



Credit Colin Davison

## Annual Review 2022-23



## Chair's welcome

It's always a pleasure to be asked to write the introduction to Sunderland Culture's annual report, and to reflect on some of the highlights of the year. The report which follows covers them much better than I can, but it is my chance to say a number of 'thank yous' to the people and organisations who have helped us achieve so much over the past year. And it's also a chance to celebrate the amazing arts and cultural activities which have taken place in Sunderland, and which have taken people from Sunderland across the country.

We rely on support from the public purse via Arts Council England. This funding is allocated on a very competitive basis, and the process takes place every 3 to 4 years. We were delighted that the strength of work in the past, and our plans for the future means that our funding has increased by 24%. This funding is for 3 years from 1 April 2023. We are hugely grateful to Arts Council England for supporting the work of our core partners – Sunderland City Council, University of Sunderland and Sunderland MAC Trust. And we are thrilled that in such a competitive funding round, we've seen an increase in resources for the city.

It's been particularly important during such a difficult cost of living crisis for so many people, and our continued ability to deliver activities across the city – in local communities as well as in our flagship buildings. Read on to see the numbers of people who have taken part in the things we have led on. It's inspiring!

None of this could be achieved without our partners, and support from a number of other trusts and foundations, as well as the donations, which people make when they visit us. It doesn't matter how large or small the contribution is – what matters is that we spend it to get the maximum value for our city and our communities.

And of course, we are totally reliant on our brilliant team led by Rebecca Ball. They are consistently innovating and engaging to find new ways of building skills in the arts and pride in the city. Thank you to all of them.

Finally – thank you to all my Board colleagues and those who serve on our Trading Company Board. They all contribute huge amounts of time and skill and we owe them all a debt of gratitude. Whilst it's invidious to pick individuals out we should say thanks to two colleagues who left us during 22-23 – to Steve Knight of the University who left us on his retirement and to Annabel Turpin of ARC who stood down as an Independent Director and Chair of our Finance Committee. They have both contributed a solid legacy and we look forward to building on it for many years to come.

**Jane Earl,**  
Independent Chair



“ We were delighted that the strength of work in the past, and our plans for the future means that our funding has increased by 24%. This funding is for 3 years from 1 April 2023. ”

## Delivering change through culture

Sunderland Culture brings together some of Wearside's most cherished cultural assets and activities and works to realise the ambition of a city brimming with creative potential. We deliver the creative programme in National Glass Centre, Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, Arts Centre Washington and The Fire Station, as well as with communities across the city.



Sunderland Culture brings together the investment of 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 registered charity and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.



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



*Rehearsals for the National Theatre Public Acts production of 'The Odyssey: The Island of the Sun'. Credit Joseph Lynn.*



## Our Partners

### Sunderland MAC Trust

This has been another wonderful year for Arts and Culture in Sunderland with so many people from the city and beyond involved as artists, participants, or audience members in the amazing range of activities that Sunderland Culture has delivered. The MAC Trust, as a founding partner, is extremely proud of what has been achieved this year and the exciting plans for the future. People of all ages and backgrounds have been inspired, involved, and entertained by world-class performances and exhibitions which have raised the level of cultural ambition in the city and continued to build pride and self-confidence among its people.

The Fire Station had so many great events that it is difficult to choose which to highlight however some of our favourites included: Sweet Dreams are Made of This: My Life in Music - An Evening with Dave Stewart when Dave came back home to celebrate his 70th birthday with family, friends and an auditorium full of fans; Shakespeare's Globe presented Julius Caesar and after the show, the murdered 'Caesar' was spotted buying a round of drinks for his 'assassins' in the next door Dun Cow pub perhaps asking "What's yours, Brute?"; An Evening with David Puttnam when the legendary film producer and former Chancellor of the University of Sunderland enthralled the audience with stories from a lifetime in movies, politics and education; sold out performances by punk poet, Dr John Cooper Clarke, and punk pioneers, The Damned; wonderful, amateur performances from National Theatre Connections, the University of Sunderland presenting Spring Awakening and the City Dance Academy presenting Looking Back and to the Future; and some exciting afternoons for the city's youngest show-goers who enjoyed Room on the Broom, The Very Hungry Caterpillar Show and The Tiger Who Came to Tea. This was certainly a 'Year to Remember'.

**Paul Callaghan, CBE, DL, FRSA,**  
Chair of Sunderland Music, Arts and Culture  
(MAC) Trust



### University of Sunderland

I want to commend Sunderland Culture for its – continuing and unwavering – commitment to the city and its cultural life. Its work promotes cultural diversity, artistic expression, and a sense of belonging. Not only that, it also seeks to engage as many people as possible, adding vibrancy to the city, at the same time as helping to shape and reshape our social fabric.

The University, as one of the founding partners of Sunderland Culture, is pleased to make a distinctive contribution to its work. Under the Sunderland Culture banner, the University's galleries, National Glass Centre and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, hosted exhibitions from an eclectic mix of artists; from the NGCA's Make Social Honey: A collective search for JOY by artist photographer Vinca Petersen, to NGC's Glass Prize exhibition that brought together the work of 42 artists from across Europe.

In addition, graduates from the Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries benefited from the career development programmes and work experience opportunities organised by Sunderland Culture across the year.

Earlier this year, the University took the difficult decision to close the NGC building at some point in the future, given the state of it and the costs that would be required to make it sustainable for the long term. We are continuing to make good progress in finding alternative locations for many of the facilities within the NGC and, in this respect, the support of Sunderland Culture has been invaluable. In the meantime, NGC will remain an important part of the University's commitment to the cultural life of the city.

All-in-all, the University's partnership with Sunderland Culture has continued to evolve over the past 12 months. For that, we are very grateful as the success of the University is not measured in academic achievement alone but also by the richness of the cultural life it nourishes, enables and promotes. To that end, our partnership with Sunderland Culture is vital and we look forward to many further years of cultural and creative success for the city and the University."

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



“

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**Paul Callaghan, CBE, DL, FRSA**

“

...the success of the University is not measured in academic achievement alone but also by the richness of the cultural life it nourishes, enables and promotes. To that end, our partnership with Sunderland Culture is vital.

”

**Sir David Bell KCB DL**

### Sunderland City Council

In my first year as Cabinet Member for Vibrant City, I am delighted to be welcomed to join Sunderland Culture's Board. 2022-2023 has been a busy year for the city's cultural venues, and the annual review spotlights the many exhibitions, events and activities that have taken place over the past 12 months.

Continuing to have opportunities for young people is one of our most important priorities, so hearing more about the Washington Area Committee funding supporting a two-year Creative You Project at Arts Centre Washington is wonderful. This is a project that can only grow and thrive in its second year. With exhibitions such as Gathering Light in Sunderland Museum and the excellent partnerships that exist with National Theatre, Sunderland Culture and the Empire Theatre, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the many staff at Sunderland Culture who work so hard to ensure residents and visitors are provided with accessible, vibrant and high quality cultural experiences right across the city.

“

The council will continue in its role as supporting partner in Sunderland Culture and as we move forward with a second phase funding bid.

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The council will continue in its role as supporting partner in Sunderland Culture and as we move forward with a second phase funding bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund to develop Sunderland Museum and Winter Gardens, alongside ambitious plans for Culture House opening in 2025, it really is a truly exciting time for culture in our wonderful city.

**Cllr John Price**  
Cabinet Member  
for Vibrant City



## Achieving our mission

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
- The Fire Station
- City programme

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

- People who live and visit Sunderland
- With a particular focus on:
- 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
- Voluntary and community organisations

A unique model for  
cultural regeneration

## Our year in figures

752,891

Visitors

754,224

Web visitors

421

Exhibitions, performances and events

985,778

Web sessions

23,228

Participants

113,749

Followers on social media

11,895

School visitors

905

Paid artist/freelance days

83

Arts Awards

47

Grants or bursaries awarded to  
artists/creative businesses

1,173

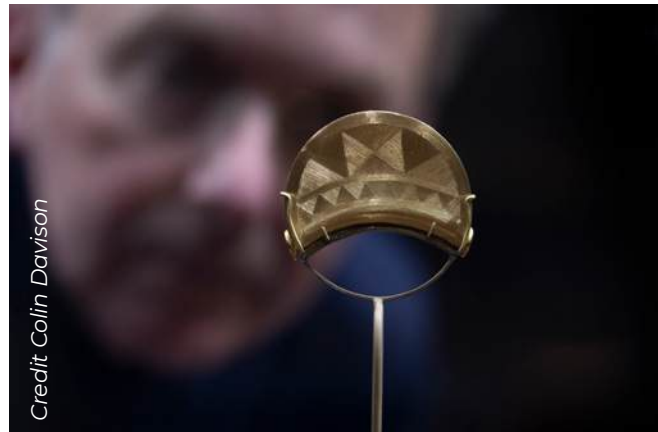
Volunteer/work experience hours



Janina Sabaliauskaitė, 'Dyke Power' from Gender Non-conforming Lesbian Visibility series, 2021, photograph. Courtesy of the artist.



## Spotlight on... Raising our ambition



Credit Colin Davison

### Gathering light: a Bronze Age golden sun

One of the most significant pieces of Bronze Age metalwork ever discovered in Britain, the Shropshire sun pendant came to Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens this year as part of The British Museum's Spotlight Loan tour. The gold bulla is over 3000 years old and was part of the Museum's 'Gathering light: a Bronze Age golden sun' exhibition which also featured Bronze Age objects from across the North East.



Credit Joseph Lynn

### Theatre Nation Partnership

As part of the Theatre Nation Partnership, Sunderland Culture began working with Sunderland Empire Theatre and the National Theatre to bring an exciting range of theatrical experiences to Sunderland audiences. This special partnership allows us to work together towards the common goal of bringing more exceptional theatre to Wearside.



'Colonial Ghost' by Pascale Marthine Tayou. Credit David Wood

### Glass Exchange

One of National Glass Centre's most ambitious projects to date, 'Glass Exchange' brought together four ground-breaking contemporary artists with some of the most highly skilled glass makers in the country to present four brand-new works across the North East. Over 24 months, artists Pascale Marthine Tayou, Katie Paterson, Monster Chetwynd and Ryan Gander worked with specialist teams at National Glass Centre to realise their ideas which were then displayed in sites ranging from Durham Cathedral to a disused shop in Sunderland's city centre.



Credit Colin Davison

### National Partners Programme

'Island: Island Life Since 1945' at NGCA was the last in our series of exhibitions as part of our three-year National Partners Programme with Arts Council Collection.

Thought-provoking and powerful, 'Island' explored the notion of island life including current debates on climate change and brought together a broad selection of artists including renowned modern British photographers such as Martin Parr, Chris Killip, Ingrid Pollard, Tacita Dean and Tony Ray-Jones. Their work was featured alongside a major new commission by John Kippin & Nicola Neate and artist-led community projects.

## Spotlight on... Investing in creative talent



### Creative Industries

Over the past year, 45 creative practitioners and organisations from across Sunderland received £1000 funding via the CLLD Creative Industries Grant to help support the growth of their business. Recipients included local musicians, sculptors and designers who used the money in a variety of ways, from buying new equipment to marketing and website design.



Jhane Wilkins, 'Anne' from Black Britain series, 2022, photographic print. Courtesy of the artist.

### Emerging artists

NGCA presented the first UK solo exhibitions of two emerging local artists. 'SENDING LOVE' by Lithuanian-born, Newcastle-based University of Sunderland graduate photographer Janina Sabaliauskaitė was a love letter to her transnational LGBTQ+ community, presenting new and existing images from her personal archive. Jhane Wilkins, also a recent University of Sunderland MA graduate, showcased two powerful new series of work - 'Black Britain' which explored Black British heritage, and 'Likkle Paradise', a photographic celebration of the Windrush generation.



### Our communities

'Amra Shobai Aikhaney' (We Are Here) at Arts Centre Washington marked 20 years of Sangini, a BAME women-led organisation with a focus on encouraging women from different communities to create, share and build stronger voices. The exhibition featured work from members of Sunderland Women's Art Group (SWAG), a collective of diverse artists, who curated and interpreted Sangini's story in their own unique way. Art works created during community workshops were also added to the exhibition throughout its duration.



### Young people

Creative You launched in summer 2022 providing opportunities for young people in Washington to get involved and to support their mental and emotional wellbeing. Sessions include Teenage Craft Club, Film Club and a Young Writers Collective which all provide spaces for young people to meet, learn and create.

In February 2023 we launched our new creative work experience programme providing an innovative insight into the world of the arts and giving young people hands on opportunities to engage with professionals working in creative industries.



## Spotlight on... Creating space for culture and creativity



### Open House

In February, The Fire Station became a fantastic centre for community arts as it staged its second 'Open House', a special showcase event celebrating the talent in our communities, and which gives a platform to performers of all ages and backgrounds. This year's event featured 19 community performance groups, comprised of over 230 participants, ranging from 5 to 85 years of age.



### Bright Lights

Arts Centre Washington also held its second 'Bright Lights Youth Arts Festival' which celebrated all the creative young people who use the arts centre. Even bigger and better than before, the event showcased performances from Washington Youth Theatre and Right Track Young Musicians Project as well as visual artists, crafters, film makers and writers.



The Festival was also the launch of the 'Bright Lights Remixed' exhibition at Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens which was co-curated by the Celebrate Different Collective, our Young Arts Leaders group (aged 13-25). The group selected artworks made by young people for previous 'Bright Lights' exhibitions, curated the show, and created new artworks inspired by their theme 'I am not up for Debate'. They also planned and delivered a successful takeover event for young people and their families in October.



### Long Loans: Young Asian Voices Community Centre

As part of the National Partners Programme with Arts Council Collection, we worked with communities and schools in Sunderland to take long loans from the Collection into different community spaces.

A display in the Young Asian Voices (YAV) community centre provided an important opportunity to bring different cultures together to integrate and interact with the artworks. The project also provided YAV with a platform to bring out the hidden talents of young people, most of whom have had little or no interaction with arts and culture, and to help them develop more provision for young people.



### Pyrex Kitchen Diner

To complement the 'Pyrex100: Made in Sunderland' exhibition at Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, a Pyrex Kitchen Diner was created in the Museum's Art Lounge featuring furniture and décor from the 1970s. Art works made by community groups and schools were displayed in the diner inspired by Pyrex patterns, alongside a Pyrex Love Stories film.



### Long Loans: Aspirations Art Gallery

At Fulwell Junior School, pupils selected and curated artworks from the Arts Council Collection to be displayed in their new 'Aspirations' art gallery at the school and two decommissioned aircraft engines by artist Roger Hiorns were installed in the school playground. The loaned art works provided inspiration for the children's own artwork, poetry and creative writing as well as a wonderful discussion point for the school community.



### Community Tour Guides

A team of tour guides were recruited from the local community to support a series of guided tours for the 'Grayson Perry Tapestries: The Vanity of Small Differences' exhibition at Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens. To help build their confidence and communication skills, the guides received training from Theatre Space North East which helped them bring the artworks to life. The team hosted bookable tours for the public, Go and See tours organised in partnership with Cultural Spring, and a special sensory tour developed for The Royal Society for the Blind.



## Arts Centre Washington

Over the past year, Arts Centre Washington delivered a varied programme of community art classes and groups, exhibitions, live performance and film screenings, welcoming more than 241,000 visitors.

Summer 2022 saw the relaunch of the Arts Centre's Craft and Makers Fair which celebrated the skill and joy of crafting with a day of craft activities and performances by members of the Centre's creative community groups.

The Centre's classes and course programme continues to grow and cater for a variety of interests and needs. Among these is Creative Age, a weekly arts group for people with dementia and their carers and those with long term health conditions.

For young people, 'Creative You' (p. 9) offers a range of events and workshops to support mental

health, build self-esteem and confidence. The project is funded by Washington Area Committee, based at Arts Centre Washington and led by Sunderland Culture in partnership with Washington Mind.

A rich and diverse theatre programme featured a variety of small-scale touring theatre and community productions such as 'Reasons You Should(n't) Love Me', Amy Trigg's remarkable debut play produced by Paines Plough, which shone a light on the difficulties finding love when living with a physical disability.

Other highlights include 'Delicate' by Jamie Beddard, produced by Diverse City, an award-winning Theatre Company committed to promoting diversity and equality in the arts, and 'Retake / Remake' by The Lawnmowers, a theatre company ran by and for people with learning difficulties.

The family theatre programme flourished, featuring adaptations like 'Hedge' by the D Project, a captivating retelling of the classic children's story 'The Secret Garden' and 'The Three Bears at Christmas' by Kitchen Zoo.

Arts Centre Washington also continues to serve as a vibrant hub for community theatre groups such as Twisting Ducks Theatre Company who this year presented their funny and poignant show 'Hopes, Hoedowns and Horizons', an original drama about leaving college when living with a learning difficulty or Autism.

2022-2023 featured an exhibition programme committed to supporting and showcasing the artistic talent of local and up and coming artists and artistic communities such as Sangini (p.9).



1. 'Reasons You Should(n't) Love Me' by Amy Trigg and Paines Plough
2. The Arts Centre's rejuvenated craft fair
3. Members of Creative Age
4. 'Spotlight: Washington Open Exhibition 2022'



“A fabulous venue, excellent for the community of Washington and people visiting from outside the area. A good variety of activities and entertainment - I would definitely recommend. (visitor)”

The 'Washington Open Exhibition 2022: Spotlight' called upon artists to creatively interpret the theme of entrances and exits, receiving an overwhelming response of over 100 entries. 40 artists were selected to exhibit their work and two artists were chosen for their first solo exhibitions at the Centre.

Sunderland Indie, a collective of local contemporary artists, brought thought-provoking exhibitions to Arts Centre Washington featuring the talents of over 90 local visual artists, musicians, and creative

writers. These included 'Earth Requiem' a creative response to the climate crisis, 'A Tale of a Few Cities' and 'A Place Unknown' where artists were encouraged to showcase work outside their usual artistic medium.

Arts Centre Washington also provided a space and platform for artists such as Kim McDermottroe, a theatre costume and puppet designer whose first exhibition 'Field Journal' transformed her sketchbook into a vibrant display of 3D models and animation.



5. 'Delicate' at Arts Centre Washington by Extraordinary Bodies. Credit Olufsen Media
6. Artwork by Kim McDermottroe from her 'Field Journal' exhibition
7. Paper Folding, Zene Making and Zentangle Design workshop with Sangini as part of the 'Amra Shobai Aikhaney' (We Are Here) exhibition

“I definitely feel more confident in a lot of different things. Yeah, it's made my dream even stronger.”

”(Bright Lights Youth Arts Festival participant at Arts Centre Washington)



## The Fire Station

In 2022-23 The Fire Station saw remarkable growth. As the pandemic's impact lessened, the venue established a strong presence in the city, delivering 153 public ticketed performances with audiences of 50,000 and ticket sales of over £1.1 million.

The Fire Station demonstrated its versatility as an exceptional venue for a variety of musical genres and cultural events.

Electrifying sold-out gigs by esteemed acts such as Public Service Broadcasting, St Etienne, The Damned, and singer/songwriter Richard Hawley, established the venue's reputation as an indie-rock hub and showcased its adaptability.

Dedicated audiences were fostered for Jazz, Folk, Blues and Americana with brilliant performances from Nu Civilisation orchestra and Ronnie Scott's All Stars, The

Unthanks and The Pitmen Poets, Joanne Shaw Clark, Brandy Clark and Cowboy Junkies among many more.

And a full season of classical music was proudly presented by the region's own world-class chamber orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, as part of an enduring partnership.

The Fire Station also presented several exceptional one-off events including 'An Evening with Dave Stewart', celebrating the Eurythmics co-founder's 70th birthday, and a special evening uniting local musicians in support of Sunderland artist Faye Fantarrow's fundraising campaign for cancer treatment.

Beyond music, the venue hosted numerous spoken word events, from rock icon PJ Harvey's reading of her ground-breaking new book to events with John Cooper Clark and Lord David Puttnam.

Sold-out comedy nights, live music performances, and captivating shows like 'Cirque The Show', 'Fastlove', 'Radio GaGa', and the Transatlantic Ensemble's rendition of Blondie's music offered diverse and engaging entertainment for all.

Theatrical highlights included 'Open House' (p.10), which showcased the talents of people from across our city, and welcoming the renowned Shakespeare's Globe for a performance of Julius Caesar.

Growth was also evident in commercial, corporate, and private hires, stemming from the broader business community and notably through a partnership with the University of Sunderland.

We were proud to see the achievements recognised in winning The Journal North East Culture Award's 'Best Museum or Cultural Venue 2022'.



6.



“ Love having such a fabulous venue in our home city. (visitor) ”

1. Rehearsals get underway for 'The Odyssey'. Credit Von Fox
2. Richard Hawley at The Fire Station. Credit Tim Grainger
3. 'Julius Caesar' by Shakespeare's Globe
4. Royal Northern Sinfonia at The Fire Station. Credit Mark Savage
5. Dave Stewart performs at his sold-out 70th birthday concert. Credit Victoria Wai
6. (This page) Ukranian band DakhaBrakha perform at The Fire Station. Credit Mark Savage

“ I can't begin to fully express the beauty that the Odyssey experience infused my life with at this very point in time. I will forever be grateful for the opportunity to be part of the experience. I can't wait for the next project. I love Sunderland! ”

(Community cast member of The Odyssey, part of National Theatre's Public Acts programme in partnership with Sunderland Culture and Sunderland Empire Theatre)



## National Glass Centre

National Glass Centre kicked off the year in spring 2022 with the opening of 'Glass Exchange' (p.8), our most ambitious project to date, developed over 24 months which celebrated Sunderland's role as a world-leading centre for artistic practice in glass and our work with artists of international standing.

The fascinating process of artistic and technical exchange throughout the project was documented in a brand-new exhibition of the same name at National Glass Centre. It was shortlisted for best exhibition at the North East Culture Awards 2022 and well received by the national arts press with features in both The Art Newspaper and The Guardian. The project was funded by Arts Council England, Art Fund, Henry Moore Foundation and the Coastal Communities Fund.

'Harvest: Fruit Gathering' opened in October and featured the work of two of Britain's leading artists working in hot glass. Rachael Woodman and Neil Wilkin have worked collaboratively for almost 40 years, however 'Harvest: Fruit Gathering' was their first opportunity to present work together and enabled both artists to express their mastery of glass as a medium, through the creation of beautiful new work inspired by the natural and spiritual world. The exhibition was initiated and toured by Ruthin Craft Centre.

Works from the exhibition were given a major national platform when they were featured alongside presenters during a BBC Breakfast broadcast from National Glass Centre in October.

The year also saw a generous donation of 366 new works to National Glass Centre from private collector Bernard Lloyd.

National Glass Centre's learning and engagement team had a busy year with 12,156 people taking part. A range of new low cost and free offers were introduced for visitors. These included 'Little Artists', a weekly drop-in for children under 5 and their carers, and a Nursery Exchange which invited nurseries across Sunderland to use the Centre's classroom space and take part in creative sessions. Free trails and scavenger hunts were also introduced for young visitors to encourage them to explore the building in new and fun ways.



1. 'Colonial Ghost' by Pascale Marthine Tayou. Credit David Wood
2. 'Requiem' by Katie Paterson. Credit Michael Davidson
3. 'The Life of St Bede' by Monster Chetwynd at Durham Cathedral. Credit David Wood
4. 'Ghost Shop' by Ryan Gander. Credit George Darrell



Continuing our commitment to ensuring National Glass Centre is welcoming and accessible to all, we worked in partnership with ESPA college (Education and Services for People with Autism) and Percy Hedley College to improve our offer for visitors with special needs and disabilities. All customer-facing staff undertook SEND awareness training and a free learning SEND backpack was created for use during visits.

Impactful relationships were also developed with Sunderland's Home Education community which led to an extremely popular new programme of artist-led and learning workshops for this ever-growing community of young people.

“A fantastic, educational venue for the whole family. Very impressed. (visitor)”



5. 'Colour Catchers' by Neil Wilkin, part of the 'Harvest: Fruit Gathering' exhibition at National Glass Centre. Credit Colin Davison
6. Participants enjoying a fused glass workshop, credit Rita Griskonyte
7. Members of the Sunderland Culture and National Glass Centre team with local guests and presenters from BBC Breakfast

“This has been the best day of my life.”

(Year 3 student from Usworth Colliery Primary School after taking part in a 9-week collaborative project at National Glass Centre)



## Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art

April 2022 saw the culmination of Vinca Petersen's solo exhibition 'Make Social Honey', an ambitious project where Petersen worked with five Sunderland-based community groups and two University of Sunderland photography students to explore, document and display the importance of creativity in the group's lives.

Over 7,000 visitors saw the exhibition, took part in events and workshops. Furthermore, 110 excluded children from the North East and 20 University students produced and displayed their own artwork within the exhibition, and 1,000 visitors produced their own 'joyful' artworks within the gallery space. Since then, Petersen's work has been included in major rehangs at the National Portrait Gallery and the V&A and acquired into national collections.

Following its opening in May, 'Island: Island Life Since 1945' (p.8) received over 9,000 visitors across the summer. As part of the exhibition,

visitors were invited to draw their own experiences of the sea, beach or coastline which were added to the gallery wall. This feature was overwhelmingly popular and welcomed by people of all ages.

As part of the NHLF funded partnership scheme SeaScapes, a group of young people from Horden worked with local artists to document and display their own art inspired by the exhibition's themes. Students from University of Sunderland also produced and displayed their own artwork alongside the exhibition as part of a three-week takeover.

Through Sunderland Culture's creative bursary, we supported Lithuanian-born, Newcastle-based photographer Janina Sabaliauskaitė (p.9) to curate the first survey exhibition in the UK of Lithuanian artist-photographer Rimaldas Vikšraitis. 'Daily Rituals of Work and Play' spanned nearly 40 years of Vikšraitis' artistic practice, from early unseen archival material and 8mm

films through to 70 photographic works, many which were shown for the first time. Photos on display explored creativity and disability, challenged gender roles and attested to 'Europe' as seen from its eastern edge in Lithuania.

An important, timely and thoughtful exhibition, 'Daily Rituals of Work and Play' was visited by nearly 7,000 visitors with an accompanying series of workshops and was featured in The Guardian, Financial Times' FT Magazine and The Eye of Photography.

In 2023 NGCA welcomed 7,500 visitors to explore a retrospective of 35 years of Mark Pinder's photographic archives covering British social and political life since 1986. 'Macromancy', which was featured as a photo story in The Guardian, told the story of the overwhelming transformation in Britain since 1979 when Margaret Thatcher came to power, with a strong emphasis on the North East of England.

As part of NGCA's audience engagement programme the exhibition successfully invited reflection and visitor connection through an interactive comment column within the gallery, as well as a series of artist talks and Q&As.



1. Janina Sabaliauskaitė, *Whoareyou x Querelle @ Sapfo Queer Feminist Festival, 2021*, photograph. Courtesy of the artist.
2. Rimaldas Vikšraitis, *Lėlės vietoj tankų / Dolls instead of Tanks, 1989*, photograph. Courtesy of the artist.
3. Jhane Wilkins, *Mr Leon* from *Likkle Paradise* series, 2022, photographic print (p.9). Courtesy of the artist.
4. #SeeMe project, part of Vinca Petersen's 'Make Social Honey' exhibition. Credit Colin Davison



Mark Pinder, 'Mission Tyne and Wear' pavilion at the 1990 Gateshead Garden Festival. Teams, Gateshead, June 1990

“An interesting visit to NGCA. Been a few times before and always something different. Learnt a lot about photography and mines this time. Will keep coming back when I'm in Sunderland. (visitor)”



## Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens

Last year Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens featured a varied exhibition and learning and engagement programme that resonated with our audiences.

April 2022 saw the last of the Arts Council Collection National Partner Programme exhibitions at the Museum and the return of the hugely popular 'The Vanity of Small Differences: Grayson Perry Tapestries'. Originally shown in Sunderland in 2013, these large-scale, colourful works comment on the English class system and chart the life of Tim Rakewell, an imaginary Sunderland born dotcom billionaire.

As part of the exhibition's learning programme, 83 pupils from Castlevue Enterprise Academy, East Rainton Primary and New Silksworth Academy worked with artist Kerry Cook on an Explore

Arts Award project inspired by the tapestries.

Another exhibition highlight was 'Football Art Prize 2022', a partnership project with Touchstones Gallery Rochdale and Museums Sheffield which featured the work of both amateur and professional artists from around the world, all inspired by football.

To accompany the exhibition, second and third-year fashion students from University of Sunderland exhibited their football kit fashion designs made for women in the Museum's Art Lounge. The students also led creative kit design workshops as part of the Museum's popular half term family events programme.

In February 2023 the Museum proudly hosted 'Gathering light: A Bronze Age golden sun' (p.8).

Shown as part of the British Museum's spotlight loan tour, the Shropshire Sun pendant is one of the most important and significant Bronze Age objects ever discovered.

The Sun Cultures project, funded by The Austin and Hope Pilkington Trust, invited community group Friends of the Drop In (FODI), International Community Organisation of Sunderland (ICOS), African and Caribbean Community Association NE and Young Asian Voices (YAV) to each respond to 'Gathering Light' by sharing stories of the sun from different cultures and creating sun themed artworks and dance.

Also inspired by the exhibition, the Older Women's Artist Collective (OWAC), a group of women artists aged 50+ living and working in



1. The Shropshire sun pendant. Credit Colin Davison
2. Sun Cultures project underway at the Museum. Credit Jessica Cornforth
3. Members of OWAC with their exhibition 'Time to Shine'. Credit Jessica Cornforth.
4. 'Football Art Prize' exhibition. Credit Colin Davison

Sunderland, created their first ever group exhibition 'Time to Shine' which was displayed in the Art Lounge.

This year, the Museum welcomed new additions through the Esme Fairbairn funded 'Pyrex 100' project, celebrating 100 years of Pyrex in Sunderland. Themed displays were introduced such as 'Joblings Art Glass', 'People's Pyrex: Made in Sunderland' and 'Decades of Pyrex – in 20th Century Sunderland'.

As part of 'Pyrex 100' many donations have been made by members of the public. The Museum also commissioned several new pieces of work for the collection including 'Pattern of Connection: Corning to Sunderland' (2022) by Eric Goldschmidt.



5. 'Grayson Perry: The Vanity of Small Differences' at Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens
6. The 'Pyrex100' project
7. Local school children working on an Arts Award inspired by the Grayson Perry tapestries.
8. 'Playing the Game' by Georgia Hayes, part of the 'Football Art Prize' exhibition.

“

The exhibitions were really fun and interesting, and curated with love. Great work and a lovely facility all round - I have come away with a positive opinion of the town in part because of the museum. (visitor)

”



## Beyond the venues

As usual, many of our projects, events and work with local communities took place beyond the walls of our venues this year. Here are just some of the highlights...



Two more artists were awarded New Encounters bursaries as part of our scheme to help artists from diverse or disabled communities realise their ambitions.

Brent Marriner, a talented dancer, spent a week with street dance artist Connor Gribben to develop skills in breakdancing which culminated in a performance for friends, family and arts professionals at The Fire Station.

Steph Robson, aka Hello Little Lady, created a new spoken word piece about her lived experience of dwarfism with the support of local poet Kirsten Luckens. Steph performed some of the work herself whilst other work was performed for her by a professional actor.



Credit: Von Fox



Credit: Von Fox

In September, Sunderland Culture took over the concourse at Park Lane Interchange with two whole days of live music from emerging and established local musicians.

Originally delayed by the COVID 19 pandemic, the event was a celebration of the Metro rail system's 40th anniversary supported by Nexus and Arts Council England and a great opportunity to showcase local and regional music talent for commuters to enjoy.

“The mentorship taught me how to project my voice, write for spoken word and have the thrill of seeing my work performed.”

(Steph Robson, New Encounters bursary recipient)



As part of our commitment to help provide creative opportunities and guidance for young people pursuing a career in the arts and cultural sector, this year we launched a Young People's Hub on our Artsfix online platform.

Designed specifically for students and young people, the hub features video case studies from people working in creative roles as well as opportunities to learn new skills and get involved in local arts groups and activities across the city.

## Reflections and looking ahead

Thank you for reading Sunderland Culture's annual review for 2022-23 and joining us to celebrate the creativity of the incredible artists, organisations and community groups we were privileged to work with during the year.

Undoubtedly, one of the key highlights of 2022, was seeing so many people return to Sunderland's cultural venues after the disruption of the previous two years. We were delighted to welcome over 750,000 visitors across the venues, with over 35,000 people taking part in creative activities from glass blowing to youth theatre, ceramics to filmmaking and music. It was particularly inspiring to see audiences take Sunderland's newest venue to their hearts, with The Fire Station welcoming over 50,000 people to music, comedy, theatre and dance in its first year and earning itself a Journal Culture Award for Best Venue.

So many of the projects that took place have sown the seeds of future opportunities - building ideas, partnerships, resources and ambitions that will take us forward over the coming years.

Our partnership with the National Theatre and Sunderland Empire goes from strength to strength. More young people from Sunderland secondary schools are now taking part in Speak Up, using theatre to build their confidence, leadership and decision-making skills. The remarkable Public Acts programme contributed to a nationwide reimagining of Homer's The Odyssey, staged in four locations across the country, including Sunderland, with performers from local communities taking centre stage. A year in the making during 22-23, our local cast performed Sunderland's episode 'The Island of the Sun' this April at The Fire Station and in August they were joined by people from around the country in an unforgettably magical finale at the National Theatre in London.

Whilst there was an inevitable touch of sadness that our wonderful 3-year National Partners Programme with Arts Council Collection had come to a close in March 2023, we are delighted that the legacy of that programme continues with artworks from this national collection on display in our communities at Fulwell Junior School and Young Asian Voices, and a new collaboration with Arts Council Collection which is enabling us to bring the incredible sculptural installations of Mike Nelson to NGCA this year.

Celebrate Different Collective, Sunderland's young curators, whose exhibition 'Where There Is Space to Grow' at Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens was shortlisted for a Journal Culture Award for Youth Achievement, continue to develop and inspire others and have been awarded the 2022 North East Regional March Award for Volunteers in Museum Learning.

Also during 2022-23, we shared the good news that Sunderland Culture had been successful in its application to Arts Council England's National Portfolio Investment Programme with increased investment of 24% per annum through to 2026. We are hugely grateful for this increase in core cultural investment in Sunderland's cultural venues which will enable us to build on the momentum and achievements of the previous four years.

Of course, there remain challenges over the coming years. In light of the news around the structural challenges facing the National Glass Centre building, we are committed to working with University of Sunderland and partners to ensure Sunderland can retain the resources, skills and heritage that have built its international reputation as one of the UK's most significant centres for glass. As Glass Exchange showed so clearly, this city is home to some of the most talented glass makers in the country.



But there is also much to look forward to. We eagerly await the construction of Culture House on Keel Square, which is set to open in 2025. And as Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens moves forward its preparations for a major redevelopment, we look forward to working with Sunderland City Council on its ambitious plans.

A huge thank you to all our supporters and funders. And we are immensely grateful for the continued support and inspiration of our founding partners - Sunderland City Council, University of Sunderland and the Sunderland MAC Trust. We remain committed to working with them all to build even more opportunities for people across the city to access great cultural experiences.

**Rebecca Ball**  
Chief Executive,  
Sunderland Culture





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



University of  
Sunderland



We are hugely grateful to our funders, partners and everyone who has supported our work during 2022-23. Your support this year 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.

Thanks to Arts Council England for its support for Sunderland Culture as a National Portfolio Organisation.



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### We wish to thank the following for their support during 2022-23:

Art Fund – Acquisition Grant to support Glass Exchange commissions and The Wild Escape grant; made possible by support from Arts Council England's National Lottery Project Grants.

Arts Council Collection

Arts Council England

Arts Council England / DCMS – Culture Recovery Fund

Arts Council England – Glass Exchange, National Partners Programme and Unlocking the Doors were supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

British Museum, with thanks to the Dorset Foundation.

Community Foundation for Tyne & Wear and Northumberland – supported by the Tyne & Wear High Sheriff Award Fund and the #iWill Fund.

Durham Benevolence

Family Arts Network

Friends of Sunderland Museum – James Wilson Bequest

Henry Moore Foundation

Helix Arts

Lithuanian Cultural Institute

Museums Association – Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund

National Trust – New Wave programme

National Theatre – via the Theatre Nations Partnership for Speak Up, and Public Acts programme, which is supported by Arts Council England's Strategic Touring Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The CareTech Charitable Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, The Mosawi Foundation, The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust and Susan Miller and Byron Grote.

NEXUS

Sunderland Local Cultural Education Partnership

Sir John Priestman Charity Trust

Sunderland City Council – Covid-19 Health Inequalities Fund, Strength & Balance Fund, Washington Area Committee – Neighbourhood Investment Fund, Coastal

Communities Fund and Sunderland Community Led Local Development Fund, part funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

The Austin & Hope Pilkington Trust

The Joicey Trust

Thriving Communities Fund - funding from the National Academy for Social Prescribing, Arts Council England, Natural England and Historic England.

Touchstones Rochdale - the Football Art Prize was supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

University of Sunderland – ERDF Graduate Internships, part funded by the European Regional Development Fund and Robson Trust Creative Internships.

Victoria and Albert Museum

Writers Guild of Great Britain

We would also like to thank Bernard Lloyd and Art Fund for their support in developing National Glass Centre's permanent collection in 2022/2023.

We are delighted that Sunderland City Council has been awarded 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:

[www.sunderlandculture.org.uk/about-us/support-us](http://www.sunderlandculture.org.uk/about-us/support-us)

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