

Drawing a crowd with Mangawhai Artists Inc.

Behind the double blue doors of the Mangawhai Artists Gallery lies a beating heart of artistic activity, pumping out inspiration to the whole community. This vibrant group currently boasts 150 members, a scheduled season of 19 exhibitions, and plans to soon double the gallery space to allow for learning opportunities year round.

The enthusiasm is palpable as I speak to committee members, Lynn Middleton and Wendy Leach. They're excited for the exhibition season ahead and for the education season that has just finished. 'We run our learning opportunities over winter,' explains Wendy. 'We're always encouraging people in and each year we run a community art project which is very popular. We're really keen to get people from Warkworth and Matakana to come here.'

In the last year, the gallery has had around 12,000 visitors and they are eager for more. 'The gallery is open every day. We've got wonderful art, wonderful cafes and it's a beautiful area to visit, so there's plenty here to enjoy.'

The number of artists in the group is steadily increasing which is not surprising considering the active exhibition schedule, the learning opportunities available and something as practical as not charging commission on artwork sales at the gallery. Added to this is a comprehensive, elegant and up-to-date website that provides full details of the group's activities and shows, profiles of the artists, and much more.

Mangawhai Artists Inc. embraces everyone from hobby artists to professionals. Artists can have solo shows or team up with others to present an exhibition, and there is ample opportunity with a new show opening every two weeks. 'The openings are popular social occasions and very well attended, often by 80-90 people,' Lynn tells me. 'The exhibitions are of a consistently high standard, world-class in some cases.'

Wendy described this year's successful community art project run by the group. 'Our theme was "Magical Mangawhai Goes Bush" which was a month-long programme. We had about a thousand people painting over the first two weeks and about a thousand people came along over the two weeks of the exhibition. We blacked out the gallery and put up ultra-violet lights, and all the paintings glowed in the dark. It was fantastic!'

Long term plans include working towards building a community art centre next to the Mangawhai Museum. It will have a larger gallery space and allow for the use of the current gallery as studio work space.

Vitality and energy are emanating from Mangawhai Artists Inc. and it is infectious so I encourage you to make the journey to Mangawhai over the coming months and indulge in their wonderful programme of exhibitions. You might just find yourself inspired to join up to their artistic revolution.

Mangawhai Artists Gallery  
45 Moir Street  
[mangawhaiartists.co.nz](http://mangawhaiartists.co.nz)