Photographer: Daniel Block

Open Studios 2015

I am delighted to endorse Open Studios as, apart from being a unique institution, it has also had a direct influence on the way that I operate my pop-up gallery.

I first opened our house in Great Shelford thirty years ago under the banner of Open Studios. In those days, I did not have a separate place to work in, but just painted on an old easel in the corner of the living room.

I remember screen-printing my posters and doing all my own publicity. I approached the Cambridge Festival committee and asked whether they could include us as a 'fringe benefit' in their booklet – but we got a very firm refusal to that one. It was amusing to see in the *Cambridge News* later that the artists had been given the most coverage in an article about the Cambridge Festival. The Festival disappeared not long after, but Open Studios has continued to grow and flourish.

When I worked at Hills Road, I encouraged our art students to visit Open Studios and record what they saw in their sketchbooks. I thought it was important for young people to see both the wonderful variety of work but also how artists often exercise their magic in quite ordinary surroundings.

I always gave the students a few simple DOs and DON'Ts when visiting studios. Always ask permission before taking a photograph, never monopolise the artist, especially if the studio is busy with visitors, but do take your parents, as they might buy something!

We have recently been on a trip to Brussels, and, although the museum dedicated to Magritte is impressive, it was his tiny flat that captured my imagination. It was fascinating to see where he had lived for many years with his wife. Although Magritte did eventually have a shed built in the garden to work in, he soon retreated back into the kitchen, as it was warmer, to do his painting.

So, I guess the message has to be, one can make art anywhere!

Ted Coney

Head of Art and Design,
Hills Road Sixth Form College (1971–2005)
Ted Coney's Family Portraits (2008–2015)
www.tedconeysfamilyportraits.co.uk