



Impact Report 2022-23

Digital Spaces,
Coventry Libraries Project



thespace.org

Contents

Foreword: Promoting digital technologies for cultural engagement and inclusivity	3
Our founding principles	5
Building digital capacity	9
Fostering creativity and digital innovation nationwide	10
Promoting accessibility in the arts	11
Breaking down the barriers to inclusion	13
Supporting sustainability	15
Exploring the world of immersive experiences	17
Sharing experiences, stories and perspectives	19
The change we want to make	21
Thank you	22

Foreword: Promoting digital technologies for cultural engagement and inclusivity



At The Space, we work with small and mid-scale cultural organisations and individual creative artists to broaden and deepen your knowledge of where and how digital technologies can engage audiences and promote creativity in all its forms. We want to celebrate unique cultural identities, profile inspirational stories and democratise digital access to all forms of creative and curatorial work.

While the pandemic was an extraordinary and challenging time, it has taught us a lot about how digital technologies can help us connect with audiences near and far. We want to help you think about what we've all learnt and its range of positive impacts on the creative landscape. Many of you are considering the challenges of a hybrid approach to cultural engagement. We want to help you focus on the benefits this way of working can bring. We want to enable greater access, inclusivity and a long-term strategic sustainable approach to our combined creative practice.

We are immensely grateful to Arts Council England for funding us as an Investment Principles Support Organisation (IPSO). Over the next few years, we are committed to increasing access to culture online and giving a voice to even more people's stories.

Sarah Ellis
Chair, The Space

Over the last 18 months, it has been awe-inspiring to witness the commitment, passion and resilience demonstrated across the cultural sector, enabling audiences and visitors to be welcomed back into physical spaces to re-engage in the joy of live entertainment and in-person conversations.

It's been one of our busiest periods ever for the team at The Space. We've run eight open calls, received over 800 applications and commissioned over 50 pieces of digital content, from live captures to immersive experiences, online collections and digital storytelling.

We have also seen some brilliant hybrid activity as artists and organisations have embraced the value of working both live and online, demonstrating the benefits gained from a dual approach that embeds greater accessibility for both creators and audiences.

This is evident across the UK nations and regions, including in our own base of the West Midlands. The Space worked with Birmingham Museums Trust to help residents of Somerset Road in Handsworth create a pop-up museum based on their street's history. It was then featured as an episode in Tony Robinson's Museum of Us, broadcast on Channel 4. Our Digital Spaces programme, delivered in partnership with Coventry Library Services, reimagined what libraries can offer their communities by educating, entertaining and providing opportunities to build digital confidence and creativity. It includes a new VR collection.



We also ran a West Midlands-based talent development programme – Pitch Perfect – to develop and profile new voices and stories from within the wider West Midlands cultural sector. We received 140 applications and have supported 20 individual artists and storytellers to refine their projects and help them pitch these projects to broadcasters. We are committed to continuing to look for opportunities for this type of place-based work, ensuring better representation of our communities, voices and histories online and across broadcast media.

To support the ongoing development of digital skills in the cultural sector, we are also committed to finding a better way of evaluating the impact of digital experiences – moving beyond basic measures of reach towards a more detailed understanding of audience engagement and a broader consideration of other benefits of digital work, including improved accessibility and reduced environmental impacts.

We don't have all the answers, but digital is essential to a thriving, adaptive cultural landscape that speaks for and to everyone. We look forward to having you join us on the journey.

Fiona Morris
CEO, The Space

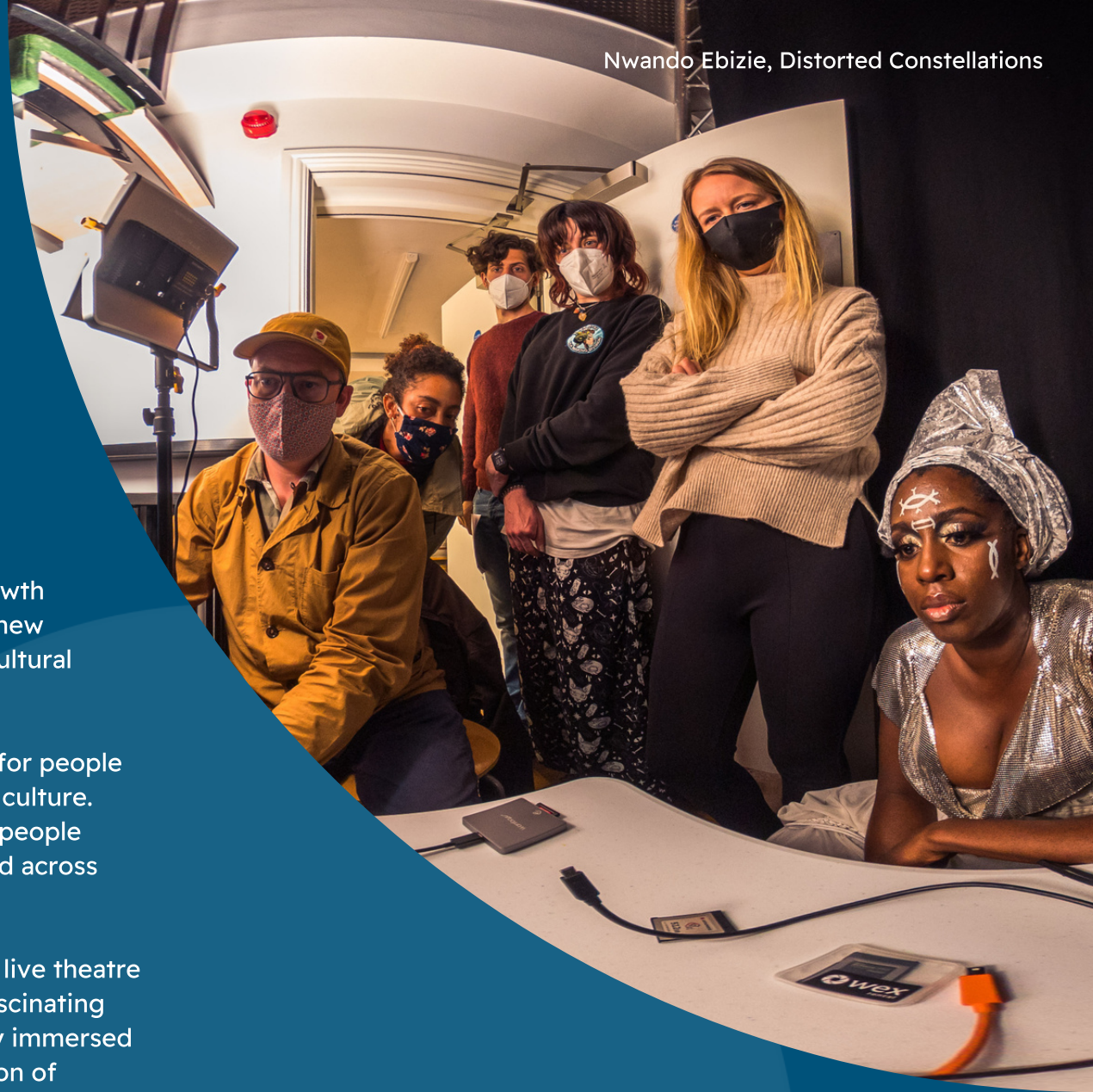
Our founding principles

We believe embracing digital is essential to the future growth of the arts, culture and heritage sectors: pushing forward new artistic forms, attracting younger audiences and making cultural experiences democratic and available to all.

We know that digital technologies can open up new ways for people to access, participate in and share the rich diversity of UK culture. We prioritise creating new engagement opportunities for people who are currently underrepresented in cultural content and across broadcast and digital media.

We are excited by a world where people can experience a live theatre performance from the comfort of their homes, curate a fascinating exhibition in a museum using their mobile phones, be fully immersed and invested in an interactive story or enjoy the exhilaration of climbing Mount Everest in 3D whilst sitting in their local library.

Our role is to help make these and similar amazing experiences available and accessible to all.



Inclusivity

It is essential that diverse perspectives and experiences are represented across the creative landscape, and that underrepresented artists and organisations are heard.

We are committed to redressing the significant barriers and discrimination that artists and creatives from diverse backgrounds face in building creative work, careers and profiles. We work to equip diverse artists and organisations with the digital skills, expertise and confidence to get their stories and talent to larger broadcast and digital audiences.



Collaboration

We know collaboration and partnerships are the best way to achieve our mission and we are strengthened by working closely with other creatives and partners. We're open in sharing our insights and knowledge.

We're excited to learn from and work with people with complementary skills, experience and connections and believe that, through cooperation, we can achieve far greater impact: in local places, nationally and internationally.

We also want to enable partnerships between those producing cultural content and the broadcasters and online platforms that can distribute their work globally. In doing this, we aim to showcase the diversity of UK culture at home and abroad.



Oily Cart, Sound Symphony

Responsibility

We have a responsibility to ensure public value and benefit in all we do and for those we work with and for.

We are committed to fair pay, treating individual artists and freelancers fairly and equitably, and ensuring they own the rights to their creative work and receive the recognition they deserve.

We aim to work in an environmentally responsible way, encouraging those we support to do likewise and to make a contribution to addressing the climate crisis.



Building digital capacity

Our Building Digital Capacity commissioning programme is at the core of The Space's activities.

In the last two years of the programme, we have supported artists, creative practitioners, community groups and small to mid-scale cultural organisations in England to produce and distribute their digital content online via national and international broadcasters, including the BBC, Sky Arts, Amazon and Channel 4, or via accessible digital experiences at live events and venues.



Fostering creativity and digital innovation nationwide

We have supported numerous arts, culture and heritage organisations across the UK from our headquarters in Birmingham through our regional and national programmes, commissioning new digital works, training, mentoring and strategic consultancy.

Scotland: Creative Digital Initiative, Creative Scotland

10 new digital commissions reflecting the nation's diversity.

West Midlands Broadcast Development

An 18-month programme codeveloped with regional and national partners, building on the national focus on the West Midlands in 2022 from the Birmingham Commonwealth Games and Coventry UK City of Culture.

Wales: Digital Mentoring Programme, Arts Council of Wales

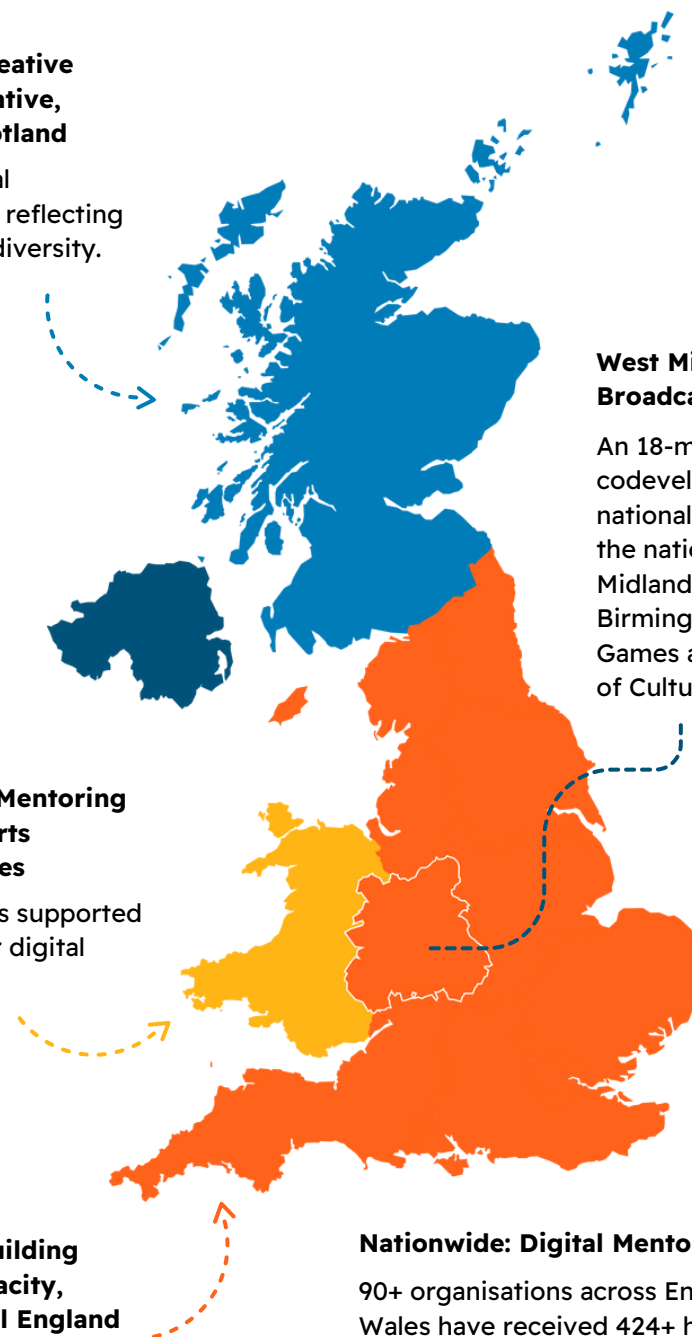
15 organisations supported to achieve their digital strategic aims.

England: Building Digital Capacity, Arts Council England

30+ digital commissions.

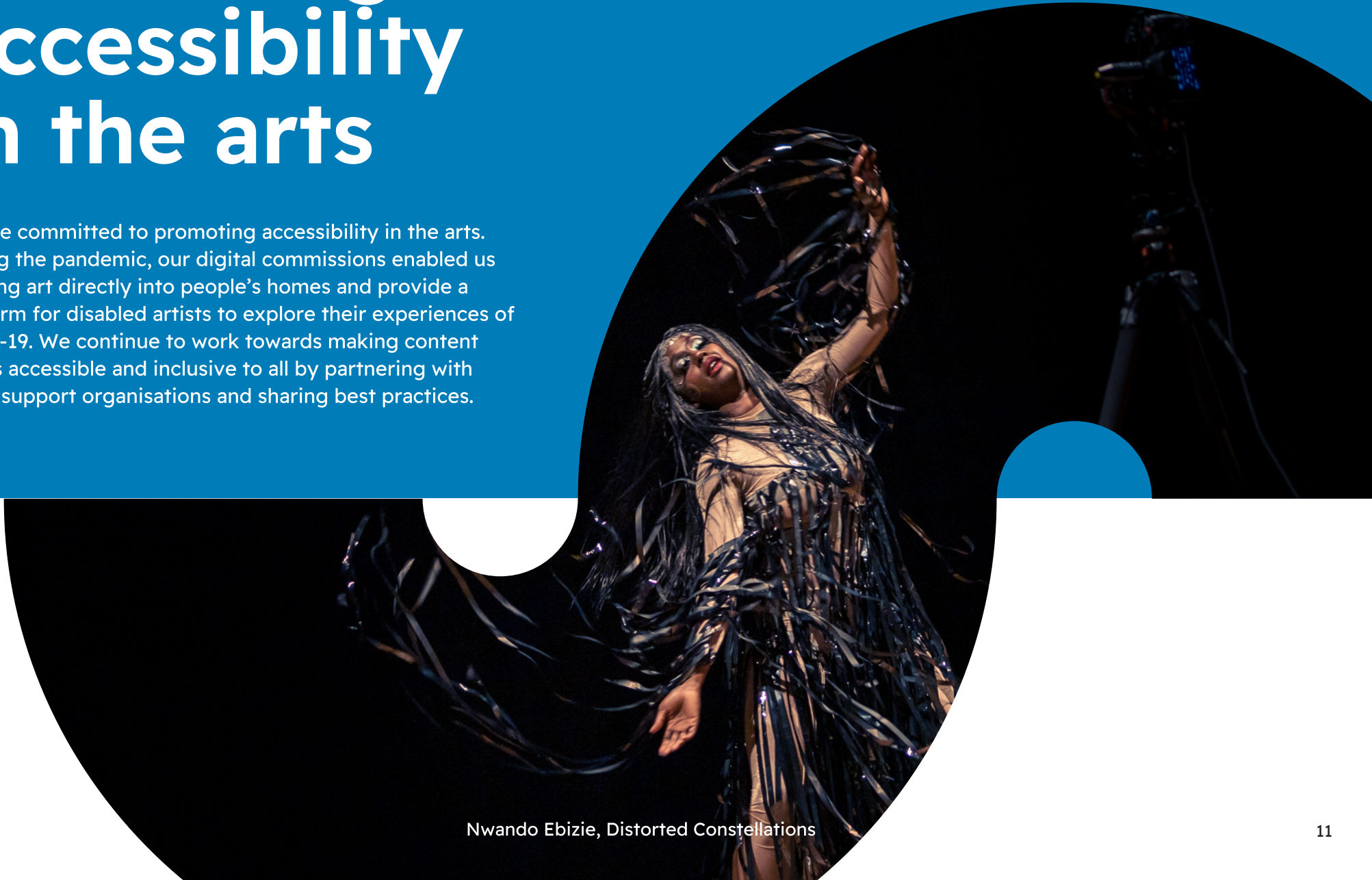
Nationwide: Digital Mentoring Programme

90+ organisations across England, Scotland and Wales have received 424+ hours of strategic support as part of our programme.



Promoting accessibility in the arts

We are committed to promoting accessibility in the arts. During the pandemic, our digital commissions enabled us to bring art directly into people's homes and provide a platform for disabled artists to explore their experiences of Covid-19. We continue to work towards making content that is accessible and inclusive to all by partnering with other support organisations and sharing best practices.



Nwando Ebizie, Distorted Constellations



My Sound Cinema

My Sound Cinema is the first online video-on-demand platform for audio-described films designed for the blind and vision-impaired community. Conceived by Screen Language, one of Scotland's leading providers of enhanced access materials and audiovisual translation, the platform was built in consultation with people with low or no residual eyesight. All films, from award-winning features to documentaries and arts performances, feature audio descriptions and subtitles.

“It has been really amazing to have the support of The Space this year, not only in monetary terms but also in terms of all-round advice and communication! The staff we have connected with have been so knowledgeable and proactive in their respective fields of expertise.”

Elena Zini
My Sound Cinema



Oily Cart

Oily Cart's accessible, interactive, sound-based website allows you to create your own Sound Symphony. The website was designed and developed for and with autistic young people by the autistic accessibility technical specialist Callum Gamble at KreativeInc Agency.

“The mentoring support from The Space was particularly valuable. As a commissioner, there was a great level of engagement and support at all stages, providing useful expertise and offering flexibility when required.”

Zoë Lally
Oily Cart



30% of projects we have supported are from disabled-led organisations or teams.



Mind the Gap

Mind the Gap is England's largest learning-disability-led performance company, known for championing access to the arts for people with learning disabilities. In collaboration with Gecko Theatre, they created and filmed their critically acclaimed stage production, A Little Space, and made it accessible to audiences via YouTube and Facebook. They were winner of the Award of Excellence in the Experimental Film category at the IndieFEST Film Awards.



Culture in Quarantine II supported the work of 12 UK artists who identify as d/Deaf, disabled or neurodiverse.

Breaking down the barriers to inclusion

The Space has a strong track record in delivering support programmes that enable greater equality, diversity and inclusion. As recipients of public funding and through our sector leadership role, we have responsibilities to promote best practices concerning inclusion and increase the extent to which the UK's cultural activities reflect the diversity of its population.

We understand how we can play an important role in redressing the significant barriers and discrimination that artists and creatives from diverse backgrounds face in getting their stories to larger audiences. We want policymakers and funders on a regional and national level to recognise the vital role of digital cultural initiatives in achieving this inclusivity.

We recently appointed evaluators to assess our equality, diversity and inclusion practices and will continue to drive forward our work in this area.





Upswing

Upswing is the all-Black creative team behind *Common Ground* – a spoof documentary on the world of contemporary circus, which uses a mix of comedy, circus artistry and music to directly confront the difficulties we have talking about race and culture. Their film uses text and physicality to break down the frames we place other bodies in, drawing out the clash of identities in each of us and why it is so hard to find ‘common ground’.

“It has been a pleasure and a privilege. A dedicated knowledgeable team was 100% behind us and we have learnt so much in the process.”

Camille Ben Soussan
Producer, Upswing

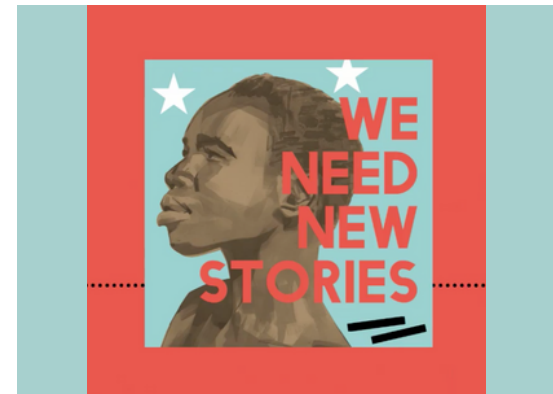


Swim Club

Swim Club is an uplifting short film from *Diverse City* and *The Mowlem Theatre* that explores the community, camaraderie and vulnerability of a close-knit group of wild swimmers as they prepare to take the plunge into a live performance of *SW!M* in Swanage Bay, Poole. Acclaimed director Steven Lake examines the cheerful bravery of these women as they make themselves vulnerable to the audience, the elements and each other.

“The Space was incredible in that they placed a lot of trust in us to do what we do best. Their guidance and support editorially came at the perfect time, and the detail and consideration they put into their feedback was vital in helping us do the best possible work we could.”

Steven Lake
Diverse City



We Need New Stories

Fifth Word's 'We Need New Stories' project, in partnership with Nottingham City Libraries, set out to amplify the voices of first-generation Zimbabwean migrants living in Nottingham by dramatising their personal testimonies into dramatic monologues. Playwright Zodwa Nyoni worked collaboratively with the interviewees to create the monologues, which were toured around libraries and released online.

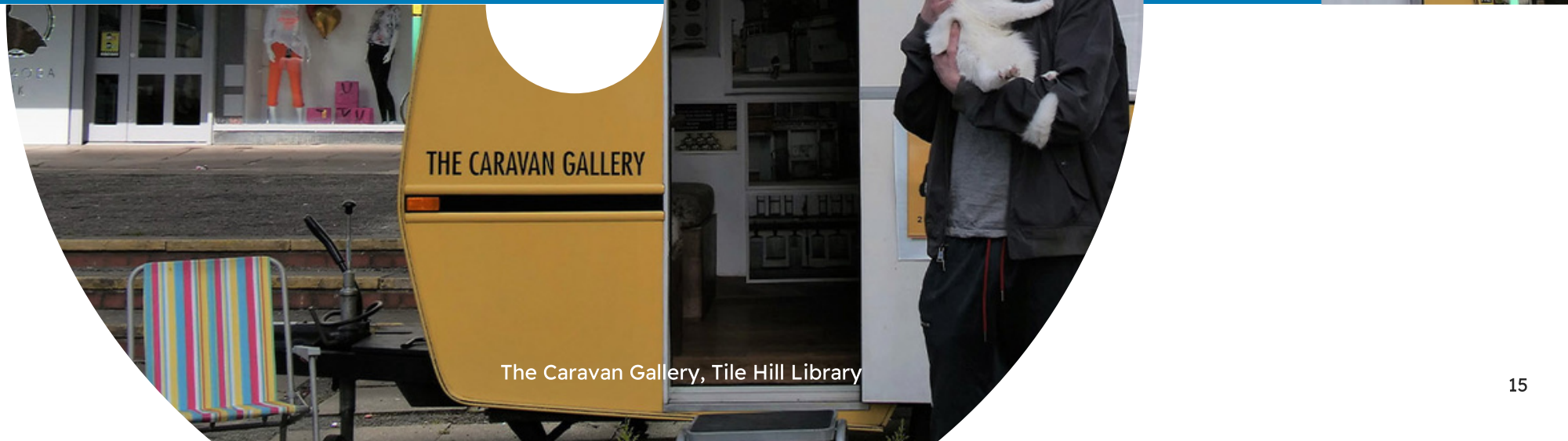


All 10 Creative Scotland R&D commissions awarded in February 2022 had diverse-led teams or subject matter.

Supporting sustainability

Finding a consistent approach to supporting sustainability is very important to us. We aim to provide fresh impetus for the arts and culture sector to upskill and address recognised structural challenges in areas where digital activities can play a key role.

We do this by promoting environmental responsibility in our working practices and sector guidance, encouraging the same from the content we commission. For instance, our digital R&D commissioning round in spring 2022 focused on the themes of environmental sustainability and responsibility.



The Caravan Gallery, Tile Hill Library



Growing Colour Together

Growing Colour Together is a short video documentary showcasing the work of local textile artists and their approach to natural dyeing. It was created as part of **WOVEN in Kirklees** – a textiles festival focused on environmental awareness and sustainability. The film allowed Kirklees to connect with creatives worldwide, encouraging individual action for broader sustainable impacts.

“The opportunity to work closely with a very experienced producer was a huge first and of great benefit to John [filmmaker]. We have noticed a lot of positive feedback from partners from our new line of films and know this opportunity with The Space has allowed us to take a big leap forward. It has been excellent.”

Emma Manners **WOVEN in Kirklees**



Moving Habitats

Dance East's Moving Habitats is a series of three 30-minute films for primary-school children that explores environmental issues such as melting ice caps, oceans and plastic pollution, and rising sea levels through immersive dance participation workshops. The films were designed for on-demand use in schools, where teachers or supporting adults can assist students in completing pre-planned tasks and extension activities.

“This project was our first interaction with The Space and has led to a positive and valued relationship. We were keen to learn from The Space and their expertise, and the time spent with the team has been very beneficial.”

Lucy Bayliss
Head of Creative Programmes, Dance East



Hidden By Things

Hidden By Things is a digital community campaign developed by Laura Horton, the Plymouth Laureate of Words. Aimed at raising awareness of collecting and hoarding behaviours, Laura used digital storytelling to look at how possessions shape us as people and how to declutter in a positive way.

“We heavily benefitted from The Space’s pool of creative specialists. We were able to work with experts in website design, graphic design, podcast hosting and social media engagement. These experts were invaluable across these areas to ensure the success of the project.”

Laura Horton
Hidden by Things

Exploring the world of immersive experiences

From virtual reality (VR) to augmented reality, audiences now have a real curiosity for experiences designed to immerse you into a story.

We want to be innovative, agile and responsive to the changing needs of those we support and in helping artists create new worlds and experiences for their audiences. At The Space, we have supported many arts and cultural organisations in bringing their ideas to life using cutting-edge immersive technology from VR to branching narratives. We are excited to continue exploring these new frontiers.





HOME X

HOME X is a cutting-edge production by Kakilang that uses its unique form to bring live dancers and musicians together with in-person and digital audience members to explore the mixing of different realities. It was created in collaboration with technologists and artists in London and Hong Kong.

“HOME X was an astonishing project from Kakilang that combined theatre, music, gaming and VR technology to bring dancers and musicians together for live and online performances. The talented team used complex technology in an innovative way to explore the concept of home and roots.”

Harmeet Chagger-Khan
Digital Producer, The Space



A Moment of Madness

The Other Way Works' free online spy game, based on its immersive theatre experience, **A Moment of Madness**, blends drama with real-time gameplay. Players become detectives on a covert spy mission to uncover facts, solve puzzles and gather evidence to expose corruption threatening the UK's environmental progress.



Virtual Magic School

Virtual Magic School is a free, interactive digital learning resource for primary-school children in Scotland and the UK. Created by Kevin Quantum, the eight-lesson online course includes illusions, tricks and lessons linked to the Scottish and English curricula, allowing children to make choices, discover secrets and learn magic. Each lesson is supported by an educational resource for teachers.

Holograms

Holograms is an award-winning R&D project from d/Deaf and neurodivergent arts organisation **DaDa**. It explores using augmented reality BSL interpreters as part of a pledge to use creative technology to address the lack of accessibility within the world of live and digital art. The project won the Digital Transformation Award at the 2023 Digital Culture Awards.

Sharing experiences, stories and perspectives

Cultural provision can be shaped by the communities it serves. By working collaboratively with community groups, commissioned artists and young people, The Space provides a platform for individuals to share their experiences, stories and perspectives.

These partnerships allow us to test new ways of engaging with underserved audiences and equip participants with relevant skills in digital content production. We aim to create a more inclusive cultural landscape by amplifying these voices and their perspectives.





Unlocked

Unlocked is a series of short films featuring 10 emerging artists (chosen through an open call) from Coventry. Responding to the theme ‘What does it mean to be free?’, the collaboration with [Arts Council England](#), [Sky Arts](#) and [Coventry City of Culture Trust](#) garnered over 25,000 viewers and received nominations for multiple Royal Television Society Midlands Awards. Among the winners was Jack Norris, whose film ‘Irish, Blacks & Dogs’ won Best Short Film. This partnership showcased local talent and provided individual support from industry professionals, fostering the creation of new digital broadcast content.



‘Unlocked: What does it mean to be free?’ received multiple nominations for Royal Television Society Midlands Awards and a Broadcast Digital Awards nomination for Best Content Partnership.



Echoes of the North

Echoes of the North is a silent film created in partnership with Yorkshire Film Archive, North West Film Archive, North East Film Archive, and London’s Archive Film Agency. It uses over 100 fragments of archive film showcasing the region’s industries, rural life, holidays and wartime experiences. It is accompanied by a new all-brass score by composer Neil Brand – recorded live at the film’s premiere at Yorkshire Silent Film Festival in Morecambe.



Many of our projects have achieved impressive cumulative reach and recognition, winning awards and nominations at film and international cultural festivals, including the Prix Italia and Venice Film Festival.



Tile Hill Pride of Place Project

The Caravan Gallery’s **Tile Hill Pride of Place Project** transformed Tile Hill Library in Coventry into a participatory exhibition celebrating the area and its people. Part of the [Coventry Libraries Digital Spaces](#) project – and inspired by the Creative People and Places programme philosophy that empowers communities to shape cultural provision – library staff worked with the local community to create a People’s Map of Tile Hill alongside an exhibition of photos from all over Britain.

“We found our initial engagement with The Space to be confidence-building. Getting such positive feedback on the project bolstered our sense of the possibilities of the work and our ability to achieve it.”

Jonny Best
Yorkshire Silent Film Festival



The change we want to make

In April 2023, The Space officially joined Arts Council England's National Portfolio as one of its Investment Principles Support Organisations. This means we will now be funded until March 2026 to deliver further activities that extend the work of our commissioning round for 2023.

While this report celebrates what has been achieved so far, we now focus on what the future may hold – what technologies might come into play and how we can navigate some of the current challenges, particularly around accessibility and securing digital rights for online works.

Our commitments for the next three years:

- We will independently evaluate our programmes to ensure that diverse perspectives and experiences are represented and share our findings.
- We will work to dismantle the barriers to inclusion that many people face to ensure that the world of art and culture online is accessible to everyone: not only to experience as audiences but also in terms of creating, curating and presenting.
- We will work with our commissioned projects and content producers to explore how they can undertake digital production projects ethically and environmentally responsibly.
- Artists and creative practitioners will feel fairly and equitably treated for their role in the projects we support.
- We will continue to address the shortage of cultural sector workers with digital skills and provide career development support for freelancers in the arts, culture and heritage sectors.
- With our other sector partners, we will develop a better understanding of the value and impact digital work can achieve.
- We will continue to iterate and be innovative in how we work. We will continue to be agile and responsive to the changing needs of those we support.

Thank you

The digital and broadcast commissioning opportunities and the free training and support that The Space provides are only made possible with funding from various national and regional cultural development agencies and content commissioners.

We want to especially thank:

Arts Council England
Arts Council of Wales
Arts Council of Northern Ireland
The British Film Institute
The BBC
The British Council
Channel 4
Creative Scotland
Sky Arts

We'd also like to thank the skills and development agencies, further and higher education providers and cultural organisations who help us ensure those participating in our programmes benefit from the broadest possible expertise.

And we could only deliver our activities in an agile and flexible manner with our UK-wide freelance network of over 80 talented digital associates. Thank you all!

Further information

Our commissions

We commission projects across all art forms and cultural disciplines. Visit our website to see more of the projects we've commissioned and a list of our current programmes.

<https://www.thespace.org/what-we-do/commissions/>

Online resources and toolkits

Visit our website for free resources, advice and guidance on building online audiences, digital rights, live streaming and filming and creating immersive experiences.

<https://www.thespace.org/resources>

Webinars and workshops

Our free webinars and workshops offer practical, jargon-free advice on how to produce digital content that really engages your audiences. Visit our website to see upcoming events, or watch previous events on our [YouTube playlist](#).

<https://www.thespace.org/events>

