

THE ARTS

# Arty weddings

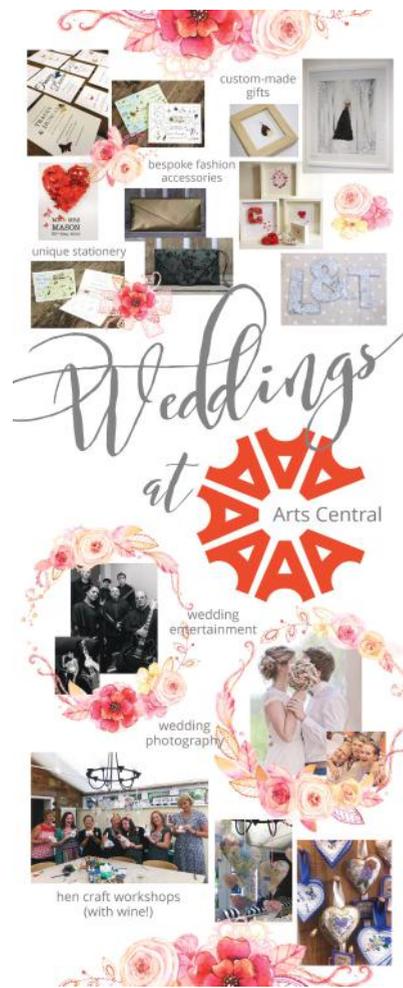
.....● JOHN BEST, CHAIR, ARTS GATEWAY MK

**T**his month I want to share something of the life of a mixed creative community. At Arts Central, our creative hub in Norfolk House, Central MK, we are 45 people developing our own creative practices in a collective workplace. The grouping of quite a diverse mix of people means there's a lot of support and help flowing between colleagues. People can organise the courses or workshops they need, joining with others from outside if they wish; we have our own programme of performances and networking events; and sometimes some quite good ideas emerge. I want to write about one of them, which may interest readers in Milton Keynes because we're based there; and readers in Northampton because maybe something similar might thrive in Northampton.

### Put some Art into your wedding

Despite – maybe because of – the rising divorce rate, weddings are hardly going out of fashion. Several of Arts Central's creatives find a home for their work in these important family events. A group of them were discussing their shared experiences and the potential for helping each other. This transformed more formally into 'Weddings at Arts Central' and the prospect of presenting a collective proposition both for younger and – increasingly typical – older

couples, who could be encouraged to tie a more artistic knot. So this month I'm profiling half a dozen creatives, who have been offering crafty hen parties, unique stationery, bespoke fashion accessories, personalised wedding gifts, live music entertainment, photography and potentially a lot more. Weddings at AC effectively offers a 'one-stop' shop for those who want their event to be creatively different as well as helping to support local arts enterprise.



### LISA KINRADE

After spending several years making soft furnishings and experimenting with clothing and bag designs, five years ago she started collaborating with a local milliner to make clutch bags to accompany her handmade bespoke hats. Lisa's first collection of silk bags was launched in 2011 under her brand Jack & Rose, a venture which she manages around the care of her two young children. Five years on and with the same keen eye to quality, she designs and makes clutch bags in all shapes, sizes and colours, working mainly with beautiful silks and Swarovski crystals. Her bags have graced Royal Ascot, Buckingham Palace Garden Parties and many weddings and other special occasions. Her ideas continue to develop: "Much of my work to date has centred around producing classic tailored clutch bags working as foils for beautiful dresses and quirky hats. In 2016 I would like to explore beyond these boundaries and add some very different designs to my collection; perhaps finding that 'signature bag' and making use of my own fabric designs!" She moved into Arts Central in June 2015. You can visit Jack & Rose in Norfolk House, CMK or at [www.jackandrosevintage.co.uk](http://www.jackandrosevintage.co.uk), or contact Lisa directly at [info@jackandrosevintage.co.uk](mailto:info@jackandrosevintage.co.uk)



Sheree Willis, and some examples of her whimsical Cute Maps.

### SHEREE WILLIS

Local illustrator Sheree Willis began creating personalised gift maps and wedding invitations for friends while she was working for 14 years in Fashion PR and design. The success of these led to the launch in 2010 of Cute Maps which attracted exposure in national and international media leading to commissions for clients across the world.

Cute Maps are custom maps individually tailored to depict a whimsical visual story and lasting memory of a special occasion or relationship. Each map is utterly bespoke; all locations are chosen by the clients, be it their venues, where they met, where they were engaged or favourite landmarks; personal motifs can also be incorporated into the design such as pets, cars and hobbies. Your Cute Map becomes a truly unique part of your wedding as well as a lasting keepsake. The Cute Maps package can include Save the Dates and Invitations, all the way through to Menus, Favour Tags and Thank You Cards; everything from creating full stationery suites to simple postcards, something to suit all tastes and budgets. Inspired by her return from Manchester to her MK home town in 2014, when she first joined Arts Central, Sheree last year conceived the Milton Keynes Cute Map, a comprehensive and naturally 'cute' map of MK's wonderful grid. This developed into the MK Cute Map Collection including Tea Towels, Prints, Notecards and more. To find out more about Cute Maps visit [www.cutemaps.co.uk](http://www.cutemaps.co.uk) Maybe every town should have its own Cute Map!

### KAREN KODISH

Karen Kodish is well-established within the arts community of Milton Keynes, working regularly with the council, actors, theatre companies, filmmakers, musicians and also nursery schools. She also enjoys commercial and business headshot shoots. She has owned a camera since the age of about eight and is testament to the wisdom of starting kids off young. After being stuck in a rut, she decided in 2010 with encouragement of a friend to take the leap into professional photography, and Karen Kodish Photography was born. Self-taught, Karen is a storyteller, who trusts her instinct to put her in the right place at the right time to capture the natural moments around her. Where weddings are concerned, Karen prefers small and something different: "I love the intimacy of the smaller weddings, where there are less than say 100 guests. Building rapport with the guests as well as the happy couple is really important to me and very much a part of who I am." She has been a resident of Arts Central from its inception in 2013, appreciating the warmth of colleagues in a profession which otherwise can be a very solitary experience. You can contact Karen via [www.kodishphotos.com](http://www.kodishphotos.com), [@kodishphotos](https://twitter.com/kodishphotos) (Twitter, iG & Pinterest), [images@kodishphotos.com](mailto:images@kodishphotos.com) or 07956 986842.



Karen Kodish, photographer, capturing the special in A&J's wedding.



Lisa Kinrade, and some matching creations proudly worn by a customer.

## THE ARTS

**CHAN LY**

Chan Ly is a creative fashion artist whose practice is driven by her passion for fashion. She takes inspiration from many sources: from the history of fashion, fashion designers and photographers to arts and ballet. Over the last two years at Arts Central she has developed her approach to fashion illustration, experimenting with pencil, painting, watercolours and mixed media. Currently her signature style uses rose petals to create fashion artwork designs in which the natural form of flowers and petals create movement and shape. Small scale one-off petal designs make a special gift for bridesmaids and family. Chan is happy to do commission work including at a larger scale. As her practice develops she will move towards turning her ideas from fashion illustration into couture production. For now her hand-drawn and rose petal work provide a distinctive tone and quality. One to watch. You can find out more about her on [www.chanly.co.uk](http://www.chanly.co.uk)



Chan Ly and some of her fashion illustrations.

**NICKY PRINCE**

Music is in Nicky's blood, having played many years very successfully in professional and semi-professional settings. I've never understood quite why she's not more widely recognised as a talent. Brought up on a hi-fi diet of Stevie Wonder, James Brown, George Benson and Gladys Knight it's little surprise that since discovering her unique singing talent in the early 1990s, and moving from dance to music, Nicky has made a big impact on the music scene. She has supported artists at the highest level, including Roy Ayres, Nate James, Courtney Pine, The Three Degrees and Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, and regularly works internationally. She has appeared at Glastonbury and at Eurovision, and more recently in The Craig Charles Funk & Soul Club show at the Bedford Corn Exchange! She has performed in her own right at prestigious venues such as The Jazz Cafe, Pigalle, The Stables, The Cobden Club, The Bedford and The Grand Prix @ Silverstone. She has many music projects ongoing, not least the next in a series of EPs. Most relevant to this article – her six-piece dance band Soul Selecta has been entertaining audiences, weddings and events since 2003 and can provide a well-honed edge to the celebrations. Nicky is also the longest-serving supporter of Arts Gateway, having remained our office manager for over a decade, while all around her changed... Find more about Soul Selecta at [www.soulselecta.co.uk](http://www.soulselecta.co.uk) and about Nicky's music on iTunes and Amazon.



Nicky Prince appears both as a solo artist and as the leader of six-piece Soul Selecta.



Jane Charles and examples of the products of her Crafty Hen Nights.

**JANE CHARLES**

Jane Charles has been at Arts Central since we opened at Station House in 2013, and I've written about her before. She has a diverse textile, fabric and quilting practice. With a degree in Fashion and Textiles from Leicester Polytechnic she teaches and runs workshops at Arts

Central and around the city. She is a fine example of how an artistic practice not only produces work of high quality, but at the same time addresses social, emotional and community needs. Arts can be very therapeutic and Jane has run crafty days and courses for years. In 2014 she set up Make Me Relax days for women to have a day off from being a mum or from work commitments – crafting, chatting, eating good food and a yoga class thrown in for luck and relaxation! That success led very soon to a package for Crafty Hen Parties which, Jane assures, can follow whatever themes and colour schemes participants request. In one, participants created hanging heart collages in the wedding colours together with vintage maps and buttons. They went on to make fun garters with vintage trims and a set of decoupage letters for the Bride and Groom to make a focal point on the top table, an unusually direct benefit from hen party to nuptials. All that with prosecco and cake, which surely adds to the artistic experience. Jane also creates bespoke wedding trees celebrating a marriage, these can be in any colours and with any sentiment hand printed on the back. Brides have used these trees to feature on their wedding cakes and they make a lovely lasting memory of your special day or as a gift. To talk through any of these ideas, email Jane at [stitch@smallbeans.co.uk](mailto:stitch@smallbeans.co.uk)

**TRACEY MASON**

Tracey Mason graduated from Northampton University in 2010 with a first class honours degree in Fine Art and has been part of the AC community since 2013. I've written in the past about her practice, which then focused on striking art-pieces derived from photographs. Currently the main focus of her practice is creating beautiful, unique collages with hand painted, hand cut butterflies. One of these pieces has been accepted into this year's Royal Watercolour Society Contemporary competition at the Bankside Gallery, London. Recently she has produced a collection of bespoke, hand crafted wedding stationery and gifts using her signature butterflies as embellishment, which she displayed at the wedding fair in Milton Keynes. Everything in her 'Butterfly Wedding' collection can be personalised and adapted to suit each client's requirements. The full range can be seen on her website [www.traceymason.co.uk](http://www.traceymason.co.uk)



Tracey Mason, and an example of her popular butterfly series of pieces.

**The strength of collaboration**

The Weddings at Arts Central project came about from informal conversation around the notional 'water-cooler' at Arts Central, and produced a collaboration which looks likely to last. Artists struggle to generate enough income to live off their creative practice and every new avenue is potentially a lifeline. And the impression gained from the Wedding Fair where the collaboration was first tried out was that weddings are all too often rather

mechanical affairs, driven by conventional components. Here was a chance to bring a slightly more bohemian proposition to sit beside the conventional. People need the choice.

The combined talents offering crafty hen parties, unique stationery, bespoke fashion accessories, personalised wedding gifts, entertainment, and photography, could start to provide a rather different 'one-stop' shop for those who want an

event with a more distinct, personalised feel. It doesn't need a great leap to think of another half dozen genres to sit beside those. Arts Gateway's role is at once to look for new channels for artists to explore, and to encourage the wider community to be drawn to creative activities. The fact that any successful conversations will help keep business local, and support your local creatives is an added bonus. ■

**NEWS FROM ARTS CENTRAL**

In the year ahead we will continue to develop an annual MK Arts Week in September that reaches across the boundaries towards artists in Northampton, in Bedford and in Aylesbury. We are working with Bedford Creative Arts to roll out their Culture Challenge database for artists working with young people. And we have a small grant from the Arts Council to establish a sub-regional network of the creative hubs similar to us, to share experience and capacity, to promote performance circuits for artists and to give a louder voice to our sector. Few people succeed in isolation and the Creative Workplace Network will help us all. And finally... for those who would like to get involved in any of those projects, either in MK or Northampton, you can sign up on [www.meetup.com/artscentral](http://www.meetup.com/artscentral), email me at [john.best@artsgatewaymk.org.uk](mailto:john.best@artsgatewaymk.org.uk) or call the office on **01908 241122**. We'd like to hear from you, wherever you're based.

