

<b>Committee(s)</b> Barbican Centre Board	<b>Dated:</b> 12 July 2023
<b>Subject:</b> <b>Visual Arts at the Barbican Centre</b>	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	<b>3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10</b>
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>If so, how much?</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	<b>n/a</b>
<b>Report of: Claire Spencer, CEO Barbican Centre</b>	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> <b>Shanay Jhaveri, Head of Visual Arts, Barbican Centre</b>	

### **Summary**

This paper outlines the past year's Visual Arts programming activities at the Barbican Centre, in the Barbican Art Gallery and The Curve. It also looks ahead to the future programme for both these spaces, as well as plans for expanding Visual Arts activity into The Conservatory and other public spaces with the Barbican.

The Barbican Art Gallery and the Curve remain at the forefront of London's art spaces, recognised for bold, daring exhibitions that focus strongly on equality and inclusion, representing women and global majority artists, and those engaged with the climate crisis. The multi-disciplinary and civic ethos of the Centre has always been at the core of our thinking. This is now enriched by the new Barbican-wide purpose and values which guide our ideas and strengthen our ambition.

### **Recommendation**

That the Board NOTE the report.

## Main Report

### Barbican Visual Arts overview

**We are London's creative catalyst for arts, curiosity and enterprise. We spark creative possibilities and transformation for artists, audiences and communities – to inspire, connect and provoke debate. We are the place to be in this Destination City, where everyone is welcome. Our impact is felt far outside our walls and ripples before the experiences we offer – locally, nationally and internationally.**

Barbican Art Gallery and Curve have remained at the forefront of London's art spaces. The Visual Arts team have strived to achieve a balanced mix of national and international modern and contemporary art, design and architecture, photography and performance created in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The rigour of our research, the timely, compelling and often socially relevant themes, the quality and uniqueness of our installations and our brave and creative curation are what we have become known for.

### Barbican Art Gallery

Exhibitions staged in Barbican Art Gallery are designed to attract a paying audience. Most of these projects are researched and generated by our team, although we do occasionally bring in touring exhibitions or partner with other institutions from the outset.

All our exhibitions are of international art historical significance. We borrow work from private and museum collections globally. To be able to do this, we need to maintain a museum standard environment in the Gallery in terms of temperature, humidity and security. We have a professional coordination team who deal with all incoming loans, insurance and transport, supported by the COL Procurement and Insurance teams. We also have our own highly experienced Front of House and production teams.

### Barbican Art Gallery 22/23 programme

The 2022-2023 programme in the main gallery presented a series of monographic exhibitions of significant women artists, starting with Carolee Schneemann in autumn 2022, Alice Neel in spring 2023 and Carrie Mae Weems in summer 2023. Each of these shows was critically lauded and, in the case of Schneemann and Mae Weems, the first time their work could be properly experienced in the UK. The shows underscored each of these artists' dedication to not only their own respective mediums, but also to a strong humanism.

They provide the opportunity to rethink a received art history which has been dominated by male artists, and in which important contributions by women have been marginalised. The group show *Postwar Modern: New Art In Britain 1945-1965* which opened in Spring 2022 set the template for group exhibitions that revisit a specific period of history, but from a different vantage point, bringing more nuance and complexity to the way we understand the art histories of those particular times and acknowledge the contributions of myriad artists who worked in a range of media.

### The Curve

The Centre's goal of fuelling creative ambition is reflected in the Curve's programme that strives to develop artistic talent. Since 2006, the Curve has been one of London's leading spaces into which artists are invited to make site-specific work. These commissions tend to be by emergent, mid-career or overlooked international artists who have not yet had

exposure in London and who are ready to take on the scale of the space. We have now staged more than 30 such commissions and established this programme as a key UK opportunity for artists to experiment and develop their practice, while at the same time raising their profile.

Keeping within this spirit, in the autumn of 2022 Soheila Sokhanvari transformed the Curve into a stunning space in which she spotlighted the lives and contributions of 31 women who were active in the visual arts in pre-1979 Iran. The opening of the show coincided with protests in Iran, which added a level of potency and urgency to the presentation. The Curve was also chosen as the venue for the 2023 Barbican Centre Dinner, where Soheila shared her reflections with invited guests.

In the Spring of 2023, the interdisciplinary RESOLVE Collective occupied the Curve to address a number of social issues, including climate change, sustainability, and institutional critique. Over the course of the exhibition, they hosted a range of community events. In June 2023, the RESOLVE Collective withdrew their exhibition from the Curve citing censorship and hostile encounters with the Barbican's Front of House staff. The Barbican issued a public apology stating "We are deeply sorry for the pain caused to the members of RESOLVE Collective and those involved in their exhibition. Nobody should have to work in a place where they don't feel welcome and respected. A great deal of work has already gone into building a new culture at the Barbican in which all our people, and those with whom we work, are valued, supported, and feel they belong. It's clear we have a lot more work to do but we are committed to making the Barbican a place that is inclusive, welcoming, and safe for everyone."

### **New Head of Visual Arts**

In October 2022, Shanay Jhaveri joined the Centre as the new Head of Visual Arts from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York where he was Associate Curator of International Art in the Modern and Contemporary Department. Shanay will remain a custodian of the programme that had been set in place by predecessor Jane Alison in both the Curve and Art Gallery.

### **New programming vision**

The programme in the Curve will begin in Spring 2024 with a show by the Morocco-born, France-based artist Soufiane Ababri, and in the Art Gallery in the autumn of 2024. We also made the decision that the autumn 2023 Curve show will be the last exhibition to be accompanied by a publication. This choice was made taking a number of factors into consideration including workload, impact of these publications, finances and sustainability.

The new programming vision recognises the strengths of the programme in the gallery that have been inherited, and the intention is to continue with the monographic and group exhibitions that audiences expect from the Barbican. However, the desire is to balance the programme to be more international and diverse. Shanay has already made specific and strategic input into the two group shows *RE/SISTERS: A Lens on Gender and Equality* and *Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art*, opening in the main gallery in autumn 2023 and Spring 2024 respectively, to ensure that non-western artists make up more than half of the curated selection.

### **Fashion and Design**

The other new priority for the Art Gallery programme is to re-introduce Fashion and Design, and to that effect we will be recruiting a new member of the team to be in post by autumn 2024. One of the founding principles for the Art Gallery was that it would have an interdisciplinary programme, and the gallery in the past has staged successful fashion and design-led shows. The hope is that by focusing a strand of the programme on fashion

and design we will be able to attract a different demographic of audience to the Centre, which would have a beneficial impact on revenue, while also increasing and diversifying our audiences. By reaffirming this commitment to the original intentions for the gallery programme, along with the rest of the gallery's ambitious programme, the hope is to excite and engage audiences.

### **Site-specific commissions**

Another aspiration is to initiate a new programme of site-specific commissions and interventions across the Barbican Centre to increase the Visual Arts programme's engagement with the ever-expanding number of visitors to the Centre. This new initiative will contribute to our goal of revitalising our place, alongside renewal works in and around the centre. The brief to artists for these commissions is to directly respond to the architecture of the Barbican and think through its legacy. The first of this series of commissions will be launched in the Conservatory in September 2023 with a spectacular installation by the Indian artist Ranjani Shettar. This will be accompanied by a range of experiences that will allow more people to come to the Conservatory to enjoy the work and experience other elements of the what the Barbican has to offer (more on this below). The team are currently exploring new artwork commissions for other spaces around the centre, with the hope to have at least one to two commissions every year. These would be funded within existing budget allocations or through fundraising.

### **Cross departmental collaborations**

These commissions will be bringing more visibility to the Barbican Centre, enhancing the opportunity for it be marketed as a destination. For example, the commission in the Conservatory has provoked a more expanded offer in the Conservatory, a much loved and popular part of the Barbican. We have already begun conversations across the organisation regarding potential cross-departmental collaborations, and our commitment to being connected – working together, supporting each other – is key to the success of these team efforts.

One of the first of these collaborative projects will come into effect with the Francis Alÿs Spring 2024 solo show, with Creative Collaboration. At the heart of the Alÿs presentation is his magnum opus "Children's Games" (1999 - ongoing) in which he has filmed children at play in various countries, sometimes in deeply troubling conditions. This work will be shown in the lower galleries and the curatorial concept for the upper galleries is to reverse the gaze and invite children from local communities to curate Alÿs's drawings. This community-led project is being developed in close collaboration with our Head of Creative Collaboration, Karena Johnson and her team and will mark a path forward for ways in which the Visuals Art Department can work with other departments in a more in-depth and considered manner.

### **Partnership and Touring Programme**

Along with focusing on the programme in London, specific attention has been paid to the department's touring and partnership programme which was established in 2015. The belief is that this part of the department's activities can be enhanced, and the Barbican should seek to tour and partner with major international museums and foundations. Conversations have already commenced with potential partners in countries ranging from Latin America to Japan. Growing this part of the department's activities could also lead to cost sharing and possible enhanced revenue. To note, *RE/SISTERS* has one partner venue, *Unravel* is organised in partnership with the Stedelijk in Amsterdam and the Francis Alÿs show will have two additional European venues. We have also confirmed a multi-year partnership with Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi which commences with their support of the 2023 Conservatory Commission.

## **Team structure**

Considering the growing ambition of the programme certain changes have been made to the structure of the department, with a series of regrades to create a senior team that includes a Deputy Head of Visual Arts, a Senior Manager of Exhibitions and Partnerships and a Senior Curator to support the Head of Visual Arts in the various endeavours. Furthermore, a department-wide workload review was completed in early 2023, speaking with more than 20 members of staff, to better understand how the department has been working and which areas could do with additional support to improve efficiencies. Recommendations to the Visual Arts leadership have been made, identifying areas where attention needs to be paid to alleviate excessive workload for members of the team. This is in line with our organisational goal of investing in our own people and culture, while finding sustainability in our workload and work patterns.

## **Barbican Renewal**

The Gallery and the Curve have both had significant improvements made to their physical structures in the last 10 years. This included a major project in the Gallery pre-Covid which improved access and created a new fire evacuation route enabling increased visitor capacity. However, there are still a number of infrastructure challenges, including the reliance of the Gallery for maintaining appropriate environmental conditions on the plant which is in need of improvement. The Gallery team have been working closely with the Barbican Renewal team on future plans, and three key members of the Gallery's senior team, including Shanay, will be involved with the Barbican Renewal Project groups going forward.

The site-specific commissions that the Gallery are planning are designed to work with the spaces of the Barbican alongside the Barbican Renewal process. Creating a commission in the Barbican Conservatory is a catalyst for change, demonstrating the potential of this space as well as highlighting the ways in which it can be upgraded and improved for the future.

## **Sustainability and climate change**

Visual Arts team are exploring new processes and solutions that reduce our environmental impact, while balancing the social, cultural and economic value we bring to the Barbican Centre and beyond. The Art Gallery has recently become a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition and are working their resources to inform our approach as well as being part of sector wide conversations. Our focus is on better tracking and recording of data around our carbon emissions, so we can more fully understand and contribute to meeting the Centre's target of Net Zero by 2027. We are also actively trying to reduce our energy consumption.

The main ways we can reduce our energy consumption is to reduce the impact of transporting artworks, reduce the amount of new exhibition build materials used and review the climate parameters for the gallery space. Alice Neel: Hot off the Griddle is the first in which the Visual Arts team have actively measured and quantified our environmental footprint. We have developed a framework with selected environmental impact indicators in the areas of energy, resource use, waste and transport to quantify impacts as well as register positive green environmental decisions. Once analysed this data provide a starting point for review, enabling us to align problem areas for improvement and subsequently set targets for future exhibitions.

We are also using our platform to showcase the work of artists whose work highlights environmental issues, thereby raising awareness (RESOLVE collective's them's the breaks and *RE/SISTERS: A lens on gender and ecology* are examples of this).

Our Senior Manager, Exhibitions and Partnerships was invited to talk about the work we are doing in this area at the Museums and Heritage show in May, an International Council of Museums (ICOM) networking event in June and will present a case study at a Touring Exhibitions Group (TEG) event in July.

## **Equity, diversity and inclusion**

This continues to be a priority area for our department. We are encouraged by the progress that has been made and the support that this brings – from the new EDI strategy and the Zero Tolerance strategy to the creation of new roles including that of the Head of EDI and the ongoing success of the staff networks (in which our department is represented). Having this expertise within the organisation provides both challenge and support. Following the publication of Barbican Stories and prior to leadership instituting positions to lead on EDI, the Visual Arts team self-organised meetings and forums to discuss issues, and arranged anti-racism training for the whole team.

There remains work to be done in how we engage with international artists, and in terms of the diversity of our own staff and audiences. We will utilise our learning from the aforementioned situation with RESOLVE Collective to review the way we work with and support artists and all those with whom we collaborate.

We remain committed to recruiting for potential and the changing make-up of the department reflects the success of this approach. We have recently submitted a bid to the Reimagine fund which if successful will enable us to offer further opportunities from curators from under-represented backgrounds and for us to learn from their expertise.

We will continue to work to reach new audiences and to ensure that our offer remains affordable to the broadest range of potential visitors through our pricing structure and initiatives like Pay What You Can, as well as by ensuring a strong free offer.

## **Challenges and Opportunities**

### **Challenges**

- The ongoing impact of Covid19 – this was a hugely disruptive for the wider arts sector and has been very de-stabilising for many visual arts organisations.
- The cost-of-living crisis has led to reduced visitor numbers across the sector and this is reflected in our own attendance figures.
- This has coincided with a period where our costs have risen (including for build, transport and staffing) requiring complex juggling of limited resources.
- The emotional impact of the issues listed above has impacted on staff mental health and well-being – and has contributed to a number of staff being on extended periods of sick leave and a greater workload for the rest of the team.
- Staffing is our key resource but post covid we saw a high staff turnover and a subsequent loss of organisational knowledge and the need for more training and support for new staff.
- The future programming ambitions will require us to make further structural changes to our team and at times to bring in additional staff resources which might require additional fundraising.
- The Visual Arts Department is impacted when other key departments on whom we rely on have capacity issues – for example Engineering, Finance and HR.

### **Opportunities**

- Post covid there is a renewed enthusiasm for in person experiences and for programming which feels relevant which is reflected for example in the critical

response and the huge visitor figures for the Soheila Sokhanvari commission which resonated with events in Iran.

- The ability for some of our team to work from home has created opportunities for flexible working which helps with staff motivation and retention.
- With the expertise of our new Head of Visual Arts and the excitement being generated around the forward programme there are new opportunities for fundraising which is already proving successful (e.g., in the funding of the Conservatory commission).
- With the arrival of the new Head of Visual Arts, and the quick implementation of their vision with the launch of the site-specific commissions, there are opportunities for Press and Communications to create excitement around the programme. Also, it allows for that team to present a more unified and cohesive visions for the Arts Programme rather than simply trying to generate interest from one project to the next
- We have the opportunity to work on better financial planning – a process which is already underway.
- With a permanent Marketing Manager in post, we can work closely with the Digital team to extend our programme beyond the gallery walls, creating shortform and longform content which engages our audiences and brings new visitors to both the Curve and Main Gallery. We will streamline our digital output by using data and performance statistics to track what is working well from one programme to the next.
- Knowing / broadening our audiences through the new programming and engagement work.
- Possibilities to grow on current plans – e.g., extend the Conservatory programme if successful in driving income and new visitors.
- Further develop our partnership and touring programme, building associations with major organisations beyond Europe, ensuring international visibility and recognition for the Barbican.

## **Corporate and Strategic implications**

The future plans of the Visual Arts team support the delivery of the City's Corporate Plan by:

- Contributing to a flourishing society. The Gallery programme is designed to be inclusive – both in terms of the artists and the audiences that we work with. We will continue to prioritise keeping down our admissions prices and enabling all visitors to experience the Curve space for free as well as creating new opportunities to engage with art across the building via the public art commissions. We are conscious of the impact of the cost of living crisis and the need to balance income generation with access, and will therefore be introducing a weekly Pay What you Can offer from the Carrie Mae Weems exhibition as well as working with the Communities and Neighbourhoods team to support free entry for key community groups.

### **Relevant Corporate Plan outcomes:**

3. People have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential.
  4. Communities are cohesive and have the facilities they need
- Supporting a thriving economy. We are committed to attracting the best talent to work for the team, recruiting for potential and encouraging and supporting all our team to be entrepreneurial in their approach to partnership working and income generation. The Partnership Programme is enabling us to make

significant savings through cost sharing and to bring exhibitions to the Barbican that would not otherwise be possible. We actively seek new fundraising opportunities and work closely with the Development team to maximise opportunities for funder cultivation. We are in conversation with several Foundations, each with different areas of commitment, including providing funding for artist operating in the non-west to other Foundations who are interested in access and public art projects. Also, Shanay has begun conversations with a number of collectors and individual donors who are keen to support the future programme. The aim would be to secure multi-year gifts from them.

**Relevant Corporate Plan outcomes:**

7. We are a global hub for innovation in finance and professional services, commerce and culture.
  8. We have access to the skills and talent we need
- Shaping outstanding environments. The new Public Art strategy celebrates the unique and important spaces of the Barbican. This initiative goes hand in hand with our commitment to environmental concerns – both in our programming and in our initiative to better track and manage our carbon footprint and to reduce use of materials that are harmful to the environment.

**Relevant Corporate Plan outcomes:**

9. We inspire enterprise, excellence, creativity and collaboration.
10. Our spaces are secure, resilient and well maintained.

**Financial implications**

None

**Resource implications**

Refer to [Team structure](#)

**Legal implications**

None

**Risk implications**

There is always some inherent risk with programming in the visual arts, mitigated by rigorous systems in place to enable any higher-risk activities/content to be flagged to senior management during the development phase and monitored accordingly. It should be noted that failing to programme in the way we do – ambitious, daring and innovative – presents a different risk, i.e. reputational risk. Taking risks in order to realise a truly global programme, and build audiences for that programme, is an important part of our vision.

**Equalities implications**

Refer to [Equity, diversity and inclusion](#)

**Climate implications**

Refer to [Sustainability and climate change](#)

**Security implications**

None



## **Conclusion: a note from Shanay Jhaveri, Head of Visual Arts**

The past two years have been a difficult and challenging time for the Barbican Visual Arts team. Emerging from the pandemic, Barbican Stories, significant changes across the Centre in leadership and a transition between Heads of the department has been unsettling and destabilising for the team. Every effort is being made to bring a sense of stability and calm to the team, and my arrival and the implementation of a new vision gives the gallery a forward momentum and many new goals to meet. Realising my aspirations for the gallery and its programme should equip it to meet the demands of present circumstances in the sector, between diversifying the offering in the gallery to adding new strands of programming. The aim is to be more intentional about the audiences we attract, with a consistent message with our programme. There is an understanding of the financial reality of the Centre and to those ends new revenue streams are being explored through programming and partnerships and touring, and our financial planning model is being reviewed. This is all being done keeping the welfare and well-being of the team in mind.

### **Report Author**

Shanay Jhaveri – Head of Visual Arts

Email: [shanay.jhaveri@barbican.org.uk](mailto:shanay.jhaveri@barbican.org.uk)

**Appendix 1** – Future programming

**Appendix 2** – 2022-23 Exhibition reviews

**Appendix 3** – Attendance analysis