
HIDDEN HISTORIES OF NEWHAM

Artist Commission Brief

Eastside Community Heritage & Royal College of Art

Overview

Eastside Community Heritage (ECH), in partnership with the Royal College of Art (RCA) community panel, is commissioning three artists to undertake a short community-based research and creative development process, each working with a distinct strand of East London's hidden history held within ECH's accredited archive.

This commission is funded by Arts Council England as part of the Hidden Histories of Newham public art project. The three artists will be selected through an open call process, and the commission forms the first phase of a two-stage process that will culminate in a significant public artwork in East London.

Background

ECH is the UK's first accredited community archive, with over thirty years of practice in heritage, oral history, arts, and regeneration work rooted in East London. The ECH archive holds thousands of oral history recordings and tens of thousands of photographs, documents, documenting the lives of London's communities.

The Hidden Histories of Newham project brings together ECH's archival expertise with the creative and critical practice of the RCA, to surface stories that have too often been marginalised, overlooked, or erased. A Community Panel, chaired by Professor Rachel Garfield, plays a central role in the governance and creative decision-making of this project.

The Commission

The commission involves two phases

Phase 1: Community Research and Artist Booklet

Three artists will be selected and commissioned to undertake a community engagement and archival research process, focused on one of the following themes:

Theme	Focus	Output
Working Class History	The lives, labour, and resistance of East London's working-class communities as held in ECH's oral history and photographic collections.	Artist booklet for Community Panel review
LGBTQ+ History	LGBTQ+ histories, spaces, and activism of East London, drawing on ECH archive holdings including oral testimonies and community documentation.	Artist booklet for Community Panel review
Global Majority Communities	The histories and lived experiences of East London's Black, Asian and ethnically diverse communities, as documented in ECH's archive spanning several decades.	Artist booklet for Community Panel review

Each artist will work directly with communities and with materials from the ECH archive, and will produce a small artist booklet. The booklet should document their research process, reflect on the archival material they have engaged with, present the communities they have worked with, and articulate a creative vision for a potential public art installation. The booklets will be presented to the **Community Panel** as part of the Phase 2 selection process and will be on display at local libraries in **February/March 2027**.

The production of the booklet will allow the panel to understand more about you and your processes; how you work with archives and communities, why you want to engage with the subject you propose and how you intend to do so. It will also allow you to develop a more detailed and concrete proposal based on the research you will do in this process.

Phase 2: Public Art Commission

Following the Community Panel's selection, the chosen artist will enter a second, separately contracted phase to develop and deliver a public artwork in East London.

Public Art Commission Funding

This is a fully funded commission with a total budget of £18,000, comprising an artist fee of £10,000, an installation and production budget of £4,000, and a materials budget of £4,000.

Timescale

The **intended** timescale for Phase 2 is approximately six months from commission to completion, with the finished work anticipated to be in place by [date TBC]. The intended lifespan of the work will depend on its nature and format and will be agreed with the selected artist and relevant partners as part of the commissioning process.

Location

The location for the artwork is not fixed in advance, as the artwork format, archive collection and community engagement will likely influence the site decision **and is seen to be part of the process**. ECH and its partners will work with the selected artist to identify an appropriate site, and will lead on negotiating any permissions, planning requirements, or landlord

agreements needed to realise the work. Artists are not expected to navigate these processes independently.

Format of artwork

We are open to a wide range of approaches and art forms — including sculptural works, installation, digital or projected media, experiential or participatory formats, and other creative responses. We do not wish to prescribe a particular form, and actively encourage artists to propose whatever approach they feel is most true to the communities and histories they have engaged with. Proposals will be assessed on their artistic merit, community resonance, and practical viability within the available budget.

Permanence

While, we would love the final work to have a lasting presence in the public realm, and a permanent installation is our aspiration; we recognise that permanence is not always possible or appropriate depending on the nature of the work, the site, and the permissions involved. The question of permanence will therefore be decided in discussion with the selected artist, the Community Panel, and relevant partners as part of the Phase 2 development process.

Selection criteria

The criteria for selection by the Community Panel include:

- Responsiveness to and creative use of the ECH archive
- Artistic ambition and originality
- The ability of the work to speak across cultures and communities
- Sustainability; and feasibility within the available budget.
- Quality and depth of community engagement

Fee and Terms

Phase 1

- Each of the three artists will receive a fee of £2,000 for Phase 1.
- The fee covers all time for community engagement, archival research, and the production of the artist booklet.
- Any additional costs (travel, materials, printing) should be discussed and agreed with ECH in advance. A small budget may be available for reasonable expenses.

Phase 2

- The selected artist will receive a total budget of £18,000 for Phase 2, comprising: an artist fee of £10,000; an installation and production budget of £4,000; and a materials budget of £4,000. All budgets are inclusive of VAT where applicable.
- ECH and the RCA will retain the right to reproduce the artist booklets for project documentation and reporting purposes.

The ECH Archive

Artists will be given guided access to relevant materials within ECH's archive. The archive contains oral history recordings, photographs, film, exhibitions and documents, spanning more than three decades of community life in East London, with particular depth in the areas of Newham, Tower Hamlets, and the Royal Docks.

ECH staff will provide an initial orientation session for each commissioned artist, and will be available to support ongoing archival access throughout the commission. All archival use must comply with ECH's Archive Use Policy, and artists must obtain/or check appropriate consents are featured in their booklets.

Community Engagement

A genuine and meaningful engagement with communities lies at the heart of this commission. Artists are expected to develop their own approaches to community engagement, appropriate to their practice and to the communities they are working with. ECH can facilitate introductions to relevant community networks and partner organisations where helpful.

Artists should plan for a minimum of 2 to 4 community engagement sessions or encounters (c. 2 hours per session), as part of their Phase 1 research, **as appropriate and in conversation with ECH and the panel Chair**. The nature of these encounters, whether workshops, interviews, conversations, or collaborative activities, is at the discretion of the artist, in discussion with ECH.

The Artist Booklet

Each artist will produce a small booklet (suggested length: 12–20 pages, A5 or similar format) that serves as both a research document and a creative proposition. The booklet should include:

- An introduction to the artist's practice and approach to the commission
- Documentation of community engagement undertaken
- Reflection on archival materials engaged with
- Original creative content developed through the research process (which may include photography, drawing, text, design, or other media)
- A visual and written proposition for a public art installation

Booklets may be produced digitally or in print. ECH will support a small print run for presentation to the Community Panel if required. The booklet format and design is at the artist's discretion, and artistic quality of the booklet itself is part of the commission.

Timeline

- Commission opens: 3rd August 2026
- Online Q&A session with Professor Rachel Garfield, RCA, Professor Harold Offeh, RCA, and Dr Joanne Tatham, RCA: Date: 1st September 2026
- Application deadline: 30th September 2026
- Shortlisted Phase 1 Artist interviews: 12 – 16 Oct 2026
- Phase 1 Artists selected and briefed: 19 – 23 Oct 2026

- Community engagement and archival research period: approximately eight weeks
- Artist booklets submitted to ECH: Early January date TBC
- Community Panel review and selection: February date TBC
- Phase 2 commission announced: March date TBC
- Target completion date for final artwork: Autumn 2027 date TBC

The Community Panel

A diverse Community Panel, drawn from across Newham's communities, sits at the heart of this project. The Panel brings together people with a range of lived experiences and perspectives reflecting the histories this commission seeks to explore. Panel members will be actively involved throughout the process: they will attend presentations of the three artist booklets, engage in discussion with the artists, and take the lead in selecting the proposal to be developed into a public art installation.

The Panel has discussed at length what they hope to see from artists applying to this commission. They are looking for work that tells and celebrates a story — not only evoking reflection or sadness but also joy and positivity. They want art that prompts both an emotional and an intellectual response, and that can speak to different cultures and communities, who may each bring their own readings to the same piece. The panel appreciate how colour and form can be used to signal warmth and celebration while also still presenting more complex narratives.

The Panel will score proposals against a set of criteria informed by their discussions. In assessing applications, they will consider: the quality and sensitivity of the artist's engagement with communities and archival materials; how the artist's methodology demonstrates experience of working collaboratively — for example, through workshops, interviews, or participatory processes; the extent to which the Newham public can trust how those materials have been responded to; the ability of the proposed artwork to speak across cultures and generations; and the long-term sustainability of the work. The Panel takes an inclusive approach to what constitutes an artist or artistic practice — artistic skills are transferable and we welcome applications from a broad range of practitioners.

How to Apply

Artists are invited to submit a proposal of no more than two pages outlining: their practice and relevant experience; which of the three themes they wish to be considered for; their approach to community engagement and how they have worked with communities before; and an initial sense of how they might respond to the commission. Please include a supporting portfolio of no more than five pages (or a link to an equivalent online portfolio) with examples of recent or relevant work. Proposals and portfolios should be submitted as a single PDF where possible.

Applications should be submitted to ECH at office@ech.org.uk by 30th September 2026 – late applications will not be accepted.

ECH and the RCA are committed to working with artists from diverse backgrounds, and particularly welcome applications from artists with lived connections to the communities and histories represented in this commission. ECH is an equal opportunities employer and commissioner.

If you would like to submit your application in an alternative format — for example, as a video or audio recording — we are happy to consider this by special arrangement. Please contact us in advance at office@ech.org.uk to discuss your requirements before the deadline.

Eastside Community Heritage

eastsidecommunity.org.uk | office@ech.org.uk | 0741153633

Online Q/A Session: 1st Sept 2026 at

This session provides an opportunity to put any questions you might have about the public art commission to our experts from the Royal College of Art: Professor Rachel Garfield, Professor Harold Offeh and Dr Joanne Tatham. To book a place, [please click here](#) (first come basis).

Appendix: Project Team and Community Panel

ECH and RCA Project Team

Judith Garfield | Eastside Community Heritage

CEO, ECH — project lead and archive specialist with over 30 years' experience in community heritage.

Kaaren Cruse | Eastside Community Heritage

Project Manager — strategic planning, finance, and community co-production.

Professor Rachel Garfield | Royal College of Art

Chair, Artist, Creative & Community Panel — artistic and curatorial lead.

Professor Harold Offeh | Royal College of Art, Artist, Panel member — community engagement and workshop delivery.

Dr Joanne Tatham | Royal College of Art, Artist, Panel member — multidisciplinary artistic practice.

Community Panel Members

The Community Panel brings together people with direct connections to Newham's communities and the histories at the heart of this project. Panel members hold equal standing with professional members throughout all decision-making processes.

Twinkle Jayakumar | UCL Prosperity Lab

Citizen social science and community-led research

Sanaz Amidi | Creative Newham

Borough-wide cultural strategy and placemaking

Sam Ikhuoria | Independent artist

Creative entrepreneurship and community arts

Emma Treleaven | ECH (Trustee)

Governance and community voice

Taskin Salem | Subco Asian Elders
South Asian community networks

Gill Tan | Newham Chinese Association
Chinese community networks

Bill Hopkinson | LGBT+ Newham
LGBT+ community networks

Maryam Abdullah | London Borough of Newham (Arts Officer)
Ex-officio — local authority liaison