

Visual Arts Organisations Call New Government to Action



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The visual arts and visual artists enrich the nation's cultural fabric, drive economic growth, foster community cohesion, enhance education, support mental wellbeing, and promote international cultural exchange.

Yet our galleries, studios, museums, and visual artists face significant challenges that hinder their ability to survive and thrive. From education and freelance work to artificial intelligence and fair pay, our policy asks to address the challenges the visual arts and artists face and provide a roadmap to sustain the visual arts for the long term.



Why the Visual Arts is critical to society:

- The sector significantly contributes to the UK's £126 billion creative industries, generating jobs and attracting tourism, while visual artists lead in creative innovation, influencing various industries with the arts sector alone contributing £49 billion.¹
- Community engagement projects and public art enhance social cohesion and local pride, while participation in the arts supports mental health and wellbeing.
- Educationally, visual arts nurture essential skills like creativity and critical thinking, preparing individuals for diverse future opportunities and offering lifelong learning experiences.
- Internationally, visual arts facilitate cultural exchange and bolster the UK's cultural diplomacy, enhancing national prestige. Supporting visual arts is essential for a vibrant, innovative, and inclusive society.
- The UK Visual Art Market is worth £9.7 billion and is one of the largest in the world, and plays a key role in attracting high-value cultural tourism.²
- The visual arts are instrumental in shaping the UK's global recognition and soft power.³ British artists, from Tracey Emin to Banksy, Yinka Shonibare to Lubaina Himid, are among the most well known in the world, and those at all career stages are often invited to exhibit abroad, take part in exchanges and residences.
- Visual Arts attendees are younger than those of most other art forms. Visual Arts audiences more closely reflect the ethnic makeup of the English population.

Our collective manifesto outlines the key areas where the UK Government can take action to create a more sustainable visual arts sector.

1. The arts in the UK: Seeing the big picture, available [here](#)

2. British Art Market Federation, *The British Art Market in 2023*. Available [here](#)

3. British Council research, available [here](#)

1. Supporting freelance artists and visual arts workers

The UK's creative industries provide 2.46 million jobs and had an estimated GVA of £126 billion in 2022, with the arts sector alone contributing £49 billion with most visual artists and many people working in the visual arts working as freelancers or self-employed. Despite their essential role in this success, visual artists are among the lowest-earning workers in the creative industries. The UK's freelance visual arts workforce need fairer pay and better structures to support and understand the challenges they face.

Shorter term

- Establish the Smart Fund to create new collective licensing revenue for artists, writers, performers and directors when their copyright protected works are copied, shared, or distributed, across digital devices that could bring in up to £300 million a year for creators, as endorsed by the Culture, Media and Sport Committee Creator Remuneration report.
- Establish and appoint a Freelancer Commissioner to advocate for the needs and interests of freelance visual artists and creative workers within the government and across departments as recommended by the Culture, Media, and Sport Committee in their Creator Remuneration report.



Everton Wright in his Acme studio at High House, 2014
© Hugo Glendinning, Image Courtesy Acme Archive.



Caroline McCarthy in her Acme studio at Robinson Road, 2006

© Hugo Glendinning, Image Courtesy Acme Archive.

- Include visual artists' needs in solutions for robust regulation of AI that complies with copyright law and incentivises human creativity whilst providing artists with consent, control and compensation for use of their works in AI training and applications.

Longer term:

- Incorporate exhibition payments and fees for activities, including performances, workshops and artist talks, into copyright law, as demonstrated in the a-n Exhibition Payment Guide to ensure fair compensation for artists exhibiting their work.
- Implement a grace period for disabled freelancer artists or visual arts workers whose income temporarily exceeds benefit thresholds. To provide financial stability and security for disabled artists, encouraging their continued participation in the arts.

It's time we speak with:

- Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- Department for Science, Innovation and Technology
- Department for Work and Pensions

2. Invest in creative education

A curriculum focused on creativity will cultivate a new generation of artists, creators, and innovators, fostering skills such as writing, design, careful visual observation, and the ability to critically analyse what we see. It encourages individual perspectives and the excitement of personal discovery, while understanding how others perceive things differently and recognising image manipulation enhances critical thinking, empathy, communication, listening, and oracy skills.

Shorter term

- Recognise and invest in the power of the creative arts and creative skills that fuel entrepreneurship and commercialism across the UK economy. Stop pitting degrees and skills against each other.
- Review the National Curriculum, increasing the availability of creative subjects and reform the EBaccalaureate to include them to ensure the pipeline of skills and knowledge to secure the future of the UK's £126 billion creative industries.
- Integrate visual literacy into the national curriculum at Key Stage 2 as a core component of the arts and design curriculum to help children navigate and understand our visually dominated world and media and increase accessibility to learning for children including special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).
- Provide funding to ensure that every schoolchild visits a cultural organisation annually as part of the national curriculum.

It's time we speak with:

- Department of Education
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport

3. Recognising the international power of UK visual arts

The visual arts are vital to the UK's international presence. Over 18 million tourists a year visit our museums and galleries helping sustain the UK's £ 237billion tourism industry. Visual artists and exhibitions are a crucial part of this ecosystem but there are alternatives to helping fund the visual arts that do not rely on government alone.

Shorter term

- Implement a new creative and cultural agreement with the EU, enabling reciprocal freedom of movement for artists and other creative workers, enhancing international collaboration and opportunities for UK artists.

- Rejoin Creative Europe. Prior to the UK's departure from the European Union (EU), the country's artists and creative professionals were eligible to participate in the Creative Europe programme. Between 2014 and 2018, the Creative Europe Desk UK awarded €89.5 million to 376 UK-based creative organisations and audiovisual companies.

Longer term

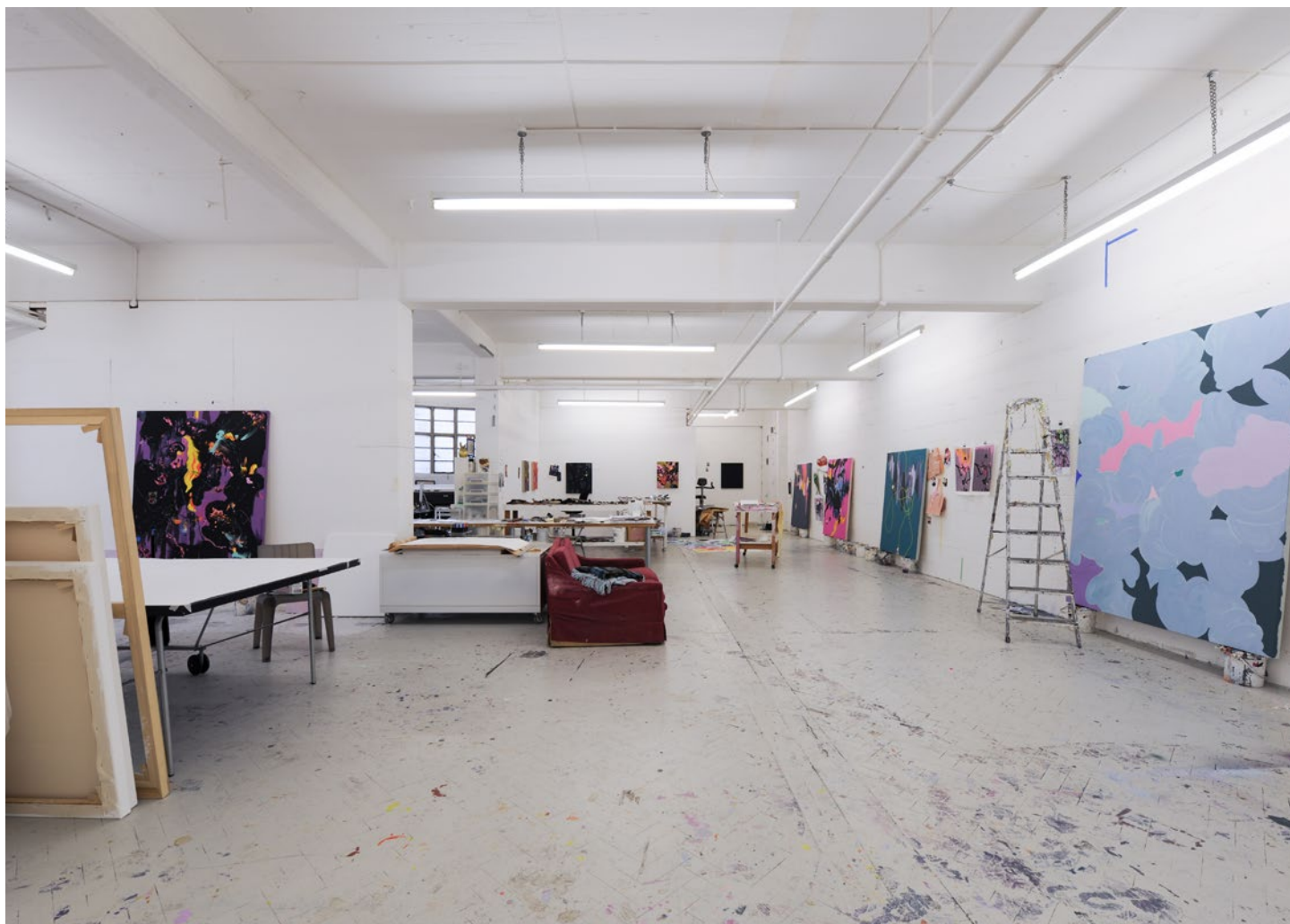
- Protect and expand free entry to museums and galleries to enable UK and international visitors to engage with the UK's visual arts, artists and cultural institutions.
- Promote philanthropy through tax incentives to diversify arts funding and provide long-term income not reliant on government.

It's time we speak with:

- Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- HM Treasury



Pogus Caesar in his studio.
Photo: Chris Waggott



Fiona Rae in her Acme studio at Orsman Road, 2011
© Hugo Glendinning, Image Courtesy Acme Archive.

4. Increase sustainable investment to enable more visual arts places and spaces

The visual arts and artists need space to create, exhibit and engage. Without access to sustainable buildings and spaces that are crucial for experimentation, development, peer learning and engaging audiences, we risk undermining access to creativity, that provides the pipeline of new work for both the public and commercial sectors. Many artist-led spaces provide community engagement projects and public art enhances social cohesion and local pride. The built environment and property sector should be supported to work with visual arts and the creative industries to find cross-sector solutions that can help develop and sustain local areas.

Shorter term

- An urgent review of local authority funding to enable local authorities to support and invest in their local cultural organisations.

- Retain and expand the Museum Gallery Exhibition Tax Relief to include performance and live art, digital online exhibitions, sales of work, and educational activity. Adapt the scheme to remove the barriers for local authority museums and galleries to be eligible. Expanding the scope of MGETR would help generate additional revenue to support exhibition-related activity that would otherwise struggle for resources.
- Commission a review to reduce emissions associated with freighting, storing, and exhibiting objects.

Longer term

- Invest in new funding to support the grassroots visual arts ecosystem, including affordable studios, artist-run spaces, and collectives.
- Affordable creative workspace and cultural infrastructure should be given its own asset class in planning regulations to recognise the unique characteristics and performance of artist workspaces that are distinct from other commercial uses, ensuring a more inclusive built environment and reflecting the contribution of artists and makers to the UK's national and local culture and economy.
- Adapt S106 Clauses to promote the adoption of planning policy and building specifications based on end-user needs, so that artist spaces and buildings can be adopted in masterplans and embedded in communities in a more sustainable and financially viable way.
- Explore the potential of a Tourist Levy to fund culture. Combined and local authorities have, for some time, been exploring opportunities for generating income through new revenue streams, with many areas considering the introduction of a Tourist Levy - that any income generated through it be ring-fenced for investment in arts organisations and cultural projects, both of which drive tourism.

It's time we speak with:

- Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities



Fernando Palma Rodriguez in his Acme studio at Childers Street, 2011
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and art together



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Get in touch

We are a group of visual arts organisations at the forefront of working in the visual arts and on behalf of visual artists in the UK.

We are keen to speak about the policy issues and solutions and can put you in touch with other organisations listed below.

Please contact us: **communications@dacs.org.uk**

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