

PRESS RELEASE

***Ode to the Midlands* launches ambitious cross-regional digital arts programme supporting six Midlands artists**

Contemporary Visual Arts Network East Midlands (CVAN EM) and Contemporary Visual Arts Network West Midlands (CVAN WM) are proud to announce the artist and organisation partnerships for *Ode to the Midlands (OttM)*, a major new cross-regional programme investing in artists, organisations, and audiences across the Midlands through digital contemporary art.

The six commissioned artists and their commissioning organisation pairings are: Aisling Ward with British Ceramics Biennial; Andy Harper with Meadow Arts; Kim Thompson with Herefordshire Museums & Galleries; Antonio Roberts with Film and Video Umbrella; Marley Starskey Butler with Arts Collective; and Natasha Taheem with Hub.

OttM brings together six organisations across the East and West Midlands to support six mid-career artists from Global Majority, Disabled, Deaf and/or Neurodivergent backgrounds to create ambitious new digital artworks exploring the cultural, historic, and geographical identities of the Midlands. Commissions will be developed and delivered May 2026 – March 2027.

OttM responds to long-standing underinvestment in the Midlands' visual arts ecology by strengthening regional connectivity, creative opportunity, and public engagement through inclusive digital practice.

The programme is led collaboratively by CVAN EM and CVAN WM, hosted respectively by New Art Exchange (NAE) in Nottingham and DASH in the West Midlands.

OttM is funded by the National Lottery through [Arts Council England](#).

The Ode to the Midlands Advisory Group

Commissioned artists were selected collaboratively by OttM commissioning organisations alongside the OttM Advisory Group. The Advisory Group has played a central role in shaping the programme's artist-centred and equitable approach to commissioning, ensuring that selection processes reflect the values, experiences, and diversity of the Midlands' contemporary visual arts communities.

Made up of Midlands-based artists, arts workers, and audience representatives with diverse expertise and lived experience, the Advisory Group supported equitable and collaborative decision-making. CVAN EM and CVAN WM would like to thank Advisory Group members Amrit Doll, [Christopher Samuel](#), Nahashon Kimata, Tierra Davis, [Ayesha Jones](#), [Farwa Moledina](#), [Kevin Hunt](#) and [Tanya Raabe-Webber](#) for their insight, care, and commitment throughout the selection process. Working closely with Advisory Group Facilitator [Ania Bas](#) and Project Manager Colette Griffin, the group has contributed critical perspectives on inclusion, representation and accessibility.

Connecting the Midlands through digital art

At the centre of OttM is a unique cross-regional commissioning model that pairs artists with organisations from neighbouring Midlands regions, encouraging collaboration, knowledge exchange, and new relationships across the sector.

The programme supports artists not only through commissions, but also through mentoring, peer learning, access funding, editorial writing, and professional development. Alongside artist support, OttM invests in organisational development and sector sharing, helping partner organisations build confidence and capacity around equitable and accessible digital commissioning.

Commissions may take the form of exhibitions, performances, installations, web-based projects, participatory experiences, moving image, sound, creative coding, AI-based work, or hybrid digital installations. Projects can be presented online, in galleries, and in public spaces, expanding access for rural, Disabled, and time-poor audiences.

OttM will also deliver a free public workshop programme in partnership with regional universities, designed to build digital skills, encourage experimentation, and confidence in new technologies and inclusive creative practice.

In partnership with [Corridor8](#), the programme will additionally commission critical and creative writing from Midlands-based arts writers, amplifying regional voices and generating reflective responses to the commissioned works.

Platforming voices in digital practice

Grounded in the values and expertise of programme hosts NAE and DASH, OttM prioritises artists historically excluded from digital and immersive arts practice, creating new pathways for visibility, experimentation, and sustainable career development.

CVAN EM is hosted by [New Art Exchange](#), the UK's largest gallery dedicated to contemporary visual arts from the Global Majority. CVAN WM is hosted by [DASH](#), a Disabled-led visual arts organisation championing Disability Arts and equitable access across the sector.

Artist Biographies

Aisling Ward (with British Ceramics Biennial)

Aisling Ward is an artist and curator from Ilkeston, Derbyshire. Their practice explores industrial heritage, landscape and collective memory through film, sound and performance. Drawing on often overlooked histories of labour and land, their work connects local places and the people rooted in them to broader questions of power, resistance, and ecology.

Instagram: [@aislingward](#)

Website: www.aislingward.com

Andy Harper (with Meadow Arts)

Andy Harper is a visual artist working with light, sound, and responsive systems to create immersive spatial installations. Using real-time technologies, his work explores perception, presence, and shared experience. Rooted in accessibility and material histories, he develops environments that audiences can inhabit physically and collectively.

Instagram: [@isandyharper](https://www.instagram.com/isandyharper)

Website: www.andyharper.co.uk

Kim Thompson (with Herefordshire Museums & Galleries)

Kim Thompson is a Nottingham-based artist working in painting and illustration. Drawing on her dual Jamaican/British heritage, Kim's work explores intergenerational narratives and the contributions of diverse communities to cultural life in the UK. A 'UK New Artist of the Year' finalist, Kim's community-focused practice seeks to create meaningful public engagement across the Midlands and beyond.

Instagram: [@kimthompson.art](https://www.instagram.com/kimthompson.art)

Website: www.kimthompsonart.com

Antonio Roberts (with Film & Video Umbrella)

Antonio Roberts is an artist, musician and curator based in Birmingham, UK. His practice is concerned with how the misuse of digital technology impacts people of colour and other marginalised groups.

His recent work focuses on the depiction of Black people in digital media, ranging from stereotypical misrepresentations in early video games to modern algorithms and AI codifying existing biases.

Instagram: [@hellocatfood](https://www.instagram.com/hellocatfood)

Website: www.hellocatfood.com

Marley Starskey Butler (with Arts Collective)

Marley Starskey Butler is an interdisciplinary artist and qualified social worker, currently undertaking a PhD in Art and Design at the Birmingham School of Art.

Their practice interweaves storytelling, memory, and emotional landscapes to explore how people make meaning of personal and collective narratives within systems of care.

Instagram: [@marleystarskeybutler](https://www.instagram.com/marleystarskeybutler)

Website: www.marleystarskeybutler.co.uk

Natasha Taheem (with Hub)

Natasha Taheem works across drawing, printmaking and material led processes. Her work explores desire, expectation and social structures through large scale graphic drawings and print based works informed by Indian wood block printing traditions, alongside a growing interest and exploration in

natural dye, ink and pigment making. Her work is playful and warm, holding humour alongside frustration, resistance and joy.

Growing up as a British Punjabi woman in Birmingham continues to shape her practice, which looks at patriarchal structures, domestic and public life, and queer expression. Drawing becomes a way of processing lived experience, working through emotion and dreaming new possibilities into being.

Instagram: [@Natasha.Taheem](https://www.instagram.com/Natasha.Taheem)

Website: www.natashataheem.com

Partner Biographies

British Ceramics Biennial (BCB), based in Stoke-on-Trent, uses clay to inspire social and creative change. BCB supports innovative ceramics through artist commissions, learning and community projects, culminating in the UK's largest contemporary ceramics biennial. Initiated in 2009, BCB is proud to collaborate with artists, organisations, and communities to deliver exhibitions and public events.

Instagram: [@britishceramicsbiennial](https://www.instagram.com/britishceramicsbiennial)

Website: www.britishceramicsbiennial.com

Born in 2001, **Meadow Arts** has evolved to become an important part of the creative landscape across Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire. Meadow Arts collaborates with highly regarded heritage organisations, historic sites, museums and universities to present contemporary art projects in unexpected, often rural places, that encourage new ideas and expands horizons.

Instagram: [@meadowarts](https://www.instagram.com/meadowarts)

Website: www.meadowarts.org

Herefordshire Museums & Galleries connect people with Herefordshire's cultural and natural heritage through collections spanning fine art, archaeology, social history, costume, and natural sciences. We care for three sites, Old House Hereford, History Store, and Hereford Museum and Art Gallery, which is currently undertaking a major redevelopment project.

Website: www.herefordshire.gov.uk/things-to-do/history-lives-here

Film and Video Umbrella (FVU) commissions, produces and curates artists' moving-image works, presenting them in collaboration with galleries and cultural partners throughout the UK and internationally. We enable artists to make challenging and ambitious projects, from multi-screen installations to online commissions, promoting innovation through supporting new and significant voices.

Instagram: [@filmvidumbrella](https://www.instagram.com/filmvidumbrella)

Website: www.fvu.co.uk

Arts Collective is a non-profit organisation dedicated to supporting artists and providing free public education on contemporary art in Northampton. Working across exhibitions, commissions, local archives, residencies, studios, performances, learning activity, and food-led programmes, the organisation collaborates closely with artists and communities to redefine how contemporary art is made, shared, and experienced.

Instagram: [@artscollectivenn](https://www.instagram.com/artscollectivenn)

Website: www.artscollectivenorthampton.org

Based in a repurposed seed warehouse, the **Hub** is a nationally significant arts centre featuring the UK's largest contemporary craft and design gallery. We offer a diverse year-round programme of exhibitions, workshops, dance, and festivals. With a curated shop and sustainable CaféBar, we connect local communities and visitors through our programmes.

Instagram: [@hubsleaford](https://www.instagram.com/hubsleaford)

Website: www.hub-sleaford.org.uk

About CVAN EM & CVAN WM

CVAN EM & CVAN WM are the free-to-access Contemporary Visual Arts Networks for the East and West Midlands, working as part of the national [CVAN network](#). We advocate for contemporary visual arts in the regions by supporting artists, arts workers, and organisations through paid opportunities, critical programming, and partnership working, while driving policy change to ensure a sustainable and vibrant sector.

Both networks are guided by diverse Steering Groups of arts professionals including artists, technicians, writers, curators, producers, academics and access support workers.

CVAN EM Instagram: [@cvaneastmidlands](https://www.instagram.com/cvaneastmidlands)

CVAN WM Instagram: [@cvanwestmidlands](https://www.instagram.com/cvanwestmidlands)

CVAN EM Website: www.cvaneastmidlands.co.uk

CVAN WM Website: www.cvanwestmidlands.co.uk

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