

For immediate release: Tuesday 23 October 2018

## Barbican hosts a day of free activities for Sky Arts' Art 50, examining British identity today

Announced today is *Barbican OpenFest: Art 50*, a day of free activities showcasing works created as part of Art 50, a collaboration between Sky Arts, the Barbican, Sage Gateshead and the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts.

This groundbreaking project commissioned 50 artists from a variety of artistic disciplines to examine the question of what it means to be British today from the varied perspectives of people in cities, towns and rural communities across the UK.

Commissions being showcased at the Barbican range across art forms and include highlights such as:

- The debut of Ivor Novello award-winning composer **Nitin Sawhney's** new work in response to Brexit, which considers the state of the nation based on his findings from a tour of UK towns and cities
- Award-winning poet **Lemn Sissay's** *Constitution for the UK*, exploring the possibility of a 'new charter' for the UK
- Olivier Award-winning **Boy Blue's** *REBEL*, a new dance and film production incorporating music, dance and performance poetry that captures the opinions, hopes and fears of young people from London
- *The Britbot*, an AI computer workshop created by **Libby Heaney**, programmed on the British citizenship test
- A pop-up cinema of films and animation shorts, including **Matty Crawford's** *His England* which follows a young Asian British boy questioning his home and identity
- Writers including **Paul McVeigh, Dreda Say Mitchell** and **A.L. Kennedy** imagining what England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales might look like 50 years from now in *Postcards from the Future*

*Barbican OpenFest: Art 50* takes place on Saturday 23 February 2019 as part of the weekend-long programme which also sees BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts and Sage Gateshead hosting a selection of performances on Sunday 24 February.

**Phil Edgar-Jones, Director of Sky Arts and Chair of Art 50 said:**

*'We were thrilled to commission projects from such formidable talents as the musician Nitin Sawhney, poets Lemn Sissay and Simon Armitage, the playwright John Godber, A.L. Kennedy and Dreda Say Mitchell. But as this was an open selection process, we were also able to hear from rural farmers in Wales, Grimsby fishermen and even schoolchildren in the Inner Hebrides. Taken together, the projects we've commissioned provide a fascinating picture of Britain today, during a unique period in our history.'*

*'We are also thrilled to be working with our partners – the Barbican, Sage Gateshead, and BALTIC – whose public programme of events in February 2019 will feature a selection of the 50 projects commissioned for this ambitious landmark project. All 50 works will also be showcased on Sky Arts on Friday 29 March 2019.'*

**Louise Jeffreys, Artistic Director at the Barbican, said:**

*'Art 50 aims to spark conversations about what it means to be British today using creative responses from artists working across music, theatre, dance, film, photography and poetry as a launchpad for discussion. It offers a whole range of ideas for people to*

*engage with as we consider the question of national identity and look at how a diverse group of artists are creatively engaging with this subject.'*

Below is a summary of the Art 50 commissions being showcased at the Barbican. All events are free to attend.

## Music

The premiere of **Nitin Sawhney's** *'BREXIT' – A rational anthem for a national tantrum* reflects the highs and lows of 'Brexit Britain', composed and performed by Nitin Sawhney, members of his band, the **National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain (NYO)** and choirs from the British Songbook project.

In this new commission British Indian musician Sawhney considers the state of the nation, focusing on its modern-day elements of multiculturalism, diversity and people. Using his findings from a tour of UK towns and cities, Sawhney will showcase a new 'anthem' that he has devised to look away from the past and truly reflect our current society – both in its lyrics and music. Sawhney decided that the piece would be brought to life by the teenage musicians of the NYO – who represent those who will shape the society of tomorrow.

The second music commission performed at the Barbican will be *When We Collide: A British Songbook*, by **Hanbury & Groves**, which brings to life Britain's passion for music. *When We Collide: A British Songbook* transforms interviews with choir members from across the country into a musical piece performed live at the Barbican and Sage Gateshead, with the aim of uniting communities through shared ideas and song. The interviews touch on the subject of what it means to be British today, focusing on why people have different views and images of Britain.

## Theatre and Dance

Olivier Award-winning **Boy Blue** return to the Barbican with *REBEL*, a dance and film production featuring young people from London, capturing their opinions, hopes and fears. The film incorporates music, dance and spoken word which explore the idea of Britishness.

*Porch Sitings* is an alternative model for public conversation conceived and developed by **Lois Weaver**. In this format, dialogue happens side-by-side, rather than face-to-face. Join Lois in quiet contemplation and conversation making space for the things we wonder about rather than providing a platform for the things we know.

**Told by an Idiot's** *Let Me Play the Lion Too* return to perform pop-up, improvised work across the Barbican's public spaces.

The following rehearsed readings will be taking place:

**Martha Barnett's** *And the Band Marches On* is a darkly comic study of identity, crisis and redemption taking place from the point of view of a Northern Irish Loyalist family. The script is interwoven with text from interviews recorded during Loyalist parade season.

*St Ives* by **Daniel Nixon** tells the story of two young locals squatting in a holiday cottage in Cornwall after being kicked out of their home by their landlord. The play examines the county's position as one of the most deprived areas in Western Europe, and its economic reliance on tourism.

## Spoken Word

*A Constitution for the UK*, performed by award-winning poet and broadcaster **Lemn Sissay**, was written for Art 50 with Salisbury Cathedral. This work explores the possibility of a 'new charter' for the UK when we leave the EU. Put into care as a child, Sissay uses this poetic work to reflect on pathways to a more just and equal society and our duty to the most vulnerable in society, particularly children.

*Postcards from the Future* will see writers including **Paul McVeigh**, winner of a *Not The Booker* award; **Dreda Say Mitchell**, writer, radio presenter and author of ten novels; and award-winning novelist **A.L. Kennedy** perform a monologue, imagining what England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales might look like 50 years from now.

## Film

A pop-up cinema will screen a rolling programme for audiences to drop in to throughout the day. Films in this programme include:

*Small Town Politics* by **Gulliver Moore**, an online sitcom consisting of three short episodes. Inspired by a real life story, it features a young female mayor in rural post-Brexit Britain. This optimistic view of the future features different types of characters whom the producers feel have been underrepresented until now.

**Gadzooks Animation**, who have animated popular children's shows such as *Postman Pat* and *Roary the Racing Car*, present *Mad Dogs & Englishmen*, a six-minute stop motion animation film featuring unscripted conversations of people from around the UK on the subject of being British.

*Stock*, by **Naqqash Khalid**, is set in the Manchester Warehouse district and follows a wholesaler newly living in the UK who becomes caught up in an unwanted conflict with the authorities. An absurd, post-Brexit fairy tale that plays with language and miscommunication.

*The Brink*, by poet and playwright **Simon Armitage CBE**, is a meditation on the historical and cultural relationship between Britain and Europe. Using the motif of an old Bakelite radio, the film tunes into impressionistic sights and sounds of Kent and the British Channel mixed into sections of this new epic poem for our times.

*Huntington Garden* is a short film by **Simon Wade** chronicling two days on a cul-de-sac in Luton, capturing the territorial arguments that take place over a 'simple' parking space, revealing the shifting power dynamics and the cultural differences of three families.

**Matty Crawford's** *His England* follows a young Asian British boy questioning his home and identity whilst proudly wearing his England football shirt, unaware of the shifting political landscapes.

*School Britannia* features poems from schoolchildren which look at life where they live – everywhere from the Orkneys to Gibraltar – providing us with a snapshot of Britishness. Five of these poems have been made into films by up-and-coming animators **Flora Martyr**, **Nick Black**, **Katherine Hearst**, **Oliver Pendle** and **Sophie Johnson-Hill**.

Artist **Nye Thompson's** video installation *INSULAE* [Of the Island] contemplates the impact of island geography on national identity in a perpetually looping virtual tour of the waters just off the British mainland.

## Workshops

Audiences will also have the chance to interact with *The Britbot*, an AI computer workshop by **Libby Heaney**, programmed on the British citizenship test 'Life in the UK: a guide for new residents'. *The Britbot* will produce its own test for people to take, but as more people interact the test begins to change, adding new words, new expressions and new attitudes, reflecting the ways in which British identity changes from location to location.

Written by 42 young creatives from London, Los Angeles, Gateshead, Scotland and Bristol in May 2018, *Tuning into Change: A Youth Manifesto for the Arts* will be distributed on the day by some of the young people who wrote it. Together, they will curate an interactive and artistic drop-in space for people to try things out and find out more about their manifesto, which calls on politicians, arts leaders and the general public to prioritise access to the arts and be creative.

**Common Vision** will work with millennials from around the UK to create unique brand identities and fictional products, addressing the question of what it means to be British today and imagining what Britishness actually looks like.

### Visual Arts

Several displays will be on show in the Barbican's public spaces, including *Shepherding the Uplands*, a photography project and roadside exhibition portraying hill sheep farming communities in rural Wales. In this exhibition, **Phil Hatcher Moore** documents the life and work of these farmers, presenting the images alongside photos of the footpaths where tourists and hill-walkers enjoy the fruits of their labour.

*We Are British*, by **Rio Blake**, celebrates multicultural society and features mixed-heritage young British people, delving into their collective and individual views on British identity. The photos specifically focus on what the notion of Britishness means to different communities within the UK.

*Dogs and their Owners* by photographer **Dougie Wallace** presents a series of portraits of dogs with the humans that own them – focusing on what the various breeds of dogs say about their owners. The dogs pictured, as well as their surroundings, signify both social status and locale of their owners.

For more information on *Barbican OpenFest: Art 50*, visit [barbican.org.uk/openfestart50](http://barbican.org.uk/openfestart50).

On Sunday 24 February, **BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead** will host the following Art 50 commissions:

**Jasleen Kaur** will work together with a small group of 2nd and 3rd generation Sikhs living in London who use music and rap as a political tool and voice. They will produce a new song and music video looking at the traditions of Sikh devotional music merged with American rap and London grime; how political suppression gives rise to patriotism and nationalism abroad; and how this imagining of a nation state parallels conversations around Brexit and the commonwealth.

**Kuba Ryniewicz**, a freelance photographer, curator and researcher based in the north east of England, will work with intergenerational groups that could be seen to be marginalised in the north east, giving voice to an area, highlighting strength and pride that exists within perceived disenfranchised communities. Ryniewicz responds to the regional context he is a constituent of, taking into consideration social and economic inequality within the region.

**Barby Asante's** work creates situations and spaces for dialogue, collective thinking, ritual and re-enactment within an exhibition. Asante will invite women and non-binary people of colour to jointly create a live writing of a new Declaration of Independence exploring these themes as part of an ongoing project *Always a Painful Declaration of Independence - For Ama. For Aba. For Charlotte and Adjoa*. This new commission will manifest as a physical environment within an exhibition (running 23 February–5 May 2019) and as a live performance on Sunday 24 February.

Also, **Sage Gateshead** has been exploring opinions and ideas about Northern identity past, present and future, through a variety of commissions using poetry and music. In November post-Brexit identity will be reflected through words and music by **UnFOLD** by Lyrix Organix – a group of young, outstanding new voices who represent the future of poetry.

More than 3,000 children from across the North East celebrated who we are, what makes us special and what we can become at **The Big Sing** in June. It took place during the Great Exhibition of the North, as part of Art 50.

**Backbone of our Land** also premiered during the Exhibition and will be reprised on Sunday 24 February. The project involves leading Northern poets and folk musicians (including Peter Brewis, Degna Stone and Bella Hardy) who have created new works inspired by conversations with people along the Pennine Way (known as our nation's spine).

Backbone of Our Land will be complemented by a series of powerful live performances (to be announced) at Sage Gateshead during the Festival in February.

## ENDS

### Press Information

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### Barbican press room

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communications team's contact details are listed on our website at [www.barbican.org.uk/news/home](http://www.barbican.org.uk/news/home)

### About the Barbican

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](http://www.barbican.org.uk) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over 1.1 million people attend events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 300 [staff](#) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas 1, 2 and 3, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery the Curve, foyers and public spaces, a library, Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](#), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](#) and [Britten Sinfonia](#), Associate Producer [Serious](#), and Artistic Partner [Create](#). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](#) and [Michael Clark Company](#). The [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) are the Barbican's International Orchestral Partner, the [Australian Chamber Orchestra](#) are International Associate

Ensemble at Milton Court and [Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble.

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### **About Sky Arts**

Sky Arts is the UK's only dedicated channel for the arts. It offers something for everyone, whatever their passion, with entertaining programmes showcasing the best of classical and popular music, theatre, opera, dance and the visual arts, as well as original drama and comedy. Sky Arts is broadcast 24 hours a day and has over 1,000 hours available on catch-up TV, including flagship programmes such as Portrait Artist of The Year, Landscape Artist of the Year and The South Bank Show. The channel is committed to supporting the arts by investing in the best talent, both on and off screen, as well as through exclusive partnerships with major UK and European cultural institutions, including National Theatre Live, Tate and The British Library.

### **About Art 50**

#### THE CREATIVE SPIRIT OF BRITAIN TODAY

Sky Arts has commissioned 50 exciting new projects examining what it means to be British in the post- Brexit world.

The impetus for Art 50 came after the outcome of the Brexit referendum stimulated a widespread debate about our national identity, with many people looking to express how they feel about our nation as we approach a future outside the EU.

Art 50 was launched in March 2017 to invite artists of all kinds, from all walks of life, from all artistic genres, and parts of the UK, to create a piece of work looking at what it means to be British in the wake of Brexit. Over two years it received over 1000 applications from which 50 were chosen - including major new works from established names like Nitin Sawhney, John Godber, Simon Armitage, Lemn Sissay and AL Kennedy along with up and coming artists such as Sarah Maple, Lucy Reeves-Khan, Abigail Conway, Martha Barnett and Connor Coulston.

15 of these projects were commissioned with our partner organizations; the Barbican, Sage Gateshead and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. They will be hosting a festival featuring a selection of the Art 50 commissions in February 2019. The Art50 projects will also be filmed for television by Storyvault and showcased on Sky Arts in Spring 2019

### **About Storyvault Films**

Storyvault Films make high quality documentaries and arts programmes for Sky Arts, BBC, ITV, and Channel 4. Long-standing series include Portrait and Landscape Artist of the Year for Sky Arts. They have been running the Art 50 project for Sky Arts, since its inception, in March 2017. Storyvault are making an evening of programmes, featuring contributions from all the participating artists and showcasing the best of the projects, on the night we are schedule to leave the EU. '*Brexit Night: This is Britain*' will broadcast from 7 00 pm to 12 00 pm on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2019.

### **About Sage Gateshead**

Sage Gateshead is an international music centre and renowned conference and event venue located in the North East of England. It is for artists, for audiences, for the North and for the long term.

Its concert programme incorporates all kinds of local, regional and international music and runs all year round. Music-making and learning activity takes place not only in the building but across the region.

As a charity, the support it receives helps to ensure everyone in the community can experience the joys of music.

**About BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Arts**

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art is situated on the south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, England and has welcomed over seven million visitors since opening in July 2002. BALTIC presents a distinctive and ambitious programme of exhibitions and events, and is a world leader in the presentation and commissioning of contemporary visual art.

Housed in a landmark ex-industrial building, BALTIC consists of 2,600 square metres of art space, making it the UK's largest dedicated contemporary art institution. The gallery has presented the work of over 400 artists from over 50 countries in 200 exhibitions to date.

[www.baltic.art](http://www.baltic.art)