

**SUNDERLAND
CULTURE**

**Annual Review
2024-25**



*Rehearsals for Public Record at Southpaw Dance Studios.
Photo Mark Savage.*



Northern Gallery for
Contemporary Art



SUNDERLAND
MUSEUM & WINTER GARDENS



**Sunderland
City Council**



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



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UK Government

Chair's welcome

Welcome to our annual report for the year 24-25. It continues to be a huge privilege to be the independent chair of this fantastic partnership. And it's even more exciting to be doing so at a time of such growth, development, ambition and excitement in the city.

Our mission continues to be to improve the lives of everyone in Sunderland through culture. We know that people experience culture in many ways, sometimes by going to venues or galleries and sometimes by exercising their own creativity in their own localities. The investment which has gone into the city by Sunderland City Council, the University of Sunderland and the MAC Trust has provided some fantastic new opportunities for people to gather together and celebrate their pride in the city. But we are equally proud of the work that we do in smaller settings working with young people who may be marginalised, with older people and with those who are using arts and culture to help cope with health conditions. We're particularly delighted by the Culture Start partnership which has already started to open up opportunities to children and young people in our city who would otherwise be excluded from things that we believe make life joyful.

None of this would be possible without our talented team of staff, dedicated trustees, and our partners. As we reported in the last annual report, our former Chief Executive Rebecca Ball left us to join Arts Council England, and we thank her for all her service. We are delighted to welcome Nick Malyan as our new Chief

“We're particularly delighted by the Culture Start partnership which has already started to open up opportunities to children and young people in our city who would otherwise be excluded from things that we believe make life joyful.”

Executive. With the Board, he's helping us to think about what we do within Sunderland Culture and within the city for the next 10 years, as we approach our 10th anniversary.

We've also said goodbye to some trustees this year, including Michael Young and Ian Kershaw from the University of Sunderland. However, we are very pleased to welcome Helen Driscoll as one of their new representatives. I thank them and all my colleagues on the Board and Finance Committee who give up their time voluntarily to help us to shape the offer for Sunderland Culture for the future. We look forward to a recruitment campaign next year to introduce new trustees to carry on this work.

It would of course not be possible to do any of these things without the support of Arts Council England and a number of other funders who are named elsewhere in this report. We thank them for their continued investment in the success of the city and look forward to developing the relationship and the impact we can have on people's lives over the next 10 years.

Jane Earl,
Independent Chair



Delivering change through culture

Sunderland Culture brings together some of Wearside's most cherished and important cultural venues and activities, and works to realise the ambition of a city brimming with creative potential. We deliver a programme of events and participatory activities in communities across Sunderland, including the creative programmes in Arts Centre Washington, National Glass Centre, Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art and Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens.

Sunderland Culture comprises the three main funders of arts provision in the city, Sunderland City Council, University of Sunderland and Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture (MAC) Trust into a single, independent,

and resilient delivery model. We are a not for profit, limited company and registered Charity in England and Wales. We are funded by Arts Council England through the National Portfolio, and with support from public funding schemes and charitable trusts and foundations.

Our mission is to improve life for everyone in Sunderland through culture. To do so, we are driving five step changes through our work: improved profile and reputation of the city; more vibrant creative economy; raised outlook and aspiration of children and young people; improved health and wellbeing; and a more socially cohesive city.



Our Partnerships

Sunderland Culture is firmly place-focused in its creative and cultural ambition. We work across the city with communities and local partners to ensure the power of great art, culture and creativity is harnessed for the benefit of Sunderland, its residents and visitors. Our approach to working in partnership with our core partners, local and national partners is widely recognised as an exemplar model of place-based working.

Our core partners Sunderland City Council, University of Sunderland and the Sunderland MAC Trust are key to us achieving our mission.

As a founding partner of Sunderland Culture, the University of Sunderland is pleased to see the progress made over the past year in enriching our city's already vibrant arts and cultural life.

From celebrating diversity and hosting exhibitions, through spotlighting and nurturing local talent, to fostering creative expression in many forms, Sunderland Culture has promoted arts and culture to communities across the north-east and beyond.

The University's galleries – the National Glass Centre and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art – have continued to present a range of exhibitions by established and emerging artists. Looking ahead, we are excited about the future development of the Glassworks project in the coming months and years and welcome Sunderland Culture's leadership of this important initiative.

Sunderland Culture has also provided invaluable opportunities for our creative industries' students to showcase their work in professional settings. In doing so, they highlight the talent of the next generation of artists and makers, ensuring that the cultural economy continues to thrive.

Sunderland Culture continues to play a significant role in helping to make the city of Sunderland a great place to live, study, and work. For that, it deserves our warmest thanks.

The past year has been an exciting time for culture and the arts in our city, and the Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture Trust has enjoyed working alongside Sunderland Culture during this vibrant period.

The Trust is delighted with the significant progress that the Culture Start programme has made under Michael Barrass's leadership. This has been made possible by generous funding from Arts Council England's Place Partnership Fund, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Sir James Knott Trust, the Gillian Dickinson Trust, and the Sir Tom Cowie Fund through the Community Foundation. Delivered through a cross-sector partnership, the project is already having a positive impact on the lives of children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in our communities. Culture Start reinforces the Trust's belief that art and culture should be a right, not a privilege, and the team and partners are dedicated to ensuring that as many children and young people as possible can benefit from culture and creativity. During the year, the Trust was also pleased to welcome Nick Malyan as the new Chief Executive of Sunderland Culture. His commitment and enthusiasm are already evident, and we look forward to an exciting future for Sunderland Culture under his strong leadership.

It has certainly been another busy year for Sunderland Culture, and I am delighted to have been a part of the varied cultural programmes and projects that have taken place across our wonderful venues over the past twelve months.

Particular highlights for me were Arts Centre Washington's pivotal role in the *Washington 60 celebrations* hosting a visit from TV favourite George Clarke in a Design Challenge for our budding future architects, the absolutely brilliant *Ballad of the Crocodile and the Underpass* project working alongside Washington Heritage Partnership and a wonderful expansion of the *Bright Lights Youth Arts Festival* reaching into Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, Arts Centre Washington and National Glass Centre; a truly magnificent achievement!

The Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens exhibition programme has also gone from strength to strength this year receiving the poignant Ian Macdonald *Fixing Time* exhibition, the beautiful and thought-provoking *Coal Face* exhibition, and the stunning work of Cumbrian artist Sheila Fell which has just recently ended.

Having access to a broad ranging cultural programme is so vitally important to our city and communities so they can continue to grow and thrive, and I look forward to seeing what is in store for us all 2025/2026.



Sir David Bell
KCB DL
Vice-Chancellor
and Chief
Executive,
University of
Sunderland



Paul Callaghan
CBE, DL, FRSA,
HonDBA
Chair of the
Sunderland
Music, Arts and
Culture Trust



Cllr Beth Jones
Cabinet Member
for Communities,
Culture and
Tourism,
Sunderland City
Council



Primary school engagement
session at National Glass Centre.

Theory of Change

Improving life for everyone in
Sunderland through culture

Improving
the city's
profile and
reputation

Creating
connectivity
amongst our
communities

Building
confidence
and
aspiration in
young people

Improving
health and
wellbeing

Growing
our creative
economy

Our Aims

Delivering an excellent
and diverse arts and
heritage programme

Encouraging
everyone to get
involved

Securing a revitalised
and resilient cultural
infrastructure

Our assets, audiences, participants and partners

Across our venues,
citywide and online:

- National Glass Centre
- Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art
- Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens
- Arts Centre Washington
- Culture Start
- City programme

Growing existing and
building new audiences,
and opportunities to
take part:

- People who live and visit Sunderland
- With a particular focus on:
- Children and young people experiencing financial disadvantage
- Artists and creative businesses
- Black, Asian and other ethnically diverse communities
- People with disabilities, autism or additional needs
- Older people

Working with our
partners to maximise
resources

- Sunderland City Council
- University of Sunderland
- Sunderland MAC Trust
- Creative, cultural and digital sector
- Funders
- Businesses
- Health sector
- Education sector
- Housing sector
- Voluntary and community organisations

A unique model for
cultural regeneration

Our year in figures

483,031

Visitors

188

Artist and freelancer collaborations

118

Exhibitions, performances and events

45

Unlock grants for creatives

42,779

Participants

47

Ignite grants for young people

10,346

School visitors

895,278

Web visitors

331

Volunteer hours

101,969

Social media followers

Apricity playing in
Washington Emerging at
Arts Centre Washington.

Arts Centre Washington

Over the past year, Arts Centre Washington delivered a vibrant and inclusive programme that celebrated creativity in all its forms through exhibitions, performances, film screenings, and community engagement initiatives. *Washington 60* celebrated 60 years since Washington was designated a New Town and Arts Centre Washington played a pivotal role in a summer of new town themed events and activities. Events included archive film screenings, an exhibition about real and fictional stories of Washington, record listening parties, live music from the Davy Lamp Folk Club and the Durham Miners Brass Band, a participation programme and a 1960's themed *Art Mart*.

The Arts Centre hosted the celebration event for the *George Clarke Design Challenge*, where young people imagined their own new town of the future. Through *The Ballad of the Crocodile and the Underpass* the Centre worked with partners Washington Heritage Partnership, We Make Culture, University of Sunderland and

Baseline Shift to collect and share stories of Washington New Town by creating new *Radio Ballads* podcasts; produced by podcaster and musician Grace Stubbings with the Washington Community Podcasting Group and featured original songs by musicians Paige Temperley and David Brewis. A series of photomontage artworks using library archive images and new photography were created by artist Tommy Anderson, to celebrate Washington's urban landscapes, culture and social heritage. The project culminated with the release of 10 podcasts, a publication, a CD and a live performance featuring David Brewis, Paige Temperley, young musicians and poet Rebecca Nasim Asl.

"We love Arts Centre Washington – such a friendly venue with lovely staff and a great artistic space."

Visitor comment



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Arts Centre Washington continued its reputation for presenting original, high quality touring theatre with classics such as Elysium Theatre's *Othello* to unique, original theatre such as *The Dreamtime Fellrunner* by Dr Julie Carter. Children's work included Theatre Company Blah, Blah Blah's *The Hidden Garden* whilst Wrongsemble brought their Christmas production of *Tinsel*. Several dance productions visited including Ballet Lorent's *The Velveteen Rabbit*. And the Centre was delighted to host National Theatre's *Connections Festival* of new plays performed by young people's theatre groups from around the region.

Bright Lights Youth Arts Festival 2025 celebrated Sunderland's young creatives with the biggest programme to date at Arts Centre Washington, Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, National Glass Centre, and city wide through Culture Start. It featured 23 free events including the *Bright Lights Youth Arts Exhibition*, *Film Shorts Showcase*, *Growing Pains* with

Sunderland College's Performing Arts Students, *Re: Style: Clothes Upcycling Event*, *Washington Emerging* showcase for up and coming bands and a takeover of Keel Square's big screen by young artists.

A partnership with Film Hub North enabled the Arts Centre to continue the expansion of its popular film programme, introducing initiatives like *Heritage Reels* (archive and documentary films with talks), *Film and Fun* (family movies with art activities), *Mr Drayton's Rock Docs* (classic music documentaries with an interactive quiz), and *Sunderland Film Club* (independent documentaries).

Exhibitions showcased a diverse range of artistic voices. *One Day You'll be Older Too* featured Andrew Tift's intricately drawn pencil portraits of residents living in Washington care homes and *Felting Connections*, which was Ukrainian born felt artist Lena Archibald's first solo exhibition, organised with Sangini, each piece telling her story of survival and of finding beauty in the midst of chaos.

Through this varied programme, Arts Centre Washington has demonstrated its commitment to fostering creativity, inclusivity, and community engagement, reinforcing its position as a vital cultural hub in Sunderland.

"It is important to have big showcases to be able show off the North East and the talent of the youth. It is nice to have performance opportunities to get used to being on stage and having the experience of being out there and having other people's feedback."

Bright Lights participant



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1. Andrew Tift, *One Day You'll be Older Too*.
2. *Washington Fact Fiction and Folklore*.
3. *The Dreamtime Fellrunner*.
4. Members of Washington Youth Theatre performing at the opening of the Bright Lights Youth Arts Festival 2025.
5. Lena Archibald's *Felting Connections*.
6. Bright Lights Youth Arts Festival 2025.
7. David Brewis and Paige Temperley perform in *The Ballad of the Crocodile and the Underpass*.
8. Davy Lamp Folk Club.

National Glass Centre

In April 2024 *Glass World* was displayed in the National Glass Centre Gallery. Featuring works from National Glass Centre's collection, the show highlighted the geographic diversity of artists working in glass and their representation in our collection. Connections were made with countries ranging from Argentina to Japan and from Canada to New Zealand. The Collection Gallery presented a selection of international works from the Bernard Lloyd Collection donated to National Glass Centre in 2022. Artists represented included major figures in international glass including Dale Chihuly, Harvey K. Littleton and Pino Signoretto.

Following a collaborative project initiated by National Glass Centre, Ruthin Craft Centre and North Lands Creative, artist Effie Burns created a new body of work shown at the Harley Gallery in Nottinghamshire, from April to

July 2024. This exhibition was then displayed at National Glass Centre in the Balcony Gallery from September to December 2024.

Graduates of the University of Sunderland's Artist Designer Maker: Glass & Ceramics BA (Hons) took over the National Glass Centre Gallery in June 2024 for their final show. This exhibition was followed by *People's Art*, which commissioned five contemporary artists - Ingrid Murphy, Zac Weinberg, Liaqat Rasul, Julia Griffiths and Francisca Onumah - to respond to selected objects loaned from Compton Verney's Folk Art collection and from a private collection. The newly commissioned works were shown alongside the loans, encouraging visitors to think about the principles we apply when considering the value of art. *People's Art* toured to the Harley Gallery where it was shown from January to April 2025.

"The exhibition is probably the best we've seen. Lots to relate to and discuss. Excellent food for thought."
Visitor comment



1. *Menagerie*, Bruce Marks, Bird, 2024. Photo Alick Cotterill.
2. *Punch and Judy* © Compton Verney. Part of People's Art. Photo Jamie Woodley.
3. Inga Hamilton, *Cake As Protection*, 2023.
4. Ingrid Murphy, *Data Dogs*, 2024. Part of People's Art.
5. Effie Burns, *Box of Delights*. Photo David Williams.
6. Parent and child drop into the Learning Zone.
7. People's Art exhibition typography.

Following storm damage, the full building re-opened in September allowing a redisplay of Hassina Khan's work in the Research Gallery, created following a residency funded by The Glass Society. In September 2024 the Collection Gallery was redisplayed presenting works by British artists included in the Bernard Lloyd Collection.

A new programme of exhibitions opened in December exploring the theme of animals. *Menagerie*, shown in the NGC Gallery was a group show presenting animals made in glass and ceramics. Highlights included a life size boar by Susan O'Byrne, Andrew Livingstone's ceramic Yorkshire Terrier, lovingly known as Sean Bone, wearing a jumper asking 'Does my bum look big in this?', and work by the winner of Netflix's 3rd series of *Blown Away*, John Moran. John came to National Glass Centre in March 2025 to do a glass-blowing demonstration and to work with students. *Glass Zoo* featuring animal themed works from the collection was shown in the Balcony Gallery and PhD student Inga Hamilton

presented her research exploring communication between species in the Research Gallery.

National Glass Centre saw a developing programme of family, school and community opportunities focusing on the collections and exhibitions shown in both the NGC and NGCA main galleries. Bespoke family exhibition guides accompanied each exhibition to support families to engage and have fun in the spaces and around the building.

An updated school offer was developed alongside Culture Start's Poverty Proofing initiative to support more schools to visit and access creative opportunities,

"Beautiful place to walk through and explore... The displays are breathtaking, as is the glass blowing demonstration."

Visitor comment

enabling them to bring more students for less money, actively encouraging young people into our galleries and talking about the work and their own ideas. The offer includes bespoke sessions for home education groups, neurodiverse students, and areas of specific focus, such as the recent photography project run with Academy 360.

New outreach workshops saw the Learning and Engagement team delivering talks and practical workshops off-site at schools and community venues, enabling a wider audience to engage with glassmaking.

Adult courses continue to sell out and in response to demand, the family workshop programme delivered new ceramics sessions which have proven extremely popular across the year.

This year the team were also delighted to take part in the *Bright Lights Youth Arts Festival*, the *Autonomy* project with young autistic adults, Hand of Children Charity, and The University of Sunderland's PGCE programmes.

Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art

From March to June 2024 NGCA hosted two painting exhibitions, a first for the gallery since it has been based in National Glass Centre. *My Echo, My Shadow* was the largest solo show to date of British painter Laura Lancaster. Presenting new paintings made over the last few years *My Echo, My Shadow* delved into the current practice of one of the North East's most celebrated and accomplished painters. Laura's exhibition proved popular with over 9,000 visitors and over 20,000 views of an interview with the artist in her Newcastle studio. Over 2,000 free exhibition guides and activity sheets featuring a new text by Laura and a full colour artwork print, designed by Foundation Press were given to audiences.

The Collection Space presented Seb Trend's exhibition *XTRALIFE*, a series of 'melted photographs' in artist made frames produced specifically for the exhibition,

marking the first time the photographs had been exhibited together as a solo show. *XTRALIFE* built on Trend's ongoing investigations into states of 'in-between': molten and solid, representation and abstraction, permanence and momentary.

The Autumn programme focused on working class communities and the North East's heavy industries. The Main Gallery presented *Fixing Time*, a retrospective exhibition across two venues – Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art – exploring 50 years of work by renowned British artist and photographer Ian Macdonald. The exhibition across the two venues reached over 17,500 visitors, with three sold out talks, 2,000 exhibition guides and a new artist interview film watched by over 20,000 people. The exhibition achieved national acclaim, being

"It's really symbolic of human pain and struggle, beautiful work."

Visitor comment



featured in The Guardian, a 5 star review in the Morning Star, Creative Tourist's number one show to visit in the North, and others. The show was accompanied by gallery activities, a portrait drawing station, an artist workshop session for 50 students from Northern School of Art, and numerous school visits and talks. Two of Ian's photographs were acquired into National Portrait Gallery's collection off the back of the exhibition.

To mark the 40th anniversary of the 1984 Miners' Strike—which had, and still has, a profound impact on Sunderland and the North East of England—NGCA Collection Space screened Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave*, the first time it has been exhibited in Tyne & Wear, alongside a selection of photographs taken during the 1984 North East Miners' Strike.

In Winter, two exhibitions focused on portraiture, family, friendships and communities. In the Main Gallery *The Skin We Live In* was the inaugural exhibition of artwork from NGCA's collection brought together in a group show

exploring contemporary portraiture through photography, painting, sculpture, film, and printmaking. The exhibition featured artwork by 28 contemporary artists and photographers who turned the tables on historic associations and practices of portraiture to go beyond 'skin deep' delving further into our shared human condition.

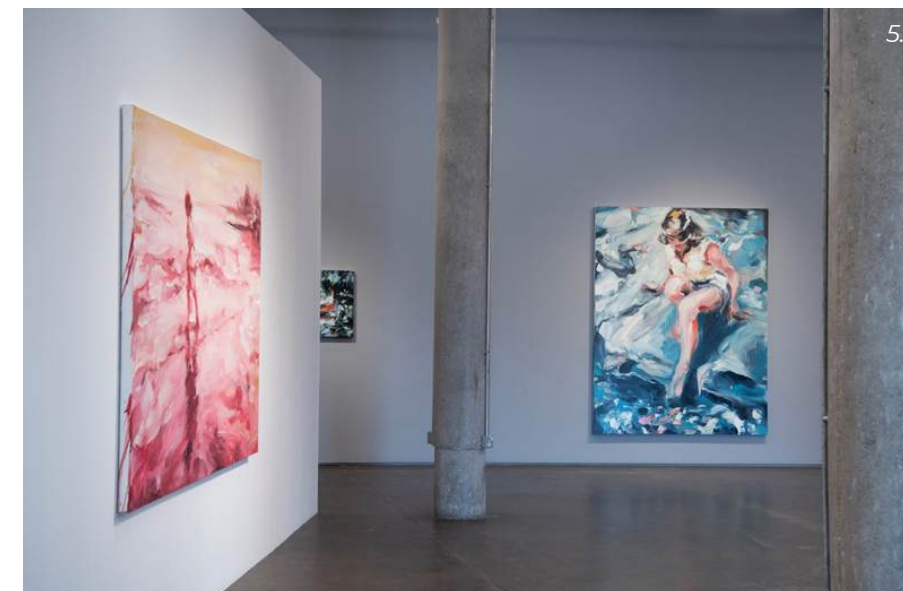
Away from the gallery artwork from the NGCA collection went on long term loan to public buildings around Sunderland including sculptural artworks by Dan Holdsworth in City Hall and large scale photographic prints by John Kippin in The Beam. The show in NGCA Collection Space, *My Name is Harry...* was the first gallery exhibition of British photographer Harry Griffin on display across NGCA Collection Space and Pop Recs. The exhibition comprised hundreds of photographs from Harry's photographic archive providing a unique insight into Britain's vibrant comedy circuit, family and friendships, moments of joy, celebration and boredom all shot through with wit, humour and

candid moments of life on tour. Curated with Gabrielle Barkess-Kerr, the exhibition was produced in partnership with the Northern Centre of Photography, University of Sunderland. Alongside the exhibition was an in-conversation between Harry Griffin and Andy Dawson (Athletico Mince Podcast) and Harry's first ever publication with over 30 full colour images and new essays. Filmed backstage at Glee Club Birmingham, a new interview film was produced with comedian, presenter and painter Joe Lycett and Harry Griffin, viewed over 200,000 times online.

This year NGCA acquired new works by Ian Macdonald, Seb Trend, Janina Sabaliauskaitė, Johannah Churchill and Michael Daglish into its collection.

"As a visiting southerner this has inspired me to explore the North East."

Visitor comment



1. Natasha Caruana, *Married Man*, 2008, installation view *The Skin We Live In: Portraits from the NGCA Collection*, 2024. Photo: Colin Davison.
2. Installation view Ian Macdonald: *Fixing Time*, 2024. Photo: Colin Davison.
3. Portrait of Harry Griffin, 2024. Photo: Colin Davison.
4. In-conversation between Harry Griffin (right) and Andy Dawson (left) at Pop Recs, 2024. Photo: Colin Davison.
5. Installation view Laura Lancaster: *My Echo, My Shadow*, 2024. Photo: Colin Davison.

Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens

Throughout 2024 - 2025, Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens' exhibition programme has continued to entertain, inspire, and resonate with our visitors.

In July 2024, a dual programme with NGCA saw the opening of Ian Macdonald's *Fixing Time* exhibition, the first comprehensive retrospective exhibition of the artist's work, (see page 12-13) with the Museum's display spotlighting key photographic series such as *Heavy Industry* and *Smith's Dock Shipyard*, as well as previously unseen portraits captured in secondary schools. The exhibition provided inspiration for family creative workshops, working with artist Pui Lee to create industrial landscapes, self-portraits and lino printed ships. A Portrait Station in the Art Lounge encouraged visitors to draw and display their own portraits and a Changing Childhoods trail encouraged conversation between the generations about different

experiences of childhood. Adult visitors enjoyed talks led by Ian about his life and work.

Coal Face was an exhibition of a collaborative project between writer Dr Louise Powell and photographer Andy Martin using film, tintype portraiture, and poetry, to share stories of Sunderland's collieries through the faces, hands, and words of those who knew them best: coal mine workers and their family members. *Coal Face* shared the hardships, resilience, and community spirit found in coal mining communities of the region. The learning programme included a Study Day with in-conversation artist talks. And series of Go and See visits supported by Cultural Spring, saw community groups take part in guided tours and object handling sessions.

The Museum's Creative Age group took part in a *Creative Coal* project, co-creating sensory resource boxes on the theme of

"Loved visiting the Museum, really educational and set out in such a way that it's entertaining for adults and children...I expected to be here for 20mins but was kept interested for over 2 hours."

Visitor review



1. Ian Macdonald. *Ship Number 1360 on the building berth in the early hours of launch day at the Smith's Dock Shipyard, South Bank, near Middlesbrough, 1986. Photograph. Courtesy of the artist.*
2. *Re-visualising Women's Work.*
3. Sheila Fell, *Snowscape, Cumbria*, courtesy Sheffield Museums Trust.
4. Young people co-created a new eco-lens takeover tour.
5. The Creative Age group co-creating coal-mining themed sensory resource boxes for older people living in care homes and supported living.
6. Ian Macdonald hosting a sell out talk for *Fixing Time*.
7. Tot Holyoak. *Wholeplate tintype* © Andy Martin 2024.

coal-mining for older people living in care home and supported living settings, working with storyteller and heritage educator Elizabeth Baker. The boxes contain sensory objects linked to life in coal mining communities, with supporting factsheets, conversation starters, oral histories and creative activities. This project is part of a UK-wide *Working Together* project led by GEM (Group for Education in Museums) and CHWA (Creative Health and Wellbeing Alliance) and generously funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The Older Women's Artist Collective worked with photographer Sophie Piper to explore photographs of working women in Sunderland from the 1940s to the 1960s in the archives, supporting Sophie's PhD research with University of Sunderland. Their research and creative responses were captured in the *Re-visualising Women's Work* exhibition in the Art Lounge from October 2024 – January 2025.

April 2025 saw the opening of *Sheila Fell: Cumberland on Canvas*, the first major retrospective of Fell's work in over 30 years. The exhibition explored her sources of inspiration, artistic

development, recognition, and legacy. Drawing together 98 works from both public and private collections from across the country, the exhibition brought in loans from institutions such as Tate, Royal Academy, National Portrait Gallery, MIMA, and National Museums Liverpool. Originated and developed by Tullie, Carlisle, the exhibition was able to tour to Sunderland through a partnership between the museums.

Young people from the Celebrate Different Collective worked with curator and Amateur Ancestor curator and producer Justine Bousard to co-create a new takeover tour, re-interpreting objects in the Museum galleries through an eco-lens. Objects selected for the tour included a walrus head, a frog in a mug, a bronze age axe, a Tamagotchi game and a coelacanth fossil which were re-contextualised within the climate crisis. The tours were launched during the *Bright Lights Youth Arts Festival* in February Half Term 2025.

Finally, last year we were delighted to support the opening of the new Mowbray Park Community Garden, creating a dedicated outdoor space for community growing and wellbeing programmes.

"We had such a wonderful day at Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens! I was genuinely impressed by how much there was to see and do – and the best part is, it's all free to enter! It's a fantastic place for families."

Visitor review

Theatre Nation Partnership

Sunderland Culture's sixth year as a member of National Theatre's Theatre Nation Partnership has seen involvement in a number of initiatives including *Speak Up*, the National Theatre's schools tour of *The Left Behinds* and the development of its second Public Acts project – a 3-way partnership between Sunderland Culture, Sunderland Empire and the National Theatre.

Public Record

Part of Public Acts which was destined to reach a fantastic culmination in April 2025, 2024-25 saw the genesis of this project starting with a series of engagement workshops delivered throughout the summer and autumn for community groups in the city including Back on the Map, Sunderland Nigerian Families Group and Connect Company as well as welcoming back *The Odyssey* participants returning for this new project. Project leaders embarked on a lengthy research and development period, meeting key artists in Sunderland and the wider region and developing the concept for a new production called *Public Record* resulting in a performed love letter to the city told through its music and dance. Rehearsals ran from January to the end of March, initially involving the core company of 52 people gradually being added to by other community groups and local artists with the final cast reaching almost 100.

"The journey so far has, undoubtedly, made me more confident to be myself and to make new friendships... *Public Record* made me feel welcomed in this city. I don't feel like a stranger here, there is a strong sense of belongingness - and I absolutely love it."

Angelica, *Public Acts* participant



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1. Members of the Nigerian Families Group take part in development sessions for *Public Record*. Photo Mark Savage.
2. Hetton Academy students listening to podcasts created by Beacon Academy at the *Speak Up* sharing event at Sunderland Empire.

Unlock

As part of the *Unlock* programme to support the city's creative sector, in 2024 Sunderland Culture launched an open call to independent creative practitioners, businesses and organisations based in the city for a grant of up to £2500, which would fund activity to support the growth of creative businesses in Sunderland. Funded by the UK Government through the Shared Prosperity Fund, the grants were part of the Sunderland Innovate and Grow enterprise programme, led by University of Sunderland.

After 2 months of information sessions, 1-1 meetings with creative businesses and other activities to spread the word, Sunderland Culture awarded 41 direct grants ranging from between £220 to £2500, totalling more than £63,000, and 6 enterprises embarked on a mentoring programme.



Artist Joanna Manousis received an *Unlock* grant

"I received funding... to take a stone-setting workshop at Vanilla Ink Studios in Glasgow while obtaining some of the necessary tools to practice new skills. Having already received recognition for my jewellery designs through an exhibition opportunity at the Museum of Art and Design in New York City, as well as being featured in Harpers Bizarre magazine, I feel that this new strand of practice will gain further recognition while being accessible to a wider pool of clientele. This will provide a steadier income stream, aiding in the development and expansion of my own personal glass/jewellery studio."

Joanna Manousis, Artist

Autonomy

Autonomy brought together a Sunderland community of autistic young adults at risk of loneliness and social isolation. Through an 11 month high quality, targeted programme of events and activities, *Autonomy* supported 303 autistic young adults to experience new things, make connections and build a new creative community. Working alongside professional artists, the programme saw students from Sunderland College's Directions and Foundations SEND provision co-creating and developing their own exhibition in National Glass Centre and NGCA, with the support of specialist artists and professionals. Engagement with autistic young people was made possible through partnerships with Sunderland College, Grace House, ESPA and a public call out for participation.

The legacy of the programme has seen the development of a weekly *Special Interest Club* at Arts Centre Washington, where young autistic adults are invited to explore and celebrate their special interests such as gaming, music, animation, photography, print alongside specialist trained artists.

Autonomy was made possible thanks to the Association of Independent Museums (AIM) Connected Communities programme which is funded by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's Know Your Neighbourhood Fund, through Arts Council England.



Student from Directions, SEND Provision at Sunderland College proudly displays his *Special Interest* portrait produced in collaboration with Luminary CIC.

"This project has had truly life changing outcomes for our students. The impact that it's had on our students' confidence, as a result of the experiences they have had, has been incredible. Long may this partnership continue."

Michelle Patterson, Lecturer and Programme Leader for Directions at Sunderland College

Culture Start

Culture Start is a transformational three-year programme that aims to reduce the long-term impact of poverty and improve life chances for children and young people in Sunderland through access to free creative opportunities.

It is delivered by a strong cross sector partnership of organisations, led by Sunderland Culture, working with brilliant arts and cultural organisations, artists and creative practitioners across Sunderland.



In its first year, Culture Start focused on building strong partnerships and testing approaches to ensure the programme is meaningful, impactful and genuinely co-created.

“Culture Start has made a real impact on the children attending the group...it has been incredible seeing the children enjoy culture and the arts and take part and bring their own talents to the group.”
Kimberley, Hope4All CIC

Culture Start supported Sunderland schools to embed creativity across the curriculum, and *Holiday Sparks* and *Creative Sparks Clubs* offered high-quality arts experiences for children under 12, delivered in familiar community settings with trusted local partners and artists.

The *Igniting Creative Futures* programme for young people aged 13–18 was piloted with the launch of *Ignite Bursaries*, supporting 47 young people to pursue creative interests with financial support.

Culture Start also delivered training, collaboration and pilot projects with artists, venues and organisations, to work towards creating a more accessible creative offer in Sunderland, including *Poverty Proofing* arts and cultural spaces. Research and evaluation is undertaken by the University of Sunderland's Institute of Economic and Social Inclusion, with learning helping to shape local policy and practice.

Looking ahead, Year 2 will focus on deepening relationships with schools, delivering *Creative Sparks Clubs* and *Holiday Sparks* provision, awarding a second round of *Ignite Bursaries* and officially launching *Future Creatives* - a free creative community for young people.



Culture Start Puppet Workshop at The Hut.

Stats and Highlights

In Year 1:

2,359
engagements

141 creative sessions/workshops

42 artists engaged

4 after-school clubs launched

3 holiday programmes delivered

£21,600
awarded in bursaries

5 arts organisations and cultural venues engaged in Poverty Proofing

53 staff received training in Poverty Awareness

Final Thoughts

It's been a packed first year in my role as Chief Executive of Sunderland Culture.

As you've read throughout this review, we deliver an extraordinary amount for the city - from world-class venues run in partnership with our founding organisations, to grassroots participatory work that reaches communities across Wearside.

Since joining in September 2024, I've felt a deep sense of excitement and aspiration for both Sunderland Culture and the city itself. I was also keenly aware of the legacy I was stepping into, following Rebecca Ball's move to Arts Council England. I'm delighted to say that the reality of the role has far exceeded my expectations.

The true highlight has been leading a creative programme that is both rich in quality and far-reaching in impact.

Nowhere is this more evident than in our free-to-enter public venues, where we deliver outstanding, year-round cultural experiences. This year, those venues welcomed nearly half a million visitors and more than 10,000 school and college students.

The National Glass Centre bounced back from its storm-related partial closure - reopening fully in September. Throughout the year, we continued to showcase joyful, inspiring exhibitions of contemporary glass, including *Menagerie* - a celebration of animal-themed works by both established and emerging British artists.

Our photography exhibitions shed light on the region's industrial legacy. *Fixing Time*, a powerful retrospective by Teesside photographer Ian Macdonald was followed by *Coal Face*. An exhibition which paired original tintype portraits by Sunderland photographer Andy Martin with verbatim poetry by award-winning writer Louise Powell, capturing the voices of the city's last generation of coal miners.



Participation remains at the heart of what we do. This year, more than 42,000 people took part in our activities—around 10% of our total audience. Our annual *Bright Lights Youth Arts Festival* was bigger and bolder than ever, expanding outwards from its home at Arts Centre Washington to include every one of our venues for the first time. Bright Lights is the culmination of our year-round young people's programme - providing platforms to shine in film, theatre, and visual art.

Partnerships are central to our impact. Our founding partners - the University of Sunderland, Sunderland City Council and the MAC Trust - never rest on their laurels in setting a vision for the city. Their support drives us to adapt, evolve and innovate in response to community need.

That drive is powerfully reflected in Culture Start- a major new partnership ensuring children and young people living in poverty have access to high-quality cultural experiences and the freedom to express their creativity where they live. Strategic in vision and rooted in community, it marks a major step forward in reaching those who need us most.

Nationally, we continue to work closely with leading cultural partners. Our long-standing collaboration with the National

Theatre has brought real energy and opportunity to Sunderland. While the Theatre Nations Partnership comes to a close with *Public Record* and *Speak Up*, we're excited about what comes next.

One such future-facing collaboration is with the V&A, as we develop Glassworks - a new, world-class facility for people of all ages to explore and create with glass.

None of this would be possible without our extraordinary team. I've been warmly welcomed by a passionate and talented group of colleagues across Sunderland Culture and our partner venues. Their work is powered further by a network of brilliant freelancers, creative agencies and community partners.

I'm proud we can support this ecosystem through initiatives like Unlock, which has backed over 40 creative businesses in the city this year.

Finally, I want to thank our Board and partners for placing their trust in me. It's a privilege to lead Sunderland Culture at such an exciting time. As we look ahead to our tenth anniversary in 2026, I can't wait to share more of our ambitions and continue building a creative city that belongs to everyone.

Nick Malyan
Chief Executive

Thank you

We are hugely grateful to our partners, funders, donors and everyone who has supported our work during 2024-25. This has enabled us to offer a remarkable range of high quality cultural, heritage and creative activities in Sunderland for people to enjoy, experience and participate in.

Thank you to our founding partners for their vision and support in establishing Sunderland Culture.

**Sunderland
City Council**



**University of
Sunderland**

MACSunderland
Music, Arts and Culture Trust

We wish to thank everyone who generously donated to our Big Give Arts for Impact campaign this year. Thanks to Arts Council England for its support for Sunderland Culture as a National Portfolio Organisation. Sunderland Culture is funded by the UK Government through the Shared Prosperity Fund.

Thank you to our partners, funders, donors and everyone who has supported Culture Start and enabled us to offer a remarkable range of free, high quality creative activities for children and young people who may not otherwise be able to participate.

Culture Start is supported by a £1.2m Place Partnership award from Arts Council England through the National Lottery, and generously funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Sir James Knott Trust, Sir Tom Cowie Fund at the Community Foundation serving Tyne & Wear and Northumberland and the Gillian Dickinson Trust.



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We wish to thank the following for their support during 2024-25:

Arts Council England	Redhills Durham
Art Fund	Scops Arts Trust
Association of Independent Museums via DCMS	Sir James Knott Trust
Know Your Neighbourhood Fund	Sport England
Big Give	Sunderland Antiquarian Society
Community Foundation North East – Tyne & Wear	Sunderland City Council – Washington Art
High Sheriff Award Fund	Committee Neighbourhood Investment Fund, UK
Compton Verney	Shared Prosperity Fund
Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance	Sunderland Voluntary Sector Alliance
Film Hub North with National Lottery Funding on	The Albany – Family Arts Network
behalf of the BFI Film Audience Network	The Cultural Spring
Garfield Weston	Tullie
Granada Foundation	University College London
Group for Education in Museums (GEM)	University of Sunderland - Innovate & Grow,
National Lottery Heritage Fund	supported by UK Shared Prosperity Fund
National Theatre	Washington Heritage Partnership
Northern Centre of Photography	Workplace Foundation
Pop Recs	Yorkshire and North East Film Archive

We are delighted Sunderland City Council has received funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, thanks to National Lottery players and the DCMS Museum Estate and Development Fund, administered by Arts Council England to support the redevelopment of Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens.



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There are lots of ways you can help more people experience great art and culture, by making a donation, leaving a legacy, sponsoring an activity or volunteering your time.

For more information on how to make an incredible difference, please visit: sunderlandculture.org.uk/support-us
Sunderland Culture is a Registered Charity, no 1184073.

Keep in touch with our programme and sign up for updates on www.sunderlandculture.org.uk

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