



Empowering Curators

A major sector-wide investment to increase curatorial diversity in UK museums, galleries and heritage sites

Cohort 2

Host Organisation information pack

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Cover: A visitor viewing the Naples Collection gallery at Compton Verney. © Zeinab Batchelor / Art Fund 2024
Above: Empowering Curators Residency at Ashorne Hill, January 2026. © Hydar Dewachi / Art Fund 2026

1. Introduction

Firstly, we would like to thank everyone who has been involved in shaping the first cohort of Empowering Curators. These reflections and feedback have significantly informed our thinking for cohort two and fed into the development of this updated Host Information Pack.

We are delighted that you are considering becoming a Host Organisation for Empowering Curators, a curatorial leadership programme for Global Majority curators, led by Art Fund in collaboration with peer funders and museum partners across the UK.

Through a programme of bespoke Curatorial Fellowships, supported by committed and meaningful organisational change within Host Organisations, we aim to increase the number of mid- and senior-career Global Majority¹ curators progressing into curatorial and executive leadership roles across the UK museum sector.

By investing in both individuals and institutions, Empowering Curators seeks to catalyse sector-wide transformation, creating a more diverse and representative workforce. The programme will support curators and Host Organisations to develop innovative programmes, explore collections in new ways, and engage broader audiences through greater representation of the communities they serve.

The Empowering Curators programme has been developed through a rigorous research and co-design process involving Global Majority curators, museum leaders and key stakeholders. Across the first two cohorts, the programme will:

- **Provide 20 Global Majority curators with professional development, support and allyship through multi-year Curatorial Fellowships** – offering the opportunities, resources, training and networks needed to accelerate their careers at a critical stage.
- **Build capacity and drive structural change across Host Organisations and the sector** – through an organisational development programme including online and in-person workshops and 1:1 organisational support, institutions hosting Fellows will be equipped with the tools, resources and strategic guidance needed to drive organisational change.
- **Fuel innovative and inclusive experiences for museum audiences** – empowering the Curatorial Fellows and their Host Organisations to challenge traditional practices and embrace new ways of working.

This document provides information on the Empowering Curators programme, its development, delivery and the role that Host Organisations can play in helping us to achieve the programme's ambitions. It sets out the criteria for being a Host Organisation, what you can expect from us and what we expect from you.

We hope you find this information useful, and it gives you all you need to decide whether to join us in being part of this exciting landmark intervention.

¹ Informed by Art Fund's consultation during the co-design phase and Spike Island's *Inclusive Language Guide*, 'Global Majority' in the context of this programme refers to people who identify as Black, Asian, mixed and/or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities'; these groups represent over 80% of the world's population.

2. Background

In November 2022, Art Fund published *It's About Handing Over Power*, a report co-authored by Sandra Shakespeare from Museum X and Dr Errol Francis from Culture&. The report looked at the lack of ethnic diversity in the curatorial workforce and the past initiatives that have sought to address this, with an aim to understand what is needed to tackle this effectively, and to set out priorities for fellow funders, museums and sector partners to deliver.

These stressed the importance of targeted initiatives that lead to permanent curatorial employment, alongside the need for ambitious investment, greater collaboration between funders, and new strategic partnerships to make ambitious, lasting change.

The recommendations included:

- For funders to work actively with institutions, ensuring accountability, recognising the structural inequities that Global Majority curators experience, and providing appropriate modes of support to retain staff, helping them gain experience and, importantly, seniority.
- To fund, increase and share high-quality research on career pathways of participants in arts and heritage diversity schemes with appropriately funded longitudinal studies and the creation of a dataset that tracks demographics of the curatorial workforce, including freelancers.
- To focus on specific initiatives leading to permanent curatorial employment, rather than generic entry-level or temporary roles.

To take forward the report's recommendations, Art Fund undertook a programme of research, consultation and co-design during 2023 to develop Empowering Curators. Led by a Steering Group of museum and gallery leaders from Global Majority backgrounds, the process involved curators, museum leaders, peer funders and sector stakeholders from across the UK. Their insights directly informed the programme's structure, priorities and intended outcomes.



Visitors at the Medicine Man exhibition at Wellcome Collection. Photo © Wellcome Collection / Ben Gilbert

3. Programme detail

The Empowering Curators programme provides bespoke Curatorial Fellowships hosted by museums, galleries and heritage sites across the UK, supporting a growing network of talented mid-to senior-career² Global Majority curators and Host Organisations. These organisations are committed to nurturing diverse curatorial talent, evolving inclusive practices and addressing power inequities within their organisations and broadening audiences through greater community relevance.

The Fellowships are designed to accelerate curators' professional development at a critical point in their careers, enabling them to become exceptional candidates for future leadership positions at both curatorial and executive level. The programme also provides Fellows with additional support, such as coaching and wellbeing check-ins, to help them thrive and make the most of their time on the programme.



The launch of *It's About Handing Over Power* at the V&A, attended by over 400 delegates from across the museum sector, November 2022. (Ameena M. McConnell, Dominique Heyse-Moore, Jade Foster, Jessica Taylor, Aliyah Hasinah). © Joladé Olusanya/ Art Fund 2022

Fellows and Host Organisations

This pilot programme will support ten Curatorial Fellowships and ten Host Organisations per cohort. There will be two cohorts, each lasting up to three years, with the first cohort running from 2025-2028 and the second from 2027-2030. The two cohorts will overlap by a year (2028) to form a network of 20 Fellows and Hosts engaged in the programme.

The programme is aimed at mid- to senior-career Global Majority curators, recognising this as a critical stage in career progression where support and development opportunities have historically been limited. Across the two cohorts, the programme will support:

- A number of newly created curatorial roles established by Host Organisations through the programme.
- Existing curators already working within Host Organisations to join the programme as Fellows.

Alongside support for the Fellows, Empowering Curators will support Host Organisations to strengthen inclusive leadership, develop organisational capacity, and support meaningful, long-term organisational change. By investing in both people and institutions, the programme aims to create lasting impact for curators, organisations and the wider sector.

² For the purposes of this programme, a mid- to senior-career curator is typically someone with significant professional experience who can lead projects, contribute to collecting strategies, programming decisions, influence organisational decision-making and, in some cases, manage people or budgets. This will often, but not exclusively, equate to around 7–10 years' experience in museums, galleries, archives, heritage organisations or related cultural institutions.

Recruitment

Hosts – For this second cohort, there will be an open call for any museum, gallery or heritage site wanting to take part in the programme. Hosts will need to demonstrate their commitment to advancing EDI at all levels of their organisation, and to have in place the necessary structures, safeguards and care to create an environment in which Global Majority curators will thrive.

Potential Host Organisations will need to complete and submit an application form. If shortlisted, organisations will be invited to interview. Further information on the assessment and selection process can be found later in this document.

Fellows – Recruitment of the Curatorial Fellows will be led by the Host Organisations, with the individual roles and remit tailored to meet the specific needs and specialisms of each Host. Guidance and support in inclusive recruitment will be provided for the Host Organisations, contributing to a straightforward, open and transparent process which limits the burden on applicants and removes traditional and unnecessary barriers.

Appointments and backfill

Hosts may choose to:

- **Recruit a full-time post externally via open recruitment** – The curator cannot have a substantive role within another organisation
- **Appoint an existing member of staff** – This must be a mid- to senior-career curator
- **Develop alternative models** – For example a job share

Organisations considering an internal appointment should carefully assess the operational impact on existing responsibilities. Art Fund can support organisations by providing funds to backfill the responsibilities of a curator who has been appointed to the Fellowship.

To note, new posts will be fully funded by Art Fund, however, please ensure Fellows are given the time and space within their working hours to take part in the Fellowship. We appreciate that this will vary between Fellows and organisations, but we ask that Hosts allow a minimum of half a day per week protected time for programme activities and additional time for professional development, such as training, research and conferences.

Provision for the Curatorial Fellows

Each of the curators will undertake a paid Curatorial Fellowship of up to three years in a Host Organisation. Fellowships will centre the needs and welfare of the curators, nurturing an environment of reciprocity and belonging, while accelerating the professional development of the curators at a pivotal point in their careers.

Clore Leadership are key partners in the programme and will support Fellows to identify and explore their goals, aspirations and achievements across the three years.

Each Fellow will be provided with the following key support and activities:

- Facilitated learning as part of a national cohort of Fellows
- Self-directed learning and personal development
- Project delivery – this could include programming, commissioning artists, collections development, exhibitions or/and new interventions
- Mentoring and/or coaching
- Wellbeing support such as therapies
- A budget to cover access requirements and professional development
- Fellowship alumni network

Fellows should receive appropriate support throughout the programme.

We recommend that Hosts identify:

- **A line manager** – responsible for supporting the Fellow's day-to-day work and development.
- **A senior sponsor or champion** – a trustee or other governance representative or senior manager who will provide visible leadership for the organisation's participation in the programme and help drive engagement with organisational development activity.
- **Relevant colleagues who can support organisational change activities** – who will take part in learning, reflection and development activities, helping to embed change and ensure the Fellowship contributes to wider organisational learning.

In some instances, these roles may be carried out by the same person.

Please talk to us if you are unsure.

Organisational change

Critical to the success of the programme will be a commitment and desire from Host Organisations to undertake a programme of change to advance equity, diversity and inclusion at all levels of their organisation. To achieve this, each Host Organisation will work with People Make it Work, organisational development specialists who are core project partners.

People Make it Work will work with Host Organisations through monthly online sessions that will centre peer learning, organisational development tools and input from sector specialists. In addition, Host Organisations will receive bespoke individual support, resourced through an additional £6,000 (per Host) organisational change budget. This commitment to learning and change by the Host Organisations is a critical element of the Empowering Curators programme and will require participation by the Fellow's line manager and a member of the Senior Leadership Team, whose role will be to share learning and lead change within their organisation outside of the programme sessions.

We recognise that organisations will begin this programme from different starting points and that change will look different in different contexts. Framed around their specific organisational needs, this package could include elements such as peer learning with other Host Organisations, action learning sets for museum leaders, facilitated anti-racism workshops, or/and one-to-one executive coaching.

Undertaking this programme of organisational change will support Host Organisations to become truly open and accountable workplaces that fully embrace anti-discrimination, are aware of their organisational biases and histories, and are committed to creating an organisational culture in which the Curatorial Fellow and future Global Majority curators will thrive. We are looking for organisations which demonstrate a commitment to learning, reflection and action and can demonstrate this at every stage of the programme.



Staff at The Bowes Museum doing a cleaning demonstration in the Collections Care Gallery. Photo courtesy of The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle. Photo: © The Bowes Museum

Leadership and governance commitment

We strongly encourage applications to be supported by senior leadership and trustees. Sustainable change is most effective when responsibility is shared across the organisation. We would therefore like organisations to consider how trustees, executive leadership and senior managers will engage with the programme and any learning. We will ask you to describe their involvement in the application form and demonstrate this at interview.

If your organisation is shortlisted, a member of your senior leadership team and trustee (if applicable) will need to attend the interview. If known, we would also like to meet the member of your team that will line manage the Fellow.

Outcomes and evaluation

Evaluation is a fundamental part of the programme part of the programme and helps us understand both individual and organisational outcomes.

This is being led by key partner Creative Arts Social (CAS), specialist evaluators working with Art Fund, the Hosts, the Fellows, consultants and other partners to monitor and evaluate the programme. The evaluation considers the Curatorial Fellows, the Host Organisations, the audiences and Art Fund and the change we want to see.

Hosts and Curatorial Fellows should expect:

- Participation in evaluation activities
- Conversations with evaluation partners
- Requests for information and reflection throughout the programme

Information about evaluation processes, timelines and partner roles will be shared at the beginning of the cohort two programme through sessions with Host and Fellows.

Indicative programme journey

Before applying, organisations should carefully consider the time commitment required. Participation in Empowering Curators extends beyond the Fellow's individual development and requires active engagement from Host Organisations.

While exact dates may vary, successful Hosts should expect participation across the following stages:

- Host onboarding
- Curator recruitment/engagement
- Fellow onboarding
- Attendance at Host learning events (monthly, with the majority held online)
- At least one in person event for all Hosts, Fellows and project partners
- Bespoke individual organisational development activities
- Evaluation and reflection activities
- Participation from relevant senior leaders and stakeholders
- Yearly and final reporting

A full programme schedule will be provided at the earliest opportunity, and organisations should anticipate and make time for attendance at a number of cohort-wide events.

As with the first cohort, this second cohort will be delivered over three years (2027-2030). The aim is to have all cohort two Hosts confirmed by **January 2027** with recruitment of Fellow's beginning soon after this.

Host Organisations will be required to have all Fellows, whether recruited internally or externally, in post by **September 2027**. This is to enable all Fellows to take part in the Fellows residential, a key moment in the programme.



Unveiling of *Hibiscus Rising* by Yinka Shonibare. © Yinka Shonibare CBE. All Rights Reserved, DACS 2026. Photo: © David Oates / Art Fund 2024

4. Being a Host Organisation

Art Fund is fully invested in realising the ambitions of this programme, but we cannot do it alone. We would like to work with organisations who are also committed to making real, lasting change. In hosting an Empowering Curators Fellow, organisations should be committed to enacting change within their own organisation and sharing their knowledge and experience with the wider sector.

Who are we looking for?

For this second cohort (2027-30), we are looking to work with up to ten Host Organisations who can demonstrate an existing track record in EDI and have a desire and commitment to undertake further organisational change at a senior, structural and institutional level. While the Fellowship could bring curatorial capacity, we are particularly keen to work with organisations that see this as an opportunity to engage with the wider organisational development and sector-wide ambitions of the programme.

To be a Host you can be a museum, gallery or visual arts institution based anywhere in the UK. You will need to have publicly accessible collections or exhibition programmes, but you do not need to be an NPO/RFO. We welcome interest from organisations of different sizes, artforms and locations. We are particularly interested in supporting organisations based in Northern Ireland, Wales, the East Midlands, and rural areas across the UK.

Organisational readiness

Central to our assessment criteria is an organisation's commitment to progressing equity, diversity and inclusion. We want potential Hosts to be able to demonstrate the following:

- **Ambition and a proven track record in EDI practice**, demonstrating a clear commitment to championing EDI, acting on learning, and addressing inequities.
- **A readiness to undertake meaningful organisational change**, including a willingness to reflect on organisational culture, challenge entrenched norms and review practices.
- **Visible commitment and accountability from senior leadership**, with leaders actively supporting, resourcing and modelling change.
- **Have, or be aiming to develop, collections and/or exhibition programmes** that can be leveraged for more inclusive public programming.
- **A willingness to give agency, autonomy and influence to Fellows**, ensuring they can contribute meaningfully to organisational decision making and strategy.
- **The infrastructure, capacity and appetite to support transformation**, including staff time, resources and an openness to experiment, take risks and embrace new ways of working.
- **A compassionate, open and supportive environment**, with a commitment to wellbeing, honest reflection, feedback and peer learning.
- **A commitment to sustaining the impact of the Fellowship** beyond the programme, including embedding learning across the organisation, advocating for this work more widely and retaining Fellows where possible.

What is expected of the Hosts

We want to work with organisations who share our vision for the Empowering Curators programme. All Host Organisations will be considered programme partners, and therefore we would need Host Organisations to:

- Nominate at least one key contact and a board/Senior Management Team representative to sponsor, lead and champion the programme internally
- Give Fellows the opportunity to develop and deliver a programme of curatorial work
- Ensure Fellows have time to engage with Fellowship and programme activities
- Contribute a sum of £10,000 to the programme (as financial support, not in kind)
- Commit to exploring how the Fellow's role could be sustained post fellowship
- Give time, commitment and energy



The Empowering Curators Residency at Ashorne Hill, January 2026. © Hydar Dewachi / Art Fund 2026

5. What you can expect from Art Fund

If you decide to work with us, we want to be clear about the type of support we can offer as part of this programme. We recognise that each organisation is different, working differently, in different locations and with different resources. With People Make it Work, we will listen and respond to the needs of your organisation so you can successfully deliver the programme. As a minimum, we will support organisations with:

- Organisational change
- A budget to support change-making
- Recruitment of Fellows (where they are new to the organisation)
- Salary and on costs for the Fellow (new posts only and tapered across the programme)
- Costs for backfill (existing staff only and tapered)
- Onboarding new and existing Fellows
- Budget to support the Fellow's curatorial work e.g. programming, collections development, exhibitions or/and new interventions

To support Fellows' onboarding, we are producing a Fellow Information Pack that provides an overview of the programme and what Fellows can expect over the three-year fellowship. The pack uses evaluation findings and learning gathered to date.

What Art Fund will fund

The indicative costs table overleaf illustrates the financial support the programme will provide, and the financial commitment expected from Hosts.

Salaries

Art Fund will pay the full salary, including on-costs, of a new curator. We recognise that salaries for mid- and senior-career curators vary between organisations, reflecting different levels of responsibility and experience. The salary set out in the table below is intended as an example and is based on our research into comparable roles at this level. However, we appreciate that not every organisation will be able to offer this salary, and Art Fund may be able to cover any shortfall to help ensure parity across the programme. Where the Fellow is new to the organisation, Hosts will be required to pay 50% of their salary in Year 3.

Where a curator is already in post, we would expect the Host to continue paying the curator's salary costs. Art Fund can support organisations by providing funding to backfill the responsibilities of a curator who has been appointed to the Fellowship. The maximum funding available from Art Fund is for a part-time post of up to 2.5 days per week. In Year 3, Hosts will be required to contribute 50% of the backfill post salary.

Activity Costs

Art Fund will cover costs relating to Fellows' and Hosts' activities, including recruitment costs for new curators, Fellows' professional development, and Hosts' change-making activities. Please see the table overleaf for a full breakdown.

All Hosts are also required to contribute £10,000 to the programme (as a financial contribution rather than an in-kind contribution) towards programme delivery. This applies regardless of whether the post is new or existing.

Cohort Two 10× Fellows 2027–2030		
Description	Cost	Contribution
Pro rata salary per Curator per annum x5*	£45,000 + On-costs	Art Fund and Host Organisation**
Backfill for existing Curator per annum x5*	£22,500 + On-costs	Art Fund and Host Organisation**
Hosts – Recruitment costs (per Host recruiting externally)	£1,000	Art Fund
Fellows – Project/Programme budget (per Fellow)	£20,000	Art Fund
Fellows – Professional Development (per Fellow)	£4,500	Art Fund
Fellows – Access and Equity Budget (per Fellow)	£2,000	Art Fund
Fellows – Support Pathways e.g. additional coaching	£1,000	Art Fund
Hosts – Internal change-making (per Host)	£6,000	Art Fund
Hosts – Networking and peer learning (across all Hosts)	£3,000	Art Fund
Hosts – Financial contribution to the programme (total)	£10,000	Host Organisation
*Where the Fellow is new to the organisation or an existing curator is backfilled, Hosts will need to pay 50% of their salary in Year 3		
**Art Fund will only fund new posts and backfill, with the Host Organisation continuing to fund existing posts		

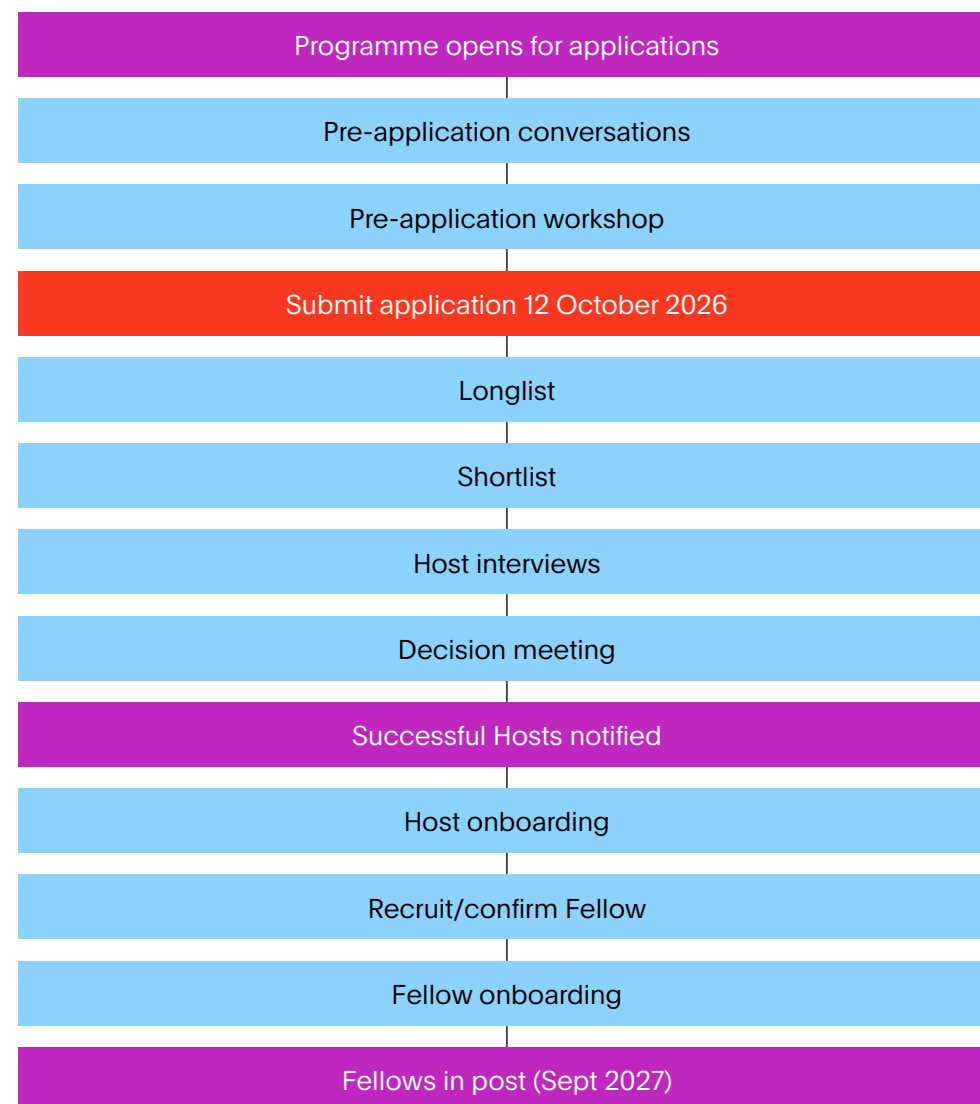
6. How to apply

Before you get started, we would love to have a chat with you as we appreciate you might have some questions. Please do contact Amisha Karia, Programme Manager to arrange this pre-application conversation, akaria@artfund.org. We will not be able to accept an application unless we have met with you before you submit.

We will also hold a pre-application workshop offering an opportunity to learn more about the programme, explore programme aims and ambitions, meet some of the project partners, and ask any questions. The workshop will be held online on **Friday 18 September, 12pm-1pm**.

Once you have decided to apply to become an Empowering Curators Host, we ask that you submit an application. This is where you can tell us why you are best placed to be a Host and how you are delivering best practice in EDI. A short application form accompanies this information pack.

To help illustrate the application and selection process, please see below



How applications are assessed

Submitted application forms will be assessed against the programme criteria by Art Fund and programme partners. Longlisted applications will then be reviewed and discussed by a panel including representatives from Art Fund, programme partners, and sector experts.

Applications are assessed against a range of criteria, including:

- Demonstrated commitment to the programme aims
- Operational capacity and readiness for change
- Leadership support and buy-in
- Proposal for the Curator's role while on the Fellowship
- Ability to support the Fellow successfully
- Potential for organisational growth and change
- Long-term sustainability of learning and impact

We do not expect applicants to have achieved all of their EDI ambitions. Creating an equitable and inclusive organisation is a continuous process of learning, reflection and action rather than a destination. We recognise that organisations will be at different stages of their journey, and our assessment focuses on commitment, organisational readiness, capacity for meaningful change, and the support available to the Fellow.

What to expect at interview

If you are shortlisted for interview this will be an opportunity to explore the information provided in your written application and discuss your organisation's readiness to participate.

We may ask questions relating to:

- Organisational capacity
- Leadership commitment
- Support for the Fellow
- Organisational change ambitions
- Long-term sustainability

Interviews are assessed alongside the written application.

We ask that attendees from your organisation include members of the leadership/senior leadership team, a trustee (where applicable) and the person who will line manage the Fellow (where this is known). Please ensure there is also representation from those colleagues who will be part of the organisational change work.

The interview panel will include Art Fund, People Make it Work and a senior leader from the Global Majority.

Next steps

If you are interested in partnering with Art Fund on this programme, please do get in touch and we can arrange a time for an informal conversation. Please ensure you have read this document in full and familiarised yourself with the application form before meeting with us. We will not be able to accept a submission if we have not had a pre-application conversation.

Application submissions should be made via the Microsoft Forms link on the Empowering Curators webpage by **5pm, 12 October 2026**.

We really hope you will join on this journey to transform UK museums and galleries. Through this, we aim to develop a culture of inclusivity for Global Majority curators to lead and thrive, helping collections and exhibitions to become more relevant, accessible, and engaging for all audiences as a result.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Art Fund

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Cutting-off ceremony for Sekai Machache's new tapestry commission for the University of Aberdeen, created with Dovecot Studios and supported through Jerwood Art Fund Commissions. Artwork: © Sekai Machache. Photo: © Phil Wilkinson. Courtesy Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh and University of Aberdeen.