Does it seem a light to me?
 Dark thoughts light keeps at bay
 And it warms me the company today
 I look towards the light
 Winter is cold
 A dark cloud outside hovers over me
 Thoughtfully
 But it knows it's not my time
 So it will not rain
 It will drift, looking for a lost soul
 I will be warm wherever I go
 I won't cry today
 I won't be subdued
 Won't even be scared by the news
 On the Daily Doom
 I will watch a smile as it flickers in a crowd of clouds
 That is the light
 I'm with it now
 Suddenly there is a whole beam
 The darkness can't fit in
 It is not me the outcast
 Just the dark, dark clouds
 I am free to be me now

By Daniel White

Article and photos by **Fe**

A COLOURFUL COMMUNITY STORY



Hong Kong-born artist W. Y. Vivian Yeung - who also has Japanese, Singaporean, European and American cultural influences is the founder and owner of Lazy Cover Art Studio. Inspired by a dream of bringing cultures together through art, she specialises in cross-cultural work that blends Oriental and Western styles.

After discussions with Morley Market, Vivian secured the perfect venue for her latest creative venture. With additional advice and funding from Leeds City Council through the Leeds Cultural Investment Programme, she was able to bring to life her ambitious Cultural Connection Project, Harmony in Colours - and it proved to be a great success.

Running from 27th September to 29th November 2025, the project offered an exciting and engaging journey for the community. It featured 10 unique workshops focused on cross-cultural painting and traditional Chinese writing, welcoming people of all ages and backgrounds.



In total, the workshops attracted more than eighty participants from diverse cultures and religions. Ages ranged from a cheerful three-year-old to an enthusiastic ninety-three-year-old, beautifully showcasing the project's



intergenerational reach. The blend of youthful energy and the wisdom of older participants created a warm, joyful atmosphere that visitors to Morley Market frequently praised.

The project celebrated the beauty of cultural diversity through artistic expression. Participants learned techniques in traditional Chinese calligraphy while exploring a variety of painting styles, allowing everyone to express themselves creatively and connect with others. Each session was filled with laughter, learning and inspiration. Attendees shared stories, ideas and experiences, creating lively workshops that encouraged creativity and appreciation for cultures different from their own. Through painting and writing, participants experienced the joy of cultural exchange, demonstrating how art can bring people together and foster genuine harmony.



Overall, Cultural Connection: Harmony in Colours was not just about art - it was about community, connection and celebrating what makes us unique. Participants left with new skills, beautiful artwork and warm memories of time spent together.

Vivian is already planning further community projects for 2026. She is also expanding her range of unique art products online, with the goal of launching a new website, www.lazycoverartstudio.com by the end of 2025. Follow Lazy Cover Art Studio on social media for more exciting updates. If you would like to book a cultural painting workshop, please contact Vivian:

WhatsApp/Message/Call: **07354 480 301**

Email: info@lazycoverartstudio.com

Facebook: **Lazy Cover Art Studio**

Instagram: **@lazycoverartstudio**

Funded by: Leeds City Council, with support from Morley Market and That Morley Mag



WHAT'S ON...

CONNECT & CREATE

Connect & Create is a monthly group where Arts & Minds members can connect, share skills, and take part in creative workshops led by other members. Each month's offer will be led by a different member and is free to attend. The workshops are on the **first Monday of every month** from **1pm to 3pm** with the exception of bank holidays, in which case they are on the following Monday.

The Connect & Create group meets at Leeds Discovery Centre, Carlisle Road, Leeds LS10 1LB. There is free parking if you are coming by car and the centre is a short walk from town if you are coming by public transport.

For more information about the workshops, email info@artsandmindsnetwork.org.uk. Sessions are free but booking is essential as there is a limit on numbers so please get in touch if you want to come along so we can help you with booking your place.



CITYWIDE EVENTS:

Sun 1st Feb 26 - Sat 28th Feb 26 - The Sculpture Gallery - Giles Newman exhibition, Leeds Corn Exchange, Call Lane, Leeds, LS1 7BR, FREE

Sat 14th Feb 26 - Sparky Saturdays: Bouquets - Valentine's Day exhibition focused around flower power. Come along and create your own bouquet. Drop-in, no need to book. M&S Archive, The Michael Marks Building, Leeds, LS2 9LP, FREE

Sat 21st Feb 26, 10:00 - 16:00 - Makers Market featuring a brand new set of traders, 34 George St, Leeds, LS2 7HY, FREE

Tue 24th Feb 26 - Scrap Talks: "Stitch It, Don't Ditch It" - Interactive Clothing Repair Talk - First Floor, The Spinning Mill, Sunny Bank Mills, Leeds, LS28 5UJ, Tickets, £5

Sat 7th Mar 26, 10:00 - 12:00 - Rebraiding History: A Creative Writing Workshop, with Becky Cherriman, Drawing on Victorian artifacts in the museum's collection and 19th century voices, we will find creative ways to weave their history with our present. Abbey House Museum, Abbey Walk, Abbey Road, Kirkstall, Leeds, LS5 3EH, Tickets, £12.50, 16+

Sat 29 Mar 2025 - Sun 5th Apr 2026 - Portrayals of Women - A display from Leeds Art Gallery's works on paper collection exploring how women have been portrayed from the 17th century to the present day. Leeds Art Gallery, The Headrow, Leeds, LS1 3AA, FREE

ABOUT ARTS & MINDS

Arts & Minds is a network of people in Leeds who are interested in creativity and mental health. We include carers, health workers, artists, performers, students, people who have used mental health services and OTs. We want to get people talking about how the arts can help mental wellbeing. If you want to know more please get in touch using the details below. You are welcome at any of our events or workshops and you can join Arts & Minds for free at: www.artsandmindsnetwork.org.uk/join-us

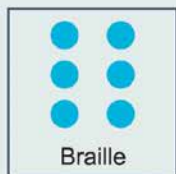
email: info@artsandmindsnetwork.org.uk

website: www.artsandmindsnetwork.org.uk

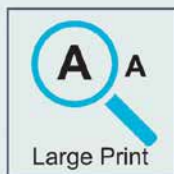
facebook: facebook.com/artsminds

Would you like this information in an alternative format?

For a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in:



or



or



or



please contact the Interpretation and Translation Support Team on [0113 85 56418/9](tel:0113 85 56418/9) or translation.lypft@nhs.net

*Service provided by Leeds and York Partnership Foundation Trust
in partnership with Leeds Mind*