

Polarities and Regions Network Artist Fellowships

Background

This Fellowship scheme is funded by the UKRI Network Plus ‘Shifting Global Polarities: Russia, China, and Eurasia in Transition’. This funding initiative brings together a network of leading expertise and centres of excellence from across the UK and overseas to address gaps and needs in research during a period of major societal, geopolitical, and environmental transformation spanning Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central, East & Pacific Asia. The funding was awarded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) as part of their Building a Secure and Resilient World strategic theme.

The initiative aims to advance innovative new partnerships within academic and policy circles linked to a range of urgent thematic areas including social upheaval, geopolitics and security, environmental crisis, human rights, Russia-China relations, and post-conflict reconstruction. The network’s activities aim to assist understanding and identification of global risks and help inform better decision-making.

Partners include the Universities of Birmingham, Glasgow, Manchester and Oxford, together with the Institute of Development Studies and the Royal United Services Institute in the UK. Overseas, partners include Colgate University in the USA; the Ukrainian Catholic University; OSCE Academy Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan; National Taiwan University; Helsinki University in Finland; and Hokkaido University in Japan.

[UK Research and Innovation](#) creates knowledge with impact by investing over £8 billion a year in research and innovation through the UK’s nine leading funding councils.

Polarities Arts Programme

The Polarities Network casts its net across a vast geographical region encompassing the Eurasian steppe, the mountain ranges of Europe, the Caucasus and the Himalaya, through forests, Arctic tundra, prairies, peatlands, rivers, seas, lakes, glaciers, and many other ecotones.

The emphasis of the Polarities Arts Programme is on thinking across or outside categories and political borders, on seeing and listening at different scales, and from multiple perspectives.

The Polarities Arts Programme invites artists whose practices are attuned to the intertwined environmental, cultural, psychosocial and geopolitical upheavals playing out around them, and on their radar. They may be filmmakers for whom a landmass suggests the form of their work, or who record a polyphony of voices at dusk to tell a story. ‘Radical empathy’ (Galina Rymbu) may be called for, not post-apocalyptic imaginings, when people are living with catastrophe now. The artists may be activists, for whom art is activism; or their art may resist in more understated ways. They may well move between genres and will probably invent their own methods. They may be artists who conduct their own kind of fieldwork, or search through archives, or walk into forests, or sit still and record the changing light, or wait for the right moment to take a single shot.

The purpose of the artist fellowships is to give the selected artists – filmmakers, photographers, poets, writers – the time and financial support to research and make their work, either developing an existing project, or beginning a new project. The artist fellows are encouraged to take part in conversations and activities with the Network, and potentially to collaborate on interdisciplinary research with other Network fellows and partners. The ethos of the Arts Programme is to enable, stimulate and nurture collaborative and individual research, to share experiences and knowledge within the network and with wide, diverse audiences. The Lead artist will work with artist fellows to develop and support exhibition opportunities and other public events. The Lead artist aims to develop an ongoing forum for artists, fellows and curators, to discuss themes, work in progress, curatorial strategies, etc. as part of the Polarities Arts Programme.

The Polarities Network would like to make use of images and documentation from the artists' projects for the purposes of documenting the network activities and promotion.

Applicants will retain all and any intellectual property, copyright, or other form of ownership generated during the preparation of their application.

Artists' Fellowships at a glance:

- **Number:** Up to 4 per year
- **Amount/Stipend:** Up to £10,000 per Fellow – to support research (including travel), production, and subsistence costs.
- **Duration:** main activities should take place over a period of up to 12 months – fellowships should begin no earlier than 1 April 2025 and no later than 1 May 2025. Links with the Network will continue beyond the fellowship, with ongoing opportunities to participate in exhibitions, screenings, publications and other network activities.
- **Eligibility:** The artist fellowships are open to artists from the regions of the Polarities Network, artists working in or on these regions, artists from migrant and diasporic communities and refugees. Artist fellows can be at any stage in their career, although students are not eligible to apply. They may work as individuals or collectives. Artist collectives are encouraged to apply, and fellowships may be awarded to two people working together where it can be demonstrated that each applicant would benefit from a fellowship, and each contribute to the Network.
- **Focus:** The fellowships are aimed at artists whose practice is research-driven, who work with lens-based media, poetry and/or combined with performance. These parameters are understood broadly, and other forms of practice may be considered too. The focus is on experiences and storytelling from the region, thinking environmentally and critically, on views from the ground, resistance and hope.
- **Location:** the artist fellows receive a stipend, to cover expenses, production costs and an artist's fee, but are not based at a particular institution. They may be affiliated with one of the partner universities, and will have a mentor.

The Polarities Arts Programme is intended to further the reach of the Network, and therefore the artist fellows are invited to engage with one (or more) of the Network's *main organising themes* (see below) and help to further the *priority theme* for that round. The priority theme for the Network this year (2024-25) is *Culture, Media and Resistance in a Polarising World*. Overlap with the priority theme is not essential for the application.

Each project will be overseen by the Network's Lead Artist, Dr Ruth MacLennan.

Aim of the Artists' Fellowships

The Artists' Fellowships give artists a key role in the Polarities Network, recognising the importance and urgency of artistic responses to climate change, biodiversity loss, war, conflict and the other risks and anxieties being addressed by the Polarities Research Network. The Artists' Fellowships bring practice-based research in the creative arts into the Network, inviting and facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration among participants and partners, visiting fellows and host institutions, and presenting the outcomes to wide audiences in the UK and abroad.

Artists have the 'capacity to sit comfortably with unknown and uncertain terrains' (introduction to *Fieldwork for Future Ecologies*, Bridget Crone, Sam Nightingale, Polly Stanton, Onomatopoe 2023). Artists often ask unexpected or unwanted but important questions, they move between disciplines, invent new methods, and their work often speaks to and connects people from different backgrounds.

The aim of the Artists' Fellowships is to enable artist fellows to:

- (i) research and develop a new project, or to expand or deepen an existing project that engages with one or several of the themes and geographic areas of the Polarities Network
- (ii) critically engage with and contribute to the intellectual debates of the Polarities Network
- (iii) foster links with a range of art and academic institutions, and reach non-academic audiences
- (iv) benefit from mentoring by and exchange with Network members (i.e. Lead artist, academic partners, Network Fellows)
- (v) play an active role in Network events, disseminating/presenting artistic research/artworks at public events (exhibitions, screenings, the website, etc.), and at the Network annual Workshop and training events.

Applicants are encouraged to contact the Lead Artist, Ruth MacLennan (r.maclennan[at]bham.ac.uk), prior to submission of an application to discuss activities and focus. Each fellow will be allocated a mentor from the Network (see below for details). There is scope for an applicant to have more than one mentor and from different Network institutions.

Exhibition opportunities and expectations

Artist fellows are expected to participate in the summer Workshop at the University of Manchester June 30-July 1 2025. The form that this will take will be discussed between the partners, the Lead Artist and artist fellows. The artists may present existing work and/or work in progress. Other opportunities to exhibit and present work through the Polarities Arts Network will be developed during the fellowship, and are likely to include exhibitions and publications after the end of the fellowship. It is expected that the artist fellows will contribute to these.

Eligibility

We invite artists from the regions of the Polarities Network, artists working in or on these regions, artists from migrant and diasporic communities and refugees. Artist fellows can be at any stage in their career, although students are not eligible to apply. Artists may work as individuals or collectives. Artist collectives are encouraged to apply, and fellowships may be awarded to two people working together where it can be demonstrated that each applicant would benefit from a fellowship, and each contribute to the Network.

Costs

You should provide a clear breakdown and justification of how the requested funds will be spent. Eligible activities include: research costs (travel/subsistence), workshop/seminar attendance, institutional visits, materials, small consumables necessary for artist's activities (e.g. hard drives, batteries, memory cards) and research support (e.g. translation costs, assistance) up to a maximum of £10,000. The breakdown should include an artist's fee.

Payment will be made on receipt of acceptable reports of expenditure.

Bids for the cost of child or parent care can be considered if the carer is conducting research away from home and it is not possible to make alternative arrangements. The costs of normal regular childcare whilst at home are not eligible for support.

Ethics of research activity

Where applicable, applicants will be responsible for ensuring they receive relevant ethical approval for any research activity from their home institution. This should be confirmed with the Network at least 4 weeks prior to any research activity being carried out. Applicants should submit their institutional ethics application and approval to the Network's Ethics Committee (ethics-polarities@contacts.bham.ac.uk), which is designed to support and enable cross-institutional research.

Independent artist researchers and/or those without access to formal ethical scrutiny and approval should describe any special ethical issues and explain how they will be addressed on the application form.

Wherever necessary, applicants should secure appropriate consent from or on behalf of participants or others affected by the research. For example, filmmakers should supply participants with waiver forms to explain and allow the use of their images and words. Fellowship applicants should indicate on the application form whether their proposed research raises any special ethical issues.

The Polarities Arts Programme is committed to addressing the climate emergency and being environmentally responsible, by supporting artists, partners and exhibitors to do so too. The Gallery Climate Coalition¹ has suggestions for how to go about this. Artists are expected to consider and mitigate the environmental impact of their activities and will be supported in doing this during their fellowship.

Additionally, proposals may raise one or more of the following considerations:

- The involvement of human participants.
- The involvement of human remains (e.g. traceable to living descendants).
- The use of non-human animals.
- Destructive analysis of historic artefacts.
- Research that may result in damage to the natural or historic environment.
- The use of sensitive social, economic or political data.

You are responsible for following the data management procedures at your host institution. If your research involves processing personal data, it is important to consider any additional actions you may need to take to comply with privacy legislation, such as the GDPR or the 2018

¹ <https://artist-toolkit.galleryclimatecoalition.org/>

Data Protection Act. We may seek additional information/clarification following a review of your institutional ethics application.

The Network requires the research it funds to be conducted in an ethical manner. The following considerations apply to all proposals: accurate reporting of findings; fair dealing in respect of other researchers and their intellectual property; proper employment conditions for research staff having respect for the provisions of the 'Concordat for Contract Research Staff' and subsequent amendments; honesty to research staff and students about the purpose, methods and intended and possible use of the research and any risks involved; confidentiality of the information supplied by research subjects and anonymity of respondents (unless otherwise agreed with research subjects and respondents); and independence and impartiality of researchers to the subject of the research.

Application process

Application deadline: **24 January 2025 (5pm UK time)**

Mandatory attachments include:

1. Application form. This should include:

- an outline project proposal for the Artist's Fellowship.
- a breakdown of your proposed costs up to a maximum of £10,000. You should explain how you propose to use the stipend to make your work.
- examples of previous work relevant to the proposal: i.e. a link to relevant pages of the artist's website, a Vimeo link to a film (extract or full film under 10 minutes), a digital portfolio of up to 10 images; an example of writing (with English translation).

The Fellow is expected to attend the following core activities during the year. Costs to support travel /accommodation for these events will be provided by the Network and do not need to be included in the breakdown of costs. We will make every effort to have hybrid options available:

- Welcome Event (UK) – late April/early May (1 day)
- Main Workshop (Manchester, UK) – 30 June-1 July 2025
- Annual Training Event (Overseas) – mid-late August (3-4 days)

2. Applicant CV (no more than 2 sides of A4) including education, exhibition/publication history, awards.

Completed forms should be sent to: polarities@contacts.bham.ac.uk (Martha Holmes) together with your CV.

Assessment of applications

Each application will be assessed by a panel including the Lead artist, and partners from the Network institutions using the following criteria:

- Originality of the proposed project, and examples of previous work.
- Relevance to the themes of the Polarities Art Programme and Polarities Network themes.
- Programme of activities and outputs, including overall relevance and coherence of the work proposed, as well as feasibility for the fellowship.
- Personal development opportunities

- Ethical considerations
- Value for money

Incomplete applications or applications outside the scope of the scheme will not be considered. The decision of the assessment committee is final.

Timeline

- Call announced – December 2024
- Closing dates for applications – 24 January 2025
- Decisions confirmed to applicants – early February 2025
- Fellowships commence – between 1 April 2025 and 1 May 2025

Network organising themes

This Network Plus brings together interdisciplinary, comparative and policy-facing approaches, structured around the **four** following organising themes.

Orders: Understanding *order* in a broad sense - including both institutionalised organisations and implicit constellations of patterned practices and norms. Where are we seeing existing forms of order eroded or replaced? What new orderings — informal or formal—are we seeing emerge? To what extent are we witnessing a resurgence of spheres of influence? What norms—liberal, illiberal, or otherwise—do emerging orderings embody? What issues are they tackling, and which problems are being left unaddressed? How are relations in the region being organised, and what does this mean for future trends?

Interactions: Interactions can take many forms—diplomatic, economic, legal, social, digital etc. Some are intentional and structured, others organic and inadvertent. What impact, for example, are interactions within the region having on the domestic politics of the states involved? How are movements of people or goods shaping regional relations and dependencies? How are transborder environmental effects shaping relations?

Anxieties: What are regional actors concerned about? What risks and dangers are considered most pressing? What fears/concerns are shaping domestic political environments or international political behaviours? Looking at a range of domains—security, environmental, economic, demographic etc—what issues represent salient concerns for regional actors?

Implications: What are the implications of the above for the UK? And, for the wider region and its inhabitants?

Mentor contacts for each institution

The contacts listed below will be able to put the applicant in touch with relevant individuals to discuss their application.

- **Network Artistic Lead** - Ruth MacLennan, r.maclennan[at]bham.ac.uk
- **Institute of Development Studies (IDS)** – James Georgalakis, j.georgalakis[at]ids.ac.uk; Lewis Husain, l.husain1[at]ids.ac.uk
- **University of Birmingham** – John Round, j.round[at]bham.ac.uk
- **University of Glasgow** – Luca Anceschi, luca.anceschi[at]glasgow.ac.uk
- **University of Manchester** – Elena Barabantseva, e.v.barabantseva[at]manchester.ac.uk
- **University of Oxford** – Paul Chaisty, paul.chaisty[at]politics.ox.ac.uk; Todd Hall, todd.hall[at]politics.ox.ac.uk
- **Ukrainian Catholic University** – Volodymyr Turchynovskyy, volodymyr.turchynovskyy[at]ucu.edu.ua
- **Colgate University** - Jessica Graybill, jgraybill[at]colgate.edu
- **Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)** – Neil Melvin, neilm[at]rusi.org