

***** EMBARGO'D UNTIL: 2nd JUNE 2025 at 10:00am (GMT) *****

ANNOUNCING COVENTRY BIENNIAL 2025: OBSESSIONS, POSSESSIONS

Today we are delighted to announce the title, dates and curatorial focus of the fifth **Coventry Biennial**.

We will additionally announce one of our venues and some of the first creative projects and commissions that we will be presenting, including a number of participating artists and organisations that we are collaborating with to deliver this exciting programme of exhibitions, events and activities.

Further announcements about the programme will follow in July 2025.

TITLE AND KEY DATES

The fifth **Coventry Biennial** is called **Obsessions, Possessions** and will take place from the **3rd October 2025** to the **25th January 2026** in Coventry and Warwickshire.

Press and Industry Previews, as well as a Grand Opening evening event will take place on the **2nd October 2025**.

A public programme of events and activities will take place throughout the festival period, with further details to follow in July and September 2025.

CURATORIAL FOCUS

The impulse to collect is tied to our desire for meaning, belonging and understanding of ourselves and of society. **Coventry Biennial 2025** will facilitate a collective exploration of the roles and functions of collecting within the sector, the community and the studio.

The programme of exhibitions, events and activities will platform the co-creation and presentation of new artworks and exciting reimaginings of collections and archives rooted in society's shared obsessions and possessions.

Ranging from major national art collections to personal and family archives, from libraries to what can be found beneath your kitchen sink, from warehouses full of artworks to photo albums full of memories, we will explore how and why we collect, what it means to collect and will examine the impacts, legacies, politics and problematics of what is (or isn't) included.

Set against the backdrop of the development of a new, nationally significant but locally embedded "**Coventry City Cultural Gateway**" building that will see the **British Council Collection** and the **Arts Council Collection** relocate from London and Yorkshire to Coventry, our festival programme will welcome, question, celebrate and challenge the access, power and meaning of "*groups of things*" that are as varied as our obsessions and our possessions - whether that's footballers, the Enclosure Acts or a photo album.

FIRST VENUE ANNOUNCEMENT

We are pleased to announce that **Coventry Biennial** will return to the **Herbert Art Gallery & Museum** where the **Obsessions, Possessions** programme will consist of four exhibitions.

Marguerite Nugent, Cultural Director at CV Life comments:

*"We're thrilled to be welcoming the **Coventry Biennial** back to the **Herbert Art Gallery & Museum** for its fifth edition later this year. **Obsessions, Possessions** opens up thought-provoking conversations about collections of all kinds and the stories they tell across a range of cultures and locations, and we are excited to share four fantastic exhibitions in collaboration with leading visual artists and curators from across the globe."*

Marguerite continues:

"We're proud to be one of the key venues supporting this year's ambitious programme, which continues to place Coventry at the heart of the national arts scene while championing creative collaboration."

Further venue announcements will follow in July 2025.

FOUR EXHIBITIONS AT THE HERBERT ART GALLERY & MUSEUM

We are working in partnership with an exciting range of partners to present four exhibitions at the **Herbert Art Gallery & Museum**, and are pleased to announce these exhibitions here.

SIMEON BARCLAY AND ARTS COUNCIL COLLECTION

Leeds-based artist **Simeon Barclay** will curate a dynamic group exhibition drawn exclusively from the **Arts Council Collection**, exploring the rich and complex history of Coventry. Charting the city as a site of transformation and regeneration - from its industrial prominence, through to the devastation of the Second World War and the city's ambitious post-war reconstruction - the exhibition will reflect on broader themes of nation-building, identity and community.

Featuring sculpture, film, painting, photography, and works on paper, Simeon uses the Collection as both a resource and a point of departure to examine how public collections can illuminate evolving histories of space, place, and belonging. At its core, the exhibition highlights how an individual can use a collection to explore and better understand themselves, their interests, and the world around them.

Alona Pardo (Director, Arts Council Collection) says:

*"I'm absolutely delighted that **Simeon Barclay** is curating an exhibition from the **Arts Council Collection** for **Coventry Biennial**. As both an artist represented in the Collection and a former member of the Acquisitions Committee, Simeon has been a vocal and valued supporter of our work. A remarkable artist, his practice, which deftly weaves together popular culture, personal history, and social commentary, brings a*

sharp and resonant perspective to contemporary British life. His thoughtful engagement with themes of identity, history, and place makes him uniquely positioned to offer a compelling curatorial perspective - we're excited to see how his vision brings fresh insight to the Collection and to the narrative of the city."

About the Arts Council Collection:

The Arts Council Collection is the most widely circulated national loan collection of modern and contemporary British art. Founded in 1946, the Collection reaches the broadest possible audience through long loans to public institutions, exhibition loans, touring exhibitions, as well as digital and print publications. The Collection supports artists in the UK through the purchase and display of their work, and safeguards it for future generations, using the highest possible standards of collection care.

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in transit under another sky

E.N. Mirembe and **Rosie Olang' Odhiambo** will continue their collaboration to curate a group exhibition that brings together works from the British Council's Collection and other works by a range of artists from across East Africa.

in transit under another sky brings together the work of artists including **Larry Achiampong** who engage deeply with themes of transience, marginal identities, and the idea of practice, objects and collections navigating between physical spaces and geographies.

Emma Dexter (Director of Visual Arts and British Council Collection, British Council) comments:

*"We are delighted to be partnering with **Coventry Biennial and Herbert Art Gallery & Museum** to present **in transit under another sky**, bringing together works from the **British Council Collection** and works by artists from Kenya and Uganda. This exhibition underlines our commitment to using our Collection to create dialogue on the most pressing issues of our time. It has been such a pleasure to work with curators **Rosie Olang' Odhiambo** and **E.N. Mirembe**, who have brought great energy and vision to this project from the outset. It is fantastic to be back in Coventry, which will be the new home of our Collection from 2027."*

About the British Council:

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. We support peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide. We do this through our work in arts and culture, education and the English language. We work with people in over 200 countries and territories and are on the ground in more than 100 countries. In 2022–23 we reached 600 million people.

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LEAH GORDON: MONUMENT TO THE VANQUISHED PEASANTS

Artist, curator and writer **Leah Gordon** presents a solo exhibition of new and recent works commissioned by **Meadow Arts**, exploring the lasting impacts of the Enclosure Acts to build a critical understanding of the systems and politics we live with today.

Monument to the Vanquished Peasants includes works created over the last three years, as well as a new commission, **Urban Vagabonds**, and a series of photographs made in collaboration with local allotment holders in Coventry. The exhibition is further contextualised by the presentation of images from author and image-collector **Stephen Ellcock**'s archive, alongside objects from the **Museum of English Rural Life**.

Anne de Charmant (Artistic Director and Curator, Meadow Arts) says:

*"Leah has been working on this monumental project, commissioned by **Meadow Arts**, since 2022. For this final phase, which brings together all the different strands of the project, **Meadow Arts** has chosen to temporarily move away from its rural base and into Coventry. The city is one of the urban centres where so many rural folk, dispossessed by enclosure, sought survival, but all too often fell through the cracks of the new industrial society."*

Anne highlights:

*"Collaborating with the **Herbert Art Gallery & Museum** and **Coventry Biennial** offers a powerful opportunity to bring this important body of work to new audiences."*

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SOPHIA EHRNROOTH: 879 HEROES BY HEART

Helsinki-based artist and filmmaker **Sophia Ehrnrooth** will present a major four screen moving image installation with the support of **Frame Contemporary Art Finland**. The work was originally made in 2016 and has been shown internationally but never in its intended four screen configuration.

Juha Huuskonen (Director, Frame Contemporary Art Finland) says:

*"**Coventry Biennial**'s bold curatorial approach makes it a distinctive platform among international biennials. We are delighted that **Sophia Ehrnrooth**'s work will be part of this year's programme, and proud that **Frame Contemporary Art Finland** can contribute to bringing this compelling work to new audiences."*

879 Heroes by Heart brings together a group of ordinary Scandinavian boys who were asked to recite by heart the names of football players from around the globe. This immersive work highlights the intensity of fandom and exposes the depth of obsessions that young people can develop around celebrity and sporting heroes.

This presentation of **879 Heroes by Heart** is supported by **Yue Yu (Independent Curatorial Advisor)**, she says:

*"**Sophia Ehrnrooth**'s work speaks of 'others', but it's actually about 'us'. When I watched these kids citing hundreds of footballers names, it touched me profoundly. Everyone*

might have an unfulfilled dream, that's what Sophia explores in her communal projects."

Mel Jordan (Professor of Art & the Public Sphere, Centre for Postdigital Cultures and Principal Investigator for spacex project, Coventry University) comments:

*"We are delighted that the EU-funded **Spatial Practices in Art and Architecture for Empathetic Exchange (spacex)** secondment activity has supported **Coventry Biennial's** curatorial research, enabling the team to connect with new artists and curators across the EU. As a result, an exciting artist based in Helsinki will present a solo exhibition to new audiences in Coventry as part of **Coventry Biennial 2025**."*

Mel continues:

*"**spacex** is a transdisciplinary research project that supports innovative cultural programming by engaging new publics and fostering a culture of diversity, difference, and discursive exchange. **Sophia Ehrnrooth's** upcoming exhibition at the Biennial embodies these values and introduces her work to new audiences."*

LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS AT COVENTRY BIENNIAL 2025

As in previous years, **Coventry Biennial 2025** will spread beyond the **Herbert Art Gallery & Museum** with exhibitions, events and activities being presented in a wide range of venues across Coventry and Warwickshire.

At this time, we are delighted to announce three creative projects by local and international artists that have been commissioned for the **Obsessions, Possessions** programme.

Further creative project announcements will follow in July 2025.

ANDI AND WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

In March we announced that in partnership with **Warwickshire County Council** we had co-commissioned Coventry-based painter **Andi** to work with the library service to ensure opportunities for Queer people to learn about, discuss and to contribute to local collections and narratives. We're delighted to announce that this project will result in a presentation as a part of **Coventry Biennial 2025**.

Lucy Carlton-Walker, Service Manager – Libraries (NPO Strategic Lead), Warwickshire County Council says of the project:

*"**Warwickshire Libraries** are excited to be able to continue our partnership with **Coventry Biennial** and **Warwickshire Pride** through **Andi's** project. Due to being the only library service in the West Midlands to be funded through **Arts Council England** to be a **National Portfolio Organisation** we are committed to developing and supporting projects that are inclusive, accessible, and representative of all **Warwickshire** communities."*

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CAITLIN KIELY AND DR JAMIE LARKIN WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Following successful collaborations with the **University of Warwick** in 2019, 2021 and 2023 where we have supported artists and researchers to collaborate, we're pleased to announce that Birmingham-based artist **Caitlin Kiely** will work with **Dr Jamie Larkin** with the results being exhibited as a part of **Coventry Biennial 2025**.

Together **Caitlin** and **Jamie** will explore a broad definition of the museum – considering it as a collection of processes connected to a place, as opposed to a static destination or specific point in time.

Through the use of art, storytelling and social engagement they will reimagine museums, their structures and functions, applying a range of lenses to engage and connect with overlooked fragments of a place's ecology and social history.

Helen Wheatley (Academic Director, Warwick Institute of Engagement, University of Warwick) says:

*"The **University of Warwick** is delighted to be partnering with **Coventry Biennial** again in 2025. This is the fourth Biennial for which our partnership has enabled artist-researcher collaborations, this year with major support from **Warwick Institute of Engagement** as well as the university's **Research Executive**. The collaboration between **Dr Jamie Larkin (School of Creative Arts, Performance and Visual Cultures)** and visual artist **Caitlin Kiely** around Jamie's 'Museum of Climate Stories' project demonstrates the intertwining of archival, historiographical and place-based research with creative practice. It also shows how the artist-researcher collaboration creates space and time for community engagement with the work of the university. I am genuinely excited to see the resulting work that **Caitlin** and **Jamie** will produce."*

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DEBASHISH PAUL, PRASANTA SAHU AND EMAMI ART

In January we announced that we had been awarded a **Biennials Connect** grant by the **British Council** to develop new relationships with artists based in India, and especially in the West Bengal region. In May we provided an update, introducing the five artists that we completed studio visits with as a part of this project.

Through our partnership with **Emami Art**, we are now delighted to announce that we have commissioned Varanasi-based artist **Debashish Paul** to develop a new project for **Coventry Biennial 2025** and we will additionally be exhibiting existing artworks by Shantiniketan-based artist **Prasanta Sahu**.

Richa Agarwal (CEO, Emami Art) comments:

*"At **Emami Art**, we are deeply invested in building international partnerships that create new opportunities for Indian artists and expand the reach of contemporary practices from our region. Our collaboration with **Coventry Biennial** through the **Biennials Connect** grant exemplifies this vision. We are proud to support the participation of **Debashish Paul** and **Prasanta Sahu** in the 2025 edition, and look forward to seeing their works contribute meaningfully to a broader global conversation around art, culture, and community."*

Ushmita Sahu (Director and Head Curator, Emami Art) adds:

*"Our collaboration with **Coventry Biennial**, made possible through the **Biennials Connect** grant supported by the **British Council**, has created a valuable framework for dialogue between contemporary art practices in India and the UK. At **Emami Art**, we are committed to nurturing such cross-cultural partnerships that not only amplify the voices of Indian artists but also deepen the global understanding of regional narratives. The inclusion of **Debashish Paul** and **Prasanta Sahu** in **Coventry Biennial 2025** is a significant step in this ongoing exchange, and we are proud to support their distinct and powerful practices."*

Shwetal Patel (Trustee, Coventry Biennial) says:

*"I'm honoured to have helped foster the dialogue between **Emami Art** and **Coventry Biennial**, two institutions I hold in the highest regard for their exceptional contributions to contemporary art. Having followed their growth over the years, I've seen firsthand their unwavering commitment to supporting artists, encouraging critical discourse, and broadening the reach of visual culture within their respective contexts. It's a true pleasure to see this relationship culminate in new and exciting projects for the upcoming **Coventry Biennial 2025**, featuring the work of **Debashish Paul** and **Prasanta Sahu**, two artists whose practices I deeply respect and admire."*

IMPORTANT INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

Coventry Biennial 2025 is generously funded through **Arts Council England's National Lottery Project Grants**.

Further details about the **Coventry Biennial 2025: Obsessions, Possessions** venues and creative projects will be released in July 2025 and the full detailed programme and schedule will follow in September 2025.

General enquiries can be forwarded to: zoe@coventrybiennial.com

Requests for quotes can be forwarded to: ryan@coventrybiennial.com

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USEFUL LINKS

- Coventry Biennial: www.coventrybiennial.com
- Coventry City Cultural Gateway: <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/regeneration-1/city-centre-cultural-gateway-2>
- Herbert Art Gallery & Museum: <https://www.theherbert.org/>
- Simeon Barclay: <https://www.simeonbarclay.co.uk/>
- Arts Council Collection: <https://artscouncilcollection.org.uk/>
- E.N. Mirembe: <https://www.artexchangemovingimage.uk/sub-saharan-africa/>
- Rosie Olang' Odhiambo: <https://www.artexchangemovingimage.uk/sub-saharan-africa/>
- British Council Arts: <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/>
- Larry Achiampong: <https://www.larryachiampong.co.uk/>
- Leah Gordon: <https://leahgordon.co.uk/>
- Meadow Arts: <https://meadowarts.org/>
- Stephen Ellcock: @stephenellcock (Instagram)
- Sophia Ehrnrooth: <https://sophiaehrnrooth.com/>
- Yue Yu: <https://www.yueyu.fr/>
- Frame Contemporary Art Finland: <https://frame-finland.fi/>
- spacex: <https://www.spacex-rise.org/>
- Andi: @andiartist (Instagram)
- Warwickshire County Council: <https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/>
- Caitlin Keily: <https://www.caitlinkiely.co.uk/>
- Dr Jamie Larkin: <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/scapvc/ccmps/staff/jamie-larkin>
- University of Warwick: <https://warwick.ac.uk/>
- Biennials Connect: <https://arts.britishcouncil.org/projects/biennials-connect>
- Emami Art: <https://www.emamiart.com/>
- Debashish Paul: <https://www.emamiart.com/artists/41-debashish-paul/overview/>
- Prasanta Sahu: <https://www.emamiart.com/artists/44-prasanta-sahu/overview/>