

RSA JOURNAL

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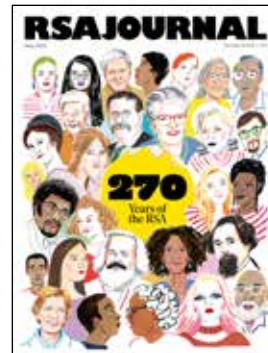
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270 Years of the RSA
Rebecca Clarke's cover illustration presents an eclectic mix of famous faces and less well-known changemakers. The famous Fellows/members depicted are: David Attenborough; Charles Dickens; Bernardine Evaristo; Herbie Hancock; Prue Leith; Nelson Mandela; Shirley Manson; Karl Marx; Mary Moser; Mary Robinson; Theodore Roosevelt and Vivienne Westwood.

Rebecca Clarke
is a Florida-based illustrator whose handmade work focuses on expression and human experiences. *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* are among her many clients.



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270 years of rewilding mind, soul and heart

This issue of the *Journal* celebrates the 270th anniversary of the RSA. On 22 March 1754, 11 good men and true — alas, they were all men — assembled in Rawthmell’s coffee house in Covent Garden. When they emerged, the RSA had been born as the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (the ‘Royal’ prefix came in 1908). Over 270 years, it has become an institution whose social innovation and changemaking has shaped and reshaped the world not once, but many times.

As Anton Howes (the RSA’s Resident Historian) sets out in his article, the world today would be unrecognisable without the RSA. Gone would be millions of trees, trade fairs, school examinations, iconic institutions such as the Royal Academy, Natural History Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum, Science Museum, Royal Albert Hall and Royal College of Music, along with blue plaques (the history of which is told by Mike Thatcher), to name but a few.

But the history of the RSA is much more than its list of innovations. The mind, soul and heart of the RSA are its Fellows. From a potentially much longer list, the article by

Dan Matthews introduces 50 of our prominent changemakers. It is hard to imagine many institutions globally that have had so illustrious a set of Fellows (or members, as they were known before 1914). From US presidents to scientific pioneers, from philosophical trailblazers to global peacemakers, from environmental rainmakers to cultural icons.

“... at the core of the RSA’s work over the centuries has been acting with foresight, operating one step ahead, leading system change from the front”

While rightly celebrating our illustrious past, at the core of the RSA’s work over the centuries has been acting with foresight, operating one step ahead, leading system change from the front. Such are the divides across society, doing so may never have been more difficult. That makes the work of people like AY Young, musician, entrepreneur, environmental changemaker — and RSA Fellow — who is profiled in this

edition, all the more important.

The ‘In conversation’ interview, with Anab Jain, puts these changemaking efforts in broader perspective. Her work at design studio Superflux is about using the power of active and immersive experiences to reimagine, and ultimately improve, our collective futures — in her words, to “make the future less of a foreign land”. And I love the way Anab describes the role the RSA can play in this collective reimagining, what she calls the “rewilding of the mind, soul and heart”.

Had the RSA not existed, the world today would, without question, be a poorer place in mind, soul and heart. Indeed, given the problems facing the world today — economically, societally, environmentally — we would almost certainly be convening in a Covent Garden coffee house (with a more diverse team of 11) to create something RSA-like were it not to exist. The RSA is of the past. But it is also very much for the future. Happy anniversary to us, and here’s to the next 270 years. ■

Andy Haldane is Chief Executive Officer at the RSA.

From campfire to mixed reality

Curious directive theatre company has been operating within the Venn diagram of theatre, science and technology for 15 years. Over that time, we have attempted to reveal new stories emerging from science.

Within an expansive theatre practice, we have embraced new 'wearable' digital tools — such as virtual reality and augmented reality headsets, and anything 'apparel' (as we sometimes call it). In embracing new technology in live theatre, we have encountered a series of deeply entrenched critiques, particularly in western contexts, and mostly from theatre critics, not audiences. Critics question whether the use of digital tools (in the hallowed space of a playwright-dominated theatre landscape) is just 'style over substance' or 'form leading content'.

It is clearly a high-risk strategy to mix traditional theatre spaces with these disruptive, even alien,



devices. This form of theatre requires a delicate storytelling balance. Whether a new theatre production using these tools has 'worked' can often be judged only by how well audiences follow a story. Because the technology is new and exciting, it can find its way into the hands of 'experience makers' who haven't had enough time to understand what audiences need in a live theatre setting. The graveyard of immersive experiences using this technology evidences the growing pains of progress.

Theatrical innovation

Wearable technology in a live or location-based theatre setting is part of an innovation continuum, a constant and persistent shift in the possibilities for theatre. I believe it is the responsibility of any progressive theatre-maker to experiment with these tools and to explore the potential for this technology to genuinely rewrite the blueprint of how theatre is performed and experienced.

We are now starting to witness the integration of 'mixed reality' technology into daily life. When these storytelling tools eventually become the mainstream (as smartphones are now) it is a theatre, or a theatre company, that must explore what this means for audiences — and many are, beyond curious directive.

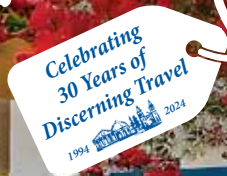
Failure to experiment, to explore and to dream with these objects is a missed opportunity for the future of theatre. Reticence to be curious about new tools, about new ways of telling stories, is also a missed opportunity to progress this ancient art form — a way of telling stories which likely started around campfires and was first depicted on the polychromatic walls made by our ancestors. These were significant magic leaps of the imagination, too.

I'd encourage artists and audiences interested in the future of theatregoing to seek out this work with an open mind. Whatever you decide, you might just encounter an innovation that one day takes a place in the theatre-making canon, right alongside Shakespeare. It will be up to you to decide whether it deserves that place or not. ■

Jack Lowe, FRSA is Artistic Director, CEO and Technical Dramaturg of curious directive, a Norwich-based theatre company that explores life through the lens of science.



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NEW FELLOWS



**Lim
Hyung-joo**

Lim Hyung-joo is a South Korean ‘popera’ (operatic pop) singer and chair professor at Civica Scuola delle Arti di Roma, the first Korean ever to be recruited as a professor emeritus at the school. For the past 25 years, Hyung-joo has been a goodwill ambassador for leading NGOs and international organisations including the Korean Red Cross, Community Chest of Korea and Korean Committee of Unesco. He is passionate about creating a better future for humanity through culture and art and is a columnist for the *Huffington Post* (*HuffPost*) Korea, covering K-pop and K-culture.



**Laura Jane
Silverman**

LJ Silverman runs the entrepreneurship centre, LSE Generate, at the London School of Economics, having built the award-winning hub “from scratch” in 2018. The centre supports up to 2,500 student and alumni mission-driven innovators every year, both in London and across its 20 international chapters. LJ developed a unique mentorship programme that is focused on regenerative education and now extends to support secondary and primary school entrepreneurial minds all over the world. The centre has won accolades for its inclusivity and focus on mental health, areas prioritised by LJ in her work.



**Arno
Geens**

Arno Geens is Director and Curator of the Astronautical Art Initiative and co-founder of The Spacecraft Agency, two organisations dedicated to creating and curating art programmes in outer space. He also serves as the Co-chair of the Space Renaissance International Academy’s Art Chapter and is passionate about engaging artists and the public in the development of space exploration. His current research explores the history, practices and collective imaginaries of artistic artefacts in the extra-terrestrial space environment, for which he is compiling the first historical collection of ‘astronautical art’: art that has ventured beyond the confines of Earth.



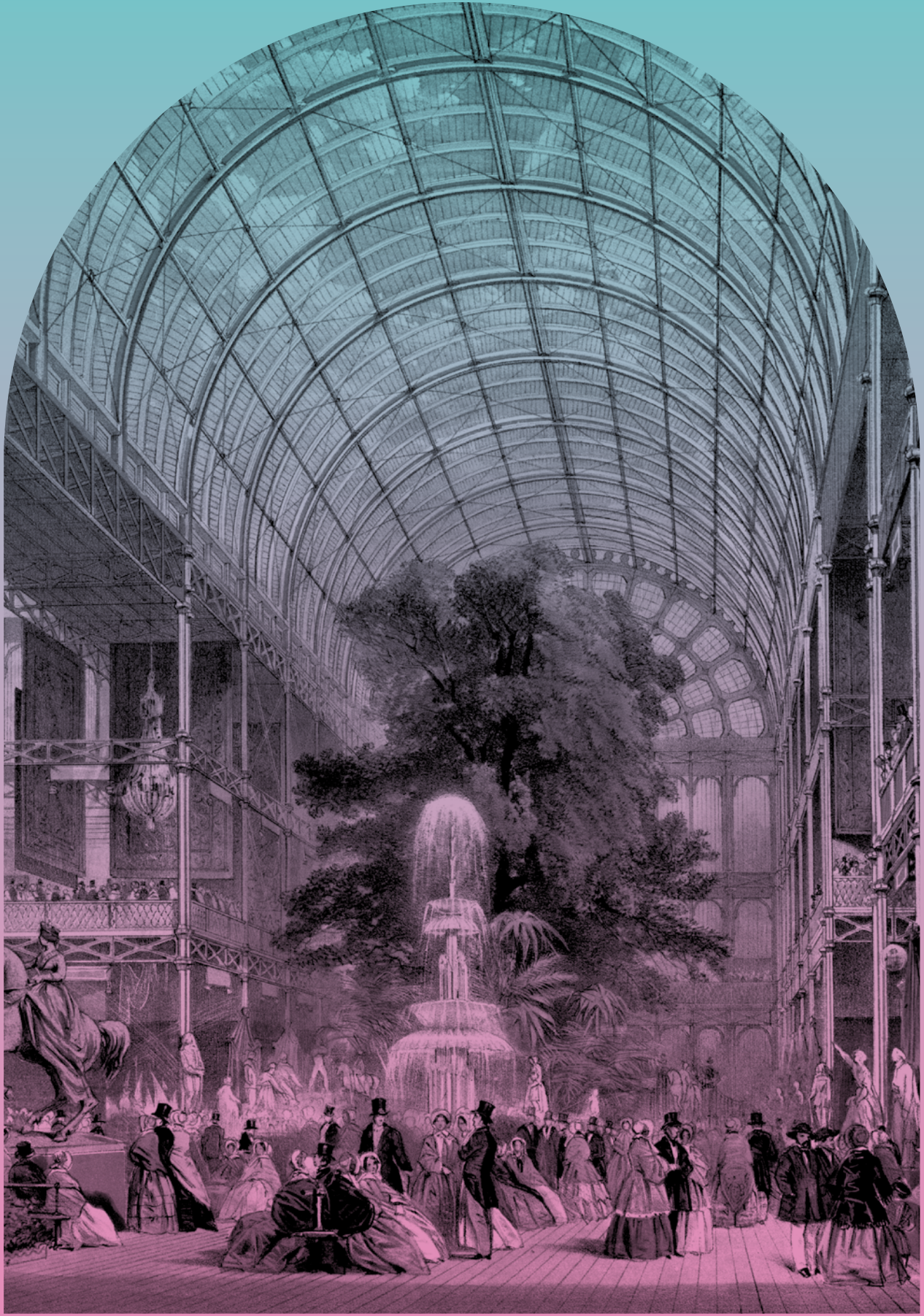
**Pepper
Barney**

Pepper Barney is an architect, master planner and educator with a postgraduate specialism in urban regeneration. She is the co-founder of BiBO, a collaborative, multidisciplinary practice bringing people together to design and develop more inclusive, resilient and sustainable spaces. To explore more inclusive modes of placemaking, BiBO has developed an ‘urban room’ in a rural town with a goal to foster meaningful connections between people and place, helping them gain a deeper understanding of the commercial, economic, social and political contexts which influence the making/un-making of spaces.



**Daniel
Solymári**

Daniel Solymári is the Director of Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, a researcher at the University of Pécs and its Africa Research Centre, Special Adviser to the President of Caritas Syria and a diplomat of the Sovereign Order of Malta in Jordan. He has worked on four continents in artificial and natural crises, urban slums, refugee camps and civil wars. His research focuses on Global North–Global South relations and the global transnational, inter-polar system. Daniel was awarded the Order of St Sylvester by Pope Francis and was knighted by the Hungarian Order of Merit.



270 YEARS OF THE RSA

A WORLD WITHOUT THE RSA

The Society celebrates its 270th birthday on 22 March.
But what if it had never been born?

Words: Anton Howes

I magine an RSA Fellow, excited for the upcoming events to mark the Society's anniversary, falling asleep in their chair with the *RSA Journal* in hand, and dreaming of waking up in a parallel universe in which the institution had never existed.

Tracing their usual way to RSA House on London's John Adam Street as though on autopilot, our sleepy Fellow walked through Trafalgar Square — and was immediately struck by the sight of the fourth plinth. Instead of the usual rotating exhibits of contemporary sculpture, there was a stolid but unremarkable statue of Elizabeth II — just one more bronze figure blending in with the generals and her great-great-great uncle on the other plinths, and largely ignored by the thousands walking past.

It made sense, they remembered — the restaurateur and Great British Bake Off judge Prue Leith would never have been Chair of the RSA. And that meant she would never have regularly taken taxis to its building past Trafalgar Square, where she noticed a bare plinth. She would never have compelled the RSA to campaign for the plinth to be used to promote works of contemporary sculpture, and to oversee the idea trialled. And, without those trials, the mayor of London would never have been inspired to make the Fourth Plinth programme permanent.

Making their way down the Strand towards RSA House, our Fellow frowned and looked up again at the buildings. Many more than they remembered were of concrete and glass. Where was all the stone and brick? Turning off the Strand, eyes failing to find the blue plaques commemorating the artist Thomas Rowlandson and inventor Richard Arkwright, it was obvious why. The RSA had initiated the memorial tablets scheme in the 1860s not only to remind Londoners of their history, but to prevent many of the buildings being torn down. Although it had been only partially successful in the early years, the absence of the scheme for almost two centuries, never to be taken on by London County Council or English Heritage, had diminished preservation and shifted the architectural make-up of the city towards the modern.

Similarly, without the RSA's campaigns to preserve older private dwellings in the 1920s and 30s, many Victorian, Edwardian and neo-Elizabethan improvers had had their way. In the early 20th century, the RSA served as a hub for preservation movements all over the country, with this *Journal* as its gazette, but with it never having existed, much of the country's architectural heritage was simply... gone.

Coming up to where the entrance to RSA House ought to be, our Fellow stopped short, their morning fix of caffeine finally having



an effect. Instead of RSA House, there stood a neoclassical church. Of course. The Adam brothers, who had designed the surrounding streets in the 18th century, had intended for there to be a public building in their development, and RSA House fitted that bill. Without an RSA to accommodate it, however, a church had been built instead.

Signal problems

At something of a loss of what to do, our Fellow checked their phone to see what appointments they had made that day — might as well give them a try.

But the phone was different. It was markedly slow and seemed to struggle with finding a signal. Our Fellow considered for a moment. The RSA had been vital to the history of telecommunications: the place where Carl Wilhelm Siemens had first seen the remarkable insulating properties of a naturally occurring latex from the sap of a tree found in Malaysia, — gutta percha — which was sent to London by one of its members based in Singapore.

Without that spark of inspiration, Siemens had never gone into business with his brothers to insulate underwater electric telegraph cables. Near-instantaneous communications across continents, even just between Britain and France, had been delayed by decades.

In the late 19th century, the RSA was also an important meeting place for the pioneers of electrical inventions, hosting early demonstrations of William Fothergill Cooke's electric telegraph and Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, and lectures on long-distance radio by Guglielmo Marconi, as well as the first public demonstrations in England of Thomas Edison's incandescent light bulb and, in 1920, of Frederick G Creed's teleprinting by wireless. Without that meeting place for inventors, and without that platform for new technologies, the development of telecommunications had been slowed in its infancy, even if it had not stopped.

And the phone was clunky. Really clunky. It suddenly dawned on our Fellow that without the RSA there had been no Student Design Awards, and so, over the course of a full century, a great many iconic designers had never had the same experiences and opportunities for research. Jony Ive had never won a travel grant to San Francisco and fallen in love with it, and had never ended up working for Apple. Instead, he found inspiration elsewhere, and iPods, iMacs, iPhones, iPads and the like, with their clean simplicity, had never set the pace for design.

Looking around with fresh eyes, the Fellow began to notice many more ways in which this alternative reality felt a bit off. Yes, the world had a different aesthetic. The street signs, bus interiors and car shapes just seemed to lack something. They were clunkier, less useful. Drabber, somehow, and less pleasing to the eye.

Missing museums

But with an appointment in the calendar — a meeting just south of Hyde Park — our Fellow had no more time to waste. Hopping on the District Line, they looked for their stop. But it wasn't there. Between Sloane Square and Gloucester Road it said only... Brompton? All became clear when they arrived and walked outside, heading north to find the address. Where there should have been the magnificent Natural History Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum, the Science Museum, the Royal Albert Hall, the Royal College of Music — all of the cultural institutions of Exhibition Road, really — there was simply row upon row of concrete apartment blocks.

Without the RSA there had been no Great Exhibition of 1851, and thus no profits with which to create the agglomeration of cultural institutions

“Without the Great Exhibition, the progress of internationalisation had been markedly slowed”

that came to be known as 'Albertopolis', after its figurehead, the consort of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert. Henry Cole, the driving force behind the Great Exhibition, had never coined the term 'South Kensington' as the name of his new museum, which later became the V&A. Indeed, that museum collection had never been assembled at all, and many of the others had ended up dispersed. The museum's effect on design had never been felt — perhaps another contributor to the city's overall lacklustre appearance.

Come to think of it, our Fellow realised, there also really hadn't been all that many tourists in Trafalgar Square that morning. And there were none at all in Brompton, with little there to attract them. A sudden thought occurred, and our Fellow quickly checked the rate to call someone in another country, or to send a package internationally. What came up was a mess of complicated infographics and tables, along with some eye-watering prices. It was just as they had suspected. Without the Great Exhibition, the progress of internationalisation had been markedly slowed. There were higher trade barriers, less standardised postage and telephone rates, and far more difficult travel and migration arrangements between countries. ▶



“The RSA had also used its prizes... to reward generations of young artists, particularly women”

Many of the conversations about standardisation and internationalisation that had begun at that event had instead only been embarked upon more gradually, and much later. And the friendly competition between countries to hold subsequent exhibitions, hoping to outshine the Great Exhibition’s Crystal Palace, also never got going in quite the same way. Yup, a quick search confirmed it — the entrance to the 1889 World’s Fair, the structure we know today as the Eiffel Tower, had never been built.

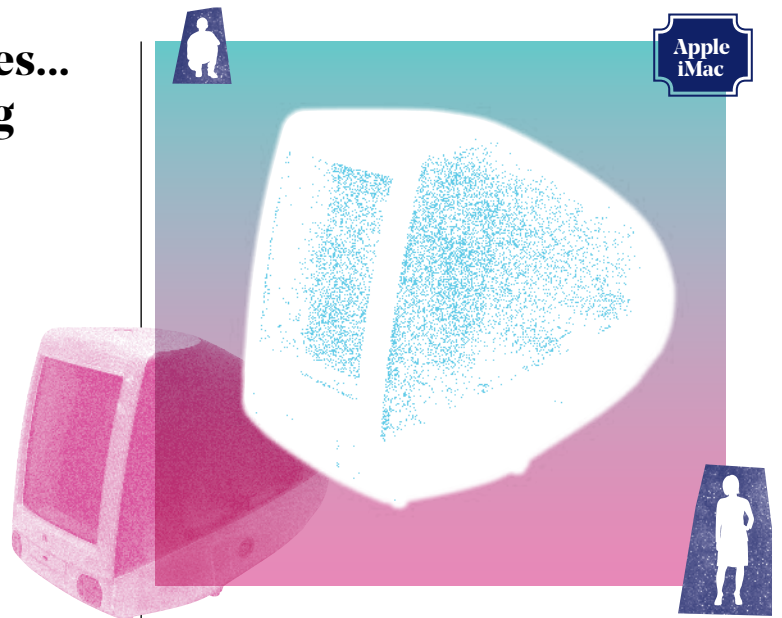
Absent artists

Their meeting concluded, but having been denied a visit to a South Kensington museum nearby, our Fellow decided to travel a bit further, to Tate Britain. After all, it was likely to be much emptier than usual, with so many fewer tourists in this reality. But even this was a shock. A great many of the paintings by British artists were missing, with the late 18th and 19th centuries looking especially sparse. On reflection, however, it made sense.

The RSA had provided a crucial platform for artists in the 18th century: by holding the country’s first dedicated exhibitions of contemporary art from 1760 onwards — the precursor to the Royal Academy’s annual exhibitions — the RSA had helped artists develop their styles for the public, and expose their works to a wider set of patrons. And it was out of the group of artists involved that the Royal Academy had eventually formed (though after falling out with the RSA over how the exhibitions should be run).

The RSA had also used its prizes, since its very first meeting, to reward generations of young artists, particularly women — not only to become professional artists themselves, but to develop a general taste and appreciation for art, which would lead them to become patrons in later life. Without all these decades upon decades of support, our Fellow found 19th-century British art in the alternative reality was notably lacking, with repercussions for later periods, too. In the 1840s, the RSA served as a hub for a community that experimented with and developed photography, and had hosted the first exhibition of photography in 1853. In this bleaker reality, that group had never assembled and that exhibition had never happened, and so the Royal Photographic Society had never been formed.

Dismayed, our Fellow walked up and down



the streets of London to see what other changes they might find. Walking through the parks, they noticed a curious lack of old oak trees — where had they all gone? But then, the RSA’s many decades of medals awarded for tree-planting from the 1750s onwards, in a bid to preserve the old oaks of England for warships, had never been instituted. This did not just mean that some 60 million trees were never planted by the winners of the medals, but that the fashion for tree-planting among the also-rans and the aristocracy more broadly had never taken off. Many more millions of trees, especially oaks, had simply not survived.

Smaller cities

And then there was the relative lack of people. It wasn’t just the tourists — the city felt generally smaller, less busy. What could explain it? Might it be because the country had never enjoyed the effects of the RSA’s prizes for agricultural innovations? The absence of a century’s worth of turnip-cutting machines, novel ploughs, schemes for transporting fresh fish to market, and experiments on the best feed for cattle in winter must presumably have had a long-term effect on slowing the rise of agricultural productivity.

It had not stopped that progress short, of course, but over the previous two centuries British cities had not been able to grow at the rate they otherwise would have, requiring more people to continue their back-breaking labour in the fields; the country’s population as a whole had not been able to grow as quickly. Given how many agricultural innovations were also shared with the rest of the world, thought our Fellow, it wouldn’t be surprising if the global population was also much lower than in their own reality.

It was a troubling thought, but with evening approaching, our Fellow needed to get to Birkbeck University for their evening class.

Except that, when they arrived, it wasn't there. After all, Birkbeck was originally the London Mechanics' Institution, set up for workers' education, and one of many educational institutions for and often run by workers. The RSA had never created the Union of Mechanics' Institutions — a network set up to support them — which breathed new life into the movement in the 1850s when they were widely thought to be in decline, and the institution had become a victim of this decline.

In fact, the Fellow realised, the *RSA Journal* itself, currently sitting on their coffee table at home, was originally created as the union's newsletter, with the RSA serving as its hub. And it was from the RSA serving the needs of the mechanics' institutions that public examinations were born.

Exam failings

Our Fellow quickly looked it up to check: because the RSA had never set up its public examinations, these examinations had never been co-opted by the government — with the RSA often trialling new subjects before the government then adopted them — and whole swathes of the state education system had thus simply never come into being. The exam board OCR certainly did not exist, as none of the letters in the acronym had ever come into being: the examination boards set up in the 1850s for the universities of

Oxford and Cambridge (the O and C), which had both been inspired by the R (the RSA).

The lack of an RSA had impacted education in other ways too. Girls' secondary education was lagging far behind that of boys: Maria Grey had never been able to use the RSA as a platform to eventually create the Girls' Public Day School Trust, which in the early 20th century was responsible for educating much of the first generation of women to attend British universities. A great many technical qualifications, such as those offered by City & Guilds, had also never come into being.

The guilds had never been urged to take on new educational roles in the 1870s, which they initially did by funding the RSA's examinations and, later, by taking over the running of the technical ones. And there had been less encouragement from the government for education beyond the basics of teaching literacy and numeracy, as the Department of Science and Art — another outcome of the Great Exhibition, run by its instigator Henry Cole — was never set up.

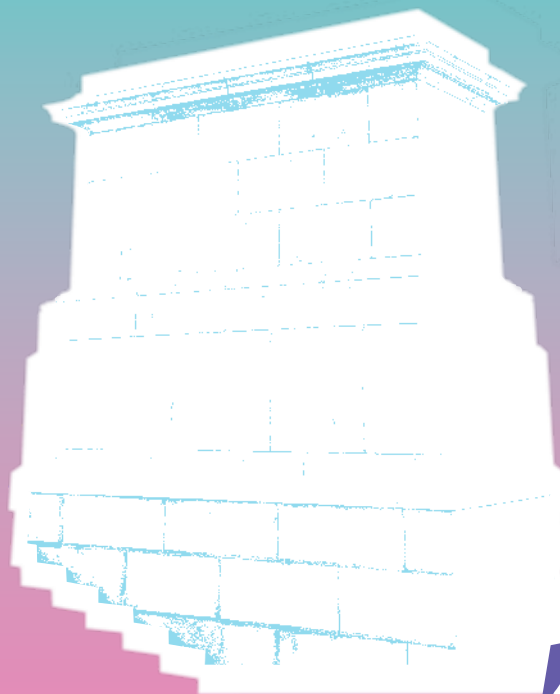
Dismayed, our Fellow returned home, with little else left to try. And then started awake, on their chair, the *RSA Journal* having just slipped from their grasp. ■

■

Anton Howes is the RSA's Historian in Residence, and the author of *Arts and Minds: How the Royal Society of Arts Changed a Nation*, a history of the RSA from its founding to the present day.



Fourth Plinth
Trafalgar Sq





INHOUSE RECORDS

Soul conversations

A designer's unorthodox approach is transforming the way education is delivered in prisons across the UK and in the US

Words:
Judah Armani



As a designer, I am drawn to apply my practice to the edges of society. These are the places that design rarely engages with, where I can embed my practice for at least a decade, allowing me to forge meaningful relationships over time. After spending my first decade applying design across homelessness, I was drawn to work with our criminal justice system.

I began my second decade of embedding with one question: can I contribute to reducing recidivism in the UK through service design? While I am still exploring the answers to this question today, the last seven years have so far yielded a portfolio of interventions resulting most profoundly in the creation of InHouse Records, which is both a functioning record label and an unorthodox approach to education that operates in eight prisons in the UK and US.

InHouse Records transformed the

tasks associated with a functioning record label into an entire education system. Not just music, but maths, English, interview skills and IT skills. Over the years, the InHouse programme has also grown to include *Aux Magazine*, the UK's only music and cultural magazine designed by current and former prisoners exclusively for those currently serving sentences, and 'Lucky13's', a weekly set of non-linear distance learning cards providing recognised accredited qualifications.

Systems of punishment

Britain has always had a profound relationship with punishment. From the stocks to public executions, in earlier times punishment was a designed deterrent towards transgressive behaviour. Today, with a reoffending rate that wobbles around 55% (according to Ministry of Justice statistics), custodial sentences have replaced that earlier model, becoming the primary means of discouraging criminal activity. Prisons are the new place to mete out justice, and regimes the instruments to punish the soul, in part by restricting free will and implementing monotony and anonymity.

To make sense of the criminal justice system today is to understand past systems and, more importantly, the thematic changes that have taken place over the years — for example, how we transitioned from capital punishment to imprisonment. This was my approach as I went for my first meeting at a London prison, ostensibly to teach English, but with a very different goal in mind. ▶



Photos: InHouse Records, Guy Bell / Alamy stock photo

Creative expressions

Beginning in 2016, I started visiting HMP Elmley, a men's prison on the Isle of Sheppey, Kent, for weekly collaborative conversations with prisoners, governors, learning and skills managers, officers and probation officers. Through carefully designed conversations over the course of a year, and open studio sessions with the prisoners, specifically those identified as currently disengaging from any form of education or training, it became evident that creativity was the preferred language of communication.

Creativity offers the scope for expression where words fail and it nurtures the space for both cognitive and emotional self-awareness. By presenting lyric writing as a form of learning, we were able to provide the foundation for what could be a learning platform.

Moving forward in this way, we were able to nurture enough trust to allow the prisoners to share future aspirations, helping us to build hope together; hope that the group's ideas were being deployed into something



“InHouse reimagines education as an ‘aspirational lake of learning’”

For more information, visit www.inhousetrecords.org



Above:
Performance
by Stickz,
Aaron and
Ren at Latitude
Festival, 2019

Left:
Aux Magazine

Top right: Judah
Armani at an
InHouse event,
London 2018

Bottom right:
Judah Armani
and InHouse
participants at
mini-festival
Pipefest,
Lancaster
2019

that would ultimately change the focus of their days. Hope in the form of a reason to leave the wing.

Collaborative practice

Education engagement within UK prisons is low, so my immediate challenge was increasing engagement in prison education and reducing recidivism. A traditional deficit approach would have merely provided information we already knew and, invariably, focused on bridging the learning gap in the quickest manner possible. In a prison setting, this usually results in the provision of workplace training in low-skilled jobs such as industrial cleaning, providing education opportunities that are of little interest to many prisoners.

There are good reasons why this approach is in place, as it allows for upskilling at pace, but it risks alienating many prisoners. A collaborative approach, however, accesses prisoners' existing skillsets by revisualising them through 'core competencies' such as communication, problem solving and leadership. For example, many of the individuals we work with understand portion pricing, product, stock, supply and demand — skills that may have been acquired for the wrong reasons but are nevertheless extremely transferable to business.

A different model

Because we wanted to make sure the project was stable enough to foster healthy dependency and the kind of consistency that nurtures trust and confidence, InHouse Records



was set up as a trading business (a community interest company), not a charity. Creating an income-generating business with all profits reinvested in the business itself provided participants with the right fuel: a mixture of aspiration, sustainability and legitimacy.

InHouse reimagines education as an ‘aspirational lake of learning’, where numeracy and literacy are inseparable through music creation, and it provides accredited qualification and industry recognition. Learners might chart a pathway of management study, in which they are assigned an artist within the prison to manage, develop, book studio time for and promote. Or they might choose an artist pathway, via which they learn an instrument, music software or both.

The actual work performed is broken down into weekly tasks that are measured through the ability of the learner to communicate the task, the accountability of completing the task and the adaptability of demonstrating learning across the task.



Expanding outward

Since launching in 2017, InHouse Records has been 300% oversubscribed across all six UK prisons in which we operate, with a recidivism rate of less than 1%. Our collaborative approach ensures aspiration is hard-wired into the initiative, providing the prisons with motivated learners keen to engage with a different kind of education offering.

Indeed, years after InHouse was launched, in response to the



pandemic, the same collaborative space birthed *Aux Magazine*. Articles are contributed by prisoners from across the entire UK prison estate as well as by InHouse graduates. This full-colour journal provides articles on wellbeing, life after prison and progressive learning through cultural and music cues. For the first 12 months of the pandemic, *Aux Magazine* was the only content exclusively designed for prisoners being delivered on a weekly basis to over half of UK prisons for free. Given its amazing popularity, we have continued to produce this magazine post-pandemic, exceeding delivery of 70,000 copies to date.

Our collaborative sessions also birthed a new way of delivering distance learning, especially to those who find themselves on the neurodiversity spectrum. Lucky13’s provides recognised accredited qualifications through a weekly set of non-linear distance learning cards offering a curriculum that can be completely designed by the prisoner. It has been formed and informed by neurodiverse collaborators across the prison system, innovating education through the use of colour, reduced words and safe fonts.

In 2020, we began working with a correctional facility in Connecticut, work which showed us that the vehicle becomes unimportant if the principles are observed: there, prisoners decided to create a fashion label. We were also able to approach the US initiative with the benefit of experience, leading us to partner with Rhode Island School of Design’s Center for Complexity, as we sought to ground the collaborative

approach and enhance the core competencies revealed through our asset-based approach.

The journey onwards

InHouse Records, *Aux* and Lucky13’s help participants to become not only better musicians, but better husbands, fathers and citizens. InHouse graduates are invited to continue journeying with the label at recording studios across the south-east of England. These spaces serve as places to create music, but also as safe contact centres for fathers to meet their children, environments in which to work through benefit forms and housing applications, even places for probation meetings.

The journey with InHouse in the community can end whenever the graduate feels it is time to move on, and ending the relationship with InHouse in a positive manner is a significant step for our graduates managing their own relationships positively.

All of these initiatives began with the most universal design tool, one that is accessible to everyone — language. A language that can create far-reaching conversations that begin on the fringes of our society and land within the heart of our communities. Meaningful collaborations across space, time and culture. ■

Judah Armani holds associate design positions at the Royal College of Art and The Rhode Island School of Design and is a visiting professor at Musashino Art University. His work across the fields of homelessness and the criminal justice system has been recognised with 15 design awards for social change.

Recommended reading

In his forthcoming (May 2024) book, *Society Driven Design: Co-creating Brighter Futures*, Judah Armani explains the role of design in community development and the designer’s role in social change, drawing on his almost 20 years of experience co-creating with people who are homeless, incarcerated or on probation.

King Cole's blue-sky thinking

Sir Henry Cole's list of achievements is long and varied — the first director of the V&A, he helped establish the Great Exhibition, reformed the postal service, introduced Christmas cards and was hugely influential at the then Society of Arts. So it is only right that 'King Cole' is commemorated by a blue plaque where he lived and worked in London's South Kensington.

It is fair to say that Cole would have approved, as he played a large part in the creation of the blue plaque initiative. Writing a letter to the *Journal of the Society of Arts* in July 1863, the former chairman of the Council of the Society of Arts highlighted a parliamentary debate proposing the introduction of commemorative plaques on buildings in London.

Cole believed that the Society should lead the way. He wrote: "It seems to me a proper subject for the Society of Arts to consider. The object in view is of public interest, and refers especially to celebrities in arts, science, manufactures, commerce and literature."

A committee of the Society was later formed, including Cole, to take the initiative forward. It discussed who should be recognised, the design of the plaques (or 'memorial tablets') and the inscription.



“There are now around 1,000 blue plaques in London, with plans to expand the scheme across England”

The first plaque was erected in 1867 at Lord Byron's birthplace in Holles Street. Plaques for Napoleon, Benjamin Franklin and Sir Joshua Reynolds soon followed. Blue was the chosen colour for the earliest plaques, but this proved expensive to produce and so a chocolate brown

Scan the QR code to read an 1882 *Journal* article about the 'memorial tablets'



background was adopted.

The Society erected 36 plaques and then, in 1901, transferred responsibility to the London County Council — with blue ceramic plaques becoming standard from 1921. Responsibility for the scheme subsequently passed to the Greater London Council in 1965 and then to English Heritage in 1986.

There are now around 1,000 blue plaques in London, with plans to expand the scheme across England. It's another example of the RSA, or its predecessor bodies, developing an idea and bringing it successfully to fruition. ■

Mike Thatcher is Editorial Manager at the RSA.

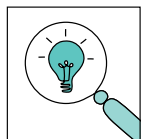
DESIGN FOR LIFE AWARDS

Fostering regenerative learning and enterprise

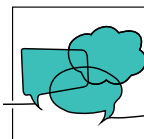
The Design for Life Awards build on our 100-year legacy of awards via a new programme inviting everyone aged 11 to 111 to discover learning, innovation, connection and funding opportunities.

A call for corporate partners

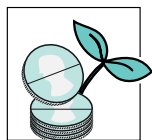
We are looking to partner with purpose-led organisations that are committed to social and environmental impact and those that put people, places and planet at the heart of their mission. Your company's involvement will be central to our campaign to:



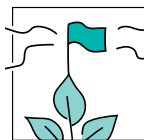
Source creative ideas that are aligned with your organisational purpose.



Engage your employees, customers and stakeholders



Invest in future talent



Platform your brand and align your organisation with other purpose-driven companies

Contact Shelley Davies, Head of Strategic Partnerships
on shelley.davies@rsa.org.uk

RSA



“The RSA could pursue the rewilding of the spirit, of minds and souls and hearts”

Futurist **Anab Jain** speaks to **Andy Haldane** about using art and storytelling to build better tomorrows — and how the RSA might play a pivotal role

Photos: Kensington Leverne

Andy Haldane: You're a designer, futurist, filmmaker, educator and much more besides. How do you describe yourself at parties?

Anab Jain: I generally try to not give a one-line description, but I would say something like “I help people imagine better futures”. That's a much nicer way of describing it, because it encourages a conversation, and I am not labelled.

Haldane: Let's start at the very beginning. Tell us about your background and the pathways that led to the creation of Superflux.

Jain: I was born and brought up in Ahmedabad, India. I went to school and college at the National Institute of Design and studied filmmaking, then came to the Royal College of Art (RCA) to study

‘Interaction Design’. I worked at Nokia and Microsoft, and then ended up starting Superflux with my partner, Jon Ardern. That's the condensed version!

Superflux began with a napkin sketch, and I still have it! It was during the credit crisis in 2008 when Jon was working on his own start-up, and I was at Nokia. We had graduated from the RCA with all these ambitious and metaphysical hopes and aspirations to change the world and do better, and it was really disheartening to watch the world as we knew it collapse to such an extent. We wanted to find a way to use our skills — as designers, artists, critical thinkers — to show people in that moment (when the old system was shown to be frankly corrupt) what else could be possible.

It started as a way to explore the edges of what's deemed ‘the norm’. The idea was then

to explore what possibilities lie ahead that do not necessarily conform to just one way of knowing and being in this world. First and foremost, Superflux has always been a project of active hope. We are interested in how we navigate complex interconnected challenges while still showing possibility. For example, right now we are asking: how do we navigate the urgent predicament of climate change, or understand where advancements in AI will lead us? During this process, we end up creating cautionary tales, but also hopeful visions of what else could be.

We also want to enable the navigation of more hopeful visions. It doesn't really matter whether I am coming from the lens of graphic design or product design or speculative design, what matters is how we can facilitate a transition from where we are today towards a collectively hopeful future.

Haldane: Could you give practical examples of how you brought this very different lens, indeed a hopeful, optimistic lens, to tackling societal challenges?

Jain: Our consulting model works with businesses that have specific challenges. For example, we worked on a project in collaboration with an insurance company on what people might want to insure in the future. Eventually, it became our own research project exploring climate change, which, as [philosopher] Timothy Morton says, is a hyper-object — it's so vast and amorphous that we really don't understand it. You see a graph of a temperature index going up and think, where am I in this? Most mornings, I can't even find my coffee grinder, so how can people compute their personal position in something so vast and complex?

We wanted to make climate change tangible, relatable, and so we built a London apartment, set in 2050 when Jon's and my son would be around the age we are now, which gave us an emotional lens to the future. Data, predictions, probability models remain alienating; we do not and cannot put ourselves into those projected futures. So, instead, we tell stories.

Then we started building 'food computers' from scratch. All that drew upon our skills of product design, prototyping, modelling, testing and experimenting. Once we had these food computers, there was a question of art direction. We didn't want the apartment to look like a set, or like an inflexible or generic prediction. It should look lived in, like something that people have literally just stepped out of, a place that doesn't just confirm their fears, but also shows them that our worst fears could be tackled with ingenuity, craft, design and storytelling.

People were able to literally enter into this future, spend time in this apartment, and understand that the family who lived there had

Right: Anab Jain and partner Jon Ardern at work in the Superflux studio in Central London



created mechanisms with their community to live in a very different way. And nowhere in that apartment did we say, 'food insecurity' or 'climate change'. It was a one-on-one, human confrontation with a completely different future that could be possible.

Haldane: I find this fascinating. You are using full sensory immersion in an issue, rather than words on a page, a graph or some arid hypothesis, to show what it means for your lived experience.

Jain: That's absolutely right. Imagine you are going from one meeting to the next. You have very little time, and you are being presented with reports and PowerPoints and predictions. Then you go home, and start all over again the next day — how much of that has sunk in?

The anthropologist Genevieve Bell has said of our modern notion "that more data equals more truth. But the reality is that more data just equals more data. We need the ability to ask better questions." Data is the collection of



“First and foremost, Superflux has always been a project of active hope”

‘what has been’ to anticipate ‘what could be’; a radically different trajectory from the norm is never pursued, that would simply be an outlier, a fluke. You can think of the work we are doing as ‘speculative evidence’. We go beyond the rationalist tendencies of analysing experience as a thing to be quantified, to instead engage with the experience of experience. That embodied feeling of being in the world and what that means for how we live our lives.

Haldane: In your 2017 TED Talk, you said this is about making the future “less of a foreign land”. When people have been immersed into how the world could be in 2050, does that give them agency to do something about it or does it depress or scare them?

Jain: That’s something we are battling all the time. One CEO that we worked with took all her leaders to India to confront a very different reality, and they went back and made some momentous decisions because of what they experienced. Sometimes injecting shock and discomfort can be powerful, but it already feels like we are rattling through a dystopian science fiction novel, just shock after shock to the point of saturation. Okay, so we need to stop all use of fossil fuels right now, that’s for certain, but there is a lack of real urgency dedicated to making that a reality. I wish there was a way to shake people out of individualism and really focus on a collective sense of solidarity.

When we tell counterfactual stories, when we show alternatives, people gain a sense of agency. That can be done by experimenting, by prototyping. Ultimately, stories are the way we make the world. We need to be able to tell different stories that percolate in people’s minds. I believe that can renew their agency to make change.

Haldane: In terms of that agency, given that the problems we face are global and collective, how do you bring people together and give them a sense of this being a team sport?

Jain: It totally depends. For instance, a few months ago, we did an immersive experience for New York Climate Week and the main audience was business leaders. The idea was — and it was a brief from a client — that CEOs need to experience FOMO [fear of missing out — Ed]. We wanted to showcase all the great climate action that is already happening across all major sectors, from industry to transport. We built something that would make them ask themselves, why are we not creating business models and product ideas that are more sustainable, that have negative carbon impact, that are not just focused on endless growth and extracting from the earth?

And it worked. We showed global, business-led solutions to changing the world. Everything from community projects to indigenous projects, to local product developments, to large-scale infrastructure projects. Many of the CEOs did experience FOMO, and decided, yes, I’m ready to try and tackle this.

Haldane: What do you think they were fearful of missing out on?

Jain: I suppose it’s fear of missing out on change, of acknowledging change and being part of the change. It is also fear of falling behind. The examples we used showed other ways of living, alternate business models and ideas of growth. ▶

Currently, some business leaders are so attached to quarterly returns and shareholder profit that they cannot decouple their visions from this cycle. Our focus is to inspire people to think in far more radical and visionary ways. Think of the legacy you are going to leave as an ancestor. Think of your children, grandchildren, and the worlds you are leaving behind for them.

Haldane: As you know, we are the Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. I want to ask you about the arts part of it: what role can art and art installations play in changing minds, and reshaping business and civil society?

Jain: The arts have a crucial role to play but are often considered whimsical or not significant to business decisions. We need to suspend that suspicion. Art allows you to be eccentric, courageous and bold, and that is what our artistic installations aim to do.

When you walk into the apartment we created — which was an art installation — you are not going to say “Oh, this beautiful world, everything is solved.” No. There was friction. There were recipes for ‘fox creole’, which points to what urban dwellers might have to eat in the future. There was a cookbook titled *Pets as Protein*. There was discomfort and messiness, but that’s the risk that art can take, that’s the experimental approach art can bring, which businesses have so much to learn from.

It’s unfortunate that we tend to compartmentalise these things, when some of the most powerful businesses are those that have been inspired by art and continue to be. For me, these boundaries between art and design and science and business and economics and systems change; they all blur quite easily.

Haldane: How do you maintain your optimism, given the challenges that we know the world, nation states and organisations face, whether commercial or non-commercial?

Recommended reading

“While it’s very hard to pick just one, I would suggest *The One-Straw Revolution* by Masanobu Fukuoka. First published in 1975, this book is an inspiring story of social impact, a quiet refusal of the status quo that radically reimagined our relationship to food, to ourselves and to time.” Anab Jain

Jain: It’s difficult. Working with futures or alternatives, you start to see, not just the first-level consequences, but the second- and third-level consequences. It can be demoralising and anxiety-inducing. But, I come from India, where the revolt against British colonial rule started in 1857. It was not until 90 years later, in 1947, that India became independent. Revolutions may be slow, dark and murky, but they are also full of hope.

I know we can effect change. That’s why I am happy to work with governments, businesses, cultural institutions and research labs, whoever wants to be making this change. I will enable that change in whatever way I can. That is what gives me hope.

Haldane: This is the *Journal* issue celebrating our 270th anniversary. To ask you, even as a futurist, to peer 270 years into the future, might be stretching it a bit. But how about the next 25, 50 years... can you tell a story about how much better it could be?

Jain: You could imagine it’s 2071 and a lot has happened. The period 2023 to 2035 was horrific, because we had to take so many bold decisions. We hear a lot about reaching net zero by 2050, but that is just a number, what does it mean? Well, we got to feel what that meant. It meant we were all experiencing hefty carbon taxes and a complete phase-out of fossil fuels. Travel was restricted. But there was so much ingenious innovation!

Interestingly, when we did surveys, we found out that people were happier with 60% less electricity and power than they were using. So, in 2050 what started to happen is that, with limited energy from the renewable sources that were available to us, people spent a lot of time resting. Resting doesn’t mean being lazy and sleeping, but rather nurturing our land, food and young people, being educated differently, learning to share and cooperate instead of following a very competitive trajectory, learning to have a reciprocal relationship with the earth, not an extractive one.

We see that a different way of life — one not full of the comforts the western world has become so used to — has made people happier and thriving, but there were a lot of sacrifices that needed to happen. I think we will have managed it pretty well by 2071.

Haldane: That is optimistic. Do you think happiness is the way we should be keeping score, societally, ultimately? Is that where we should be directing our attention?

Jain: Absolutely. I went to Bhutan last summer, and Bhutan is not only beautiful, but also the country that came up with the idea of a Gross



“Revolutions may be slow, dark and murky, but they are also full of hope”



Watch the expanded interview here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M--ZvX1dQI4>

National Happiness Index. They have given up 70% of their country to forests and nature reserves. Every person there is supported by the government and gets a little piece of land and a house. You cannot go and do whatever you want with the land or just buy any land you feel like; even the king's land is very limited.

It's a challenging but very beautiful plan of deeply visionary thinking. I just didn't want to come back! It was beautiful, that reckoning, combining the personal, the ecological, the spiritual, the cultural, the social. It was all interwoven in the same fabric. I think that is the aspiration.

Haldane: On our big anniversary year, could you give us here at the RSA the gift of your imaginings of how we could contribute to this more optimistic future that you have painted for us so beautifully? What contribution can we make in bringing that about as a reality?

Jain: I would say there are two pathways. The first is to lobby the government to bring back the creative sector and support for creativity and the arts. The House of Lords recently submitted a report that showed the importance of creativity and artistic thinking, and how in our secondary education it becomes so narrow. The RSA is best positioned to support and lobby for more interconnected, critical, creative, multidisciplinary education, right from childhood.

The second is inspired by work Superflux has created recently called "The Quiet Enchanting" which is an installation of digitally generated artworks that was displayed on the Strand in London. There is so much talk about rewilding the world around us, rewilding our landscapes. I think the RSA could pursue the rewilding of the spirit, the rewilding of minds and souls and hearts. That notion goes hand in hand with nurturing creative education.

Haldane: "The rewilding of minds and souls and hearts." That is a wonderful way of setting out our challenge, and it fits very well with some of the work that we are doing.

Jain: Yes, you are already doing that through your regenerative design programmes. I think there just needs to be more emphasis on emergent thinking, on less prescriptive, but more open storytelling and creative approaches that nurture that deep sense of rewilding. ■

Anab Jain is a co-founder and Director of experiential futures studio Superflux and a 2022 Royal Designers for Industry (RDI) Fellow.

Andy Haldane is Chief Executive Officer at the RSA.

Young at heart

Becoming a nation with children at its centre in 10 courageous steps

Words:

Jonathan Prosser

Illustration:

María Jesus Contreras

Just imagine...

The government leaders of Guatemala, Togo, the UK, Tonga, Australia, Tanzania and India come together to declare that for too long children have been ignored, and that they have the courage to become child-centred nations.

From idea to action

If the leader of your country made this declaration, what would be the practical next steps? Here are 10 key considerations to guide leaders towards becoming a child-centred nation.

1. Listening to children

More than 100 children aged 3–5 years contributed to Ireland’s National Consultation with Young Children to “... inform the development of a whole-of-government strategy for babies, young children and their families.” This aims to see children grow up to be active and healthy, achieving their full potential, safe and with economic security, and to be

connected, respected and contributing to the world.

For Professor Imelda Coyne, the consultation’s lead author, a child-centred nation “embeds engagement with and respect for children’s views as a core value of services and policies that affect children’s lives, incorporates the rights of the child to participate in all matters that affect their lives in conjunction with their family, and provides children with the means, space, opportunity and the support to participate.”

2. Protecting the right to play

Social entrepreneur Liz Ebengo has a background in design and international law. “Although enshrined in law, the right to play is ignored by many governments, yet when it is acknowledged in a child’s life, it becomes one of the purest expressions of the government’s commitment to fulfilling its duty to protect.”

For Ebengo, a child-centred nation is “one where governments take action on their duty of care for children, fully enabling the right to play, so a child can simply be a child.”

3. Sparking and developing creativity in children

Louise Holloway has taught children aged 4–7 for 25 years. “Early Years curriculum in the UK now allows teachers to get alongside children, play, and role model learning activities with them. Previously, we were asked to continually write down observations: children didn’t see







“A child-centred nation is one with play at the centre of all primary education”

someone modelling play with them but writing on a clipboard! Yet when the child moves from Reception to Year 1, the priority moves to reading, writing and maths, due to tests at the end of Year 2. Sweden’s early curriculum, by contrast, has a major focus on forest schools and play-based learning up to seven years old.”

“A child-centred nation is one with play at the centre of all primary education, not just the start, to see the imaginations of children fully develop... preparing them for lives where they are fulfilled, and lead with empathy, compassion and understanding.”

4. Ensuring safety

Ending human trafficking and modern slavery is the aim of Hope for Justice and its CEO Tim Nelson, FRSA. With 1.7 million children in forced commercial

sexual exploitation, 13.1 million exploited through forced labour, and 9 million in forced marriages, avoiding family separation is key for policymakers. They must prioritise preventing the drivers such as “poverty and economic shocks; social exclusion and discrimination; and unaccompanied or separated children.”

Tahina Booth, FRSA, is Founder and CEO of Grass Skirt Project, which uses sport as a tool to combat gender inequality and eliminate gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea. She calls for a “child-led Ministry for Children, to dismantle entrenched inequalities by amplifying the voices of the young generation, whose experiences, hopes and dreams can shape policy discourse in a holistic manner.”

A child-centred nation keeps families together, keeps children safe and provides education for all.

5. Equipping children as peacemakers

Conflict. Injustice. Children voiceless. What if there were a pathway that gave children and young people a voice?

PaxHax is an NGO I founded to catalyse youth-led peace initiatives. We are creating a pathway that will see more young people active and equipped to lead in the peace community and, through our contributions to working sessions led by Swedish NGO the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, receiving increased private sector support for their efforts.

A child-centred nation equips children as peacemakers, supports youth-led peacebuilding and enables public-private funding models.

6. Bringing hope and skills for climate adaptation

Dr Andrew Leake leads the Sustainability Practice at INGO Compassion International, which addresses child poverty through local churches in 29 countries. “A child-centred nation is committed to environmental sustainability and climate resilience, meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations. Ensuring the ability of children to adapt and become resilient is the minimum we can offer to them and their descendants.”

“A child-centred nation places a strong emphasis on providing spaces, opportunities and educational programmes for children to cultivate both hope and climate change adaptation and resilience from an early age.”

7. Designing with children instead of for children

Kobina Yeboah Okyere, National Director of Compassion Ghana, describes the importance of a co-design approach, with the Compassion UK Innovation Lab, for elevating youth voices: “We see it as part of developing youth agency, that young people telling their stories would enhance their skills, advancing local responses to community needs.”

Such an approach seeks to accelerate child development outcomes. It also aims to guard

against a challenge that can arise in child-centred praxis that has been identified by Professor Nicole Hennem: as countries make progress in improving the lives of children, scientific knowledge and data grows, and “...paradoxically, these same knowledge bases informing social policies often produce representations and images of children and their parents that are detrimental for both of these groups.”

A child-centred nation elevates the voices of children, engaging them in co-design and ensuring they remain at the centre of an ongoing narrative they shape, rather than representations of them being allowed to take shape in data.

8. Learning languages, place and local understanding

The work of Dr Pamela Mackenzie of International Network for Development has focused on developing curricula equipping children to have full command of their mother tongue, deepening their cultural understanding and skills. The result is that “children’s sense of connection locally is deepened, whilst enabling the learning of a second language in a structured way, so they can contribute more broadly to their nations. If children learn the knowledge of their culture and environment through their own language, that in itself can shape our futures. All that insight is lost if a language dies.”

Child-centred nations consider local depth and international reach through language and education. They recognise that knowledge and culture are transferred between generations in indigenous languages, and this enriches the fabric of a nation.

9. Putting value on the public good of good parenting

Elsbeth Kirkman has worked in social policy innovation for over a decade. For her, a child-centred nation is one that pays people for parenting for the public good. “The social return on investment on birthing and raising the next generation must be recognised. Studies show that parenting has a big impact on outcomes in later life, and that there

Learn more

Questions to sharpen your government’s performance and move towards becoming a child-centred nation:

Minister for Children

Who in my government is responsible for children? Who is listening to them, designing with them, and taking steps to improve the lives of children in my country?

Foundations

Have we considered safety and access to essential resources? Are we building the attitudes, institutions and structures for a peaceful society?

Long-term view

Are child-lens investment approaches being used? Are we considering the countries children will inherit?

Valuing social good

Are children seen as agents that simply reduce the working capacity of their parents and thus tax revenues? Do we recognise the value to our country of raising children?

Learning

Are changes required to our educational systems and curriculum? Have we listened to children and not designed play out of our school systems?

are reliable ways to improve how well we parent — we should use payments to incentivise parents to invest in improving their skills.” Kirkman described how this would bring a helpful parallel to taxing negative externalities, such as smoking.

A child-centred nation equips and incentivises parents to improve their parenting skills.

10. Considering international relations and foreign policy

Professor Ali Watson, OBE, of the University of St Andrews, focuses on the place of children in international relations. “Consider colonial governments that had children firmly in their sights when they shaped education and child welfare policies to force assimilation, such as the Indian residential schools system in Canada. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada stated that this was cultural genocide.”

Alternatively, “a child-centred nation would have a firm focus on policies being used for good, placing all children — including marginalised children — at the centre of domestic and foreign policy.”

Make a commitment

For national leaders: have the courage to become a child-centred nation. Commit to this publicly, work on it intently for 12 months, engage with those who contributed to this piece for input and formulate a long-term, cross-party strategy. Be a child-centred leader.

For citizens: have the courage to speak up. Write to your politician and ask them to join an international movement of leaders declaring that their countries will be child-centred nations within 12 months. Get your friends and communities involved, spread the word, build the movement. Be a child-centred champion. ■

Jonathan Prosser, FRSA, FRAI, is Compassion UK Director of Innovation Lab, PaxHax Founder, University of Cambridge Visiting Lecturer and a Forbes Nonprofit Council Member.

María Jesus Contreras for the RSA. Maria is an illustrator born and raised in Chile. In 2022, she won the Young Guns award from The One Club for Creativity.



Words: Dan Matthews Illustrations: Pyotr Kovalenko

Born on 22 March 1754 at Rawthmell's coffee house in Covent Garden, the RSA's founding aim was to use subscription funds to promote the world's best creative endeavours. Originally based on a membership model, the term 'Fellowship' was adopted in 1914.

Today, RSA Fellows are a global network of extraordinary people, an eclectic group of thinkers, makers, doers, activists and artists — all changemakers — who understand

how much stronger they are when banded together under the banner of the Society.

That RSA spirit has attracted some truly remarkable Fellows (and members) over the years, including globally renowned and historically significant individuals across all industries. Here (in no particular order), we cast a spotlight on just 50 of them, ranging from lions of the Enlightenment to contemporary campaigners for justice.

Theodore Roosevelt
US president
(1858-1919)

Theodore Roosevelt was the 26th US president, and a soldier, naturalist, historian and man of letters. In 1910, the then-former president was elected a life member by the Society for his commitment to progressive reforms, conservation and strong foreign policy.

Sarah Mason
Chief executive and
charity leader
(1973-)

A Fellow since August 2023, Sarah Mason is Chief Executive of the Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland, having worked in various roles in the movement for more than three decades. The Federation provided specialist support to more than 7,500 women in the financial year 2022-23. She was made an MBE for services to women and girls in the 2024 New Year Honours List.

Judi Dench
Actor
(1934-)

Dame Judi Dench has enjoyed an illustrious career in film and television and on the stage. Since her 1957 debut, she has collected an Academy Award and eight further nominations, two Golden Globes, seven Olivier Awards and six Baftas.

Muhammad Abdul Bari
Physicist, writer,
community leader
(1953-)

Bangladeshi-born Dr Muhammad Abdul Bari is a former Secretary of Muslim Aid, a former Chairman of the East London Mosque and a former Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain. In 2006, *Time Out* put him at number seven on its list of movers and shakers in London.



Henry Cole
Inventor (1808-1882)

Sir Henry Cole was a civil servant and inventor who became chief architect of the Great Exhibition of 1851. He promoted postal reform, was instrumental in creating the National Training School for Music and helped progress working conditions on ships. It was said of him that, "his enterprise, energy and perseverance stimulated its proceedings and supplied much of the driving force that gave the Society a new importance in the land".



Bernardine Evaristo
Author (1959-)

Bernardine Evaristo is a British author and academic. Her books have been awarded 'Book of the Year' 60 times and her novel *Girl, Woman, Other* jointly won the Booker Prize in 2019, making her the first Black woman to claim the prize. She has received numerous honours, and was made an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List in 2020. Elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 2004, she became its president in 2022.

Alexander Graham Bell
Inventor and scientist
(1847-1922)

Alexander Graham Bell gave two demonstrations of his telephone to the Society in 1877. In 1878, he was elected an honorary life member and was presented with the Albert Medal in 1902.

Caroline Haslett
Electrical engineer
(1895-1957)

Dame Caroline Haslett started her career as a clerk at the Cochran Boiler Company. Her interest led her to train in the manufacture of boilers, ultimately leaving the company to become the first secretary of the Women's Engineering Society. She went on to create the Electrical Association for Women, which implemented a national educational programme, and was elected a Fellow in 1934.

Isambard Brunel
Civil engineer
(1806-1859)

An exceptional civil and mechanical engineer, Brunel designed the first transatlantic steamer, built more than 1,600km of railway and constructed innumerable ships, buildings and infrastructure. He was a member of the Committee of the Society.

William Wilberforce
Politician and abolitionist
(1759-1833)

William Wilberforce was a British politician and philanthropist and a leader of the movement to abolish the slave trade. He was elected an independent MP for Yorkshire in 1784 and quickly became a leading abolitionist, heading up the parliamentary campaign against the British slave trade for 20 years until the Slave Trade Act (which abolished the British slave trade) was passed in 1807.

Thomas Edison

**Inventor
(1847–1931)**

Thomas Edison, inventor of the light bulb and phonograph, was honoured with the Albert Medal in 1892 for his numerous inventions. The Society's Great Room hosted the first demonstration in England of Edison's incandescent light bulbs.

John Howard

**Philanthropist and reformer
(1726–1790)**

John Howard was a prominent philanthropist and English prison reformer. He advocated for a prison system that maintained its toughness but ensured a healthy environment for inmates. The Penitentiary Act of 1779 saw the construction of two prisons in accordance with his ideas. He also forced through the abolition of discharge fees. His name appears in the first signature book of the Society of Arts.

AY Young

**Recording artist and
UN Young Leader
(1991–)**

AY Young is a singer, songwriter, producer and entrepreneur. His Battery Tour, run on 100% renewable energy, raised money to provide energy to individuals and towns across the world. He is currently working on Project 17, a collaborative concept album about the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Patricia Tindale

**Architect
(1926–2011)**

Patricia Randall Tindale was an architect and senior civil servant working on large-scale projects in the UK and US. A Society of Arts Fellow for more than 20 years, she left around £700,000 in her will to the Society. The RSA established a Tindale lecture series in her memory, created a space for Fellows, the Tindale Room, at RSA House, and a Patricia Tindale Legacy Award, part of the RSA Student Design Awards.



Nick Park

Filmmaker and animator (1958–)

Creator of the famed animated film series *Wallace and Gromit*, Nick Park has received four Academy Awards since *Creature Comforts* won him his first Oscar in 1989. He is the brains behind a host of globally successful animations including *Chicken Run*, the highest-grossing stop motion animated film, *Shaun the Sheep* and *Early Man*. Park was appointed a CBE in the 1997 Birthday Honours for services to the animated film industry.



Mary Moser

Painter (1744–1819)

Mary Moser was a celebrated artist admired for her paintings of flowers. She won her first premium for a design from the Society aged 14. In 1795, Moser received another and was awarded the Society's silver medal for 'extraordinary merit'. The painting was displayed at the Society's first art exhibition in 1760 and again in the 'Exhibition of Exhibitions' in 1951. At 24, she was one of two female founding members of the Royal Academy.

Deanna Van Buren

**Architect
(DOB unknown)**

Deanna Van Buren is an activist and architect renowned for her contributions to architecture, design and real estate innovation, and advocacy for restorative justice. She has received the Rauschenberg Artist as Activist Fellowship and the Berkeley-Rupp Prize.

William Hogarth

**Painter
(1697–1764)**

William Hogarth is considered by many to be the 'father' of English painting. He was one of the earliest members of the Society of Arts, elected in 1755. Along with Thomas Gainsborough and Richard Wilson, he presented portraits to decorate the Society, and his name appears in the original signature book in the archives. Hogarth's Act, created in 1735, secured copyright for works of art.

Charles Dickens

**Writer
(1812–1870)**

Charles Dickens became a member of the Society in 1849. He appears in the archival minutes of several meetings, contributed to journals and in 1864 read a paper at the Society entitled "A Poor Man's Tale of a Patent".

John Millais

**Painter
(1829–1896)**

A founder of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Sir John Millais was an English painter and illustrator. He won a gold medal from the Society in 1846 for an original historical painting and a gold medal in 1847 for an original composition, and exhibited at the Chicago Exhibition in 1893 and the Exhibition of Modern Illustration in 1901. In 1896 he served as President of the Royal Academy.

William Shipley

**RSA founder
(1715-1803)**

Shipley founded the Society of Arts in 1754, believing that public recognition would inspire industry, making Britain a centre for advancements in the arts and sciences. The first meeting occurred in March 1754 at Rawthmells coffee house.

Georgina Lara Booth

**Journalist and humanitarian
(1994-)**

Georgina Lara Booth is a British-Dutch humanitarian, writer, filmmaker and journalist. She is a UN Women delegate at the Commission on the Status of Women and recipient of the International Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Award. In March 2023, Booth was selected for the *Forbes* 30 under 30 list in the media category for her journalism and editorial work.

Mohammed Amin

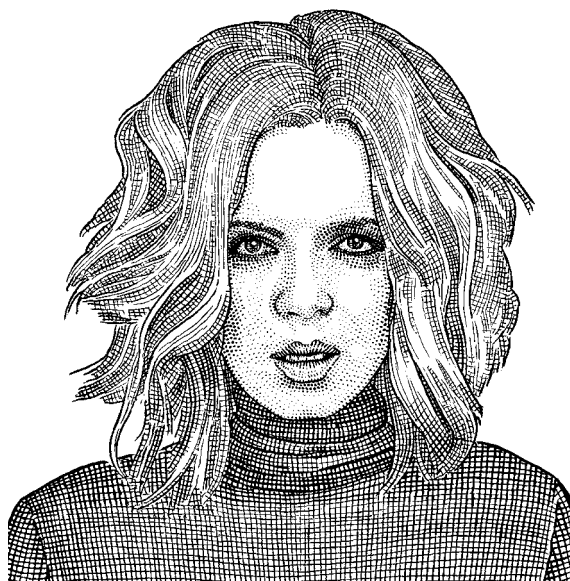
**Businessman
(1950-)**

Mohammed Amin is a British-Pakistani businessman, ex-PwC partner and former Chair of the Conservative Muslim Forum. He currently Co-chairs the Muslim Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester and leads the Council of the Islam and Liberty Network.

Deborah Meaden

**Entrepreneur and investor
(1959-)**

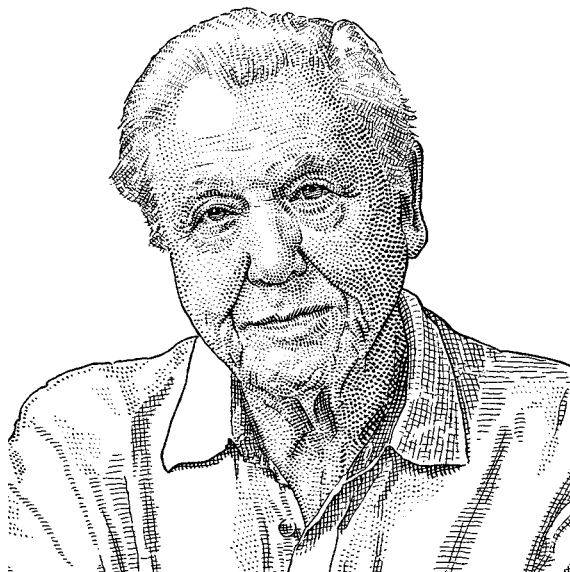
Deborah Meaden is a business owner and celebrity investor, having first appeared on the popular TV show *Dragon's Den* in August 2006. In addition to appearances on numerous TV shows (including as a contestant on dancing competition programme *Strictly Come Dancing*), since 2022 Meaden has co-presented *The Big Green Money Show* for BBC Radio. The series discusses actions being taken by businesses and individuals in response to climate change.



Shirley Manson

Musician and actress (1966-)

Lead singer of the American rock band Garbage, Shirley Manson has released seven studio albums, including *Version 2.0*, which garnered two Grammy Award nominations. Born and raised in Edinburgh, she commuted to the US for recordings with the band. Manson is credited with inspiring other female artists and has used her profile to help raise millions of pounds for charitable causes, most notably Aids charities.



David Attenborough

Broadcaster and biologist (1926-)

With a career spanning eight decades, Sir David Attenborough is a naturalist known for hit TV shows made with the BBC Natural History Unit. He rose to prominence presenting *Zoo Quest* in 1954 and is the only person to win Baftas in black and white, colour, high-definition, 3D and 4K. His beloved presenting style has earned him three Emmy Awards and he has used his celebrity to progress environmental causes.

Mya-Rose Craig

**Author and activist
(2002-)**

Mya-Rose Craig is one of the RSA's youngest Fellows. She is an author, bird lover and activist, and sometimes goes by the name 'Birdgirl', which is also the title of the memoir she published in 2022. She was awarded an honorary doctorate from Bristol University in 2020 and is the youngest British person to receive such an award.

Prue Leith

**Broadcaster and chef
(1940-)**

Dame Prue Leith is a restaurateur, broadcaster, cookery writer, novelist and Chancellor of Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh. She was the first woman appointed to the British Railways Board in 1980 and is a former director of the Places for People Housing Association. As Chair of the RSA (from 1995 to 1997), she led the successful campaign to use the fourth plinth in Trafalgar Square to feature continuously revolving installations by contemporary artists.

Vivienne Westwood

**Fashion designer
(1941-2022)**

Dame Vivienne Westwood was an English fashion designer and businesswoman, credited with introducing punk and new wave fashions to the mainstream. She designed clothes for the boutique she ran with Malcolm McLaren, then expanded worldwide.

Betty Jackson

**Fashion designer
(1949-)**

Betty Jackson was named British Designer of the Year in 1985, just four years after launching her first fashion collection. She was given the Royal Designer for Industry title by the RSA in 1988, became a Visiting Professor at the Royal College of Art in 1999 and received a CBE in the 2007 Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Mary Portas

Creative director and presenter (1960–)

A leading figure in retail and branding, Portas became creative director of Harvey Nichols in 1989 and in 1997 launched a creative advertising agency, going on to create TV shows and write extensively on branding in retail.

Ken Robinson

Author and speaker (1950–2020)

Sir Ken Robinson was a successful author, speaker and education adviser with the ear of governments, education institutions and arts bodies. He was director of the 'Arts in Schools' project and Professor of Arts Education at the University of Warwick. 'Do schools kill creativity?', his 2006 TED Talk, is one of the most watched ever. He was knighted for services to the arts in 2003.

Herbie Hancock

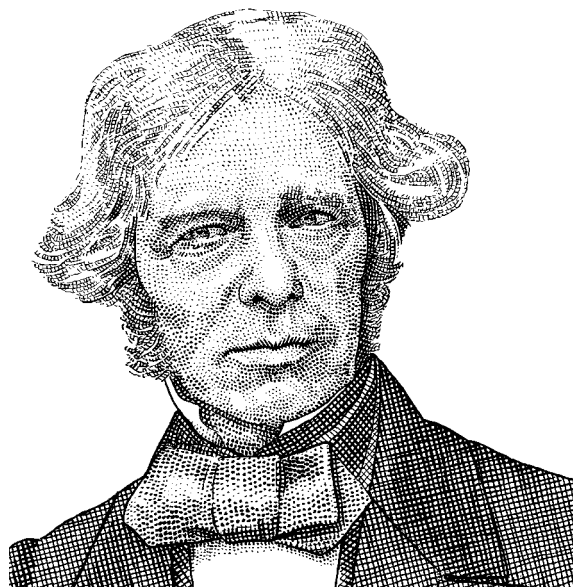
Jazz musician (1940–)

Jazz musician and composer Herbie Hancock has collected 14 Grammy Awards throughout his career, including Album of the Year in 2007 for *River: The Joni Letters*. He was part of the Miles Davis Quintet and experimented widely with sound, particularly on his album *Head Hunters*. He is a professor at the University of California and Chair of the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz.

David Puttnam

Film producer (1941–)

Lord Puttnam is a British-Irish film producer whose productions include *Chariots of Fire*, *The Killing Fields* and *Midnight Express*. He received a Bafta in 1982 and the Bafta Fellowship in 2006. He was appointed Knight Bachelor in 1995 and a life peer in 1997 and was granted a seat in the House of Lords in 2007, from which he retired in 2021.



Michael Faraday

Scientist (1791–1867)

Michael Faraday was a member of the City Philosophical Society whose work contributed greatly to the understanding of electromagnetism. He made several groundbreaking contributions to science, including the invention of the world's first electric generator. A chairman of the Chemistry Committee for 11 years, he was awarded the RSA's Albert Medal in 1866 "for discoveries in electricity, magnetism and chemistry".



Dame Zarine Kharas

Co-founder, JustGiving (1951–)

Kharas co-founded JustGiving, the world's leading online fundraising platform. She grew up in Karachi, Pakistan, studied law at Cambridge and, eventually, became a corporate law solicitor. She launched JustGiving with co-founder Anne-Marie Huby in 2000, raising more than £4bn cumulatively before leaving the organisation in 2017. In 2015, she was made a Dame Commander in the Queen's Birthday Honours List.

Colin Powell

Politician (1937–2021)

An army general and statesman, Powell was the 65th US secretary of state. He won numerous US and foreign military awards as well as the Presidential Medal of Freedom, twice, and the Congressional Gold Medal.

Mary Robinson

Former president of Ireland (1944–)

Mary Robinson became the seventh president of Ireland in 1990 and served until September 1997. She was the first woman and the first independent to hold the country's highest political office. Following her time as president, in 1997 Robinson became the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. She has received praise for her work in the fields of sexuality, contraception and gender equality.

Dominique Palmer

Activist (1999–)

Dominique Palmer became a climate campaigner and speaker when she discovered how air pollution affected her community in South London. She has spoken at major events such as Cop 26 and was included on *Forbes'* 2020 list of top UK environmentalists.

Karan Bilimoria

Businessman (1961–)

Lord Bilimoria is a British-Indian businessman and member of the House of Lords. He founded the brand Cobra Beer in 1989 and turned it into a global success with a multi-million-pound turnover, before it was partially acquired by drinks giant Molson Coors. Bilimoria is a crossbench member of the House of Lords, Chancellor of the University of Birmingham and Vice President of the Confederation of British Industry.

Zandra Rhodes

Fashion designer

(1940-)

Zandra Rhodes' 50-year fashion career has garnered a slew of awards, including Designer of the Year, the Walpole British Luxury Legend Award and an Emmy for costume design. Her unique style earned her the nickname 'Princess of Punk'.

Timothy West

Actor

(1934-)

Timothy West is a British actor with a decades-long career spanning stage, screen and radio. He has played Macbeth twice and King Lear four times, as well as characters on long-running British soap operas *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*. With his wife, actress Prunella Scales, he is a patron of the Lace Market Theatre in Nottingham and the Kings Theatre in Gloucester. He was awarded a CBE in 1984.

Hannah Lena Rebel

Composer and author

(2001-)

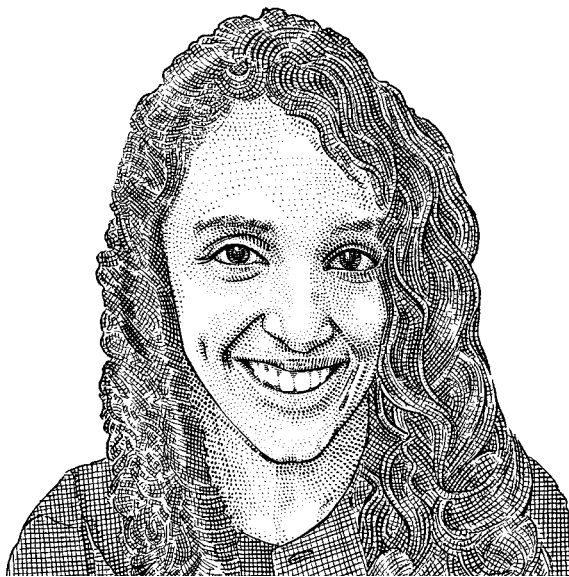
Austria-based composer, choreographer and author Rebel studied at the Vienna State Opera, the University of Music and Arts, Prayner Conservatory for composition and conducting and the University for Music and Performing Arts for composition and film scoring.

Tim Berners-Lee

Scientist

(1955-)

Sir Tim Berners-Lee is known for inventing the World Wide Web to accelerate information-sharing between scientists in different institutions. He was knighted in 2004 and received the Turing Award in 2016. He chairs the W3C Consortium, which oversees development of the web, is a Senior Researcher at MIT, a Trustee of the Ford Foundation and President of the Open Data Institute.



Kirthi Jayakumar

Lawyer and activist (1987-)

Peace educator Kirthi Jayakumar is a Commonwealth Scholar, serves as an adviser to the G7 and was named one of UN Women's 30 for 2030. She is head of community engagement at World Pulse and founded the Gender Security Project, a feminist initiative working towards peace, security and justice. Previously, she founded The Red Elephant Foundation, an initiative for peacebuilding and gender equality.



Barbara Ehrenreich

Author and activist (1941-2022)

Barbara Ehrenreich was an award-winning American author best known for her 2001 book *Nickel and Dimed*, which recounted her experiences working a series of minimum-wage jobs and helped galvanise the movement for better pay during the US dotcom bust. Her honours include a Lannan Literary Award and the Erasmus Prize, given for exceptional contributions to the humanities, social sciences or the arts.

Benjamin Franklin

Statesman

(1706-1790)

A well-known American polymath, Franklin had a long-standing association with the Society of Arts. He corresponded often and, while resident in England, was actively involved with the Society through supporting the Premium Award Scheme.

Nelson Mandela

Politician and campaigner

(1918-2013)

Nelson Mandela became the first president of South Africa in 1994, just four years after being released from a 27-year prison term. Dedicated to dismantling apartheid-era policies, he received more than 250 honours, including the Nobel Peace Prize.

Karl Marx

Political theorist and economist

(1818-1883)

Famous as an architect of modern social science, Marx's best-known publication is *The Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848, which expanded on the labour theory of value. His 1862 letter accepting membership of the Society survives in the RSA archive to this day.

Jane Boyd

Artist

(1953-)

Jane Boyd is a British artist best known for her work in light-based installation and drawing. Exhibiting internationally since 1986, Boyd was the first woman to be elected Fellow Commoner in Creative Arts, awarded by Trinity College, Cambridge.

Dan Matthews is a journalist and writer for the national and trade press; he presents a YouTube show under the name 'Mr Obscura'.

Pyotr Kovalenko is an illustrator and graphic designer based in Tartu, Estonia. He uses only pen, ink and paper.



GRASSROOTS

Power to the people

Fellow AY Young's music has already delivered energy access to dozens of villages around the world — and he's just getting started

—

Words:
Leah Clarkson

Photos:
Chris Burrow



“Welcome to the farm.” AY Young, CEO of Battery Tour, UN Youth Leader for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and one of the RSA’s newest Fellows, is standing on the peaceful winter grounds of an urban farm in what used to be one of the most blighted, drug-ridden neighbourhoods of Kansas City. Crunching through a thick crust of fresh snow on an overcast, sub-zero day, Young rocks ski gloves and reflective shades as he shows off tidy rows of billowing white tarpaulins that stretch into the distance, some protecting clusters of still-green kale from the recent frosts. As he lopes towards the main farm building, his tall, wiry frame exudes pent-up energy, appropriate for a musician and entrepreneur who, in his own words, spends much of his time “obsessing over energy storage”.

Raised for change

The UN’s Youth Leaders for the SDGs are chosen for their commitment to finding solutions to the world’s greatest challenges; that Young was the only American selected during his inaugural year is perhaps not surprising for a man who has activism in his blood. His parents, Alan and Yolanda Young, are well known in the Ivanhoe neighbourhood of Kansas City. Since moving in more than 30 years ago, they have raised four children while simultaneously transforming the community around them, always taking a needs-based, common-sense approach to change, the community farm being just one example. “I grew up in a family of changemakers,” says Young. “I watched my dad change my neighbourhood block by block. Watched my mom bring the city together, mobilising the community.”

But his own path to activism wasn’t always straightforward. He came to music late, at the age of 19, after emerging from a promising four-year stint playing basketball for the University of Kansas, where he assumed he was headed for the NBA. “I always wanted to change the world,” says Young, but, ultimately, “I just didn’t think putting a ball through a hoop for 10 years was going to do it.”

Young quit basketball “cold turkey”. He had started writing poetry and had a sense that music was the direction he wanted to take, but he knew it wouldn’t be easy “to catch up”. A lucky break in 2012 sealed the deal: Young earned an audition on the *X Factor*, performing as a duo with younger brother AJ Young. The pair received four ‘yes’ votes from judges Britney Spears, Louis Walsh, LA Reid and Demi Lovato, and though they didn’t progress past the preliminary rounds, Young’s path was now firmly set.

“Everyone needs energy, and if you store enough, you can power anything”

AY Young

10,000 hours

To hone his craft, he decided to apply the same strategy to music that he had to basketball, putting in the requisite “10,000 hours” to build up his chops as a musician and performer. At first, his goal was simply to get as much practice in as quickly as possible. But something unexpected happened: the more Young performed, the more he began to think about the energy needed to power his performances, and its true cost. He realised he had to find a more sustainable way to harness and store energy. “Energy is the base resource we need in our food, our water. Everyone needs energy, and if you store enough, you can power anything.” Though Young had never built anything even remotely similar, he began researching how to create what he needed and was soon able to start storing energy in batteries, easing his reliance on the grid. ‘The Battery Tour’ had arrived.

As Young toured, he constantly refined his kit, often performing multiple shows a day, ▶





“We’re all in this life together and it takes collaboration — radical collaboration”

AY Young

all powered by renewable energy. Soon, there came another major shift. He was sleeping in his car, wedged in with his batteries, Googling on his phone, when he read that 1 billion people globally do not have access to energy. He suddenly understood he had to use his passion for music to get people “plugged in”. That very day he decided to change the Battery Tour’s focus to music for impact, meaning “every concert is going to raise money to send one person or one village energy till I get the world plugged in.”

Young is pragmatic about what, to the average bystander, might seem like a pretty serious bit of inspiration. “Everyone in the world is an outlet for change. If we’re plugged in to each other on the local level, on the community level, on the world level, we can power change. That was what really sparked the mission to go get the world plugged in.”

Project 17

Young kept touring, delivering his message of sustainable, accessible energy, and soon the world was paying attention. The day he got a call from the UN inviting him to be a Youth Leader was also the day he learned about the 17 SDGs, bringing his journey and mission into even sharper focus. Today, Young is at work on Project 17, a full-length concept album made with 100% renewable energy. The album will include 17 songs, each highlighting one of the SDGs and featuring a celebrity collaborator (Tech

N9ne and Peter Gabriel are already signed up), a corporate sponsor (GM and Samsung, tick) and a recipient organisation. “Each song is going to empower organisations that do the work so we can achieve the goals.”

While the line-ups are still being finalised (and Young emphasises that the process is fluid, with collaborators influencing the choice of recipient organisation depending on their own interests and commitments), the album is expected to drop in 2025.

Young started 2024 with major momentum after attending Cop 28 in Dubai, where he performed as one of the featured artists on the Cop 28 anthem *Lasting Legacy*, written by multi-Grammy-award-winning producer RedOne. When asked about some of the controversies that swirled around Cop 28, Young responds thoughtfully: “Everyone’s looking for someone to blame. But it takes time. I definitely have that patience and understanding that this is going to take a while, and it’s going to take radical collaboration and every facet of humanity working together to take a step.”

Radical collaboration

The cast of ever-growing collaborators on Project 17 proves just how fundamentally Young’s activism is rooted in the idea of radical collaboration, which, according to Young, is “the kind of collaboration that we need to make sure that people have power and energy and water. You should always have counsel and advisers and a network of people that you bounce everything to. We’re all in this life together and it takes collaboration — radical collaboration.”

And that, says Young, is precisely why he decided to become a Fellow. “What drew me to the RSA was the simple fact that you guys are a convener. You’re bringing people together.” His advice for young Fellows would be to spend more time developing your ‘why’. “If you know your ‘why’, if you know what drives you, then you can use your passion to take an action and it will guide you. I really do believe that. And then you don’t burn out, you don’t have climate anxiety, and you’re able to do that thing.

“The RSA is literally the epitome of what I’ve based my life on, of what the Battery Tour is, of what Project 17 is. I keep talking about radical collaboration. The RSA is, across the board, plugging people in and it’s powering change.

“To achieve anything, you have to come together and partner.” ■

Leah Clarkson is Editor of *RSA Journal*.

Chris Burrow is a Kansas City-based photographer.



To watch our video profile of AY Young, scan the QR code or visit <https://youtu.be/TqLVlbZtGog>



Take courage

The arts sector is in crisis. Can a renewed commitment to creativity deliver a bolder future?

Words: Lucy Kerbel

Being creative will take courage in the arts in 2024. I don't mean showcasing creativity — staging productions, exhibiting collections or designing new products — these are our stock in trade. I mean being creative in how we do these things.

I think it's fair to say that the arts have not been at their most creative recently. Given the permacrisis that's been going on around us, that's not surprising. Sitting in a Zoom breakout room with a group of arts workers in the early days of the first lockdown, one artist said: "It's hard to create from a position of panic." It's a comment that's stayed with me.

We remain in a significantly altered landscape, one of accelerated social change and political instability. One across which, in the UK at least, the cumulative impact of years of cuts to public spending are writ large. In the arts sector — especially for people running organisations — the panic has not gone away. Or if it has, it's been replaced by a bleak survivalism; trudging through wave after wave of rolling crises, anxiety and loss. This may have tested our mettle as far as endurance goes, but it is not conducive to creativity.

Despite this, those of us in the arts do need to find the strength (and support one another to find the strength) to be creative again. The alternative is that we are whittled away to nothing; an increasingly depleted sector doing less and less, on leaner and leaner resources,

with fewer and fewer people. The context in which we are operating will not dramatically alter any time soon. Trying to operate the way we were before 2020 (or even, to take the longer view, how we were before 2008) but in smaller, meaner ways, feels like a depressing prospect.

A positive future for the arts?

A more hopeful alternative would be to identify a positive future for the arts in the UK. There's a new world that's dawning around us and we have the opportunity, if we choose to grasp it, to decide what role we want to play and how to make that happen. This may entail a certain amount of letting go.

The pandemic forced a rupture in how the arts operate in the UK and catalysed significant changes across society. These continue to play out in unpredictable and often challenging ways, impacting our audiences, our workforces and our wider communities. Many of us in the arts are carrying significant amounts of sadness, loss and anger regarding events of recent years. I'm not sure we've grieved properly, really taken time to collectively surface what we feel, to acknowledge that our situation has changed, to stare into the difficult but unavoidable reality that we can't go back.

As anyone who has gone through a bereavement knows, to look at this hard, cold reality requires courage. But it is the only way to move on and to find a life (albeit a different one)



Photo: tomaz/istock



“As anyone who has gone through a bereavement knows, to look at this hard, cold reality requires courage”

on the other side. The alternative is stasis or decline.

If we can summon the courage to face this process, then we can start looking to the future and reconfiguring who we are as a sector and the role we want to play in society. There should be no sector better equipped to think in the innovative and novel ways required to do this. We may need to reassess our priorities, escape the tyranny of our Outlook calendars to make space so we can do big picture thinking, (re)connect with colleagues and peers, remind ourselves of why the hell we are in this sector in the first place, search for joy, spark ideas. Most importantly of all, listen to people in our communities about what they want and need from the arts.

What would give them hope? How do they want to feel about life? What is the future they dream of for themselves and for those they love? Considering how we can play a role in making this a reality would prompt us to think about new models and force us to be creative. This can only be a good thing.

I'm not so naive as to suggest that this will be easy. But if we can only find the courage to look up and outwards beyond our immediate challenges, we will find the inspiration to picture a better future. We can be proactive about visualising and stepping into the position we want to have in that. Or we can miss that chance because we're still stuck where we were, trying to make work the models that no longer fit. ■

Lucy Kerbel, FRSA is Founder and Director of Tonic. For over a decade, Tonic has been at the forefront of driving change within arts and culture, making the sector more equitable, diverse and inclusive.



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KEYNOTE

Welby: “courage can enable us to overcome any problem”

Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby called for political leaders to embrace “courage of the right kind” in the first in a series of RSA lectures on the theme of courage.

Welby said that, in 2024, the world faces challenges on multiple fronts, including conflict, migration, trade wars and social divisions. This presents a ‘bandwidth’ problem, with many global politicians focusing on the months ahead and not the next generations.

“The struggle to lead amidst bandwidth inadequacy and a hostile punitive culture is one that requires courage of the right kind,” he told an audience at RSA House on 31 January.

Welby said courageous leadership must carry a decisive vision, involve honesty and have achievable aims.

“Courage rests on values that are absolute. Not hating others, for example, not dividing the country for the sake of political advantage, the use of so-called ‘wedge issues’, where unity is an absolute need for our flourishing,” Welby said.

In the UK he pointed to Winston Churchill, Clement Attlee, Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair as leaders who had a decisive vision. “We might differ with any or all of them, but they set out ideas well formulated both in opposition and in government.”

Political courage can enable us to overcome any problem, he suggested. “We have an extraordinary story of overcoming the greatest obstacles, rising above our worst selves and coming together when we need to.” ■

AWARDS

Rare honour awarded to RSA Fellow

RSA Fellow **Professor Dame Carol Black** was awarded the Dame Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire (GBE) in the King’s 2024 New Year Honours.

Prof Black is only the 78th woman since 1917 to be awarded the GBE, which highlights exceptional and sustained public service.

Black is a physician and academic who is currently Chair of the British Library and the Centre for Ageing Better. She also advises government departments on health, work and wellbeing.

Other Fellows were also recognised in the New Year Honours, including:

- **Brian Clarke**, stained glass artist, knighthood, for services to art
- **Lady Frances Sorrell**, Co-chair, Sorrell Foundation, Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE), for services to design and creative industries
- **Professor Mala Rao**, Director of the ethnicity and health unit at Imperial College, CBE, for services to public health, the NHS, equality and diversity
- **Marvin Rees**, Mayor of Bristol, Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE), for services to local government
- **Simon Hancock**, Founder Chairman of Pembrokeshire County Council, Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE), for services to the community in Pembrokeshire
- **Audley English**, co-founder, Society of Black Architects, MBE, for services to architecture and sustainability
- **Jahangir Alom**, emergency medical doctor, British Empire Medal (BEM) for services to tackling health inequalities

The RAIN: an influential voice in the AI space

We are pleased to announce the formation of the RSA's newest network: the Responsible Artificial Intelligence Network ('the RAIN'), which has launched on Circle.

Building on the Fellow-led AI Interest Group, established in May 2023 by Faye Brookes, the RSA's online community manager, and Ismael Kherroubi Garcia, founder and CEO of Kairoi, the RAIN will continue to highlight Fellowship expertise in artificial intelligence. It will courageously challenge the status quo by giving civil society a new voice in the AI space.

As a formal network, the RAIN will be co-led by Ismael, alongside Tania Duarte, Michael Allan Galvez and Nathan Kinch. It will receive more support from RSA staff, who will ensure

that the network's initiatives have greater public reach.

A change from interest group to network is only possible thanks to the RAIN's clear objectives, the co-leads' commitment to the Design for Life mission, and the hard work that has seen the group grow rapidly to more than 400 members.

The AI Interest Group (as it was formally known) has frequently prompted relevant discussions among Fellows and informed the RSA's own practices — from contributions to RSA Comment and the 'Day One' Manifesto, to data management and partnerships. We aim for the RAIN to be equally influential. ■

Ismael Kherroubi Garcia and Faye Brookes



AWARDS

RSA Journal wins big

On November 30, 2023, *RSA Journal* was awarded 'Best Publication' at the 2023 CorpComms Magazine awards. In their citation, the judges called *RSA Journal* "outstanding". This capped off a year of honours for the *Journal*, which won five additional awards in 2023. ■



OBITUARY

Stuart Walker: RDI who inspired generations of designers

Tributes have been paid to award-winning production designer and RSA Life Fellow Stuart Walker, who died in September aged 91.

Stuart, who was appointed a Royal Designer for Industry (RDI) in 1989, had a successful career in film and television spanning more than 50 years, first at the BBC and then working freelance.

He won two Baftas for his BBC design work — for *An Englishman Abroad* in 1983 and *Portrait of a Marriage* in 1990. In 1988 his designs for *Road*, a BBC film set in a deprived area of Lancashire, won him a Royal Television Society award.

Jim Clay, an RDI who worked with Stuart in the 1960s and 70s, described him as an "inspiration" and a "man of genuine integrity".

"His magnificent work was often intelligently understated but always memorable and powerful. His transformation of Dundee into a freezing Moscow for *An Englishman Abroad* has inspired many generations of designers and, some 40 years on, continues to inform my own work.

"Stuart was a man of genuine integrity. As a colleague, he was the finest of examples, and, as a friend, he was always there to generously give support, advice and wisdom."

Charlie Paton, Master of the Faculty of Royal Designers, added that he was "deeply saddened" by the news. "Stuart left an indelible mark on the industry." ■



VIRTUAL REALITY

RSA's first 'hybrid exhibition'

The loneliness and increased isolation of people who work from home was exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic. We are leading increasingly atomised lives, disconnected from each other, and cut off from our work communities. As the shift from office to homework accelerates, supporting each other is getting more challenging.

This was the main reason that I responded with enthusiasm to a proposal to develop a creative art collaboration

of international Fellows. In my day job, I run a cooperative, Cybersalon.org, and I know first-hand the positives of inviting like-minded people to share their creative ideas. I was intrigued to be approached by Julie Samuels (UK) and Zoë Camper (US), the two RSA Fellows leading the Augmented Society Network, who were looking for support on a hybrid exhibition project involving virtual reality.

Under the title 'Creative Offers Us a New Formula for Life', they connected

28 creative contributors, Fellows and non-Fellows from across the globe. Their vision and exploration of creativity culminated with collaborations across disciplines including artists, makers, musicians, dressmakers, futurists, scholars, gardeners and writers. That is creativity in action.

Zoë and Julie were the souls of the project and the lead curators, who brought everything together. The physical exhibition took place at RSA House between 1 November and 15 December 2023, with the virtual reality gallery exhibition continuing until March 2024.

This hybrid approach — combining a physical and virtual reality exhibition — was a first for the RSA and proved very popular. Since the launch of the exhibition, the Augmented Society Network's online VR gallery has attracted more than 500 views. It has been an amazing experience to walk around the virtual galleries with other people, artists and their friends and visitors.

The physical artworks will be relocated to The Hive library in Worcester for an extended reality exhibition between May and June 2024 and we will be running a series of workshops for visitors. ■

Eva Pascoe, London Fellowship Council Representative



To see the exhibition, visit www.thersa.co/newformula

CATALYST GRANT

Kenyan business boost

Ninety women have successfully completed a microbusiness incubator programme in Kenya following the award of a £10,000 RSA Catalyst Scaling Grant in 2023.

The grant was awarded to Business for Better Society (BBS), which works with women affected by HIV/Aids in the Homa Bay region of Kenya. BBS's incubator provides business training, start-up grants and ongoing coaching to empower participants to address challenges and seize opportunities.

"The grant has helped us expand our reach and deepen the impact we create, fostering more success stories and transforming lives in Homa Bay," said Kelly Brantner, BBS CEO.

Thanks to the Scaling Grant, the 90 additional women who completed the programme have launched businesses such as egg vending, sewing and food retailing. Measurement data shows a 121% increase in income among participants.

BBS reports that the incubator's emphasis on starting small, enabling participants to save both personally and for their businesses, has led to above-average savings rates and a strong sense of mutual support. ■



Two-way mentoring

A young Fellows mentoring programme pilot has been launched to enable knowledge and expertise to be exchanged between different generations.

Feedback from participants in the pilot scheme will be reviewed to examine the effectiveness of platform functionality, the application procedure, matching process and engagement levels. Once this analysis is completed, the programme will be opened up to all young Fellows later this spring.

Mentees, aged 18 to 25, will be supported by an older mentor from the Fellowship. Younger Fellows will have the opportunity to expand their networks, grow their skills and further their professional and personal development.

“We don’t want this to be a one-way process,” said Emma Land, RSA Joint Head of Fellowship Engagement. “Older Fellows have told us they want to connect intergenerationally, not only for the chance to exchange knowledge and expertise, but also to be inspired by and learn from the next generation of changemakers.” ■



IMPACT

RSA reaches for the stars

A multidisciplinary RSA interest group focused on space has been launched on Circle with the goal of exploring how the economic application of space infrastructure and expertise can boost regeneration and prosperity on Earth.

According to Silviu Pirvu, founder and one of the leaders of the group: “The mission of the RSA is Earth-focused — we want to expand that to space and, at the same time, for space to amplify the RSA’s mission on Earth.”

The leaders of the Space Interest Group, have identified three overriding themes:

- **Regeneration:** using space satellites and stations, and space-derived technologies, to promote regeneration
- **Prosperity:** using space activities to expand access to clean energy and provide economic opportunities and capabilities that reduce harmful activities
- **Health:** using knowledge and space infrastructure to improve human health

Pirvu, Chief Technology Officer at Optimal Cities, said he aimed to have more than 100 active group members within a year, and to run at least 12 in-person or hybrid events with at least four major guests such as former astronauts, inventors and artists. ■

FELLOWSHIP CONNECT

Explore opportunities to connect online:

- Follow us on X @theRSAorg
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Fellows’ LinkedIn group
linkedin.com/groups/3391
- Email the Fellowship Services team at fellowship@rsa.org.uk or call +44 (0)207 451 6939

CIRCLE OF FELLOWSHIP

Join our online community: chat, connect and collaborate with Fellows through Circle. To get started, just log in through your My RSA account.



To get started, visit thersa.org/fellowship/community-platform

CALL FOR PUBLIC SPEAKERS

We are currently seeking a diverse range of speakers from across the UK and beyond to reflect our annual theme of ‘courage’ at the RSA’s public events. Please contact our events team with recommendations by emailing:

RSA.Events@rsa.org.uk

BOOKS

What our Fellows are reading



The Alternative

Nick Romeo

Reviewed by
Elrica Degirmen

This book sets out to answer the age-old question, ‘Does money bring happiness?’, beginning with a summary of a short story by Leo Tolstoy (“How Much Land Does a Man Need?”) in which the protagonist learns that the pursuit of excess leads to... nothing.

This is the underlying message of Romeo’s book: that, while we need money to live our lives, it is not an asset in itself. Rather, it is a tool that allows us to achieve happiness and fulfilment with others. The conspicuous consumption of money for the sake of accumulating more, he argues, does not confer better social outcomes.

Romeo paints a picture of how we have come to prioritise profit over purpose. He emphasises that economics is a social science and that attempts to make it a physical science have been futile. I am reminded of Hillary Cottam’s *Radical Help*, a book that explores how we can redesign our current economic systems to better serve the interests of our people.

I am left thinking that we need to revisit utilitarianism as a philosophical basis for how we shape society. We need to increase happiness, but not at the expense of others. While the book presents many options for how this may be done, it makes clear that we must adopt an alternative mindset to the interplay between money and happiness.

Elrica Degirmen is a Senior Service Design Consultant at Human Engine.



We Must Not Think of Ourselves

Lauren Grodstein

Reviewed by
Victoria Kinkaid

Once I started this book, I couldn’t put it down. Set in Warsaw in 1940, the story focuses on the life of Adam Paskow, a Jewish teacher imprisoned in the Warsaw ghetto under the Nazi regime. The story follows his life in the ghetto and his mission as part of a secret group of archivists working to preserve the truth.

A unique retelling of the events of the Holocaust, this book highlights the importance of how we remember and retell history. The characters are well-developed, and I became invested in their lives and stories. Although a work of fiction, the research that the author has clearly put into this book is evident and the stories plausible.

The narrative is interspersed with excerpts of interviews (‘testimonies’) conducted by Paskow with his friends, neighbours and students in order to ensure the history of the ghetto lives on. This device reiterates the importance of ensuring history reflects the truths of all members of the community.

The story is unspeakably sad, but gives us glimmers of happiness and hope and a real sense of the community that existed in the ghetto. This well-written, eminently readable book tells an important story from a unique perspective — if I could award it stars, I would give it 5/5!

Victoria Kinkaid is an army doctor and a co-founder of The FGM Education Project.



Not the End of the World

Hannah Ritchie

Reviewed by
Nia D Thomas

This book offers a totally different take on global sustainability. Not a blinkered, micro-view of planetary doom, but a considered, wise, macro-approach. Ritchie takes a zoomed-out statistical outlook on global development, demonstrating the incredible progress that’s been made by humans over the centuries. She sets out the arguments and follows up with recommendations for improved global caretaking across air, land and sea.

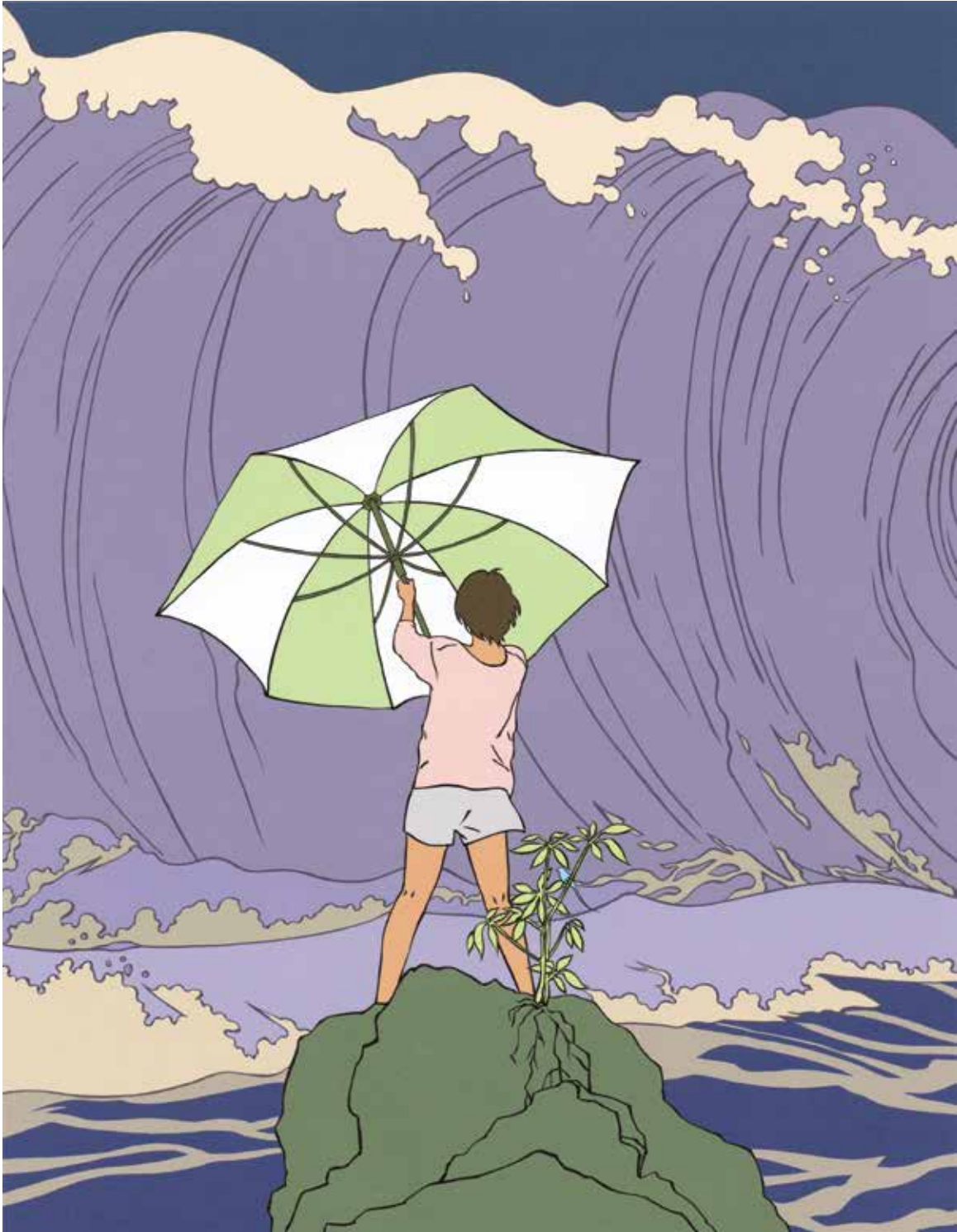
I applaud her no-nonsense approach. She puts aside the silly debates of ego-driven politicians and the petty squabbles of nations arguing over ‘who goes first’. Her recommendations are straightforward and simple. All we need is the courageous and determined few who accept that it’s an infinite game we’re playing to just get out there and do it. Radical reformers act now!

The book is well-written and accessible, with a good balance of stats and story. But it’s important to read it all or else run the risk of missing or misinterpreting the point.

There aren’t many books we read in a lifetime that make us want to run out and thrust them at passing strangers pleading, “Read it! Read it!”, but this is one of them. It has the capacity to change the trajectory of the planet. A mandatory text for all new politicians and CEOs.

Nia D Thomas is a doctor of self-aware leadership and director of a children’s charity.

Courage



Artwork by Manshen Lo for the RSA. Manshen's work has a clarity of line and composition influenced by cinematography and comics; she approaches subjects in a naturalistic and minimal style. Her clients include *The New Yorker*, Netflix, Faber and Shiseido.



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