

PRESS RELEASE

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ART FUND LAUNCHES EMPOWERING CURATORS TO STRENGTHEN MUSEUMS



Empowering Curators residency at Ashorne Hill, January 2026 © Hydar Dewachi

High-res press images available for download:

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Art Fund is today announcing details of *Empowering Curators*, a pioneering programme of Curatorial Fellowships hosted by museums and galleries across the UK.

A major five-year initiative from the national charity for museums and galleries, it will support 20 multi-year curatorial roles for senior to mid-career curators from Global Majority backgrounds.

Museums and galleries committed to nurturing diverse curatorial talent, increasing equity within their organisations, and engaging new audiences through greater representation of the communities they serve will participate in the programme and host the Curatorial Fellows.

The first host organisations and the ten new Curatorial Fellows, who are recognised for their achievements, leadership, and contributions to the field of curation, are: Autograph, London (Neicia Marsh), Chapter, Cardiff (Sim Panaser), Culture Coventry (Taniah Simpson), Glasgow Life (Nelson Cummins), Manchester Museum (Nusrat Ahmed), National Museums Liverpool (Dr Jill Sutherland), Royal Museums Greenwich, London (Hannah Cusworth and Dr Nydia A Swaby), Tate Liverpool (Carine Harmand), and The Whitworth, Manchester (Dr Christo Kefalas). Together they represent the breadth and diversity of the UK's museums and a shared commitment to creating innovative and enriching experiences for audiences.

Alongside hosting Fellows, each organisation will undertake a programme of change to advance equity, diversity and inclusion, facilitated by external experts. The Curatorial Fellows will receive tailored professional development delivered by Clore Leadership, supporting them to become exceptional candidates for senior positions at a pivotal stage in their careers. The programme empowers host organisations and Curatorial Fellows to embrace innovative approaches to curation and audience engagement, ensuring their collections and research respond to the rich and diverse world we live in.

Empowering Curators was created in response to Art Fund's 2022 report *It's about handing over power*, and developed in consultation with Museum X, Culture&, and a steering group of arts leaders from across the museums, galleries and heritage sector. The report found that previous diversity initiatives rarely focused on curatorial roles and lacked evidence-based, long-term impact – undermining the sustainability of curatorial careers for Global Majority professionals and limiting what institutions can offer their audiences.

It's about handing over power highlighted the need for collaboration between funders to support change. Alongside lead support from Art Fund, *Empowering Curators* has been made possible thanks to many funders coming together in partnership to enable the programme, including The Headley Trust, Arts Council England, Ford Foundation, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Rothschild Foundation, John Booth Charitable Foundation, Hollick Family Foundation and individual supporters.

Despite calls for change from across the sector, Arts Council England NPO data (2018-23) shows that just 6% of those working in museums identify as Black, Asian, or ethnically diverse. As reported in the Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre's State of the Nations 2024 report, this number is further reduced in management and executive positions, with most UK sector equity schemes created for entry-level roles.

The Curatorial Fellows will design and deliver exhibitions and programming and engage with local communities in their host organisations, as well as having opportunities to come together to share knowledge. Projects currently underway include:

- Carine Harmand is curating exhibitions and displays for the reopening of Tate Liverpool in 2027, as well as working with visual artist, poet and filmmaker Julianknxx on a new multidisciplinary installation co-commissioned with the International Slavery Museum.
- Dr Jill Sutherland (National Museums Liverpool) is developing interpretive approaches as part of the International Slavery Museum's redevelopment. She is working alongside Carine Harmand on the new installation by Julianknxx, in dialogue with the International Slavery Museum's collection.
- Dr Christo Kefalas is leading the Whitworth's next collections rehang exploring transcultural perspectives and developing a new collaborative MA programme with the University of Manchester.
- Neicia Marsh will be researching and co-curating a major solo exhibition at Autograph's London gallery in 2027, expanding on the organisation's long-standing commitment to photography that examines critical questions of race, rights and social justice.

- Nusrat Ahmed will lead work to embed anti-racism and social justice across Manchester Museum's practice, applying knowledge around the practices and ethics of co-curation and care from the landmark South Asia Gallery throughout the organisation.

The *Empowering Curators* steering group included: **Dr Gus Casely-Hayford OBE** (Director, V&A East); **Dr Cliff Lauson** (Director of Exhibitions, Somerset House); **Dominique Heyse-Moore** (Senior Curator of Contemporary British Art, Tate); **Salma Tuqan** (Director, Nottingham Contemporary); **Ekow Eshun** (British writer and journalist); **Miles Greenwood** (Lead Curator of Transatlantic Slavery and Legacies, International Slavery Museum, National Museums Liverpool); **Noorah Al-Gailani** (Curator of Islamic Collections [Arab World] at the British Museum), and **Péjú Oshin** (Curator, writer and cultural strategist). Their collective expertise and commitment to diversifying the artworld has shaped the *Empowering Curators* programme.

Applications to participate in the second cohort of host museums and curators will open later this year.

Jenny Waldman, Director, Art Fund, said:

"We are enormously proud and excited to launch Empowering Curators and to work with an exceptional first cohort of Curatorial Fellows and host institutions. In its inaugural year, the programme will bring some of the country's top curatorial talent into museums across the UK. Building on Art Fund's long-standing commitment to strengthening the sector by investing in people, we hope Empowering Curators can serve as a blueprint for the industry, showing how supporting the storytellers of tomorrow ensures museums reflect and inspire the diverse communities they serve. This programme has only been made possible thanks to the belief and partnership of so many funders and individuals who have come together in support, and we're incredibly grateful to them and our National Art Pass members."

Gus Casely-Hayford, Director, V&A East, said:

"Since I began my career in the arts, calls for action in the sector have long been heard but rarely answered, with talented curators lost to industries that are both more supportive and progressive. It has never been more important for this to change."

"Curators are at the forefront of cultural exchange. Through their work, audiences can imagine new worlds, understand different histories, and reflect upon the world we live in today. Empowering Curators is one step closer towards bringing about this much needed change, ensuring that the next generation of cultural leaders are reflective of the global, diverse and dynamic Britain we live in today. I am thrilled for this year's Curatorial Fellows, and I look forward to seeing the programme grow and inspire."

Hilary Carty, Executive Director, Clore Leadership, said:

"The Empowering Curators programme is of its time - strategic, ambitious, thoughtful and focussed. It draws together key sector partners, learning from the past, and contemporary perspectives, to make a sustained investment in the future of curatorial leadership. At Clore Leadership we know the

value of investing in the human-infrastructure that supports our sectors and are delighted to be partnering with Art Fund to bring forward the future."

Nelson Cummins, Curatorial Fellow at Glasgow Life, said:

"Empowering Curators represents an exciting opportunity to be part of a cohort of brilliant fellows from across the UK, the opportunity to learn from them and be a part of a group like that is an exciting one. The focus of the programme on equity and anti-racism resonated strongly with me and it's great to be a part of something that aims to make the museums sector more diverse, inclusive and equitable."

Esme Ward, Director, Manchester Museum said:

"We're so excited to be part of a broader shift towards curatorship that's grounded in values, accountability and relationship-building, opening up a new sense of what's possible. We know, from our work in recent years, the difference it can make when you create the conditions for diverse perspectives to thrive. Programmes like Empowering Curators are foundational in building a new ethics of care for participants, museums and the sector."

Empowering Curators is an Art Fund programme made possible with lead investment from Art Fund and generous support from The Headley Trust, Arts Council England, Ford Foundation, Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, Rothschild Foundation, John Booth Charitable Foundation, Hollick Family Foundation and individual supporters. Fundraising is continuing to ensure the programme's longevity and long-term impact.

For media enquiries and further information, contact:

Zosia Gamgee, Communications Manager, Art Fund
zgamgee@artfund.org / +44 (0) 20 7225 4800

High-res press images available for download:

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Art Fund

Art Fund is the national charity for museums and galleries. For over 120 years, it has helped institutions across the UK to develop and share their collections, invest in people and expertise, grow their audiences and inspire the next generation.

Art Fund connects museums and people with great art and culture through funding, advocacy and initiatives, because access to art is vital for a healthy society. It champions the sector through the prestigious Art Fund Museum of the Year award - the world's largest museum prize - and supports museum professionals through dedicated training and grant programmes.

Independent and people-powered, Art Fund is supported by 142,000 members who buy a National Art Pass, as well as generous contributions from individuals, trusts and foundations. The National Art Pass offers free or discounted entry to over 1,000 museums, galleries and historic

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