



Roger Olive

## Roger Olive

### Curator and Craft Manager, Swan Gallery, Old Harwich, Essex

Roger runs The Swan Gallery with his wife, Karina. He originally worked for the BBC as a team-leader, converting the analogue audio archive to a digital format. When the office moved across London, which resulted in an even longer commute for Roger, he decided to take the leap and follow his passion for art.

#### What does an average day look like?

*I wake up 6.30am and I'm straight into the school run, sorting packed lunches etc. Breakfast. An hour or so of housework, then into the gallery to sort through work emails, answer phone & social media messages and start prioritising the day ahead. One of us will then walk the dog. 9am, baking begins for the tea room and more cleaning.*

*Open the front door for business at 9.30am. Coffee...*

*As the day pans out, there's a constant flow of planning for workshops, future gallery events, serving in the tea room, giving visitors advice on local places of interest and generally just being friendly, plugging what we do and what we can offer via social media and the website. More planning and running workshops serving tea, coffee and sandwiches, cleaning (hygiene is important in the kitchen) designing PR material, posters etc serving customers, more talking to visitors and ....coffee...Late lunch, about 3pm...all whilst keeping an eye on emails, phone calls and social media messages. Kids arrive back from school. Tea room visitors are by this time (3.45 – 4pm) winding down but not visitors to the craft shop or gallery. Some days are of course dead, we don't see a soul, but we always have to be prepared so we're always on call as it were. This "free" time is generally used to get on with work related projects. Other days can be frantic, there's just no real way of telling.*

*5pm. close the front door. Although that's not always possible if people are still on the premises. There are days when we can't close until gone 6pm. Clear up and get on with dinner & housework,. Back on the computer do follow up on the day's work messages. Dinner with the family (important!) Back on the computer for an hour for more work (this could be just research which can be relaxing though) and finish around 8-9pm. Actually, we never really switch off, phones receive work emails etc so even when we're trying to watch TV late at night we're still 'on call' answering Facebook message queries about crafting or exhibitions or social functions. Participating in local community events for a small business is very important to us. Bed around midnight., thinking there just isn't enough hours in the day.*

#### Your gallery is part of your house. How does working from home impact on your well-being?

*To cope with living where we work, we alternate who gets up in the mornings so at least every other day one of us can relax and not have to think about getting up to go straight into work mode. Also as well have to keep open during the weekends we decided to close on Monday's, and we try to have our own days off. Which means either a Saturday or a Sunday one of us will have our own day off whilst the other works. It gives us our own space apart from everything. Although if we don't leave the house on those days we do find ourselves sliding back into work to deal with queries and speak with people in our area, craft shop or gallery. It also means that on the Saturday or Sunday we employ one of our daughters (ages 13 & 14) to help with the tea room. So we get to*

*spend a bit of time with them, they get some money for working and they have an input with the business. Mind you, it does feel that we're not getting as much family time as we would ideally like. It's not easy balancing work and family time but we do try to involve them as much as we can. Helping out in children's craft workshops, helping out during gallery private view events etc. It's quite a busy time for them at their age really. I would like to think they're developing a good foundation in taking responsibility for their actions and a sense of reward for hard work and having their views and opinions listened to in how areas of the business are operating. Certainly an understanding of how hard it is to run your own business.*

#### Have your values in relation to work changed at all during your life time?

*Certainly when the children were younger, income stability was far more important than daydreams. But as they got older, having a job in London which involved a minimum daily 5 hour commute became a problem. Physically and emotionally. Street was a big factor, mainly due to tiredness and ill health. Although I seem to remember having more family time at the weekends, I was certainly more anxious of not waisting that time, because Monday morning 5am I'd be awake preparing for the morning commute again. Which in turn, meant that family tie wasn't as relaxed as it should have been. There was almost an urgency about it. Another job to do. In contrast, being self employed with a daily commute of 5 seconds from upstairs to downstairs has had a profound effect on our quality of family time, and significantly reduced stress levels. It's not easy by any means, we work harder now than we've ever worked. But none of it feels like a chore or a waste of time. Every moment on trains commuting and being in London was time away from the family. But every moment at work now, is time for our family's enrichment, creativity and experiences. The difference in priorities have come about because our children have grown, they have more awareness and understanding of the world around them as individuals. It became more important to show them that life can be what you make.*

#### Have you had to take risks in your work life?

*The main risk was mainly a financial one. Leaving an established career at the BBC with a regular income and embarking on a new career with no guarantee of income, was to some degree completely reckless. But Katrina had already begun her craft shop business which was growing, I had opened an art gallery above her shop which was generating interest. So, with effort and planning we knew it was possible to successfully make the transition. With the emphasis on Hard Work. The main issues to overcome was that whilst working for a large corporation, I had an academy of free training and business advice to hand. I could delegate projects and tasks. When you're self-employed you are everyone. Unless you can afford to employ someone or pay for training, everything you need to run*

*your business successfully, is completely down to you. From cleaning the dishes, being project manager to writing the press release. The challenge is in having the conviction that what you're doing is right and a positive attitude to maintain the momentum. No one will hold you accountable apart from yourself. This has been made slightly easier to manage because we have each other to be accountable to. If we mess up or have new ideas about the direction of our business, we can at least rely on each other and close family members for feedback.*

**As you've grown older how has 'self-understanding' contributed to your choice of work?**

*I guess as time's gone by, you can't help but to re-evaluate or question your "path". Self-understanding through knowledge, transforming likes and dislikes, being able to understand and act on strengths and weaknesses aren't easy choices to make. I've known people who have worked all their lives in factories to earn enough to live a very comfortable life after they retire. Then die 6 months later. Others who have lived a full and rewarding life working hard at the things they love doing and never retiring. Knowing people who have now passed on has shaped my priorities to a larger degree than just an awareness of who I've become. My choice to quit the London 'job of work' was a difficult decision to make, it was a good job and rewarding. In the end it was all down to a change in perspective. Life's priorities became re-shaped on the premise that it's okay if you don't own a house or drive a nice car and can't buy your children the latest Nike trainers to muck about in. I'm not saying that's a bad thing but only that these are the things we realised shouldn't direct our lives above all other experiences. This perspective is perhaps the privilege of age and experience, but not everyone would agree I'm sure. To live in such a relatively safe society requires money, there's no getting around that. But you can earn it safely and securely, or by the skin of your teeth and have a rollercoaster of a time, health permitting.*

**What skills does your work give you the opportunity to exercise and to what extent are these skills?**

*The skills that my career choices have given me are generally attributed to communication and motivating others. In the BBC I was in charge of a small group of researchers and audio technicians working on the preservation of the audio archive for 14 years. Up to that point, unknown territory for most broadcasting companies. We were then encouraged to take chances and try new thing out. It was a creative time and we were leading partners in establishing policies on audio archive preservation with other similar groups throughout Europe. So I got to meet some fairly important people in broadcasting from all over the world. There was no established training outside that of team leader to achieve this status. We were all making it up as we went along. It certainly gave me the confidence to have the front to run my own show. But then I realised that most adults in similar managerial, creative positions are all blagging it to some degree. Quietly thinking to themselves 'how the hell did I make it here, and more importantly I hope they don't realise I haven't a clue what I'm doing.' Quiet confidence, that if you step forward things will happen and people will follow your lead. I didn't train to run an art gallery, Katrina didn't train how to run a craft shop or a tea room. We just do. We obviously learn things along the way, accounting, data management, copy writing for PR, website design and management and professional social skills just through experience. All whilst raising a family, keeps you on your toes by necessity.*

**Thinking of a situation in which you feel good about your-**

**self (in general). Are you able to exercise these feelings through your work?**

*I feel good when I am able to motivate people to achieve or at least to take a step towards achieving a goal.*

**On a scale of 0 to 10 how fulfilling is your working life? (10 being the most fulfilling)**

7.

**Why isn't it a zero?**

*Because I've experienced soul less jobs and can compare to the life I have today.*

**Do you set yourself goals to help you achieve a more fulfilling work life ?**

*Absolutely, without challenges there's no reason to progress. Work life, has blurred boundaries at the moment and it's a good place to be. I'd like people who read this (young people in particular) to understand that setting goals is crucial in determining a happy, meaningful and ultimately fulfilling work life.*

**To what extent has working in your gallery set-up developed your understanding of other cultures ?**

*Being surrounded by 'art' every day and the results of the artists inspiration, I can't help but explore the world around me to be inspired myself, to achieve a similar confidence in my work. I've come to revive the hunger for study in art history and cultural influence that I once had back in my college days.*

**What are the stresses of your job and how do you cope with them?**

*Time limits on producing a new show and publicity is a challenge to the work I do, but the stresses comes only on a financial level these days, i.e. 'are we going to earn enough money to pay the bills this month?' But the financial security of having a regulated income by working for someone else, compared to the irritable income of being self-employed is no contest. Life is so much more creative and real when you alone are accountable for all that you do.*

**What three things do you feel most passionate about (generally)?**

*Showing our children that hard work and creativity is important in contributing to living a full rewarding life – i.e. Transforming an idea into a real situation or outcome*

*Honesty – Being honest with people and especially family releases you from so much stress and guilt that you become a happier person and can get on with life*

*Choosing to have consideration towards others – Acknowledging that so much more can be achieved, with less stress, when people can work together with mutual respect would help us avoid so many unnecessary negative hurdles in life.*

**Finally, what advice would you give to anyone starting out in work or considering a new career?**

*Don't be afraid, you will become the best you can become when placed outside your comfort zone. Embrace it and cherish it.*