



ART<sup>UK</sup>

Connecting  
everyone to art

Impact report 2023



## Art UK's vital service

Art UK's mission is simple: to connect you to art, whether you are a school child or scholar, a teacher or tourist. From one incredible digital platform, anyone can delve into the wealth of the nation's art. We unite collections big and small – from local museums to large universities – and bring their artworks to millions of people. Art UK inspires creativity, supports lifelong learning and gives everyone a unique opportunity to discover art that inspires.

With close to 3,500 collections now represented on Art UK, we provide a vital service to the cultural sector and beyond. Against a background of ongoing financial pressure in the sector, we ensure that collections have the chance to engage with digital audiences, whether that is through adding new works to our site, hosting an Art Unlocked lecture or launching a guide on the Bloomberg Connects app.

As a pioneering charity which has created the UK's largest ever institutional arts partnership, we are committed to innovation. Over the past 12 months we have developed a new Art UK Shop platform to help collections generate critical revenue, launched a groundbreaking education programme that will transform young lives, and begun planning to add millions of object records

## We ensure that all collections have the chance to engage with digital audiences

to our site as the game-changing Museum Data Service gets underway.

Meanwhile, our dedicated staff have continued our essential day-to-day work: adding artworks to our database, publishing fascinating stories, solving art mysteries and much more. Over the coming pages you will find out about the incredible impact that this work has delivered. Every artwork you see in this report was added to our site in 2023.

We want everyone to know about Art UK and, whatever their interest, make the most of this incredible resource. We hope this report will inspire you to spread the word... and to make an art discovery or two of your own.

**Kathleen Soriano**  
Art UK Chair



Above

*Black Madonna* by  
Paul Furneaux (b.1962)  
© the artist. Image  
credit: University of  
St Andrews

Cover image

*Future Fossil III* by  
Anya Beaumont (b.1971)  
© the artist. Image  
credit: Chippenham  
Museum



## Our progress in 2023

Reaching the five million users mark was a major milestone for Art UK, with total traffic up 13% year on year\*. We are particularly pleased that the proportion of our UK audience from the global majority closely matched the population benchmark, as broadening our audience has been a significant focus for us. Furthermore, the platform attracted over 3 million overseas users to explore the extraordinary national art collection owned by the UK public.

Audience satisfaction levels were also encouraging with 55% of those surveyed saying that they use the site at least weekly and 86% saying they generally found what they were looking for on the platform. What is also gratifying – given our desire to encourage more people to visit museums – is that 19% of our audience say that they use the site to plan visits.

Whilst we made advances on many fronts, 2023 was also a year in which we invested for the future, with particularly generous support from Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Freelands Foundation. Our new Shop was built and launched, and in future will generate significant amounts of much-needed commercial income for museums. Huge progress was made on creating the Museum Data Service, our joint-

## 5.3 million users visited Art UK last year

venture initiative that will enable museums to share object records between themselves and beyond. It will also help Art UK open up access to significantly more of the national art collection. Lastly, we launched the national roll-out of The Superpower of Looking, which will play a critical role in improving the visual literacy powers of primary school children and also support teachers.

As this report attests, Art UK provides significant public benefit to audiences, collections and artists. We do this economically, imaginatively and collaboratively. All that we deliver is down to our generous funders and my amazing colleagues. Against a sometimes challenging financial background, these colleagues have made Art UK what it is today, all of them passionate in the belief that our national collection of art should be shared and enjoyed by the widest possible audience.

**Andrew Ellis**  
Art UK Chief Executive



*Holidays Abroad* by Edward Bawden (1903–1989) © the estate of Edward Bawden. Image credit: The Higgins Bedford

\*All figures in this report cover the period when Google's Universal Analytics was replaced by GA4. In some cases, direct comparison was not possible and full 12-month growth rates are estimated



# Our audiences

The total number of users visiting Art UK was **5.3 million** in 2023, showing growth of 13% year on year. There were **6.8 million** sessions and **20.9 million** page views.

Our top five countries by percentage of total users:

- » UK ..... **42%**
- » USA ..... **23%**
- » Canada ..... **3%**
- » Australia ..... **3%**
- » Germany ..... **3%**

Our 2023 survey (2,740 respondents) revealed:

- our UK audience is becoming more diverse, with **16%** from the global majority
- our audience is becoming younger, with the largest age group being **25-29**
- we have more users from Scotland and Wales, with them together making up **19%** of our global audience

On social media:

- our total followers reached **172,136** across all platforms, an increase of **13%**
- our posts had **4.5 million** impressions with a reach of **3.3 million**
- we had **48,012** views on YouTube videos, **47%** more than 2022



*Iona, Mull and Ben More in the Distance* by Samuel John Peploe (1871-1935). Image credit: City of Edinburgh Council



## Our learning programme

We are deeply concerned about the marginalisation of the teaching of arts subjects in our schools. Through our platform and our growing learning resources our long-term ambition is to connect every school child with the extraordinary public collection of art they all own.

Art UK provides teachers with access to free and inclusive digital learning resources about art and art history, designed to meet the needs of all teachers working in today's schools. Our aim is to ensure that cultural capital is not the preserve of the privileged few.

- Our free-to-use schools' learning resources, which can be filtered by home nation curriculum, grew to **219** curriculum-based activities, an **18%** increase
- Traffic to our learn and art terms pages was **123,072** users – an increase of **87%**
- Over **870** teachers have now signed up to receive our schools' newsletter, a **45%** increase on 2022



Mandy Barrett, Gomersal Primary School. Image credit: David Madden/Art UK





Pupils at Belgrave St.  
Bartholomew's Academy.  
Image credit: David  
Madden/Art UK

**'Watching my pupils' enthusiasm in the classroom grow after The Superpower of Looking lessons has been inspiring. For children who may never have been to a gallery before, it's been transformative'**

*Adele Darlington, EYFS teacher at Leighfield Primary School*

## IN FOCUS: The Superpower of Looking

In September, we started the national rollout of The Superpower of Looking, our flagship schools' learning programme. An innovative and inclusive programme, it seeks to transform the visual literacy skills of primary school children across the UK, taking the world of art and images as its starting point. Our ambition is to reach all primary schools by 2030.

- **20** accessible lesson resources are available for free to encourage 'everyone learning' through inclusive and adaptive approaches and guidance notes for teachers
- Between 1st September and 31st December there was a **228%** increase in users, with **7,338** people visiting the pages
- **1,000** teachers have engaged with the programme
- An advocacy event at the Royal Academy in London assembled **52** influential supporters to amplify the learning programme across the UK



## Our innovations

Art UK has always encouraged the innovative development of new digital tools and offerings in response to audience needs.

The winning of the Apollo magazine Digital Innovation of the Year Award in late 2022 was due recognition of this. Over the next few years, the Museum Data Service will, we believe, stand apart in its unique contribution to connecting and sharing museum records on a massive scale.

We added an artist gender filter to our search, which shows that **24%** of artists, where we know the gender, are female.

We developed a **new search facility** and landing page for people featured in artworks. In due course this will allow our audience to discover historical figures alongside those from myth and legend, the Bible, literature and wider fiction, as well as artists' models – and even artists themselves.

*L'allée au bois (The Woodland Path)* by Pierre-Auguste Renoir (1841–1919). Image credit: Ulster Museum, National Museums NI



**'Art UK is an indispensable resource. Curations are a wonderful feature, virtually extending engagement with exhibitions. Art Detective encourages knowledge sharing and debate, plugging informational gaps and reanimating works through reappraisal.'**

*Julia Beaumont-Jones, Curator, Royal Air Force Museum*





*Fukushima No. 8* by Paul Scott (b.1953)  
© the artist. Image credit: Aberystwyth University School of Art Museum and Galleries

**‘The Museum Data Service will mean researchers can more easily discover the richness of our local and regional museums across the UK, alongside the collections taken care of by national museums’**

*Dr Catherine Eagleton, Director of Libraries and Museums, University of St Andrews*

## IN FOCUS: Museum Data Service

A free and transformative service, the MDS aims to connect and share all the object records across all UK museums, large and small. A joint initiative by Art UK, Collections Trust and the University of Leicester, it is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Arts and Humanities Research Council. We can take collection data in any format and offer an easy way to share and backup collection management systems.

- There have been **40** expressions of interest in the new Museum Data Service after the soft November launch
- Combined, these cover nearly **9.1 million** records
- Our **11** early adopters include museums big and small: Amgueddfa Cymru – Museum Wales, Ashmolean Museum, Diving Museum Gosport, Government Art Collection, National Gallery, National Museums Northern Ireland, Norfolk Museums, Science Museum Group, Tenby Museum, University of St Andrews and Wiltshire Museum
- These collections have already brought more than **two million** object records into the MDS repository



## Telling the stories behind art

In 2023 we embarked on a new, funded programme of commissioning story content, with dedicated staff working across our artwork database, both geographically and thematically.

Our new funding model has been remarkably successful and will help us deliver on our ambition to make Art UK the place to go for anyone wanting to learn about art in the UK.

- **1.4 million** people read one of our stories, a **24%** increase on last year's figure
- There were **1.7 million** sessions, and **2 million** page views
- We reached the milestone of **2,000** published stories – evergreen articles that tell the story of art across the UK
- We publish on a diverse range of themes and topics, and our writers represent a wide cross-section of society, in terms of ethnicity and nationality, and socio-economic background

**'Joining Art UK has enabled us to share our collections with a wider audience – the stories are a great way to explore new themes and narratives'**

*Thomas Dobson, Collections and Digitisation Officer, Oxford Centre for Methodism*



*Full Cart* by Brian Scampton (b.1964)  
© the artist. Image credit: Northern Ireland Civil Service

### IN FOCUS: Content from Northern Ireland

In 2023 we published considerably more Northern Ireland content thanks to specific funding received. Some of the stories took a fresh look at how Northern Ireland's artistic community developed over time, particularly in Belfast, from the urban development of the early 1900s to the city's modernist outlook in the 1930s and 40s, and public art since the Good Friday Agreement. Others focused on the work of specific artists, such as Paul Nietsche, Alice Berger Hammerschlag and James Sinton Sleator. During this period, we saw unprecedented growth of the Northern Irish audience for stories. Between February and November 2023 we more than doubled our Northern Ireland audience reading stories about Northern Irish art and artists.



## Our engagement tools

Through our innovative Art Detective, Curations and Tagger tools, we offer a variety of ways for our audiences to engage with the artworks on our site.

- Our Art Detective global network of specialist knowledge helped update **1,637** artwork records with new artist attributions, sitter names and other important information in 2023
- **45,249** users viewed Art Detective discussion pages a total of **291,254** times
- Our Curations tool allows anyone to create a digital exhibition, and **528** new Curations were created, boosting the total number by **34%** to reach **2,099**
- The total number of Curations sessions over the year was **112,994**
- We developed a set of Curations featuring an A-Z of 1,000 women artists, which when shared on X became Art UK's most engaged social media post

**'We are deeply grateful to the specialists and leading scholars from Art Detective for sharing their expertise, which allows us to enhance and update our records'**

*Helen Fothergill, Aberdeen City Council*



*The Contrast* by Nasser Azam (b.1963) © the artist.  
Image credit: Ben Uri Collection

### IN FOCUS: Tagger

In the summer of 2022, we relaunched Tagger, our easy-to-use crowdsourcing tool that allows anyone to help make artworks more searchable by adding tags. An essential part of our mission to democratise access to the nation's art, it makes it easier for users to find the subjects they are looking for. Over the past 12 months we have seen a huge increase in Tagger activity:

- A total of almost **28,500** artworks have now been tagged – a total increase of **169%**
- There are now **230,000** individual tags, a **182%** increase
- The number of tags verified by other people reached **140,000**, an increase of **302%**



## Supporting artists

Art UK unites artists' works in public collections and actively promotes their works at a global level. Artists benefit from this extensive visibility on an unparalleled platform for engagement and recognition. Art UK also provides opportunities for income generation.

- There are **54,000** artists shown on Art UK
- **93%** of their **308,000** works have images
- Some **40%** of works are in copyright
- Last year **770** more artists/estates were sought out to request their permission to reproduce their work on Art UK
- Less than **1%** of artists or their estates refuse to show their artworks on Art UK (93 rights holders)
- Works by **7,910** artists, **200** of which remain in copyright, are available as print on demand through the Art UK Shop

Art UK actively engages with artists and estates as well as collections in discussions about copyright protection and licensing. Through these dialogues, the organisation has secured image reproduction consent for a significant number of artworks. This not only safeguards artists' intellectual property but also facilitates access to their work, contributing to a broader cultural dialogue.

**'I have to say that the whole Art UK site is an incredible achievement – my congratulations to everyone involved'**

*Paul de Monchaux, sculptor*

*The Swelling of the Sea – Furthest West – The North Atlantic Ocean by Thomas Joshua Cooper (b.1946) © the artist. Image credit: Scottish Parliament Art Collection*





## Supporting public collections

Art UK is, we believe, the largest ever institutional arts partnership put together in the UK. At least **90%** of the institutions we work with would not be able to do what we do for them on their own. There are now **3,472** collections on Art UK, with **329** of these being paying Partner Collections.



*Portrait of a Large Dog (Dingo) (detail) by George Stubbs (1724–1806). Image credit: National Maritime Museum, Greenwich*

- In 2023 we added **25** new paying Partner Collections
- We supported Bloomberg to launch **23** Bloomberg Connects guides, bringing the total number of Art UK-launched guides to **39**
- We held **34** Art Unlocked talks, with **6,918** attendees listening to a live talk
- Almost **7,000** artwork records were added to Art UK taking the total to **308,000**
- **78%** of collections surveyed said they used Art UK to research exhibitions
- **61%** believed they received loan requests due to being on Art UK
- There were biography-related updates to over **4,200** artist authorities
- Over **1,200** execution dates were added to artwork records

### IN FOCUS: Art UK Shop

The Art UK Shop provides vital support for Collections by making their artworks available for purchase as framed and unframed prints. The total number of collections on the shop has reached 129. This has been a challenging year for retail, with a downturn in our shop sales, but we continued to add collections to the Art UK Shop and generate revenue for them.

With the support of Bloomberg Philanthropies, we invested in the Art UK Shop and relaunched an upgraded platform in October. We saw an immediate improvement in the customer conversion rate across the shop, from around **1%** to nearly **2%**.



## Our organisation

Art UK achieves huge reach with a small and dedicated team of staff who are brimming with creativity and enthusiasm. Our committed board of Trustees support the work of colleagues across four delivery areas. Our dynamic workforce is spread across all regions of the UK, with micro-offices in Stoke-on-Trent and Glasgow.

- We had **29.5** full time equivalent staff at the end of 2023
- Our total property bill was under **£10,000**
- We created **11** new staff roles to support principally new, funded project work
- We have **150** wonderful public art digitisation volunteers and four Collection Research volunteers
- Our annual staff survey showed that **97%** are proud to be associated with

us and 93% feel their work makes a difference

## Delivering value

- Total costs (including funded one-off projects) **£2.05 million**
- Percentage spent on offices and utilities **0.4%**
- Percentage spent on raising funds **8%**
- Costs spread across collections (based on core running cost) **£373** per collection
- Costs are for calendar year 2023

**'Art UK provides a vital service for smaller museums with limited digital resources'**

*Rebecca Hill, Senior Curator, Gallery Oldham*

## IN FOCUS: Youth engagement

We engaged eight young people aged 16–24 on our annual Summer Work Experience programme, now well-established in its seventh year. **75%** of our intake continues to be from state schools, and in 2023, **38%** of participants were from a global majority background. Participants of our youth programmes are automatically enrolled into our alumni network through which we continue to engage with and offer opportunities to members

- **Our alumni network has grown to 57 members, and in 2023 we organised three in-person networking events for this group**
- **Alumni network members are invited to join our youth panel, which currently has eight members**
- **Projects that our members engaged with included a Kids in Museums social media takeover day**



# Trustees

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**Chair:** Kathleen Soriano, Curator, arts and culture consultant, broadcaster

**Vice Chair:** George Entwistle, Former Director-General of the BBC

Hasan Bakhshi, Centre Director, Creative Industries Policy and Evidence Centre, NESTA

Carola Boehm, Professor, School of Digital, Technologies and Arts, Staffordshire University

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Thomas Davies, CEO, Machroes Holdings and active investor

Errol Francis, Artistic Director and CEO of Culture&

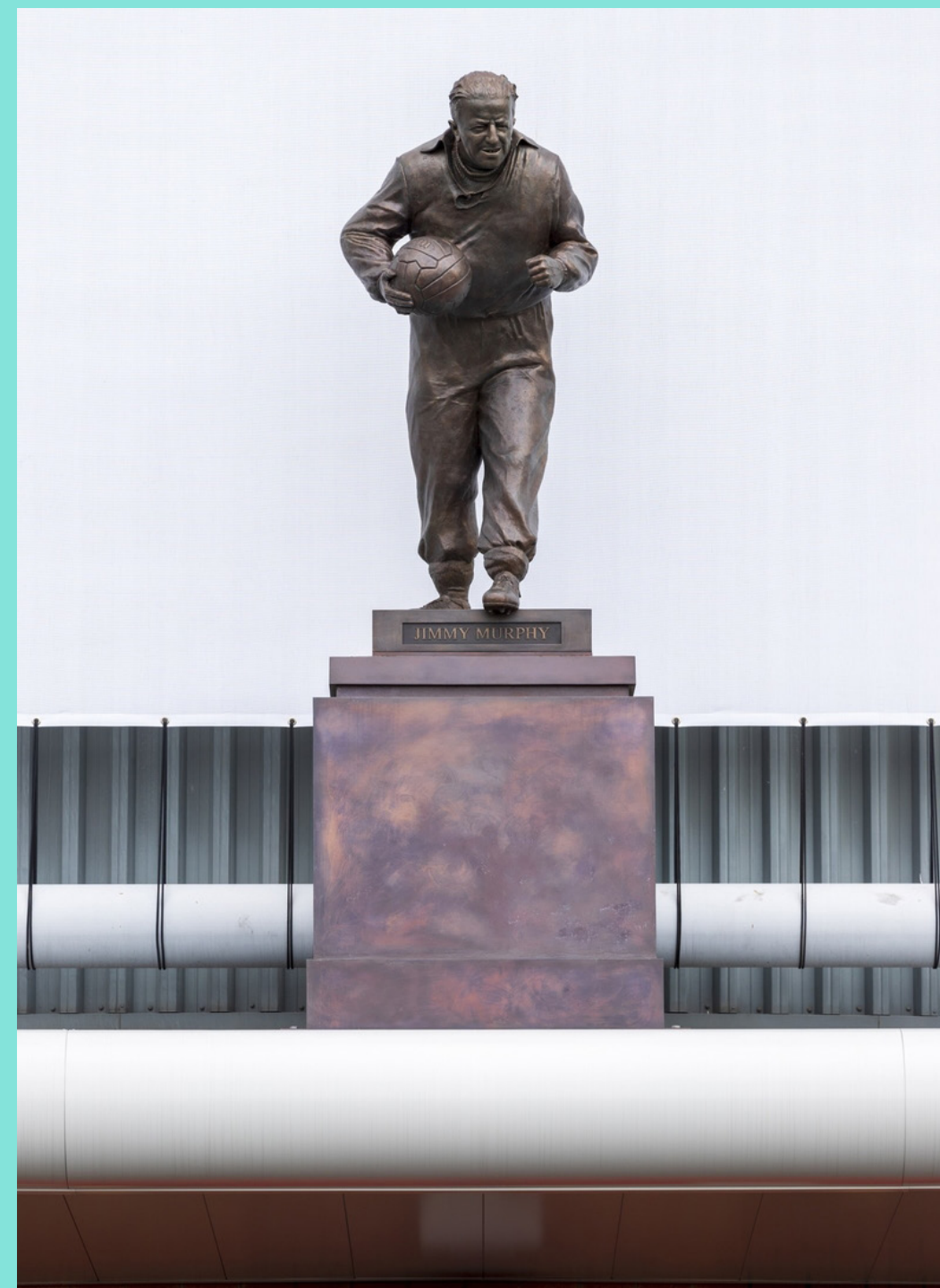
Catherine Holden, Scotland-based independent culture and heritage consultant

Clare Lilley, Director, Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Thomas Marks, writer and critic, and former Editor of Apollo magazine

John Stack, Digital Director, Science Museum Group

Kim Streets, Chief Executive, Museums Sheffield



**‘For many young people today their first encounter with art is online. The online experience then leads to a visit to an art gallery. Art UK drives visits to art galleries and – yes – drives online research into stories and images. Art UK is the world’s portal to the art we all own in the UK.’**

*Bob and Roberta Smith  
2023 Art UK Patron*

*Jimmy Murphy (1910–1989) by Alan Beattie Herriot (b.1952), Manchester United Football Stadium © the artist. Image credit: Martin Henderson/Art UK*



# Donors

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*Hibiscus Rising (in memory of David Oluwale)* by Yinka Shonibare (b.1962), Aire Park, Leeds, West Yorkshire © Yinka Shonibare CBE. All rights reserved, DACS 2024. Image credit: Peter Farmer/Art UK

The above gave at least £1,000 to Art UK in 2023



# Staff

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Imelda Barnard, Commissioning Editor – pre-19thC European Art

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Peter Bogle, Copyright and Licensing Officer

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*Dream Team* by  
Lubaina Himid (b.1954)  
© the artist. Image  
credit: British Council  
Collection





A pupil at Belgrave St.  
Bartholomew's Academy.  
Image credit: David  
Madden/Art UK

ART<sup>UK</sup>

**'Art UK is a national treasure. Their drive and commitment to opening new routes, providing access to, and engagement with, the nation's collections is exceptional. The platform which the team has developed is nothing short of brilliant '**

*Samantha Johns, Collections Development Manager, Norfolk Museums*

**Can you help us inspire creativity and learning?**

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If you would like to discuss supporting the vital work of Art UK, please contact our Chief Executive, Andrew Ellis  
[andrew.ellis@artuk.org](mailto:andrew.ellis@artuk.org)