

Arts Gathering - "Artsy Fartsy" Autocrat Guide .

Zenobia Naphtali, December 2000

* What Is Arts Gathering/"Artsy Fartsy"?

Arts Gathering is an arts oriented event that is intentionally "not the usual" event. It arose as a result of a number of discussions between various arts oriented folk in the Shire and elsewhere. These folk had noticed that:

1) The "traditional" Arts and Sciences activities in this Kingdom weren't meeting all their artistic needs.

The "traditional" activities referred to being: formal A and S competitions, formal classroom type events (Ithra) and guild activities.

2) They often had the most fun (and learned the most) while getting together in informal groups of friends in a living room or shop, working on their personal projects, seeing what everyone else was doing, and talking about it in a casual social setting.

So, Arts Gathering was an attempt to "bring the living room to the populace", by allowing that casual artistic atmosphere to flourish at an event, rather than at a private home gathering. Attendees would bring their art projects, bring some nifty art resources (books, materials), and share with each other.

Arts Gathering had a secondary goal of making the arts accessible to those who haven't become involved before, either because they are new to the arts, or because the "traditional" events had not suited their interests. As a result Arts Gathering does generally have some classes.

However, Arts Gathering classes tend to be more informal 'workshop type' classes than one might find at an Ithra, and do not crowd out the "general arts zone". For example, we might have a cooking class where we 'make the Shire contribution to the feast' after talking about how the recipe was redacted from period recipes, and while discussing 'feastocrat' logistical problems for making a dish to serve 50-75 people. Or there might be a Scriptorium open all day for people wanting to look at Scribe books and putter with scribe stuff.

There is generally also a desire to provide some classes that "aren't the usual" type of accessible class. Teachers have been brought in from as far as Canada or as near as a mile away, to teach skills such as shoemaking on a last, and metal casting. Some more standard SCA arts skills (basic tailoring, scribal work) are also generally taught as well.

The standard Arts Gathering is a one day event, that has the "arts living room" and classes happening during the daytime, followed by a potluck feast (generally with the Shire providing a main dish), and then by an evening activity. The evening activity has often (but not always) been bardic in nature, but one year we had a dance. Often there is feast entertainment during the potluck, provided by attendees of the event.

We have not as yet had a two day Arts Gathering, although one year there was a follow-on smithy workshop at Morgan's house.

The traditional time for Arts Gathering has been the 2nd or 3rd weekend in September.

The event is not formally called "Artsy Fartsy" because of the cowardice of the first autocrat in putting this in the Crier, however it is often informally known by this name inside and outside the Shire.

* Autocrat Tips:

The attendance tends to be in the 50-65 person range, although AG2000 had 75 people. With the increase in attendance at shire events in general, the slight increase may well be a trend.

The event tends to draw few children and as a result we have not had many children's activities. With the increasing number of children in the Shire this probably should be considered more in the future.

1) "artsy living room area": needs to have the things that standard indoor artists need: sizeable, sturdy tables, and access to water (for things like paints.) Most art forms that need electrical support (like sewing machines) are somewhat loud to have in the same room with the general artsy area conversation etc. and need to have their own space outside the main room. In the site we have most often used (the Frog Pond Grange) we had a large center room, with a long narrow side room which had a kitchen at one end and table space on the main part of the long room; we put the sewing machines here.

2) Space for classes: We have found that the classes can be given at one end of, or one corner of, the "artsy living room area" without too much problems of noise pollution. Some very workshoppish classes such as 'Scriptorium' generally are in the artsy living room area without problems.

3) Space for 'messy' or 'loud' arts: As a general rule, this has ended up being a borrowed pavilion or pavilions outside the site. Classes in music, or classes in metal casting, have been given in a pavilion outside at one end of the parking lot/field, to keep the noise pollution down. As yet we have not had enough population pressure to want to have a "all loud/messy arts zone" type area, so it has been OK to relegate the loud stuff to outside.

4) Cooking/Food: We have often had a cooking class using the kitchen area of the site, because the sites we have used so far supported a cooking class, and often the cooking class also made the main dish that the Shire was to provide. The ability to have a cooking class would depend on the site at hand. Remember that the people bringing potluck contributions often expect to heat up or otherwise finish prep on site.

Some years we have provided a small lunch at the event, consisting of things like fruit, hard boiled eggs and cheese. These have always gone over very well. Other years the Ithra people have brought their food-for-donations/cost setup. Coffee and tea available in the a.m. is always very popular. None of the sites we have or about to use is near a food store or restaurant, so the ability to have a mid-day munchie without leaving site is valuable.

You will need to have enough tables and seating for the potluck.

The potluck serving area needs good flow through. We have found that it is very valuable to designate someone to 'run' the potluck, which is to say to help coordinate people putting things out on the table, ensure decent flow through the room (by calling up tables in some order) etc.

5) Contests: Arts Gathering hasn't had many contests, although a contest could occur. We have had a period cooking contest in connection with the potluck (food to be brought, not made on site.) One year there was a filk competition during the evening part of the activity (bardic that year.) Another year there was a "Dragon's Mist Song" contest that was part of the feast entertainment.

6) Feast entertainment: It helps to have someone coordinating this, if it is going to occur. (With so many DM events having feast entertainment, I'm starting to hear a bit of a desire for a "just eat and talk" feast once in a while.) A signup sheet at gate is a good way to know your entrants and allow for scheduling them (especially if it's mentioned in the site copy.) It is pretty much always necessary to announce the signup sheet for the feast entertainment via herald a few times during the day as well, as people tend to forget about the signup.

7) Evening activities: Bardic requires very little in the way of resources. Dancing does require an adequate dance floor and a place to plug in the boom box, but that is fairly minimal as well. However evening activities are only limited by the Autocrat's imagination, the limitations of the site, and the stalwart nature of the clean-up crew :-)

8) Cleanup: Remember that a lot of sites, especially rural sites, require that you haul all garbage. Having predesignated people to bring extra trash cans (which may or may not be needed) and to haul garbage home in trucks is very useful, and avoids the 'souvenir sack of garbage' situation of 1997.

One known feature of the Frog Pond grange that we found to our horror is that its hot water heater tends to run out. This means that when using that site, you need an organized dishwashing brigade. If people just wander in and wash their personal dishes ad hoc (instead of using dish tubs) we run entirely out of hot water. (We had to finish the dishes that time using hot water from coffee urns!)

If the solution to the problem of hot water is providing plastic trash bags to the attendees and proclaiming 'no dishwashing on site', it must be proclaimed loudly. Otherwise folks will go into the kitchen to wash dishes as they are accustomed to such things.

9) Finding teachers and picking classes: Obviously the constraints of the site affect what classes you can have. One might also want to ask around the Shire to see if there are any classes people want to see of uncommon skills (cheese making? soap making? etc.) and then find a teacher for that.

Help finding teachers can be gotten from many sources: all the Shire's Laurels are happy to help find appropriate teachers, and of course there is the A and S officer, Arts and Sciences Champion, Ithra Chancellors, and other such folks. These people can also be called upon to help find replacements in the case of emergency last minute teacher dropouts (which have happened, so far we have always found replacements). However, since this isn't a formal class type event, the impact of a teacher dropout is generally not tragic. (So far, the teachers of 'strange and unique' skills have not yet been the teachers who had to drop out.)

Do remember that if you rely solely on Ithra teachers, you will miss the teachers who aren't on the "regular Ithra rotation", and many of these people have useful skills to teach us!

10) Scheduling: Even though the workshops are informal, it is handy to schedule them and make the schedule available (through gate flyers or a sign somewhere prominent on site.) Careful

situating of classes so that, if one class should run over, the next class is starting in another area of the site, is a good idea. Aside from all day workshops, I think it's nice not to have too much going on at Arts Gathering, maybe at most two workshops at once.

Unless the Shire is providing lunch, or the site is moved to an area where it is easy to go out and get lunch, I suggest a 5:30 dinner time. Folks start getting peaked around 5:00.

It is nice to start this event at the standard S.C.A. 10:00, with setup around 9:00 and run it until 10:00 or 11:00 p.m. with appropriate end to cleanup. Do note that the Frog Pond Grange has a standard Saturday morning aerobics class, which has led us to start the event at 11:00 there, since we are not allowed in until 10:00 to even start the setup. Inquiry in any grange type hall for such events is worthwhile. Sometimes the Grange liason will be happy to say you have the Grange "all day" without remembering to inform you about the "oh yes, of course, except for ..." factor.

11) Fee Structure: The Shire generally hopes to break even on this event and perhaps make a modest profit, but this is not considered a moneymaker. Autocrats doing budgeting should check this on a yearly case by case basis. A \$5 per person fee with children under 7 free has come to be the standard fee.

12) Artisans Display for Laurel Comment: In 2000 there was an Artisan's Display for Laurel Comment (previously known as: the "Laurel's Prize Tourney", also known as the "Phred".) This activity in some ways functions as a display and in other ways functions (at least for some subset of the day) as a 'class' in that we need to reserve space and time for people to make noise: performance entries, talking between artisans and the viewers of their work, etc. If this becomes traditional with the event, space will need to be reserved for this, as well.

The Artisan Display for Laurel Comment in 2000 was very successful, in that many people (Laurels and exhibitors) participated. It did mean however that in the site used (Kinton Grange), there was a fair amount of crowding in the downstairs area which functioned both for classes and for 'artsy living room'. Luckily the weather was good enough to allow some classes to go outside if desired, but this certainly isn't always the case in September.

* History of Arts Gathering

Arts Gathering has been given every year since 1996. The responsible autocrat teams and sites have been:

1996: Zenobia Naphtali, Frog Pond Grange

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1998: Katherine FitzAlan and Arlys o Gordon, Frog Pond Grange

1999: Teceangl Bach, Frog Pond Grange

2000: Oriana of Myrtlewood and Lianna Stewart, Kinton Grange.