

# ART HISTORY FESTIVAL 2025

Evaluation and  
impact report



# Art History Festival 2025

## Evaluation and impact report

### Introduction

The Art History Festival is designed to bring the richness of art history to a public audience, to get people enthused about the subject, and to increase awareness that the experiences we enjoy with works of art are produced and presented by those who study art history.

Inaugurated in 2021, the Art History Festival is a free, UK-wide event staged annually with participating galleries, museums, and individuals over one week in September. Organised and promoted by the Association for Art History, the festival comprises free public events, including talks, tours, workshops, and family activities (in-person, live online, or recorded), presented by the Association or partner organisations. Events reflect or offer interpretations of the festival theme and bring people together to explore and celebrate the histories of art, design and architecture. The festival goes from strength to strength, growing from 3,700 attendees and 15 partners in its inaugural year to **43,256 attendees** and **117 partners** in 2025.

**The 2025 Art History Festival was generously supported by The National Gallery Trust.**

# 2025 Overview

7 days – 15-21 September

Theme: Art and Nature

43,256 attendees

137 listings comprising 121 events  
and 16 exhibitions

117 partner organisations

26 individual contributors

65 new partners

Events held in England, Scotland,  
Wales and Northern Ireland



## Festival identity

The 2025 Festival theme, **Art and Nature**, celebrated the deep connections between the natural world, creativity, and wellbeing. It provided a broad, inclusive framework for partners to showcase art from diverse cultures and periods that draw on nature, respond to the environment, or work in synergy with it. In a time of conflict and global crises, the theme invited audiences to explore how art and nature can soothe, heal, centre, and uplift individuals, while restoring communities and prompting reflection on sustainability and our shared responsibility to the planet.

### Partner comments:

*"The Art and Nature theme was really apt and a great way of foregrounding the broader value of art history."*

*"The theme gave organisations a chance to champion sustainability, nature and access to green spaces within artistic and creative practices."*

*"The theme was appealing to a wider audience, who might not normally be engaged with art."*

## Diversity

This year's Festival welcomed a broad and diverse audience, with 10% of attendees from global majority backgrounds and 11% reporting an impairment, health condition or learning difference.

Family focused events and a strong online strand (20% of events, attracting 16% of the Festival's audience) broadened access and reduced participation barriers.

The 2025 Festival included events exploring non Western art, work by artists from the global majority and those with protected characteristics, and sessions engaging with colonial and imperial histories.

We are committed to an inclusive Festival in which a wide range of people see themselves reflected and feel invited to take part. We will continue our work to ensure the Festival is representative, accessible and welcoming through programming shaped by varied backgrounds, perspectives and lived experiences.



## Partnerships and geographical reach

From the National Galleries of Scotland to Cyfarthfa Castle and Museum in Wales, and from the Northern Ireland War Memorial Museum to Tate Britain in London, a total of 117 museums, galleries and cultural venues across all four nations of the UK featured in the Festival. Organisations from the USA also took part.

The festival programme can be found [here](#).

## Attendance

The festival attracted **43,256 attendees**. This total consists of attendees at events and exhibitions included as part of the festival.

## Organisation of the festival

86% of partners rated the Festival team's support and helpfulness, as well as the Festival resources, as excellent or good.

## Festival website

For 2025, we developed a new festival website, enabling participants to search for events by place, date, event type, or audience category, and for organisations to sign up as partners and upload event details. 76% found the website to be excellent or good, and improvements are planned for 2026.

## Bloomberg Connects

The festival programme was made available on Bloomberg Connects, and partners were invited to contribute short videos for the platform, spotlighting their contributions to the festival.



## Impact for attendees

We are achieving our aim of increasing awareness of and interest in art history and its connection to the visual and material arts.

- 80% of attendees said the event had sparked an interest in the event's subject
- 76% made a connection between art history and the subject of the event they attended
- 59% of attendees said the event they attended sparked an interest in art history
- 58% of attendees now have a stronger awareness of what art history is

We are successful in promoting the personal and social relevance of art history.

- 66% had an increased understanding of the topic's relevance to everyday life
- 65% made a connection between the topic and wider contemporary issues
- 53% made a connection between the topic and their own life

The Festival supports wellbeing by raising mood through lifelong learning and the enjoyment of art and art history.

- 94% learnt something new
- 84% said they now felt inspired to find out more about the topic of the event
- 77% felt that attending the event improved their sense of well-being or mood

### Attendee comments:

*"It's an annual event that I really look forward to, and through it, my interest in Art History, which has always been there, has grown exponentially."*

*"I've never been to an event quite like this before. Ultimately, museums are meant to be there for connection and community, and coming today made me feel connected."*

*"I enjoyed learning something new, looking at something from a new perspective, listening to an expert talk about art and sculpture from a geological and spiritual angle."*

## Forging new audiences for art history

We are reaching audiences who are new to art history, while also raising awareness of art history among those who enjoy art, but have not studied our subject.

- 22% of attendees were new to art history
- 35% of attendees go to galleries, read or watch TV about art, but have not studied it
- 15% have attended informal art history courses
- 26% studied art history and or work in an art history-related career
- 2% are parents of young people potentially interested in studying art history or in a career in this area

## Why festival partners get involved

Our partners share our commitment to promoting the subject of art history to public audiences.

- 77% of partners aimed to raise awareness of the art history content that informs their organisation's work
- 74% said that raising awareness of art history (and its value) was an objective of their event
- 96% of partners felt it was important that the event was part of the Art History Festival, and 67% organised their event specially for the Festival

Partners also get involved to strengthen their own organisation's profile and reach and to develop new relationships.

- 18% aimed to engage a new audience
- 18% aimed to raise the profile of their organisation or work
- 15% sought to establish new relationships with cultural partners or communities

### Partner comments:

*"We hoped that being part of a national festival would help us reach audiences from beyond our local area. In this, we were successful."*

*"We wanted to engage people with art history as a way of critically thinking about the world."*

The Festival aims to give museums, galleries and arts institutions a boost through collective promotion, with smaller organisations benefiting from this connection to national institutions. Partners reported a positive impact.

- 95% felt that being part of the wider Festival brought their organisation to the attention of audiences who might not have been aware of them previously.
- 90% felt that taking part raised the profile of their organisation
- 81% of partners saw an uplift in attendance due to being part of the festival (a key goal for 43% of partners)

**Partner comments:**

*“One man said he wouldn't normally come to an art gallery, but found it really interesting and will visit again.”*

*“Attendees noted enjoying participating in workshops, doing things that they had never heard of before.”*

*“Having the seascape as a form of inspiration encouraged people who had never painted or hadn't painted in years to join in with the activity. Even people who came alone wanted to stay, sit outside, enjoy the sunshine and paint for hours. It encouraged inter-generational collaboration, grandparents, and grandchildren, which I was very proud to see.”*



## Marketing and publicity

We provided museums and galleries with broad public visibility, strong engagement, and a proven platform for attracting audiences to our Festival.

- **2025 campaign**  
reached over 500,000 people, helping build awareness of the Festival programme and supporting footfall across partner venues.
- **Instagram**  
delivered 419,499 organic views.
- **Facebook**  
achieved 90,973 views and 4.7k link clicks.
- **LinkedIn**  
activity reached over 20,000 users.

- **Email**  
remained a key driver of engagement, with our September e-newsletters achieving a 37% open rate and up to 9% click through, showing sustained interest in festival events and partner activities.
- **Press coverage**  
generated an additional 125,000 opportunities to hear about the Festival, including national exposure in *Country Life* and *This England*, helping us reach audiences well beyond our immediate digital community.



# Art History Festival 2026

## Call for Events

### 5–11 October 2026

Planning is underway for the Art History Festival 2026, celebrating the full breadth of art history across periods, places and approaches.

We welcome **events of all kinds, for audiences of all ages** – from curator talks and behind-the-scenes demonstrations to hands-on workshops and imaginative new formats.

We are committed to **an inclusive Festival** in which a wide range of people see themselves reflected and feel invited to take part. We invite programming that is representative, accessible, and welcoming, shaped by varied backgrounds, perspectives, and lived experiences.



Although the 2026 Festival has no overarching theme, we are offering two optional areas for partners to draw on when developing their events. These are prompts for inspiration – there is no obligation to follow them.

## 1 Youth-focused events

As part of our commitment to inspiring the next generation, we are spotlighting the option to host sessions for 13–18-year-olds and their adults. Youth events may be fast-paced and pop culture-inspired, or slower and reflective – the key is that they help young people see art history as alive, relevant and open to them. This invitation sits alongside, not above, the wider programme.

## 2 Making & Materials

Our optional 2026 strand, Making & Materials, invites proposals that illuminate the processes and material transformations behind art making. From tools and techniques to pigments, fibres, metals and clays, we welcome events that reveal the craft, science and stories embedded in the making of art.

The above two recommendations are entirely optional – offered as a prompt for partners who enjoy working with a shared focus.

### Any topic, any period, any approach

- Any audience – all warmly encouraged
- Youth sessions are highly welcomed
- Optional theme: Making & Materials

### Priorities for 2026

- Create an enticing offer for young people, showing the contemporary relevance of art history to their lives, interests and concerns.
- Increase the offering of events in the North of England, where there is reduced access to art history education.
- Increase the number of partners in key cities, including Glasgow, Belfast, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield and their immediate environs.

### Partner suggestions for improvement:

*"It would be helpful to emphasise how art history promotes visual literacy, empathy and critical thinking. Studying/participating in art history builds confidence and greater awareness of our place as interpreters of this world."*

*"Increase the volume of activity at each venue to create more of a critical mass - ours felt like a one-off."*

*"Is there any way it could be timed to coincide with the start of the academic year, so students are more likely to come, perhaps over a weekend? The daytime slot for my event limited attendance, I think."*

## Organisations that took part in 2025

Albion Millennium Green	Farfield Mill	Museum of the Home	Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery
Alfred Cohen Museum	Gaelle Moore	National Galleries of Scotland	Shropshire Museums & Archives
Amalia Pica	Galerie Betty Charles	National Gallery of Art, DC	Sotheby's Institute of Art, London
Art Laughs	Gibberd Gallery	National Museums Liverpool	St Mary's University
Art UK	Glasgow Museums Resource Centre	New Art Gallery, Walsall	TAFETA
Artiq	Goldsmith's College	Newcastle University	Tate Britain
Arts Society Grantham	Guernsey Museum and Art Gallery	Newry and Mourne Museum	The Arts Society Knole
Ashmolean	Guildhall Art Gallery, City of London Corporation	Norfolk and Norwich Art Circle	The Bluecoat
Athena Art Foundation	Harlow Art Trust	Northern Ireland War Memorial Museum	The Box
Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art	Hatton Gallery, North East Museums	Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery	The Burrell Collection
Bethlem Museum of the Mind	HENI	Nxt Gen	The Courtauld Institute of Art
Birkbeck College, Peltz Gallery	Hogarth's House	Orleans House Gallery	Design Museum London
Bloomsbury Publishing	Hundred Heroines Museum	Pangolin London	Fitzwilliam Museum
British Museum	Imperial War Museum	Pannett Art Gallery	The Garden Museum
Castlefield Gallery	Just FACT	Pensychnant Foundation	The Museum of English Rural Life
Christie's Education	Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum	Perth Art Gallery	The National Gallery
City Art Centre Edinburgh	Kettle's Yard	Pier Arts Centre, Orkney	University College London
City Lit	Larne Museum & Arts Centre	Pigfoot Theatre	University of Dundee Museums
Civic Square	Leeds Art Gallery	Portraits of Recovery	University of Leeds
Culture Perth and Kinross	Leighton House Museum	Randle Centre	University of Reading Art Collection
Cyfarthfa Castle and Museum	Lillie Art Gallery	Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery	V&A Academy
De La Warr Pavilion	Linklaters	Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh	Vincent and Frida Ltd
Deptford People's Heritage Museum	London Borough of Richmond Arts Service	RWA Art Gallery	Walker Art Gallery
Dovecot Studios	London Fieldworks	School of Advanced Study, University of London	Wallace Collection
Down County Museum	MAC, Midlands Arts Centre	Science Museum	Warburg Institute
Dumfries Museum	Manchester International Festival	Scottish Society for Art History	Watts Gallery
East Dunbartonshire Leisure & Culture Trust	MIMA	Sheffield Museums Trust	Whitechapel Gallery
Eco Birmingham	Mitchell Library		Whitworth Art Gallery
Esea Contemporary	Munnings Art Museum		William Morris Society
Estorick Collection			Women and Theatre
Fallingwater, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy			

Additionally, 26 independent contributors took part, including artist Hew Locke and media personalities Lucy Siegle, James Fox and Will Gompertz.



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