

JOURNAL

RSA

2026

CURIOUS MINDS

ISSUE No.2

BIG IDEAS

ARTS SPECIAL

Art bites back

SIR QUENTIN BLAKE HAS SPENT
DECADES CHAMPIONING ILLUSTRATION
AS AN ART FORM – NOW HIS VISION HAS
A NEW HOME IN CENTRAL LONDON

ALLY ZLATAR
HARNESSES THE
POWER OF THE
STARVING ARTIST

CHRISTOPHER DANIEL
ON HOW TO CHALK
A HORSE - AND WHY
IT MATTERS

ELEANOR BARRACLOUGH
UNVEILS THE VIKINGS'
SURPRISING LOVE AFFAIR
WITH WORDS

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Registered as a charity in England

and Wales, no. 212424 and in

Scotland no. SC037784

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The RSA Journal is published

for the Royal Society of Arts

by Wardour,

81-87 High Holborn,

London

WC1V 6DF

Tel +44 (0)20 7010 0999

www.wardour.co.uk

RSA Journal, Volume CLXXII

No. 5605 Issue 2 2026

ISSN: 0958-0433

Advertising Sales

Bourne Media – Mark Toland

mark@bourne-media.co.uk

Tel 07771 881251

The RSA Journal is printed on paper that has been carbon offset through the World Land Trust.

The journal is printed on FSC-certified Mix paper. The Forest Stewardship Council is an international non-profit organisation that promotes sustainable forestry for environmental and social benefits. Working with approved partner organisations, the FSC inspects forests and supply chains and tracks timber through each stage of the supply chain.

The FSC Mix designation indicates the paper is made from a combination of recycled materials and materials from FSC-certified or controlled forests, meaning the wood in these products must be responsibly sourced.



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Starting in 1783, the RSA published *Transactions of the Society*, which became *The Journal of the Society of Arts* in 1852 ('Royal' was added to the title in 1908). The publication assumed its current name, *RSA Journal*, in 1987.

The creative act

Welcome to the latest edition of *RSA Journal*: the arts special

This is a particularly special edition of *RSA Journal*. As the Royal Society of Arts introduces its new visual identity and takes its place as the home of creativity for the common good, this edition celebrates the arts.

Creativity is one of the most natural human instincts: the urge to look again, to question, to imagine what might be possible. It lives everywhere – in science and technology, in classrooms and communities, in business and design.

Sometimes creativity changes the world, sometimes it simply changes how we see it. Often, it is so ordinary that we barely notice it. As legendary music producer Rick Rubin wrote in *The Creative Act*, it can even be as simple as “a new route home to avoid a traffic jam.”

If creativity is the impulse, the arts are the sandpit: the place where we play, experiment and rehearse; where we explore, express and imagine. We often see the arts as under threat, underfunded, underappreciated. And yet, as you’ll discover throughout these pages from our Fellows and contributors, they are the clearest path we have back to each other, and to the progress we can imagine together.

From illustrations to immersive theatre, Viking poetry to Victorian novels, this edition demonstrates how the arts, whatever their form, move us, spark dialogue and inspire societal change.

Our cover features Sir Quentin Blake, FRSA, the Royal Designer for Industry whose illustrations have delighted book lovers, theatre-goers and magazine readers for more than 70 years. As the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration opens in London, Nicholas Wroe explores the breadth of Blake’s imagination and influence.

Other highlights include Pawlet Brookes, MBE, FRSA on the contribution to classical music made by composers, musicians and performers of African and African Caribbean heritage; Ally Zlatar on the intersection of art, philosophy and mental health advocacy; and Daisy Carter of the RSA’s Social Impact Team on civic creativity.

At the Royal Society of Arts, we have always believed that the arts have a public purpose. A powerful example is *The King of Sustainability* (see p. 48), a striking portrait of King Charles III currently on display at RSA House. Made from reclaimed and natural materials, it invites conversations about sustainability, circularity and the role of art in shaping public understanding.

Throughout this issue runs a common thread: creativity powering the common good and convening conversations around the defining questions of our age.



Charlotte Thomson
Director of Strategy and Creative at the Royal Society of Arts

NEISHA HUSSAIN



THE SENIOR YOUTH DELEGATE TO THE UNITED NATIONS IS PASSIONATE ABOUT IMPROVING THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS THROUGH BETTER POLICY

Where did you grow up?

In East Bristol, a vibrant and culturally diverse community that, alongside my mixed heritage upbringing, has shaped how I connect with people across different perspectives and lived experiences. It deeply influenced why I approach diplomacy and collaboration with empathy, nuance and curiosity.

What did you want to be as a child and what are you now?

An actress, a scientist, an author. I certainly never planned to be working with multilateral organisations, governments and foundations!

At 18 (I'm 20 now), I became the UK's sole United Nations Youth Delegate to the UN Commission on Population and Development, and I'm now the first Senior Youth Delegate. Along with the international delegation – the UK Mission

to the United Nations – I work on UN agreements that progress international development and the rights of women and girls globally.

I am also an adviser at Mission 44, [Formula 1 racing driver] Sir Lewis Hamilton's global charitable foundation, where I explore innovative and participatory approaches to philanthropy – I joined at age 16 as the foundation's youngest adviser.

What is the one thing the world needs to know about you?

I have walked into spaces which felt out of reach and elitist. I believe in un-gatekeeping processes, so much of my work centres on making global institutions feel less distant and more accessible to the people most affected by their decisions.

To learn more about Neisha's work, scan the QR code



"I want a world where women and girls are not expected to shrink themselves in order to stay safe, be respected or be heard"

Share a book/album/television show you're reading/listening to/watching right now

I'm a big horror cinephile, so lately I have been catching up – watching *Hokum*, *Passenger*, *Obsession* and the classic *Scary Movie*!

What are you most passionate about and why?

Changing the narrative that leadership is one singular image. So often we are taught that a leader is a man in a suit bossing people around. As someone who doesn't fit that stereotype, I have worked on redefining what leadership means to me: listening, compassion and vision.

If you had one wish to change the world, what would it be?

I want a world where women and girls are not expected to shrink themselves in order to stay safe, be respected or be heard.

Tell us about someone who has inspired you

Growing up, I loved movies and books. For me, they were a way of seeing the world from the comfort of my bedroom, at a time when I didn't feel in control of my own story. My biggest inspirations are female protagonists such as Beth Harmon (*The Queen's Gambit*), Tris Prior (*Divergent*), and Elle Woods (*Legally Blonde*).

Why did you become a Fellow of the RSA?

The RSA hosts such a cool community of innovative thinkers. I want to soak up all the available knowledge and contribute what I've learnt.

Photo: Courtesy of Neisha Hussain



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NEW FELLOWS



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to connect with our
new Fellows

**Wenfeng Li**

Professor at Xi'an University of Science and Technology (China) and Deputy Secretary-General of the China Mine Rescue Professional Committee. Wenfeng's work explores safety, community resilience and emergency response systems for people working and travelling in high-risk settings. A former visiting scholar at the University of Glasgow, he drew on his experience of living in Scotland for his book, *Glasgow Always Rains*. As a Life Fellow of the RSA, Wenfeng hopes to share lessons on emergency response ecosystems to improve preparedness and responsible innovation globally.

**Miranda Harrison**

Senior Publishing Manager at London's Design Museum. With a focus on building a list of contemporary design books,

she aims to make the arts more accessible and inclusive. Previously, Miranda worked as a publishing consultant for multiple cultural institutions, including the Bodleian Library, the Tate and English Heritage. She has also held in-house roles at Yale University Press, V&A Publications, Scala Publishing and Lund Humphries. Miranda also runs Page to Stage London, a training ground for writers, actors and directors.

**Jordan Scudder**

Senior Radio Manager at Universal Music UK, where he leads national campaign strategy for major global artists and

emerging talent. His work spans radio, digital media and cross-platform campaign rollout, with a focus on culturally resonant moments and long-term artist growth. Alongside his industry role, Jordan advises for the Student Radio Association, supporting and helping to create opportunities for young broadcasters and music professionals. He is also an advocate for better mental health awareness across the music and media industries.



Photo: Nicholas Dawkes Photography

Ana Raquel Aquino

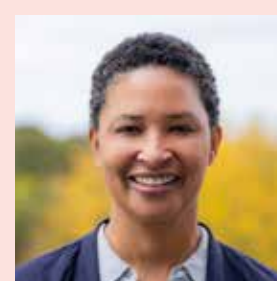
Founder of BecaLab, an educational tech startup that uses artificial intelligence, gamification and personalised academic advising to help students across Latin America access international scholarships. Named an MIT Innovator Under 35 (2025), Ana built BecaLab after winning 13 international scholarships herself, an experience that exposed deep inequalities in global access to opportunity. Her work sits at the intersection of access, technology and social mobility – and her company now serves thousands of students through AI-powered tools, WhatsApp-based advising and institutional partnerships with universities worldwide.

**Dominic Arnall**

Chief Executive of Ditch the Label, a global organisation that helps 12–25-year-olds navigate the digital world. The charity delivers research on the intersection of technology and young people's mental health, runs programmes to upskill teachers and young people and provides direct youth support. Dominic is also a judge for the World Economic Forum's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Lighthouse Programme and a Commissioner for the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. Previously, he led Open for Business and Just Like Us, championing LGBTQ+ inclusion.

**Pamela Jikiemi**

Director of Services at RLF Volta, part of the Royal Literary Fund. Pamela combines the arts and neuroscience to develop emergent thinking, resilience and innovation, for corporate leadership programmes. As a voting member of BAFTA, she advocates for better representation and inclusion in the screen industries. Pamela was Head of Film, Television and Audio at RADA, producing and directing more than 30 award-winning short/feature length films, including *The Storm*. Pamela recently published *Out of the Black Box. Conversations with Global Majority Actors Volume 1*.

**Danielle Allen**

Harvard University Professor, political theorist and democracy reformer, Danielle also directs the Allen Lab for Democracy Renovation, where she focuses on redesigning democratic institutions, making them more responsive and accountable. She is convening chair at the

Coalition for Healthy Democracy and chairs the boards of Partners In Democracy and FairVote. A contributing columnist at *The Atlantic* and publisher of *The Renovator*, she is also the author of *Justice by Means of Democracy*, *Our Declaration* and *Radical Duke: How One Aristocrat – and the American Revolution – Transformed Britain*.

Photo: Melissa Blackall

**Jenny Phaure**

Founder and Clinical Director of the National Centre for Autism and Mental Health (NCAMH). Jenny is also a neuro-affirmative child, adolescent, adult and family-based psychotherapist. She has worked in the autism field for more than 30 years, including within NHS mental health trusts and national and regional charities. Through NCAMH, she works to strengthen neuro-affirmative mental health services and expand networks of informed therapists and support services to help ensure autistic people (diagnosed and undiagnosed) can access support that is both relevant and timely.

Maksym Turkeych

Founder and CEO of Unburned (Neopalymi), a non-profit foundation, charity and national rehabilitation programme in Ukraine that provides free treatment for people living with war-related burns, scars and deformational injuries. Unburned's work focuses on restoring dignity, confidence and everyday life for veterans, civilians and people released from Russian captivity. Under his leadership, Unburned has built a growing network of partner clinics across Ukraine and strengthened public understanding of the human rights dimensions of torture, captivity and visible war trauma.

**Richmal Maybank**

Neuroinclusion Consultant and Founder of Seats at the Table, a consultancy working with businesses, venues and organisations to make services and experiences more accessible and inclusive. Richmal combines lived experience, professional

expertise and practical training to support organisations in becoming more inclusive. She is an adviser to the Accessible Hospitality Alliance and a member of the Regional Stakeholder Network for the UK Cabinet Office's Disability Unit. Through The O2 Arena's Access Board, Richmal contributes to ongoing venue accessibility at The O2, which holds Platinum Accessibility Status.

FELLOWS' INK

WHAT THE FELLOWSHIP IS WRITING ABOUT



Pioneering Women Archivists in Early 20th Century England
by Elizabeth Shepherd, Routledge, June 2025

Shepherd's work explores women's contributions to managing and preserving historical records, and the development of that field into a profession.



What Makes a Good Teacher? Values in Educational Practice
by Karen McArdle, Alison Hurrell, Penny Ogden, John Forrester, Taylor & Francis, June 2025

McArdle examines what makes a good teacher and the role of values in educational practice.



The Watervale Ladies' Writing & Firefighting Society
by Mette Menzies

(pen name of Viktoria Butler and Steven Reynolds), HarperCollins, August 2025
Mette Menzies' novel explores unexpected friendship, creativity and resilience in a group of women rebuilding their lives in a rural South Australian town.



Liderazgo y una taza de té
by Esther Clarke, LID Editorial, August 2025

Clarke's practical leadership guide encourages readers to develop their own leadership style, with a focus on

human-centred management. The English title is: *Leadership and a Cup of Tea*.



Cultural Intelligence in Practice: Expert Insights for Trainers in a Multicultural, Globalised World

by Lucy Butters, Right Book Press, November 2025

Butters shares her insights on cultural intelligence, and how it can be mastered to improve our work performance.



The Wick: 15 Years of Culture, Community & Change

by William Chamberlain, Local Content Company, December 2025

Chamberlain collates the stories behind 15 years of culture, community and change in Hackney Wick, London, one of the biggest grassroots creative clusters in Europe. To learn more about Chamberlain's work in Hackney Wick, see page 36.



Maybe? Mais Oui!
by Ben Levey, Tiny Tree Books, January 2026

Levey's children's book encourages young readers to think creatively and embrace possibility through the power of saying 'yes' to ideas. The English title is: *Maybe? But Yes!*



Can Cycling and Micro-mobility Deliver a Modern and Sustainable City?: A Roadmap for More Equitable and Sustainable Communities

by Giles Bailey, Ibex Publishing France, February 2026

Bailey examines how cities worldwide are embracing cycling and micro-mobility to address climate, affordability and liveability challenges.



Supercreativity: Accelerating Innovation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

by James Taylor, Sirmione Publishing, March 2026

Drawing on eight years of research, Taylor positions creativity as a learnable skill shaped by collaboration and augmented by artificial intelligence.



The Power of Governance
by Emma Knights, Hachette Learning, June 2026

Knights details the UK's state school system – what it means to have good governance and what the future holds.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the RSA House Library



Photos: Julie Broadfoot, Verve Portraits, Mary Hinkley

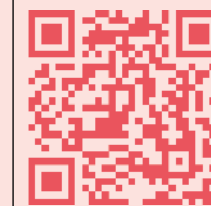


THE WHALE REIMAGINES THE CLASSIC AMERICAN NOVEL *MOBY-DICK* – PLACING ACCESSIBILITY AT THE CENTRE OF IMMERSIVE THEATRE

RIYA MAHAJAN



To learn more about *The Whale* and other experiential storytelling projects, scan the QR code



Riya Mahajan, FRSA is a London-based 3D artist and visual designer.

Below: *The Whale*, an immersive theatre production

There is a particular joy in seeing a digital world move beyond the computer screen and into a shared physical space. When I was invited to collaborate on the 3D world design for *The Whale*, an immersive theatre production, I was excited by the chance to bring Herman Melville's classic American novel *Moby-Dick* to life within a vast projection environment inhabited by both performers and audience members.

Reimagining a classic

Conceived by co-directors and theatre makers Jack Hardiker-Bresson and Sharon Clark, *The Whale* set out to be a bold reimagining of *Moby-Dick*, fusing live theatre with a 180° projection at FRAMELESS London, the UK's largest permanent multi-sensory venue.

As Lead 3D Visual Artist, I was responsible for creating the digital environments that framed the experience. This meant imagining the harbourside town and building oceans that felt vast, eerie and angst-ridden

– echoing the atmosphere of Melville's original text.

Because the ocean features in almost every scene, it became the starting point for the visual design. I tested different software until I found Blender's Ocean Modifier, a simulation tool that transforms a flat mesh into realistic waves, crests and wakes. It allowed me to dial up the chopiness and scale to match the intensity of each scene.

The whale itself was the hardest thing to get right. Early in the process, we made a decision that it should rarely reveal itself fully, but remain a form looming above the audience, more felt and heard than seen. The moment it does surface, just enough for its eye to meet yours, is a quiet, deeply moving beat in the piece.

Inclusive expression

Immersive theatre has historically been among the least accessible art forms; its power often lies in sensory qualities that standard access

solutions struggle to accommodate. As a 3D artist, you tend to think of the landscape as the final layer; here, it was just the beginning.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the project was watching our visual worlds becoming a canvas for Ben Glover's creative captioning, developed in collaboration with deaf, deafened and hard-of-hearing artists and audiences. Rather than relying on static subtitles confined to a fixed corner of a screen, this approach integrated text directly into the visual aesthetics of a live performance.

For me, being part of a team that uses individual crafts to ensure no one is left on the margins is the point of making art in the digital age. Ultimately, inclusivity is what allows immersive work like this to reach its full potential: inviting more people into the experience.

I would like to credit Visual Effects Supervisor Joseph Whitmore and Creative Technologist Rian Stephens, as well as Helen Skiera, Phillip Kay and Shankho Chaudhuri for their work on the sound, score and the physical set. They have all made The Whale possible.



Photo: Margherita Allievi

KATE BLEE

IN THE LATEST EDITION OF OUR RDI SERIES, BLEE REFLECTS ON HER CAREER – JUMPING ACROSS ARTIST, DESIGNER AND MAKER

My time at art college was formally in textiles, but I seeped out into print and papermaking and moved in and out of ceramics and architectural projects. My family background is in architecture, so I grew up listening to conversations about space creation, materials, composition and scale.

I usually work alone in a studio-based practice, primarily through painting and sculpture, developing ideas by trying



things out, rarely saying no, and expanding into different environments – a singular engagement of ideas and making. The design side of my work, in contrast, always involves collaboration, and I enjoy the stimulation of all the players and parts of a commission.

Through it all, I am looking for what connects us, what we might collectively respond to – what feels familiar, calming and approachable. Colour, with its vast emotional connecting possibility, is a real focus of my work, operating in every material it sits within. But I am also looking for something universal – something to do with the relationship between our

Above:
Kate Blee in her
London studio

Bottom left:
Kisses not stones 5
Oil on board,
Messums Gallery
group show
'A Changed
Environment', 2026

Top right:
*everything
begins and ends*
Porcelain and
stoneware, 2025

Bottom right:
Skewered
Porcelain and
Cedar wood, 2024



Photos: Christina Wilson, Matt Livey

bodies, our emotions and our environment. Something natural of which we are all a part.

It feels to me that this relationship is what we need now more than ever. The physics of life is where we balance, physically and emotionally, and yet the physical, sensual experience is the very thing that we now seem to be losing: the messy imperfections, the cracks and scars, all the uneven beauty of variety. It feels important that we consciously remember to value what we used to take for granted as the actions of living – the daily engagement in everyday physical tasks that develops into bodily skill, satisfaction and self-reliance.



To view more
of Kate's work,
scan the QR code

Top left:
*The Unexpected
Life of a Piece
of Cloth*
Exhibition,
Scottish Gallery,
2023

Bottom left:
In the Woods
Detail, Flatweave
for Christopher
Farr, 2025

Bottom right:
Royal Sussex
County Hospital
redevelopment
Brighton,
Installation,
ceramic tiles,
2023

My studio work often involves the careful setting up of a situation in which things can simply happen. I am trying to exert a kind of soft control, one where I am able to learn through direct experience, observation and reaction. I play with that control, with substance that is on the move and sometimes unstable. I love the things that happen when I am not around – to go away and come back to change is brilliantly exciting. This might involve pouring dye onto a horizontal surface and then lifting the surface to vertical and letting gravity move the colour, exploring the subtlety in the particular – the amount of dye, the viscosity of the dye, the moisture in the cloth... every condition affects the outcome.

The physicist Carlo Rovelli argues that the world is not made of things, but of events and relationships. Nothing is solid, everything is a reaction, and we should think of life as "kisses, not stones".

I am very inspired by this way of seeing and it poetically underlines our responsibility to

put things out into the world that embrace circular thinking.

There is great potential in emotional connectivity through material – connections that create meaning can promote care and longevity. However, our culture increasingly involves the fast acquiring and disposing of things and this has become a kind of addiction.

There is a section in novelist Linn Ullmann's book *Unquiet* that has stuck with me: "We acquired things and used them and disposed of them. What we liked best was disposing of them. It felt like disposing of the bad and burdensome parts of ourselves."

It is hard to understand how we might slow that train when economists, politicians and conglomerates are so fixated on growth and AI. But the mental health crisis must be in part related to an increasingly manic existence that involves unsettling levels of speed and overload. Time is precious, and we need to encourage each other to protect that breathing space where unexpected and beautiful things happen.

Kate Blee, RDI is a cross-disciplinary artist working across design, installation, sculpture and painting. Her work is in numerous public collections, including at the Victoria and Albert Museum, Portcullis House at the Westminster Parliament, The Wellcome Trust, Cambridge University and several NHS trusts. Kate has been a visiting lecturer at the Royal College of Art and was awarded Royal Designer for Industry status by the Royal Society of Arts in 2015. She lives and works in London.



Art at heart



Left: Quentin Blake, RDI, FRSA beside *A Bridge to the Past*, 2026, a new mural commissioned for the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration

From children's books to theatre, hospitals to prisons, Quentin Blake's vision of illustration as a universal language has finally found a permanent home - at London's historic New River Head

WORDS BY NICHOLAS WROE

The genesis of London's newly opened Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration can be traced back over a quarter of a century to 1999, when Blake - awarded Royal Designer for Industry status in 1981 - was appointed as the inaugural UK Children's Laureate, and noticed a glaring gap in the public art landscape.

"He was struck that there was no place where people could come to explore illustration," explains Centre Director Lindsey Glen. "No place to chronicle and celebrate an art that, even aside from the life-enhancing and life-changing genius of illustrated children's literature, is at the heart of all our everyday lives. It exists to communicate things, to tell a story, to share an idea, and it's often how we understand the world. How to learn to read, how to safely cross the road and a million other things. Where was the permanent home for that type of art?"

Drawing together

Blake's response was to set up a charity which, by 2014, had established a temporary space in King's Cross, London, known as the House of Illustration. Glen remembers her first encounter with the project as being around this time; she viewed both Blake's drawings for Roald Dahl's *The BFG* and some North Korean graphics during that visit, recalling the exhibits as "so different, but both absolutely fascinating, which sort of summed the place up."

There's no question that Blake has been an exemplary front man for the project. Now aged 93 and with a knighthood and a Légion d'honneur, he has illustrated more than 500 books. Alongside celebrated collaborations with Dahl and Michael Rosen, he has provided images for work by George Orwell and Voltaire, to name just two of many standouts, as well as countless other projects off the page, from postage stamps to work in hospitals and prisons.

He has, Glen says, been a "perfect" collaborator. "He doesn't really want to run a museum. What he wants to do is draw. It's like breathing to him and he draws every day. He said early on that while he is very glad that all this is happening, he's also glad someone else is doing it and it is from that stance that he has been indispensable to us with his curiosity and knowledge

Photo: Benedict Johnson



Above: One of the galleries at the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration

Top right: *The Young Performing Horse*, 1977

Bottom right: *Our Friends in the Circus*, 2008, from Quentin Blake's *Performance* exhibition at the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration

Below: *The Birds of Aristophanes*, 1971



“Illustrating is like directing a play... except that you also get to design the scenery and play all the parts”
Quentin Blake

and help, always asking ‘what about this...?’ and always being right to ask exactly that.”

The charity trustees found their ideal site in 2019, in the unprepossessing form of the then-derelict New River Head waterworks in Clerkenwell. Blake jokingly said that “it must have been the gods, the minor deities who sit behind illustration, who led us to this place.” The building’s history goes back to the early 1600s, when a channel was dug from Hertfordshire to London to bring clean water to the city. “It was England’s first utility company,” Glen says, “and one of the first three shareholder companies. It has a really fascinating business history.”

The works operated in various iterations until the 1950s, when electric pumping took over and the site fell into disrepair. The buildings have now been restored by Tim Ronalds Architects - who previously worked on the Hackney Empire and Wilton’s Music Hall - at a total project cost of £12.5m. The result is the world’s largest space dedicated to illustration, comprising three exhibition galleries, a free library with over 1,800 books, comics, graphic novels and zines, gardens, a café and a shop.

Drawing in

Of the three inaugural exhibitions, one, of course, is Blake’s work. *Performance* occupies the top floor of the engine house and explores his longstanding relationship with theatre. More than 100 original works on paper, showing the breadth of Blake’s expansive imagination and capacity for whimsy, are on display; many have never been shown in public. The show

Photo: Benedict Johnson



includes Blake’s depictions of every character from *Macbeth* (including the dagger) as birds, an illustration to accompany the opening-night review of Laurence Olivier in John Osborne’s *The Entertainer* and Blake’s recent stage version of *The Enormous Crocodile* which, in the 1970s, was his first collaboration with Dahl.

“Illustrating is like directing a play,” Blake has said, “except that you also get to design the scenery and play all the parts.” “And what’s also lovely about it,” adds Glen, “is when you go to a fine art exhibition, what you see on the wall is the finished product. Here you can also see the process. The sticky tape and the Tipp-Ex are sometimes visible, too.”

The other opening exhibitions are a solo show titled *Ever feel like...* by the British-Sri Lankan illustrator Murugiah, whose kaleidoscopic, vividly coloured work explores identity and mental health, as well as the joy of being a teenager. “His work is instantly adorable to children,” Glen says, “but he’s also worked extensively with brands such as Apple and New Balance, showing how his individual perspectives are threaded through commercial work. A really important part of what illustrators do today.”

The third exhibition, *Queer as Comics*, is the first major exhibition of LGBTQIA+ comic-making in the UK, spanning the 1940s to the present day and featuring more than 60 artists, from Tove Jansson to Alison Bechdel and Tom of Finland. The show traces comics and zines as a medium through which marginalised communities found voice long before mainstream acceptance. “It’s such a rich body

of work that has this important social and political side and has a real relevance in what’s going on culturally right now.”

Drawing out

The plan is for one of the galleries to always host a Blake show, with the remaining two galleries highlighting other illustrators. While the Centre has already developed strong links with local schools and community groups, it also intends to start a touring programme next year to take its message across the UK.

Glen is acutely aware that the Centre is opening at a moment of particular tension for illustrators in terms of the



Illustrations: Quentin Blake



Left: Café at the Centre

Below: The Centre offers numerous opportunities for young people



Photos: Hufton+Crow, Justin Piperger, Illustration: Quentin Blake

Below bottom: *Our Friends in the Circus*, 2008, from Quentin Blake's *Performance* Exhibition at the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration



In addition to art exhibitions, the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration, in line with its ethos, offers school workshops and teaching resources and is available for school visits. To learn more about the work of the Centre, including how to plan your visit, scan the QR code

rise of AI-generated imagery. "It certainly carries an undercurrent of threat," she says. "But what illustrators do is bring an individual perspective to a piece of work - almost the opposite of the often homogenised imagery you might see created through AI. There is a very good reason why some of the biggest brands are still actively championing and celebrating illustration."

Every table in the Centre's library and café has a stash of colouring pencils and paper. "And the biggest surprise, and pleasure, since we opened, is just how much drawing is going on among people of all ages, not just children. So many adults say they were told at school they couldn't draw and have never done it since. That's terrible."

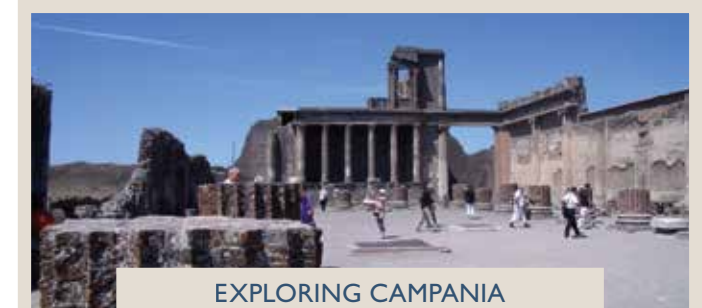
Glen believes that to make a mark is not only to respond to the world around you, but also to reflect your place in it. "And beyond that, you can also sometimes change that world. We want this to be a place from which people go away looking at the world differently. To notice the imagery around them, and to notice what it is trying to say and how it is saying it. Then be empowered to pick up a pencil, or a stick, or a piece of chalk, or their digital tablet, and express themselves through illustration."



Nicholas Wroe is a freelance writer and former Assistant Editor of *Guardian Review*.



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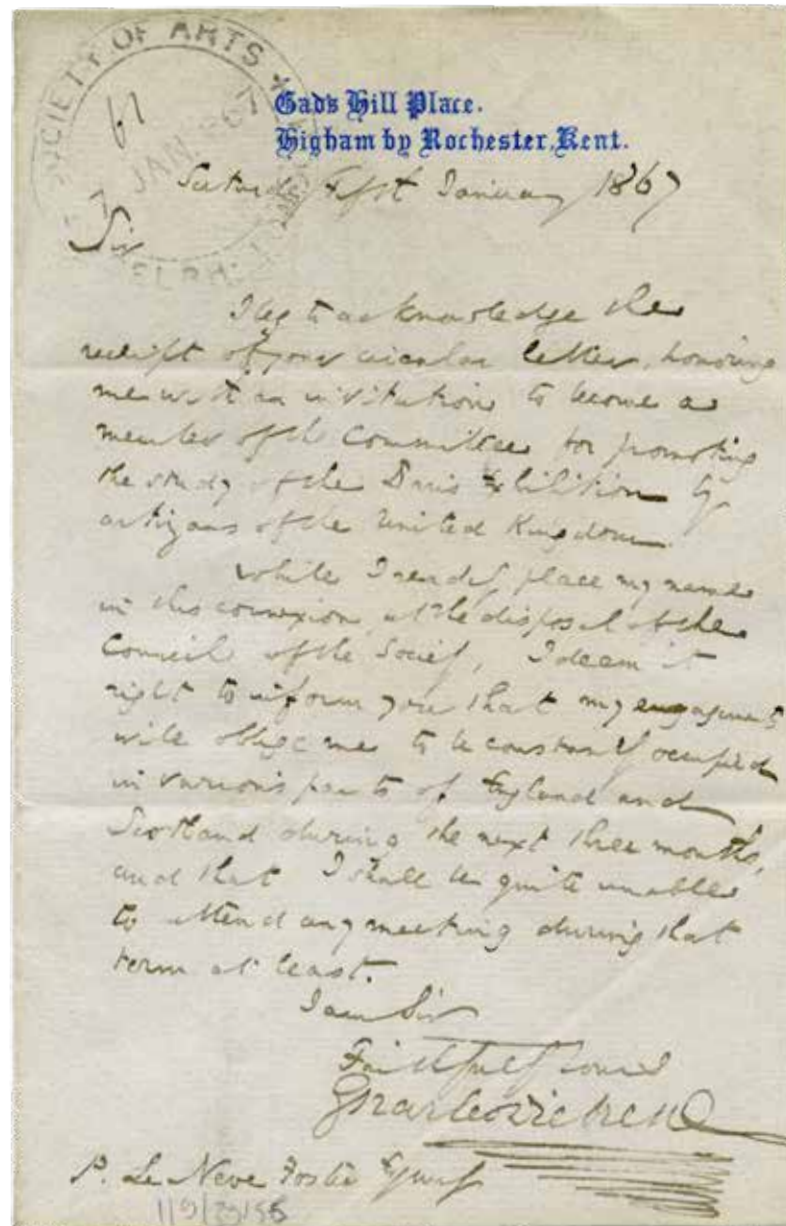
Charles Dickens is one of our most famous Fellows, but an examination of archival documents shows just how much the work of the Society influenced the daily life of this lion of English literature

WORDS BY SUSAN BENNETT, HONFRSA

Before his election to the Society's membership on 28 November 1847, Charles Dickens would already have been aware of the institution's activities, so integral was the Society of those days in the dominant cultural discourse of the time. Five years before his birth, his own mother was awarded a silver medal by the Society for one of her drawings, and the earliest known miniature of Dickens was painted when he was 18 years old by another winner of a 'polite arts' premium, Janet Ross, who had married his uncle Edward Barrow – and is believed to be the inspiration for the landlady Miss La Creevy in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Yet another prize winner, Rose Emma Drummond, was commissioned by Dickens to paint his miniature on ivory as an engagement present for his fiancée Catherine Hogarth, and Hablot Knight Browne, himself a recipient of silver medals from the Society in 1832 and 1833, illustrated 10 of Dickens' novels under the pseudonym 'Phiz'.

The environs of RSA House and the activities and ethos of Society members appear in some of Dickens' novels. Like Dickens himself, *David Copperfield*'s titular character lodged in Buckingham Street and was "fond of wandering about the Adelphi, because it was a mysterious place with dark arches". An entire episode of *Pickwick Papers* takes place in the Adelphi Tavern, when Mr Snodgrass is accidentally (and hilariously) confined to Wardle's bedroom there. William Osborn had opened his tavern and coffee house in a building on the corner of John Adam Street, formerly known as John Street, which the RSA acquired to add to its original headquarters, before moving the main premises to the other side of the street. The organisation of the Pickwick Club, with corresponding members, perpetual members, chairmen, vice presidents and published *Transactions*, was very similar to the Society of Arts at the time.

Dickens praised his friend, Joseph Paxton, another prize winner, for his daring scheme to build a 'Palace of Glass' and was one of the first to visit the Great Exhibition when it opened on



Above: Dickens' 1852 reply to an invitation from the Society's Secretary George Grove

1 May 1851. Overwhelmed by the displays, Dickens remarked on his second visit, "there's too much". A member of the Society's committee to amend the patent act, in 1850 Dickens wrote to the Society's Henry Cole (who had secured royal support for and was instrumental in bringing the Great Exhibition to life) that he had been inspired by his paper advocating a reform of the patent laws to write "A Poor Man's Tale of a Patent" for *Household Words*, an article which helped to raise awareness around the issue; the Patent Amendment Act, for many years known as the Society's Act, was passed in 1852. Dickens also immortalised Cole as the overzealous school inspector Thomas Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, published in 1854.

In 1852, Dickens replied to an invitation from the Society's Secretary George Grove, saying that he had read with great satisfaction the excellent project to establish Drawing Schools for Artisans and had "the utmost pleasure" in both joining that committee, and the invitation to be on the committee to send artisans to view the 1867 Paris Exhibition, but only on the understanding that he would not be able to attend any meetings for three months due to a full programme of engagements in England and Scotland. On 4 May 1853 Dickens responded to the Society's



Photos: RSA Archive, Jeremiah Gurney, John Quintero

enquiry on the impact of paper duty saying that he suffered from the imposition of this tax in the case of *Household Words*, but he still made his journal the best he could.

Like many others, Dickens saw what is now the Royal Society of Arts as a vehicle to provide better opportunities for the poor to raise themselves out of poverty by promoting its educational and social activities. As part of their programme to commemorate eminent people in the arts, manufactures and commerce, the Society erected one of their memorial tablets to Dickens in 1886 on the wall of Furnival's Inn (then located at 13-15 High Holborn) where he lived between 1834 and 1837.

Susan Bennett, HonFRSA is a researcher, historian and a former Curator/Archivist of the RSA Archive. Since 2004 she has served as Honorary Secretary of the William Shipley Group for RSA History.



Above: Portrait of Charles Dickens by Jeremiah Gurney, circa 1867-1868

Below left: An 1816 trial drawing by Janet Ross, which can be found in the RSA Archive

My ancestor and the RSA

When I became a Fellow of the RSA some years ago, I didn't realise that my great great grandfather had so many connections with it. So I was fascinated to read Susan Bennett's article. The portrait she references, painted by his aunt, Janet Barrow, of an 18-year-old Charles Dickens, can be viewed today at the Charles Dickens Museum in London. As a patron of the museum, I am often there, and I always find this painting particularly moving, showing as it does a rather nervous looking teenager, with so much hope for his future, but no idea of quite how famous he would become. At that age, Dickens had little idea of being a novelist. He was only just embarking on his career as a freelance journalist, with dreams of becoming another Shakespeare (one of his great heroes). His plan was to write plays, act in them and, hopefully, tour as widely as possible.

By the time he was elected to the Fellowship in 1847, Dickens had become astonishingly famous, not only in the UK but all over the world. The huge success of *A Christmas Carol* (published in 1843) ensured him the financial security he had long craved, and he had also managed to achieve his dream of travelling overseas: making his first trip to the USA, and to Canada, in 1842; spending a year living with his family in Italy in 1844-45; and then several months living in Switzerland and France in 1846. In 1851, when the word 'celebrity' entered the Oxford English Dictionary, Dickens was one of the first people to whom it was applied.

His aims were aligned very well with those of the Royal Society of Arts, and I feel sure he would appreciate the values the organisation still espouses in an exceedingly challenging world.

Lucinda Dickens Hawksley, FRSA is an author, art historian and the great great granddaughter of Dickens.



To learn more about Dickens, scan the QR code



Drawn together

The Uffington White Horse is not a relic, but a relationship between landscape, community – and time itself. Its continued survival rests on a simple principle: things last when people keep showing up for them

WORDS BY CHRISTOPHER DANIEL, FRSA

PHOTOS BY PETER LANDERS

Sitting on a hillside in Oxfordshire, I shift my weight, change the angle of my body, and move the lump hammer from one hand to the other. I look down, select a lump of chalk – the biggest within reach – and let the hammer drop. The metal does the work; the chalk crushes softly. I chase the lump as it disintegrates. I repeat the action, breaking the chalk into finer and finer grades, before shifting my attention to the next patch.

The chalk is part of the White Horse of Uffington, a giant piece of land art cut into that Oxfordshire hillside sometime in the late Bronze Age, roughly 3,000 years ago. Nobody

knows who first cut the marks, or what they meant by them. We are not even entirely sure what animal they were meant to represent. But one thing we do know is that it has endured because, generation after generation, century after century, millennium after millennium, people have cared for it.

The Horse requires continual grooming. If the chalk is not renewed, it grows muddy and grey, and plants – weeds and otherwise – encroach on its outline. Leave it a year and the figure grows indistinct; leave it a decade and it starts to vanish. Thirty years, I'm told, would be

enough for it to vanish altogether. The Horse is a piece of art, but the art is not just the image cut into the hillside: it's the activity that keeps it vital. The Horse is the visible trace of activity that has persisted, without any plan or organisation, for thousands of years. The artwork is the chalking.

From my position on one of the Horse's legs, I can see only a small part of its form. What I can see instead are the friends, old and new, who have come here to chalk the Horse with me. Around me is the gentle thumping of hammers; the breeze brings snippets of birdsong and human chatter. When I look up and



out to the far horizon, there are fields and hedges, tree-lined roads, the occasional village with its spire or tower. From up here it feels as though all the land below can see that we are here for the people down there: repairing their Horse, cleaning her, as people always have, getting her bright again for another year looking out over White Horse Vale.

Deep-time perspective

The work of chalking is not complex. Most of it is not particularly arduous. It just needs to be done. The historic scourings – recorded for at least 350 years, but certainly going back far further – were communal, festive occasions. Thomas Hughes, newly famous for *Tom Brown's School Days*, decided his next book should be a fictionalised account of the scouring he had attended in 1857: a fair on the hill, cheese and ale, wrestling and games, all recounted by a young clerk who comes to the scouring as a holiday from his London desk. It's in much the same spirit that my 21st-century team of chalkers visit the Horse each year.

There are no fairground attractions to distract them today, though: the Horse is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument in the care of the National Trust. Andy Foley, the Trust's Area Ranger, has a small team of volunteers who care for the Horse year-round, but chalking needs a crowd. So, twice a year, a wider community is invited. Since 2019, that's included a delegation from Long Now London (LNL), a collective dedicated to considering the challenges of the present in the context of much longer time spans than we usually might, meaning hundreds or even thousands of years. Our monthly gatherings bring together all sorts of parties – technologists, artists, philosophers, writers, heritage specialists and more – who are interested in how we can reframe the way we think about the ramifications of our actions. The leading zero in the year as I've written it above is one reminder that the past and future extend much further than we normally consider in our day-to-day lives.

Many of us have returned to the Horse year-on-year and, as we do, we learn the ways of chalking and pass them on to newcomers. There's no correct way to chalk the Horse, because there are no instructions, nor even a particular objective. We might imagine conservation as the prevention of change, but archaeology reveals that the Horse has shifted shape

across the centuries. Its legs, tail and ears have lengthened and shortened, its lines have thickened and thinned. Debate has raged – politely – as to whether the Horse should be 'restored' or left as it now is; compromises have been made, and plans drawn up accordingly.

At the micro level, chalking is simple, but it still has its subtleties – how to avoid strained muscles, how the chalk crumbles, how to avoid straying out of your patch – and these are passed on. The Horse will always need new carers, and they will always learn from those who have been before. The anthropologist Tim Ingold writes of generations as fibres twisted together like the strands of a rope, each life overlapping with those before and after. The strength of the rope lies in the connection – and the friction – between those overlaps. The Horse persists in much the same way: each generation of chalkers learns from those who learned before. What is passed on is not a specification, but a practice.

Ritual and meaning

The Horse is maintained not by being frozen in time, but by being given attention as time flows. You could say the same of many other artworks, buildings, customs or social structures that we hope will endure. Try to preserve them, and they fracture and break; maintain them with an eye to the needs of the moment, and they go on. But our attention is a finite resource, one now being commandeered by an economy designed to capture it and, some might say, optimised to fracture and scatter it. And we have many institutions dedicated to preserving the past, but precious few dedicated to protecting the future.

There are attempts underway to conceive and construct such institutions – in politics, in environmentalism, in technology. But these are often rigid, brittle, precise. And, sometimes, that's exactly what's needed. You don't maintain a bridge by leaving it to the community. But there are other areas in which what's required is to create a context that draws people back, that ensures their attention returns, over and over. That demands something other than an institution, or a five-, 10- or 100-year plan: it requires physical and emotional connection. Ritual and meaning, practice and community. It needs culture.

In that respect, the Horse's younger siblings are a handful of long-term art projects that have



Shaping change

Maintenance of the White Horse is both site- and time-specific. Twenty people today can renew a patch of Horse each year without damaging the site. Previous generations 'scoured' the entire horse less frequently, but with a much larger crew. The steeper hill of the Cerne Abbas giant in Dorset, by contrast, requires a different chalking routine. Some of the military badges in Wiltshire have their chalk delivered by helicopter. And, since the 1960s, the Long Man of Wilmington is now made of concrete bricks. The rituals of care are shaped by each place's community, ownership, history and practicalities – or, as in the case of several figures now forever lost, the rituals fail and they are not cared for at all.

Below: James Taylor *On White Horse Hill*, 2022



“Each generation of chalkers learns from those who learned before. What is passed on is not a specification, but a practice”



Christopher Daniel, FRSA is an architect and experience designer, Director of Polysemic, a placecraft consultancy, and convenor of Long Now London. He teaches regenerative design at the University of Westminster and has been a Fellow since 2019.



To learn more about the work of Long Now London, scan the QR code

been established around the world. The Horse is an ancient site, but a number of artists in LNL's extended network are trying to understand how you might emulate the practices that have led to its longevity.

The musician Jem Finer's piece *Longplayer*, for example, is intended to last for a thousand years without repeating itself. But for that to happen, people must be inspired to continue playing it - whether via an app, an installation, a concert or in another, as yet undetermined, way. In Utrecht, a single letter of the alphabet is carved into a cobble along the Oudegracht canal every Saturday morning - as long as people continue to commission them. The artist Katie Paterson's Future Library in Oslo adds one specially written book to its collection each year to be stored, unread, until the year 2114 - so long as people continue to write them. There will be the party to end all parties on 6 June 2269 - but only if folk keep turning up for a warm-up

event every year until then, and inviting more and more people to join them along the way.

Handle with care

These projects are not monuments. They are cultural infrastructure, built from the outset to need care, handing each future generation something it can choose to continue, or allow to stop. They are invitations to participate. And the invitation is not immediately to think on vast, planet-spanning, civilisational scales. It is to think about what's needed now, in the awareness that 'now' extends deep into the past and far into the future.

So what is there, close to where you are, whose future survival, or prosperity, depends on someone attending to it? Could you be the person who attends to it, and who leads others into attending to it? And - the harder question - what might you make, or help to make, that is designed to demand, and reward, the attention of generations to come?

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WORDS BY HASAN BAKHSHI

ILLUSTRATIONS BY FIEN JORISSEN

The work of art

For years, the arts have relied on economics to prove their worth. But, as Britain searches for improved productivity and growth, and new sources of innovation, economics may now need the arts just as urgently

In recent decades, the case for public investment in the arts has relied increasingly on economic arguments. To justify and attract funding, arts and cultural organisations have been expected to demonstrate their economic impact, showing how they contribute to job creation, gross value added, tourism and increased footfall to local businesses. But, today, economists need the arts as much as the arts need economics. Let me explain.

Valuing culture

The dependence on economics is even greater in the museums and heritage space, where the majority of benefits are less 'tangible' and not fully reflected in market prices. Here, economic methods that estimate what people would be willing to pay are used to estimate the non-market benefits of culture and heritage, such as those that instil a sense of pride of place in the community or the value that accrues to the public from the mere existence of a cultural or heritage site.

It explains why in the UK, through the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's (DCMS) landmark Cultural and Heritage Capital Framework, organisations like the DCMS and Historic England have become world leaders in applying economic valuation techniques to culture and heritage. So much for the value of economics to the arts. But what of the value of the arts to economics?

Productivity puzzle

Here, the starting point is the very slow productivity growth experienced in advanced industrial economies since at least the global financial crisis in 2008. Productivity growth matters because it is the basis of long-run improvements in

material living standards. Even de-growth advocates have reason to care about productivity growth, since it can free up resources for investment in more socially and environmentally valuable activities. In the UK, despite successive policy strategies to address the UK's productivity problem, performance remains obstinately poor, which is of considerable embarrassment to the economists who have devised them.

Traditionally, the arts have been seen as a drag on productivity growth, an effect even earning the title 'Baumol's

cost disease' - the tendency for the cost of providing labour-intensive services like the performing arts to rise without a corresponding increase in productivity - named after the economist, William Baumol, who first wrote about it in the 1960s. But every cloud has a silver lining and, in the UK's case, it may lie in the relationship between the arts and commerce, or the creative industries.

Creative supply chains

In the UK, productivity statistics - how much output is produced per hour - at the industry level are notoriously uncertain, and classed as 'Official Statistics in development'. DCMS estimates for the creative industries are currently only available for five years and, reliant as they are on detailed estimates of output and hours worked by the workforce, are highly volatile. This limits their usefulness for understanding productivity trends and obscuring assessment of the sector's potential to address the UK's productivity problem.

More fundamentally, they omit the indirect contributions made by creative businesses - such as those in advertising and design - through the provision of productivity-enhancing intangible assets like brand and design capital to other sectors. The general point is that they exclude the positive impacts from the creative industries on innovation in other parts of the economy through the different supply chain linkages that exist between sectors.

Together, these channels suggest that the overall contribution of the creative industries to UK productivity growth is likely to be substantial.

Growth questions

Certainly, the official estimates of the value the creative sector adds to the UK economy, which is easier to measure than productivity, show that, since 2010 (the earliest year for which consistent data are available) the creative industries grew at 3.4% per year on average, more than double the rate of the economy as a whole.

Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, this growth is not all due to the government's inclusion of fast-growing IT, software and computer services activity in the creative industries definition. Even excluding this sub-sector, the latest estimates suggest that value added by the creative industries grew by 39.1% in real terms between 2010 and 2024, compared with 24.3% in the whole economy.

This strong performance suggests that the creative industries could play a central role in improving the UK's productivity growth in the years ahead. It helps to explain why the UK government has chosen to include the sector as one of eight priorities for its industrial strategy, and why the Arts and Humanities Research Council funds a dedicated research centre hosted by Newcastle University Business School in partnership with the Royal Society of Arts - the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, of which I am Director - to develop the evidence base on its growth needs.

Perhaps the question is not, then, whether the arts need economics or economics needs the arts - but how much longer we can treat them as separate conversations at all.



Scan the QR code to learn more about the RSA's partnership with PEC

Professor Hasan Bakhshi, MBE is Director at the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre

Fien Jorissen is an illustrator living and working in Antwerp. Her surrealistic, playful works have appeared in publications including *Wired*, *El País*, *de Volkskrant*, *The Financial Times*, *The New York Review of Books* and *The New Yorker*.



WORDS BY ALLY ZLATAR

When doctors couldn't reach her through the grip of an eating disorder, one artist realised her survival depended on finding another way

Hungry for change

Left:
Realm of Ideas,
2025

I remember the first time I started having disordered eating thoughts. I was about 13 years old, in the eighth grade at my middle school in Canada, and I just happened to notice a girl – who was thinner than me – smiling. I felt like I wanted to smile, too. For some reason, that smile led me to skip one meal, and then another, eventually launching me into the arms of a severe eating disorder that would grip me for over a decade.

My traditional Eastern European family could not understand the depths of the disease I was grappling with. They thought, 'Just eat; it's really not that hard'. They couldn't possibly understand that I was engaged in a constant battle of trying to cope with the world around me. My body was so weak I couldn't even climb a flight of stairs; even just sitting in a bathtub hurt, my bones pressing against the hard smooth surfaces of the tub. My relationship with my body was the only way I felt able to exert control.

Cue the next five years of medical treatments: different inpatient programmes, cognitive behavioural therapy, dialectical behaviour therapy and truthfully none of it helped. Medical practitioners saw only a diagnosis; they didn't see the person suffering behind the disease. I felt like no one could see the ME inside, struggling so desperately to make sense of the world around me.

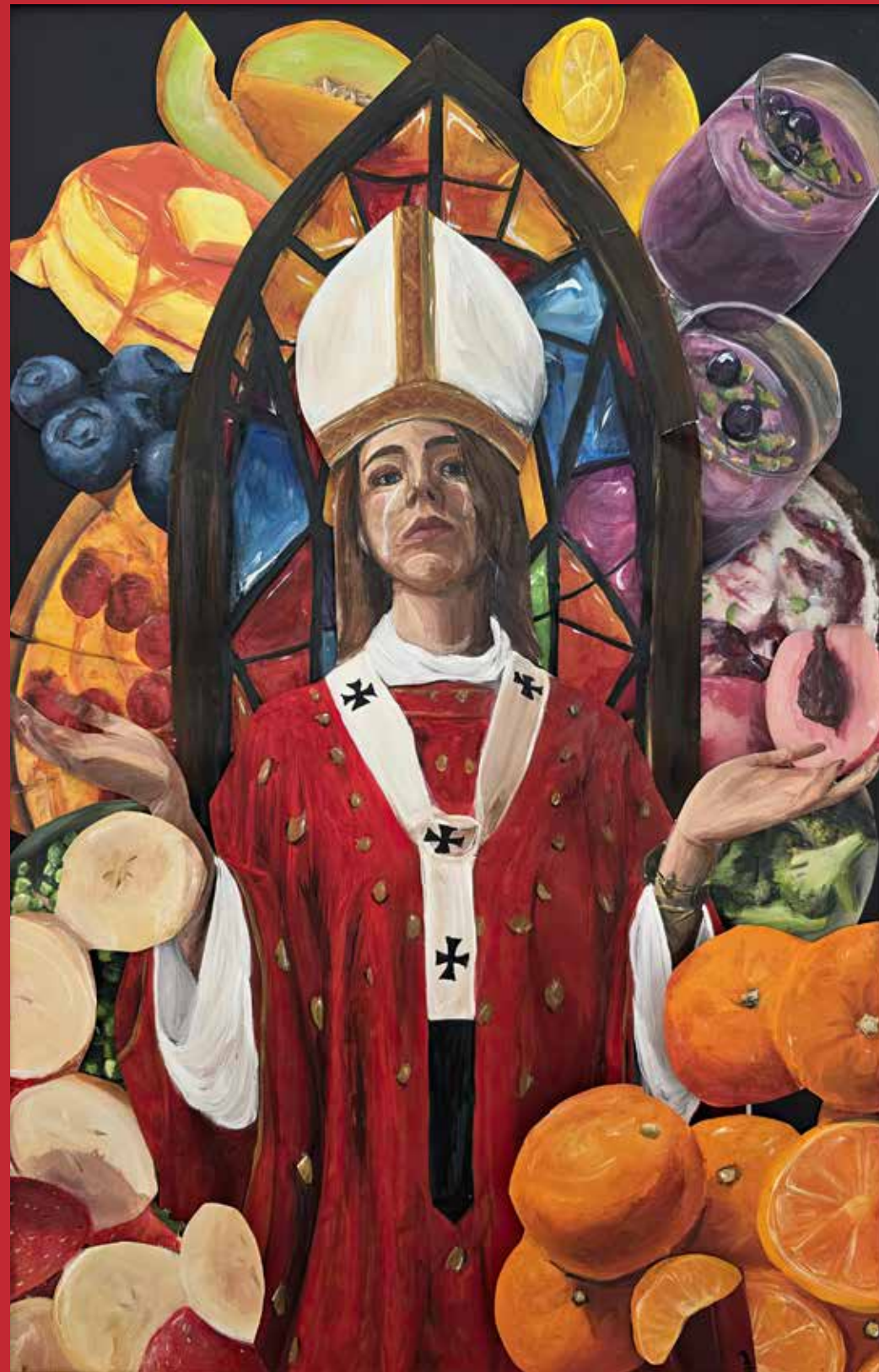
“Staring at a slice of red velvet cake that I waited two days to eat, I was sitting on my bedroom floor both excited and terrified to eat. It was my battle, that only I was fighting. And in that moment, I realised I was all alone... and in the end, all that was left was me and the disease”

Art opens me up

But something finally did break through, and that something was art. Art was not only a space for me to process, reflect and engage with the complexities and difficulties I was feeling and enduring, but a tool for those around me to get a glimpse behind the curtain of my true experiences, both physical and mental.

Today, through my work and my art, I explore eating disorders (EDs) beyond the dominant clinical narratives that frequently reduce them to mere diagnostic categories or visual stereotypes. Medical language describes behaviours and patterns, it can even measure progress, but it rarely captures the strange, often other-worldly logic of living inside an ED. I believe that disconnect is a big part of the reason why I struggled for so long to get well. Now, I use my art and voice to explore the intricate mind-body relationship of wellbeing. My work attempts to move beyond the polished, over-simplified ideas of illness and recovery that tend to flatten lived experience into something neat and easily consumed.

I'm interested in what happens when discomfort, contradiction and uncertainty are allowed to remain visible. My work positions art not as cure, but as testimony, revealing how creative practice can expose the failures of systems that often misread, silence or simplify what it



Right:
*Mother of
Anorexia*,
2026

means to be 'unwell'. And instead of just thinking about the body as something to be 'repaired' (the medical viewpoint), I try to view it as a site where memory, care and control all collide. So much in my own paintings emerges from that point of tension between what is visible and what remains hidden.

Too often, those living with EDs (not to mention other mental health disorders) are positioned as 'too ill' or 'too unfit' to contribute meaningfully to the dialogue around the illness, much less their own treatment, which can lead to their exclusion from dominant conversations about mental health and the perpetuation of unhelpful stereotypes. Contemporary representations of EDs often fall into narrow cultural scripts, either romanticised fragility or simplified illness narratives. My art insists on the harsh reality of EDs, while also acknowledging the paradox: humour, satire and absurdity as survival strategies within the experience itself.

Illness as muse

I Was Blind to My Illness employs an approach I call 'memoryscapes', where I invite viewers into some key points of the grim reality of living with an ED. This work was a glimpse into my first admission into an ED treatment programme, a time when I was not able to accept that I was even struggling at all. Here, the viewer is physically and conceptually invited in, challenging the assumption that objectivity must come from distance.

The visual works developed in this study resist aestheticisation of illness. Instead, they attempt to hold discomfort, contradiction and emotional intensity. In my painting *Facing the Skeletons in My Closet*, for example, the body is not idealised or resolved. It is satirised, fragmented, and shows that recovery is not linear but unstable, and insistently present.

Mother of Anorexia invites viewers to attend a fictional 'Mass' in which God absolves participants through the sins of restriction, control and self-denial. The piece draws on my long-standing interest in the relationship between religion and eating disorders, particularly the ways both can shape identity through systems of belief, ritual and obedience. The work recognises how closely the logic of EDs can resemble religious devotion, creating rigid internal commandments: rules around purity, discipline and morality that begin to structure everyday life. The piece examines how



Above: *Facing the skeletons in my closet, 2026*



Scan the QR code
to see more of
Zlatar's work

Dr Ally Zlatar is an artist, scholar and activist, and Founder of The Starving Artist; she is currently a Leverhulme Research Fellow at the University of Teesside, examining art and medical ethics. She has received numerous accolades for humanitarian work, including *Forbes* 30 Under 30 for Social Impact (Asia, 2025), Commonwealth Innovation Awards (2023), UNWomen 30 for 2030 (2024) and winner of The Princess Diana Legacy Award (2021). Zlatar has lectured at the University of Sharjah (UAE) and has taught at the University of Glasgow, KICL London and the University of Essex.

easily suffering can become ritualised, and how self-denial is often reframed culturally as virtue.

Enter the artist

As my practice developed, I also began to prioritise the connection and promotion of authentic and vulnerable communication around unwell bodies. While I hoped my own voice was powerful, I knew it was not the only voice that needed to be heard. That's why, in 2017, I founded The Starving Artist, an initiative that draws on creative voices to create advocacy and systemic reform. It was conceived as a singular exhibition. I hoped to find perhaps five people wanting to explore the theme of body image but, when over 200 people showed interest in participating, it inspired me to continue the work. As momentum built, I expanded the themes (including health equity, migration and gendered wellbeing) and the community continued to grow.

To date, The Starving Artist has positively impacted more than 100,000 lives across 30+ countries through initiatives including The Starving Artist Scholarship Fund, which helps people access inpatient mental health treatment, and The Starving Artist Publishing Studio, which platforms marginalised artists (10 publications to date sharing over 1,000 distinct experiences of artist un-wellness). The Starving Artist also creates change through exhibitions, public talks and campaigns focused on wellbeing and social justice.

One of the main reasons we've had so much impact is, I believe, because we are one of the few organisations currently creating spaces for these conversations. Systems struggle to hold the complexity these conversations demand. They diagnose, categorise and treat, but too often do not listen.

Art cannot resolve an illness; but it reveals it. My goal, through my art and work with The Starving Artist, is to help reclaim the figure of the 'starving artist', not as a romantic trope, but as a way of examining the realities of illness, vulnerability and survival. To ask what it means to live within systems that repeatedly fail to hold the complexity of embodied experience and, in doing so, move beyond clinical narratives to foreground something more human, unstable and difficult to contain.

Fundamentally, the work arrives at a simple proposition: systems fail; art does not.

We would like to thank our corporate and strategic partners for their support across the RSA's work

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WORDS BY DAISY CARTER

Common ground

Fellows across the UK are using creativity to reclaim the built environment for the common good, turning overlooked and contested spaces into places to gather, make - and to stay

Daisy Carter is Head of Strategic Programming at the RSA's Social Impact Team.

Below: Brian Dawe, FRSA and Jane Dawe



The story of community in this country has become a story about loss.

But this is a story about making things - and making space for them. About what brings people together in physical space, and what it takes to protect that space over time.

Reclaiming space

Enclosure has a long history in Britain: between the 16th and 19th centuries, thousands of acts of Parliament converted common land - fields, woods and pastures shared and stewarded for generations - into private property. Today, enclosure pressures are intensifying on every front, including through the onslaught of digital and discount culture, the results of which can be seen on our hollowed-out high streets.

Creativity is how communities take it back - reclaiming shared space and holding it fast when power can feel remote. It is one of the few forces that still pulls us into the same room - and that is exactly what is being lost as more of our shared life is bought up, priced out, emptied out or moved onto screens. Creativity is a force for reclaiming physical space for human encounter and agency.

This piece visits four such acts of resistance - a community-owned pub in Bootle, a contested artist quarter in Hackney Wick, a reclaimed Debenhams in Great Yarmouth and a reimagined department store in Bristol - led by Fellows who insist we reclaim space, creatively, for the common good.

SAFE Regeneration, Bootle, Merseyside: Brian Dawe, FRSA and Jane Dawe

"What would we build if we had to build it ourselves?"
- **Brian Dawe**

SAFE Regeneration began 25 years ago, brought into being by a group of disgruntled artists with a shared conviction that public art could create genuine connection. After buying an old school building and, later, a pub, Brian and Jane built an organisation that operates a canal-side community pub, hosts 4,000-person festivals with world-class artists and is a hotbed for local creativity and enterprise in one of the country's most economically deprived neighbourhoods.

They had watched the story play out in places across the country and knew it well. "Art goes to a place where nobody else wants to be, animates it, creates energy and character," Brian says, "and then what typically happens is

Photos: Daisy Carter



that developers come and say: 'you can piss off now while we do the same thing for much more money.'" Their rejoinder to this was to create a toehold - a building they actually owned. "We started thinking about what our neighbourhood might look like. And it wasn't just what we thought should be done - it was what the community felt was important."

Though very different spaces, the hub and the pub are both about giving creativity in Bootle a home. A space to try things. Every activity, from sea shanties, a philosophy group, ukulele club and Cheesy Tuesdays has been asked for, and led by, the community.

At the heart of everything is an insistence on quality: the kind of cultural experience wealthier communities take for granted. "How do you go from opening a pub in an area with real social issues to Nile Rodgers, the Waterboys and Billy Ocean? It always comes back to quality," Brian says. "The principle is people have to feel that the ownership is there for them."

Sparks and the Pickle Factory, Bristol: Manu Maunganidze, FRSA

"Creativity is really about: how do we resist and rebel against systems that are handed down to us?" - **Manu Maunganidze**

Sparks is a sustainable "department store with a difference" housed in a former Marks & Spencer. It was built in partnership with Artspace Lifespace and Invisible Circus, its interior cobbled together from old film sets - flexible, beautiful and wild. Across the city, the Pickle Factory, a distressed Victorian building repurposed as a creative hub for young people and community organisations, offers the same spirit - vast, raw spaces for imagining and reinventing.

Manu came to both looking for a home for the communities his organisations, NYCE and the Global Goals Centre, were already working with: young people, and groups organising around nature and sustainability.

"Consumerism is handed to us, capitalism in its current form is handed to us," he says. "And when you enter a space like Sparks, it allows people to reinvent, to reimagine: what can a retail space be?"

The first thing he noticed after moving to the UK in 2003, he says, was the high street: "You don't need a degree in political economy to realise that the power in this space is not

Above: Manu Maunganidze, FRSA

Below: Sparks, Bristol





Above: Original Projects/PrimeYarc

Below: Julia Devonshire, FRSA and Kaavous Clayton

in the hands of the people who live here.” DIY spaces, though, point to “a different possibility. An empowered group of people raising something different out of the ground.”

The alternative, he warns, is bleak. “The end-game of constant scaling is infinite reduction of inputs and price, and then you move to virtual spaces... and the result is less interaction between people.”

Originalprojects and PrimeYarc, Great Yarmouth: Julia Devonshire, FRSA and Kaavous Clayton

“I used to come when I was at art school and drive the loop: along the quayside, up to the port, through the industrial zone, past a roller coaster opposite council housing, and along the seafront. All these completely different areas in close proximity. It felt electric.” - Kaavous Clayton

On the Norfolk coast, the artists Julia Devonshire and Kaavous Clayton - working together as

Originalprojects - have spent years treating Great Yarmouth itself as their workplace. “Not a White Cube gallery model,” as Kaavous puts it, “but working with people, in a place we lived and felt committed to.” Their work is now anchored in PrimeYarc, a reimagined former Debenhams where artists’ studios sit alongside community workshops and exhibitions.

“Physical space gives you the opportunity to respond to the place you live in,” Julia says, “rather than digital space, which we inhabit in a very different way. Here, you can meet your neighbours, make change together, have an impact on the place.”

The insistence on doing things well and doing things yourself is its own form of resistance. “With high levels of deprivation, where everything operates on a discount culture, there’s a constant temptation to leap into things that are cheap...” Julia says. “What we’re trying to resist is capitalism done in a discount way. Spaces that let you make art, but also let you question.”

For Kaavous, it comes back to agency. “Great Yarmouth is an independently spirited place. That sense of agency - the ability to have some effect on the world that is your own - feels increasingly important in a time when we’re told that external forces are affecting our lives and someone else will sort it out.”



Photos: Originalprojects, yarmonics



Above: William Chamberlain, FRSA

Creative Wick, Hackney Wick & Fish Island, London: William Chamberlain, FRSA

“Hackney Wick was the wild west, or the wild east. All this magical stuff happens in liminal spaces, between the cracks, in the places where there isn’t that much attention.” - William Chamberlain

Hackney Wick is home to one of the largest concentrations of artists and creative businesses in Europe. The Cultural Interest Group (CIG) began 16 years ago, inspired by an arts festival and a shared interest in the neighbourhood’s creative future. When the financial slump stalled development, it gave the grassroots time to get organised and to open a dialogue between the creative community and the development world.

“Artists are often the first wave of gentrification,” William says. “They are the natural placemakers - the people who activate a disused building with a gallery, create a café, which becomes a bar, which becomes a nightclub. As the vanguards of that process, why shouldn’t they be real stakeholders? Why shouldn’t they benefit from what they’ve helped create?”

“It all started in quite a confrontational way,” William admits, in response to the feeling: “I’m losing my home.” The CIG’s purpose, he says, is to solve the problem of displacement by connecting stakeholders who wouldn’t normally

meet - and has helped generate policies, born in Hackney Wick, now preventing the displacement of creative communities elsewhere.

Alongside it, the HWFI Community Development Trust secures buildings and spaces for the long term, while The Wick - a free weekly newsletter and quarterly print title - communicates to the creative, business and residential communities locally. Together, the three form a model built on connection, communication and community ownership. William calls it “inside-out regeneration”, working with the assets already present in a place.

Just the beginning

Holding the ground, though, is only the start. What unites these Fellows - in Bootle, Bristol, Great Yarmouth and Hackney Wick - is a refusal to treat creativity as a placeholder until spaces become worth more to someone else. These Fellows work tirelessly to build the opposite of what hollows a high street out: real places made and run by the people who use them. Places where care, not cost, is what matters. Where neighbours can bump into ideas, and each other.

In the end, creativity is not just about making things, but about making space: for ordinary people to decide what their corner of the world is for. When public space comes back to life, so does agency. And that may be the most lasting work of all.

Scan the QR codes below to find out more about the initiatives profiled

SAFE Regeneration:



Creative Wick:



Originalprojects/PrimeYarc:



Sparks Bristol:



The Pickle Factory:



History in runes

Far from being defined solely by conquest, Viking society prized storytellers, poets and wordsmiths. Through riddles, kennings and fragments of verse, we can recover a culture that viewed creativity as an essential part of everyday life

WORDS BY ELEANOR BARRACLOUGH, FRSA

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ROMY BLÜMEL

The Viking Age is known for its war-like culture, its far-travelling explorers and settlers, and its colourful pantheon of gods and outlandish cosmic beings. But away from the dramatic myths and epic sagas, the idea of the arts as an intrinsic part of Norse culture is perhaps less familiar. Yet, for those who lived in the early Nordic world, the arts were intricately woven into the tapestry of their lives, and those who wanted to bolster their reputations were just as likely to boast about their artistic prowess as their physical skills.

Take Rognvald, the 12th-century ruler of Orkney, who we know had a healthy sense of his own accomplishments because he even composed a verse boasting of his many talents: "I am quick at playing chess, I have nine skills, I hardly forget runes, I am often at either a book or craftsmanship. I am able to glide on skis, I shoot and row so it makes a difference, I understand both the playing of the harp and poetry."

Precious words

Medieval Norse culture delighted in poetry, storytelling, and wordplay, and the ability to conjure stories, shape poems and solve riddles was greatly valued. Wordsmiths were held in high esteem, and the wily, one-eyed god Odin was the god of poets. According to a myth later recorded by the 13th-century Icelandic Snorri Sturluson, Odin stole the mead of poetry from a giant by transforming himself into an eagle and carrying it back to Asgard in his belly. Those who drank the finest mead (the portion he spat out of his mouth) gained the gift of beautiful verse. Those who received the dregs (the portion he squirted out of his bottom) could produce only doggerel.

The title phrase of my book, *Embers of the Hands*, comes from this rich literary tradition. It is a kenning from the Viking Age itself, a word puzzle that poets - called skalds - tucked into their fiendishly intricate verses. A kenning describes something familiar in a roundabout,



often metaphorical way. As with cryptic cross-words, where the rules need to be known before the clues can be deciphered, skaldic verse delights in alliteration that chimes across the lines, tangling up the word order so that it has to be unpicked like a knot. Within each verse are kennings hidden in the tangle of words like Easter eggs – word riddles full of unexpected imagery and mythological references. A kenning for ‘battle’ might be ‘the furious rain of sword-points’, while a kenning for ‘alcohol’ might be ‘the soothing balm of all torments’.

The original meaning of ‘embers of the hands’ was a precious metal – gold or silver – glowing and shimmering like fire on the palm of the one who held it. It came from the inventive mind of an 11th-century Icelander, Thorarinn Skeggjason, who was court poet to the Norwegian king Harald Hardrada. Killed in 1066 at the Battle of Stamford Bridge, Harald was a powerful ruler, whose glittering reputation was preserved and embellished in sagas and poems (some of his own composition).

Story culture

Skalds such as Thorarinn Skeggjason represented the elite of the profession. Many names of his fellow poets survive together with their verses, immortalised in the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas alongside their royal patrons. But storytelling, wordplay and poetry were the preserve not only of the upper echelons of society. The Viking world was full of people who shaped stories to tell around the winter fires on their farmsteads, when carrying out repetitive domestic tasks, or during the less exciting parts of long journeys over sea or land. Those famous sagas themselves had been passed down many generations before they were finally recorded in manuscripts in 13th-century Iceland.

The word ‘saga’ itself is a clue to this oral storytelling heritage: it comes from the verb at segja, meaning ‘to say’ or ‘to tell’. Some written sagas even give hints of this process at work, describing how certain stories were brought to Iceland by individuals with excellent memories, how others did the rounds among merchants and priests, and how still others passed directly from one generation of a family to the next. Storytelling was the lifeblood of the community – a connection to the past, an anchor in the world: shared memory, shared identity.



“Storytelling was the lifeblood of the community – a connection to the past, an anchor in the world: shared memory, shared identity”

That same Viking world was also full of those who took delight at playing with words, making vowels and consonants chime together across the lines of poetry, conjuring images out of other images and shaping brainteasers and puns. Very little direct evidence of this survives in the archaeological record, not least because so much of it would have been spoken rather than written.

Riddle me this

Some such evidence, though, comes from Norse Greenland, a colony settled from Iceland at the end of the 10th century, and surviving until the 15th century. The underlying permafrost, the cold climate and the sparsely settled landscape enabled a substantial quantity of organic material to survive from the era of the Norse settlement, including hints of wordplay and poetry.

One example is runes – those spiky letters so closely associated with the Viking Age – written on a stick of pinewood, with a natural knot at one end that resembles a birdlike creature. Transliterated into the Roman alphabet, the runes begin: ‘o : sa : sa : sa : is : o sa : sat’. Several interpretations have been suggested, along the lines of ‘On a tub saw the person, who sat on a tub’, or perhaps ‘On the sea that seemed to be, which you did not see on the sea’, or ‘On the sea, the sea, the sea, is the ambush of the Æsir’ (the Æsir being one group of the Norse gods, including Odin).

Whatever the correct interpretation – and perhaps there was never meant to be just one – this is an example of wordplay using homonyms: words that are spelled the same but have different meanings. The next part of the inscription slips a little kenning into the mix: ‘Bifrau is the name of the maid who is sitting on the blue one’. ‘The blue one’ may refer to the sea, the sky, or even heaven, in which case perhaps Bifrau is a mythological being perched upon it. Ultimately, her identity remains a mystery – a reminder that more stories were lost than survive.

Greenland wasn’t the only part of the Norse world where this sort of wordplay was enjoyed. A similar runic inscription from Bergen in Norway, again on a wooden stick, also plays with the many meanings of ‘sa’. The result is a word riddle that translates as ‘what did they see who looked into the tub? They saw themselves, they who looked into the tub’. Likewise, an inscription on a length of bone from Sigtuna in Sweden continues the theme, with runes that mean ‘See! They who saw themselves in the tub, saw themselves in the ice.’

Old truths

These fragments of poetry, kennings, inscriptions and riddles reveal a society deeply invested in the creative use of language and storytelling – one in which the arts were not confined to monumental achievements or elite patronage. They were embedded in daily experience, shaping how people entertained themselves, remembered stories, understood the world and interacted with one another. Literary culture flourished not only in royal courts but also in farmhouses, workshops and ships, wherever people gathered to talk, listen and imagine.

From a historical perspective, these fragments are important. They allow us to move beyond narratives focused solely on kings, warriors and political events, and instead recover something of the texture of ordinary life. But from a broader human perspective, the fragments are invaluable. They remind us that artistic expression and storytelling are not luxuries, but fundamental parts of the human condition.

Romy Blümel is a Berlin-based illustrator and painter who has exhibited globally, including in London and Shanghai. A member of the ‘Spring’ collective, her work spans publishing, advertising and cultural events and has appeared in publications including *The New Yorker* and *The Guardian*.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Eleanor's work

Dr Eleanor Barraclough, FRSA is a historian, writer and broadcaster currently based at Bath Spa University. Her most recent book, *Embers of the Hands: Hidden Histories of the Viking Age*, from which this article is extracted/adapted, was shortlisted for the Wolfson History Prize, longlisted for the Women's Prize for Non-Fiction, chosen as a *Times* History Book of the Year and chosen as a *New York Times* Editor's Choice.

WORDS BY PAWLET BROOKES, MBE, FRSA

Loosening canons

The presence of Black artists within classical music is neither new nor peripheral. It is longstanding, influential and woven into the fabric of the form itself

Classical music is often imagined as distant from Black cultural experience, an elite European tradition into which Black artists have only recently entered. Yet this narrative is deeply misleading.

For centuries, composers, musicians and performers of African and African Caribbean heritage have contributed to, expanded and challenged classical traditions across Britain and Europe. They were not merely participants within the canon, but innovators who pushed artistic boundaries, crossed cultural worlds and reimagined what classical music could sound and feel like.

What is perhaps most striking is not that Black artists existed within classical music history, but that so many were celebrated in their own time before later being pushed to the margins of cultural memory. Reclaiming these histories is therefore not simply about representation. It is about recognising that artistic excellence, experimentation and intellectual rigour have always been part of Black creative heritage.

Lyrical legacies

By the 18th century, Britain was already home to thousands of people of African descent, both free and enslaved, and Black musicians were actively shaping cultural life within this landscape. Ignatius Sancho (c.1729-1780), remembered today primarily as a writer and abolitionist, was also the first known Black Briton to have music formally published. His collections

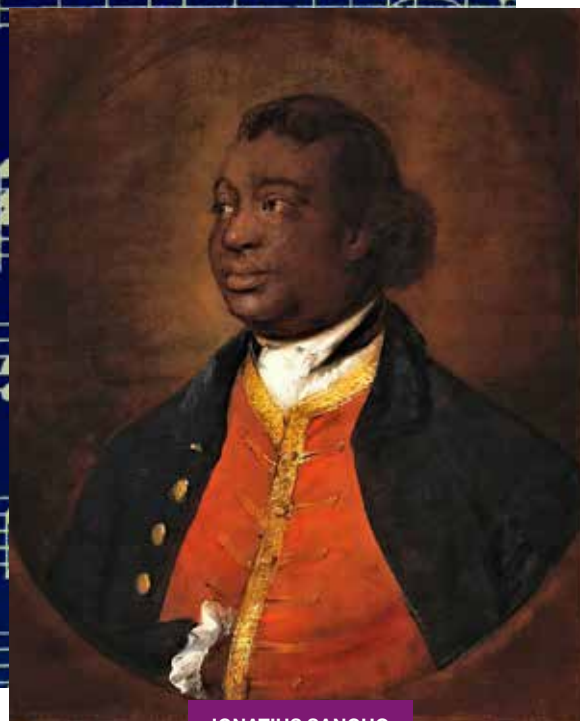
Photos: gbrundin / iStock, Thomas Gainsborough



JOSEPH BOLOGNE, CHEVALIER DE SAINT-GEORGES



SAMUEL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR



IGNATIUS SANCHO

of dances and songs reveal not an outsider looking into British culture, but an artist fully engaged in shaping it.

Joseph Antonio Emidy (c.1775-1835) similarly unsettles assumptions about who classical music belonged to. Born in Guinea, enslaved as a child and later forcibly recruited into the British Navy, Emidy eventually settled in Cornwall, where he became a celebrated violinist, composer and leader of the Truro Philharmonic Orchestra. His life speaks not only to extraordinary resilience, but to the long-standing relationship between Black artistry and classical innovation in Britain.

This spirit of boundary-crossing continued into the 20th century through Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912), whose success challenged both racial and cultural expectations of the period. His celebrated composition *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* toured internationally, and his influence extended well beyond the artistic. Coleridge's wider presence across Black intellectual and political circles connected movements across the Atlantic. He was, for example, the youngest delegate at the 1900 Pan-African Conference in London. Nonetheless, his story also exposed the inequalities embedded within the cultural industries. Despite the extraordinary success of his work, he died in poverty at the age of just 37, having signed away the rights to compositions that generated substantial profits for others.

Likewise, Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges (1745-1799) - virtuoso violinist, conductor and composer - disrupted European assumptions about race, artistry and refinement long before such conversations entered contemporary discourse. Frequently reduced to the label 'Black Mozart', Saint-Georges was something far more significant: a pioneering artist whose work stood powerfully in its own right. His acclaim across France and England reminds us that Black excellence within classical music has never been an anomaly.

These figures matter not simply because they existed, but because they reveal a deeper truth: classical music has always been more culturally interconnected, Diasporic and expansive than institutions have often allowed us to believe. The notion that Black communities are somehow new to classical traditions ignores centuries of contribution, innovation and authorship.

Reshaping the present

That history continues to resonate in contemporary practice. Today's Black composers, musicians and cultural leaders are not entering



Scan the QR code for more information about the Black Classics Symposium and Concert, which will take place on 1 October 2026 in Leicester



Scan the QR code to learn more about the Serendipity Institute for Black Arts and Heritage

Pawlet Brookes MBE, FRSA, is the Founder, CEO and Artistic Director of Serendipity Institute for Black Arts and Heritage. Her passion is discovering, nurturing and promoting artistic talent from across the African and African Caribbean Diaspora.



ALISON BUCHANAN

“Classical music has always been more culturally interconnected, Diasporic and expansive than institutions have often allowed us to believe”

see themselves reflected within opera and classical music, not as exceptions, but as part of its evolving centre.

An open room

To reimagine tomorrow is to understand that culture is never fixed. The canon is not a closed room; it is a living conversation shaped by who is invited in, who is remembered and whose stories are allowed to endure. Recovering Black classical histories is therefore not an exercise in nostalgia, but an act of cultural responsibility. It challenges inherited assumptions about excellence, belonging and authorship, while opening the door for future generations to imagine themselves differently within these spaces.

And yet, despite important progress, structural inequalities remain deeply embedded within classical music. Black musicians continue to be underrepresented within orchestras, particularly at senior and leadership levels. Too often, diversity is treated as an initiative rather than a deeper reconsideration of cultural value itself.

Reimagining tomorrow requires more than symbolic inclusion. It demands honesty about the past and imagination about the future. It asks us to recognise that Black contributions to classical music are not peripheral additions to an established tradition, but part of the tradition itself. Classical excellence has always existed within Black creative heritage. The challenge now is not discovery, but recognition.

unfamiliar territory; they are building upon legacies that stretch back generations while simultaneously reshaping the future of the form.

Composer Philip Herbert's work demonstrates how classical music can remain socially urgent while expanding its own artistic language. His composition *Elegy*, written in response to the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, gained renewed resonance following the murder of George Floyd and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Herbert's music pushes beyond narrow definitions of orchestral composition, incorporating steelpan and tap percussion within classical forms – a reminder that Black musical traditions have always carried both innovation and complexity.

Similarly, soprano and arts leader Alison Buchanan has become an important force within British opera. As Artistic Director of Pegasus Opera Company, and the only Black woman leading a British opera company, her work challenges long-standing assumptions about leadership, visibility and artistic authority within the sector. Her contribution extends beyond performance; it is about creating space for future generations of artists to

RECOMMENDED READING

“Reflections: Cultural Voices of Black British Irrepressible Resilience by Serendipity Institute – this publication acknowledges the contribution that Black British artists have made in the UK and internationally, the changes that they have witnessed and the impact of cultural politics and policy on shaping the arts sector as we know it. **Access, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Cultural Organizations: Insights from the Careers of Executive Opera Managers of Color in the US** by Antonio C. Cuyler – this is a comprehensive overview of what amounts to a global issue within the creative industries.” **Pawlet Brookes**



PHILIP HERBERT

Photos: Serendipity Institute for Black Arts and Heritage

FELLOWSHIP NEWS



FELLOWSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Reimagining Birmingham

RSA volunteer community leaders and Fellowship engagement managers are collaborating to deliver an ambitious programme of ‘beautiful conversations in beautiful places’ across the country in 2026.

There is often an assumption that the best events, the sharpest speakers and the most important conversations all happen in London. But the Royal Society of Arts’ Central area Community Leader, Kaleem Hussain, is helping to put Birmingham firmly on the map for high-quality civic dialogue that inspires action.

Kaleem recently hosted ‘Branding Birmingham: Future Ambitions and an Evolving Identity’ at the Library of Birmingham, bringing together leading local voices to explore how Birmingham can define and communicate its identity for the future.

Fellows were joined by Sir Andy Street, former Managing Director of John Lewis and Mayor of the West Midlands; Ed James, Deputy Lord Lieutenant for the West Midlands; and Tahir Abbas, Professor of Criminology and Global Justice at Aston University.

Photo: Luke Dorian

The discussion examined Birmingham’s complexities – from inequality and institutional trust to the opportunities created by major transport investment and forthcoming global sporting events.

Sir Andy said: “The Royal Society of Arts has a unique history of bringing diverse audiences together to host the conversations that address big challenges. It’s a competitive current landscape for UK cities, and RSA Fellows are well placed to help Birmingham brand itself effectively to stand out.

“It was a pleasure to share my experience with Fellows to help kickstart this conversation and inspire local action.”

The event marked the first in a wider series hosted by Kaleem, exploring the practical steps needed to help Birmingham realise its potential. Fellows left energised by the discussion, and plans are already underway for the next conversation.

Luke Dorian is the RSA's Fellowship Engagement Manager for the Central area.

PROGRAMMES

Valuing our volunteers

The Royal Society of Arts volunteer best practice training programme, taking place from March to October this year, has been creating a welcoming space for Fellowship councillors, community leaders and network leads to connect, learn and grow together.

Running over lunchtimes on the last Friday of each month, these relaxed and interactive online sessions explore themes such as event delivery, governance, data and communications.

The sessions have been co-led by RSA staff and Fellows, blending practical guidance with shared experience, to encourage open conversation.

From creating inclusive and respectful spaces to promoting events and using RSA branding, each session aims to leave our volunteers feeling better supported and better equipped to strengthen connections and to confidently and thoughtfully engage with other Fellows.

Clara Heffernan is RSA Fellowship Coordinator.

EXHIBITIONS

RSA House showcases royal portrait

A striking portrait of King Charles III made entirely from reclaimed and natural materials is now on display at RSA House.

On loan from the Royal Collection Trust, *The King of Sustainability* will be exhibited until the autumn.

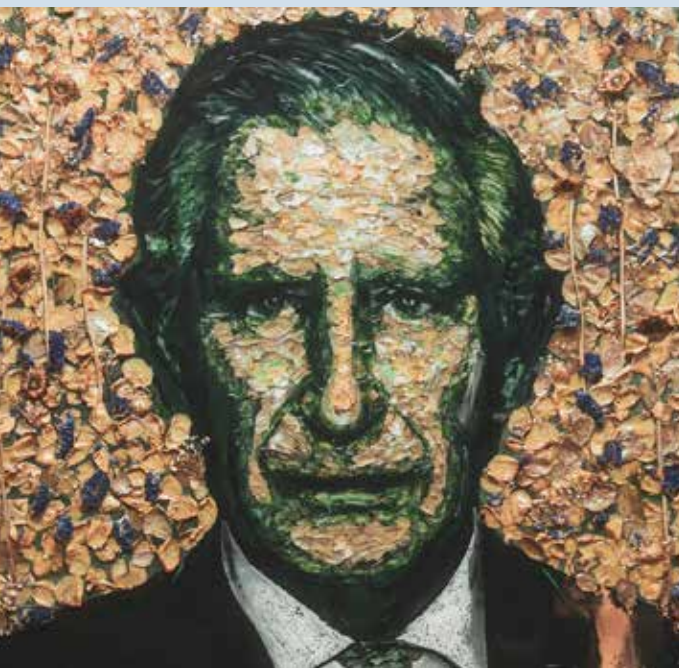
Created by Texan artist Michael Shellis, in collaboration with social entrepreneur Taz Khan, the artwork is constructed from salvaged wood, discarded materials, fallen petals and flowers collected from London's Royal Parks, and organic dyes made from coffee waste.

It is inspired by the King's long-standing commitment to environmental stewardship and reimagines waste as something of beauty, dignity and public value.

At its core is a message about circularity, stewardship and the transformative potential of creativity.

Laure Barthelemy, curator at the Royal Society of Arts, described *The King of Sustainability* as a "powerful example of art carrying public purpose".

She added: "We are delighted to welcome the work to the Royal Society of Arts and to create space for wider conversations around sustainability, circularity, community and the role of art in shaping public understanding."



The King of Sustainability was created using only natural materials

CONNECTIONS

A week in the life of a Fellowship engagement manager



Kate Monkhouse is an RSA Fellowship Engagement Manager (FEM) for the South-West of England and Wales and has been a Fellow since 2005. We asked her to keep a diary during a typical working week in May 2026.

Monday

Today, I am meeting Fellows at the Hawkwood Centre for Future Thinking near Stroud. It's a place where rural Fellows often come together to connect, collaborate and share creative ideas through our experience-led events and lectures. During the day, I take part in an outdoor Forest of Imagination workshop.

Tuesday

I am now in Bristol, hosting a Table Talk meet-up for Fellows at the beautiful Square Club. We hear from three local Fellows leading innovative work in research, artistic practice and hospice management. As always, it's an inspiring reminder of the breadth of our Fellowship, and of how the Royal Society of Arts brings people together for the common good.

Wednesday

Today is largely an admin day. I spend much of the morning posting on Circle, encouraging Fellows to continue

conversations sparked by events over the past two days, and nominating new Fellows. I have also been exploring a new co-working option for Bath.

In the afternoon, I write my monthly mailing for Fellows in Wales. In the evening, I head to a local community centre, where I serve as a trustee – a role I took on thanks to encouragement from a Fellow.

Thursday

Today I am at RSA House with colleagues from the Fellowship team. We are reviewing the past financial year and discussing priorities and strategy for the year ahead – particularly how we can bring the Fellowship First strategy to life and strengthen our ability to deliver social impact in local communities.

I enjoy comparing notes with colleagues about the best way to support our community leaders, alongside sharing a laugh with people who usually live and work hundreds of miles apart.

Friday

After a late-night train journey from London, I meet Welsh Fellows for lunch in Abergavenny. We discuss entrepreneur mentoring, student wellbeing and investment in the creative industries.

On the train home, I email an update to my Fellowship councillors and receive a debrief on our AI workshops and innovation lectures taking place at universities across Wales.

To connect with Kate or a FEM in your area, email fellowship@rsa.org.uk



COMMUNITY

Art, identity and inclusion: Meet Community Leader Oliver Enwonwu

Oliver Enwonwu is one of the RSA's newest community leaders, working alongside Fellowship councillors and local engagement managers to organise activity across Canterbury and Folkestone.

A British Nigerian third-generation artist, Oliver became a Fellow in September 2024 and was immediately inspired by the Royal Society of Arts' legacy and impact. His appreciation for the RSA's longstanding commitment to societal change motivated him to deepen his involvement, and in November 2025, he took on the community leader role for his area.

Since then, he has hosted virtual coffeehouses to bring Fellows together – including a session exploring how art can nurture self-awareness and support mental health.

Through his artistic practice, Oliver explores themes of identity, inclusion and representation, using art as a vehicle to challenge inequality and inspire dialogue. He is a strong advocate for creativity beyond the arts, believing it has a vital role to play across all disciplines.

"Art helps us to think creatively," he says. "It's all about solving today's problems of inclusion and diversity."

Oliver's decision to step into a leadership role reflects both his respect for the RSA and his desire to contribute meaningfully. "I like the fact that the RSA has been able to convene people from different disciplines to help shape society – and that it thinks seriously about civic responsibility."

For Oliver, the RSA is particularly relevant in today's world, where questions of race and identity continue to influence public life. He sees it as a space for genuine connection, shared purpose and collaboration – and is keen to spread the word.

"I would encourage anyone and everyone to join the RSA. It's a platform for creativity, a platform for collaboration – a place to dream bigger, share ideas and develop close camaraderie with colleagues and enthusiasts alike."

Fellowship Connect

Explore opportunities to connect online

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@theRSAorg

@thersaorg

Fellows' LinkedIn group
[linkedin.com/groups/3391](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/3391)

Email the Fellowship Services team at fellowship@rsa.org.uk or call +44 (0)207 451 6939

Photo: Courtesy of the RSA

Circle of Fellowship

Join Circle today and get your conversation started: to activate your Circle account, log in through My RSA via the RSA website. Your global community awaits.



To get started, scan the QR code or visit thersa.org/fellowship/community-platform

Free co-working spaces available

There are co-working locations available across the UK where non-London-based Fellows can work for free – and we regularly add new venues.



For the latest information, please scan the QR code or visit thersa.org/fellowship/in-your-area/coworking-spaces-for-fellows/

FELLOWS' STORIES

Creativity in action: South-West Fellows driving change

The RSA has long believed that creativity can transform lives and communities. Here we celebrate two South-West Fellows whose work – spanning entrepreneurship, disability advocacy, co-design and storytelling – demonstrates what it means to be a creative force for good.

Helena Traill, FRSA



Helena is an artist and designer, and the founder of nooh Studio – a co-design

agency working with charities, healthcare organisations and changemakers. She believes in the power of co-design and storytelling to create meaningful change, and brings that conviction to her work at nooh, her podcast *The Ideas Machine* and as a senior healthcare design consultant with the Root & Branch Collective.

Educated at Central Saint Martins, Imperial College London and the Royal College of Art, Traill curated 100 Stories, a compendium of accounts written by people living with cancer. She is also a trustee of Cancer on Board.

An RSA Fellow since 2023, her multi-impressionist landscape paintings were on display at the Dr Cross room at RSA House in September 2025. Traill spoke about her distinctive approach to capturing urban landscapes. She is passionate about building creative communities, and has established Bristol Plein Air Painters, whose members are exhibiting together this summer.



Scan the QR code to learn more about Helena. Her 'Last Word' contribution can be viewed on page 52

Sammy Everard, FRSA



Sammy has been an RSA Fellow since 2021. In 2016, she founded

Support and Mentoring Enabling Entrepreneurship (SAMEE), the award-winning charity she continues to lead as CEO. SAMEE supports disabled and neurodivergent people who want to explore self-employment, working with them through co-created and co-designed projects.

SAMEE received an RSA Catalyst Award in December 2022, and Sammy has shared insights into the initiative's pioneering approach at an RSA South West Coffeehouse event. A qualified business mentor, her practice has also informed a PhD journey with the Centre of Seldom Heard Voices at Bournemouth University.

Sammy was recognised in the 2024 Disability Power 100, and was awarded an MBE in the 2026 New Year's Honours.

Kate Monkhouse is the RSA Fellowship Engagement Manager for South West and Wales.



Scan the QR code to discover more about the work of SAMEE

AWARDS

Shining a light on fantastic Fellows

Nominations will open shortly for our Fellowship Awards 2026. This annual celebration will shine a well-deserved light on Fellows whose leadership, creativity and commitment to civic impact demonstrate what it means to play an active role in our community.

The awards ceremony will take place on the evening of Tuesday 8 December 2026. Hosted at RSA House and livestreamed for those joining from around the world, the event will spotlight those individuals who convene communities, champion positive change, and embody the values of the Fellowship.

This marks an exciting moment for the RSA as we honour excellence across our network, and we look forward to sharing more in the months ahead for what promises to be an inspiring December event.



Photo: Paul Collins for SAMEE



RSA HOUSE

Fellows Lounge opens

We are delighted to introduce the new Fellows Lounge at RSA House – a dedicated space for Fellows.

Open Monday to Friday, from 9am to 5pm, the lounge is designed as a relaxed and informal environment to connect, exchange ideas and spark collaboration.

Whether you are looking for inspiration, conversation, or simply a quiet place to think, it offers a welcoming setting to make the most of your Fellowship.

Simply sign in at reception when you arrive. We look forward to welcoming you to the Fellows Lounge.

EVOLUTIONS

Tafflab: a legacy of enterprise

Founded in 2014, Tafflab gave young entrepreneurs from three further education colleges in the South Wales Valleys the financial support and mentoring to turn business ideas into reality.

The project was born from a conversation between Karen Phillips, Deputy Principal of Coleg y Cymoedd, and Dr Kathy Seddon, an RSA Fellowship councillor. They recognised that RSA Catalyst funding could fill a critical gap in enterprise education for communities still scarred by the decline of coal mining and manufacturing.

Photo: Tom St Aubyn, Interior Design: Alex Dauley

Over nearly 12 years, RSA Fellows were central to Tafflab's success – interviewing applicants, providing hands-on mentoring and sharing hard-won business expertise. Student entrepreneurs built businesses in everything from artisan baking and theatrical makeup to PR, personal training and car maintenance.

Fellows guided them through pricing, marketing, tax, insurance and networking, with many crediting their mentor's wisdom as the project's single greatest benefit.

In 2026, the trustees made the decision to close Tafflab after having facilitated a transformation in enterprise education in Welsh FE colleges. As the trustees noted: if Tafflab were starting today, it wouldn't be needed in the same way.

CORRECTION:

In Issue 1: 2026 of *RSA Journal*, the image credit for photographer Derrick Wess was inadvertently omitted from the article 'All the right moves'. We apologise for this oversight and are pleased to acknowledge the work of Wess, a London-based photographer whose work captures natural, authentic and compelling storytelling moments. View his work on Instagram: @whatderricksees



HAUNTOLOGY

'Hauntology' describes how the present is haunted by the ghosts of the past – or by the failure of 'lost' futures. In art and music, the word also describes an aesthetic characterised by the sampling of analogue vintage media, such as old radio broadcasts

Helena Traill, FRSA is an artist, designer and founder of nooh Studio - a co-design agency working with charities, healthcare organisations and changemakers. Helena's work explores the space between memory and perception, through multi-impressionist landscapes.

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Offers available for late 2026 wedding bookers, subject to availability.

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