

YOUNG  
LONDON  
PRINT ———  
PRIZE

# Ecological Renaissance

HOW *ART AND CULTURE*  
CAN TRANSFORM OUR  
WORLD (AGAIN)

# Ecological Renaissance

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# Ecological Renaissance

## How art and culture can transform our world (again)

The environmental crisis is a cultural issue. Not just a science problem. It's rooted in our values, choices and behaviours. Throughout history, art and culture have profoundly shaped the way we think and act – as individuals and as a society. We think an Ecological Renaissance is within our grasp. We think that culture – alongside regulation, data, skills and knowledge – is critical to environmental change. This discussion paper seeks to explain why art and culture are fundamental to achieving net zero. And why they're essential to the next decade of decisive climate action.

We have written this paper to inspire and challenge people and organisations working on sustainability in the UK. These span three main settings – business, government and the culture sector. The writing process has been collaborative. It draws on the experience of professionals and a group of young people from across London taking part in a programme on art and ecology. We have also worked alongside art historians and creatives working in the culture sector today. We focus on the UK and London specifically, because this is our local area. However, the ideas we propose are universal.

For COP27<sup>(1)</sup>, art and culture are already part of the plan. The international community knows that it is vital to change. Civil society and education are integral to COP's strategy – and art and culture are integral to civil society and education. This paper builds out two key parts of the COP27 programme:

1. **Ace (Action for Climate Empowerment) & Civil Society**, which looks at how to empower the public to change their behaviour.<sup>(2)</sup>
2. **Youth & Future Generations**, which ensures young people are at the heart of environmental action.<sup>(3)</sup>

There are two sides to both of these. First, listening to the environmental concerns of the public and young people. Second, empowering them to behave in sustainable ways.

Making art and engaging with culture do both. It's a highly effective way for people and communities to express themselves. It's also a highly effective way to educate and change behaviour<sup>(4)</sup>

<sup>1</sup> COP (Conference of the Parties).

<sup>2</sup> <https://cop27.eg/#/presidency/eventsThematic>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> [Learning about climate change in, with and through art, Julia Bentz, 2020.](#)

# This paper comes in three parts: past, present and future.

## Past

In this chapter, we look at three periods of history where art and culture changed the spirit of a society. Each is a Renaissance and suggests a consistent pattern: **Roots, Growth, Nurture**. **Roots** are what came before. **Growth** is a cultural flourishing. **Nurture** is the need to sustain action over time. Together, these show how art and culture have always been at the forefront of social change.

## Present

In this chapter, we take a look at where we are now in the UK. We argue that the **Roots** of the Ecological Renaissance already exist. So now we must **Grow** and **Nurture** them. We do this by looking at three case studies that are already changing the ecological paradigm through art and culture.

## Future

In the final chapter, we offer three ways to use art and culture as a core part of any net zero or climate action strategy. These are adaptable for any business or public sector organisation:

1. Test your strategy.
2. Borrow ideas and connect people.
3. Launch a new agency.

But first, let's define what exactly we mean by 'art and culture' and 'Ecological Renaissance'.

## Art & culture: what exactly do we mean?

The nature of art and culture has been debated for centuries. Since the start of human life, they've existed. And, in one way or another, everyone engages with them. At their core, **art is anything made in a creative way: culture is the way things live together**. In the context of art and culture, we can see these as slightly more specific. **Art is anything made in an *intentionally* creative way. Culture is the way *these things* live together**. As Arts Council England explains:

**We believe that creativity [art] and culture are deeply connected, but different. Creativity [art] is the process by which, either individually or with others, we make something new: a work of art, [a play, a song, a book, a television show...] Culture is the result of that creative process: we encounter it in the world, in museums and libraries, theatres and galleries, carnivals and concert halls, festivals and digital spaces.<sup>(5)</sup>**

Philosophically speaking, if 'art is anything made in a creative way', science is also art. Yet, throughout history, a divide between art and science has emerged. This means that, on a practical level, society is run within this divide. In part, this project seeks to challenge that divide. We do this by approaching net zero as a shared cultural and scientific endeavour.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create/strategy-2020-2030/our-vision>

## And Ecological Renaissance?

We use the word 'Ecological' because it best describes the relationship between all things, human and non-human. Simply put – to support the paradigm shift that COP27 calls for, we must change how we see ourselves in relation to the earth and all life on it.

In French, 'Renaissance' means 'rebirth'. In English, it has come to describe a form of 'cultural rebirth'. We champion an Ecological Renaissance because that is precisely what we need – a cultural rebirth for ecology.

What's essential here is the 're' before the 'birth'. We do not aim to bring outlandish new ideas to the table. An insatiable thirst for the 'more-new' is precisely the mindset that got us here. Instead, we aim to build on the work of people and organisations who are already sowing the seeds for an Ecological Renaissance. Only by tapping into the work that already exists, will we be able to nurture the cultural forests of the future.



NFT by NessGraphics,  
*The Sequel to the  
Critically Acclaimed  
Year '2020', 2021.*  
Courtesy of the artist.

# Past

## Northern Renaissance: art, printmaking & religion.

### Roots.

When we think of 'the Renaissance' we generally think of the big, household names – Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Caravaggio. In the 1400s and 1500s, these Italian<sup>(6)</sup> artists did away with orthodox mediaeval painting and spurred a new wave of art. But the lesser-known part of the Renaissance was happening in Northern Europe – an area less affluent than cities like Florence and Milan. This was the Northern Renaissance. Together, all these artists laid the foundations for the modern era.

In 1432, artist brothers Hubert and Jan van Eyck finished the Ghent Altarpiece in modern-day Belgium – then part of the Low Countries. It was revolutionary to its audiences as they'd never seen anything quite so realistic. As galleries didn't exist, the church was the only public cultural space. With a largely illiterate population, paintings were a means of religious education too. This new style was considered the starting point of the Northern Renaissance<sup>(7)</sup>.

Not long after, around 1455, movable type was invented in Germany (similar printing techniques had been used for centuries across Asia.) For the first time in Europe, there were books other than the Bible and printed images were mass-produced. Thanks to the emergence of trade, particularly in fabric and spices, there was also a growing middle class who bought these books and printed artworks. Just like the internet, an entirely new form of culture and information was born<sup>(8)</sup>.

### Growth.

The printing press created a new feedback loop. Artists illustrating books inspired artists working for the church. And vice versa. In doing so, they began to push religious iconography in new directions. Much of the public witnessed this shift through books and in churches. Their growing appetite for new imagery – and growing literacy – contributed to the cycle.<sup>(9)</sup>

In 1516, the Isenheim Altarpiece was completed. This painting epitomised the feedback loop. It showed Christ as a human, in pain, rather than ethereal. It challenged the idea that good and evil were clear-cut. Then, in 1517, priest and author Martin Luther protested against corruption in the Catholic Church by adding posters to church doors – perhaps one of the earliest forms of protest art.

<sup>6</sup>Today, we call these artists 'Italian' but, during their lifetimes, Italy was not a united state.

<sup>7</sup>*Northern Renaissance Art*, Susie Nash, 2008.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>*Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art*, Wood, Christopher, 2008.

These artworks intentionally asked the public to think and reflect. That said, artists of the Northern Renaissance did not all have the same opinions on the Church. But with their novel imagery, they all challenged the norms of society at the time. For much of the public, this new radical wave of art tapped into their dissatisfaction with the Church. Equally, many theologians denounced such art<sup>(10)</sup>. These were the Twitter threads of their time. A culture war was brewing.

Soon, this culture war – spearheaded by artists and printmaking – led to riots destroying art in the churches. Eventually, this social upheaval led to Protestant Reformation. These avant-garde artists had probed the public to imagine a new future. For better or for worse, that's exactly what they did<sup>(11)</sup>

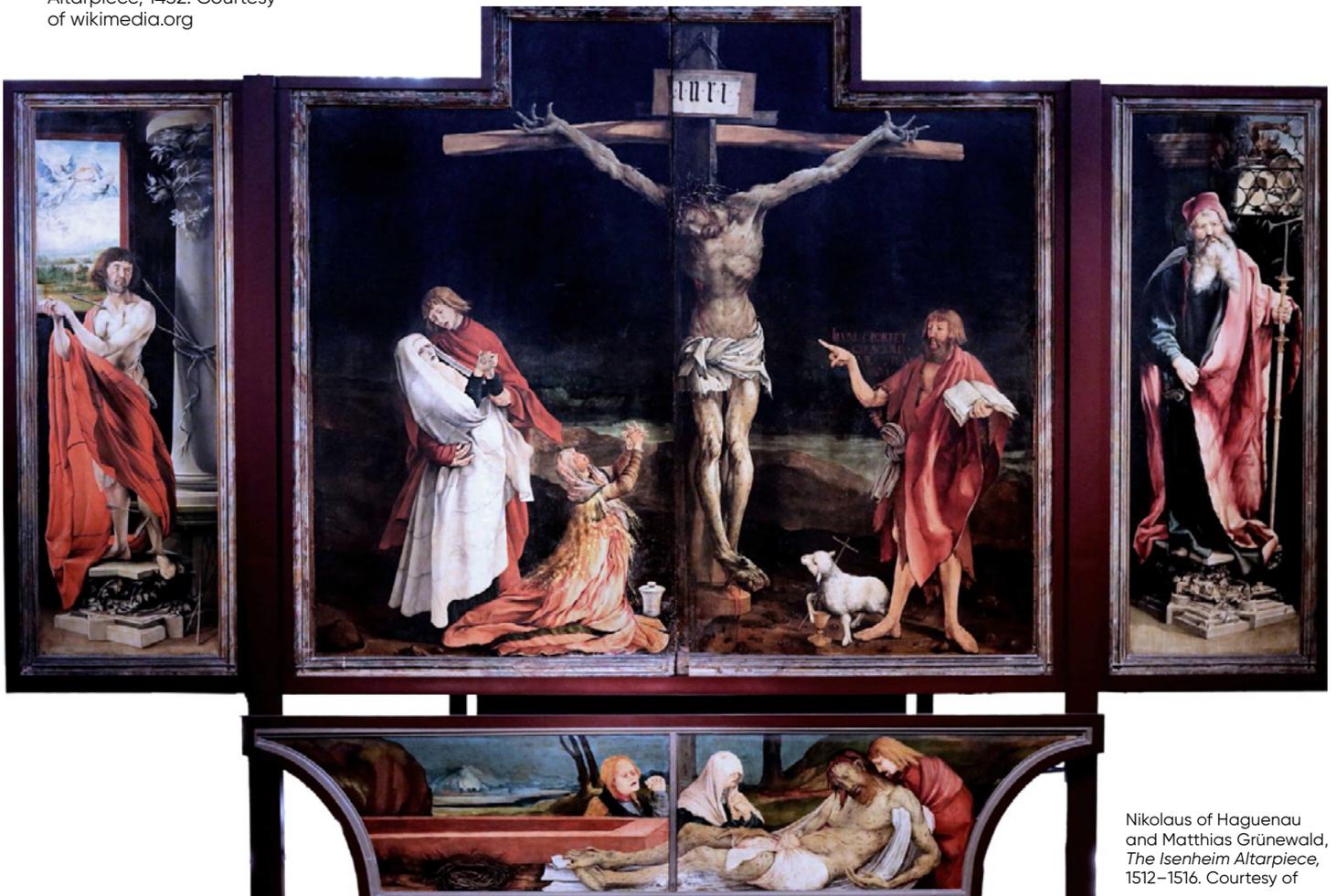
### **Nurture.**

Interestingly, a huge part of the Reformation was to take away all forms of art from the Church. This gesture goes to show just how powerful these images were considered to be.<sup>(12)</sup> The legacies of this era are complex. The Reformation was spurred by many different factors and was by no means a golden ticket to equality – indeed that was never really the objective of the Northern Renaissance or the Reformation.

But amidst all this, one thing is clear – art (altarpieces and book illustrations) and culture (the Church and book circulation) helped empower the public to question the way things were.



Hubert and Jan van Eyck, *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb/ the Ghent Altarpiece*, 1432. Courtesy of wikimedia.org



Nikolaus of Haguenau and Matthias Grünewald, *The Isenheim Altarpiece*, 1512–1516. Courtesy of

# Harlem Renaissance: art, community & civil rights.

## Roots.

In 1920s and '30s America, Harlem was the place to be. The New York neighbourhood was a hotspot for African American culture and community. Countless artists, writers and musicians were at the epicentre. They referred to themselves as 'New Negroes' and to the cultural movement as the 'New Negro Renaissance'.<sup>(13)</sup>

Looking back on the era in the late 1940s, renowned historian John Hope Franklin gave it the name, the Harlem Renaissance. Today, it is most popularly known as such. During the movement in the 1920s and '30s, there was much debate and criticism. Poet and writer Langston Hughes referred to the 'Harlem Vogue' of the 1920s as a time when white patrons, philanthropists and publishers took note of already-existing cultural and artistic activities.

Before the movement began, a mix of histories set the backdrop. Here, it's impossible to detail them in full. But one important factor was migration. After World War I, many people from the Caribbean islands moved to Harlem in search of a higher standard of living. On arrival, they were often met with inadequate living and working conditions. At the same time, many African Americans fled the South to cities across the North. New York City was one of them. Harlem in particular. As a result, by the 1920s Harlem was a majority Black neighbourhood.

## Growth.

During the Harlem Renaissance, art and culture went hand in hand.

One influential editor Jessie Redmon Fauset helped promote many of the most famous novelists, poets and thinkers of the movement. But as well as seeking out art, she provided cultural spaces in the form of salons, parties and public events.

Harlem's 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library, later the Schomburg Center, worked in a similar way. In 1934, they commissioned a young Aaron Douglas to paint a mural. It was monumental in scale and documented African American history. But Douglas's commission was not alone. It was accompanied by a thriving programme of events and workshops at the library.

Another interesting factor was the music and performance venues. In the late 1800s, Harlem was rebuilt for white middle and upper class Americans. As a result, there was an Opera House, grand architecture and many cultural facilities. Access to these facilities was key to the movement. A young Ella Fitzgerald, for example, was first spotted at an open-mic night at the Apollo Theatre – a venue renovated in the 1930s.

This community-centred approach was part of the success of the Harlem Renaissance. Art itself was important, yes. But it was accompanied by

<sup>13</sup>Cheryl A. Wall, *When the Negro was in Vogue, The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction*, 2016.

culture. Venues and events enabled the art to be discussed and debated – thus crossing over into public life, activism and behaviour. This is an important lesson for today. For an Ecological Renaissance to flourish, cultural facilities must be accessible to all.

### **Nurture.**

While the Harlem Renaissance was full of energy and joy, it should not be romanticised. There was poverty as well as crime and violence – within the community and from the police. And, while countless women contributed to the movement, sexism was rife. On top of this, white economic dominance proved to be a difficult balancing act in terms of creative autonomy for some artists, writers, and other culture makers.

Nonetheless, a sense of empowerment was the greatest legacy of the Harlem Renaissance. And that sense of empowerment was nurtured and critiqued. While it was by no means perfect, it set the stage for decades to come. The age of Black Power from the 1950s to the 1970s was tumultuous, but it did make huge steps for equal rights and justice. Today, the fight against racism in the United States and around the globe continues. But the resilience, joy and pride of African American culture is here for good.

As Malcom X writes in his memoir, "I had been hearing about how fabulous New York was, especially Harlem. In fact, my father had described Harlem with pride."<sup>(14)</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



Augusta Savage with her sculpture *Realization*, 1938. Photo by Andrew Herman. Photo by Andrew Herman.



Hale Aspacio Woodruff,  
*Amistad Murals*, 1938.  
Courtesy of Peter Harholdt  
and Talladega College.

# Queer Renaissance: art, the internet & identity.

## Roots.

Over the past decade, a Queer Renaissance has emerged in London and beyond. Throughout the 2010s, queer people, ideas and aesthetics have become profoundly more visible in pop culture. Queerness has always existed. But it's not always been 'out'. This recent Queer Renaissance roots back to centuries of underground queer art. In the past fifty years, the 1980s was a clear turning point for queer visibility.

During the 1980s AIDS epidemic, artists played a huge role in raising awareness in Europe and the United States. Although the mainstream media were filled by homophobia, a new conversation around queerness had started. It was during this time that the term 'queer' began to be reclaimed from a homophobic slur. All of this, of course, came with a high and painful price.

While these were important steps, the 'gay' image was largely white cis men. But there was an undercurrent of artists, writers and thinkers who were challenging this image. The likes of Octavia Butler, bell hooks, Ursula le Guin<sup>(16)</sup> and Judith Butler were writing from different perspectives. Namely, non-binary, trans, female and Black perspectives. These writers – who moved from philosophy to science fiction – came to inspire a new generation, the millennials.

This same generation was the first to grow up with the internet. This monumental new technology saw queer communities connect and flourish across the world. They continue to do so today.

## Growth.

In the 2010s, this queer-theory-savvy generation became a new wave of underground artists. Their MO was intersectionality. This intersectionality built on the work of writers from the '80s and '90s.

Art schools and underground scenes across the country were inspired. They were thriving with queerness. In London, performance artist [Sin Wai Kin](#) (fka Victoria Sin) studied at the [Royal College of Art](#). They started out performing at small queer venues, and in 2022 they were nominated for the [Turner prize](#). Sculptor [Jesse Darling](#) went to [Central Saint Martins](#) and [Slade School of Fine Art](#). He brought crip perspectives to queer conversations – looking at how chronic illness, dis/ability and queerness cross over. Many grassroots groups, collectives and events emerged at this time also. The likes of [BBZ](#), [Pxssy Palace](#) and [Hungama](#) flourished across London, all centring QTBIPOC.<sup>(17)</sup>

These underground queer artists and scenes set trends ahead of their time. By the late 2010s and early 2020s, pop culture followed suit. This happened with countless rappers and singers being openly queer and, at the same time, straight stars taking on the 'gay aesthetic'. Fittingly, Beyonce's most recent 2022 album was called [Renaissance](#). It's a lesson in the history of queer Black music – taking inspiration from ballroom culture in New York and collaborating

<sup>15</sup> [imaginations.glendon.yorku.ca/?p=13328](https://imaginations.glendon.yorku.ca/?p=13328)

<sup>16</sup> Ursula le Guin dealt with a lot of themes of gender and sexuality, but did not identify as queer.

<sup>17</sup> QTBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour).

with some of its greats. Namely, iconic DJ, producer and musician Honey Dijon. On top of all this, RuPaul's Drag Race has brought one of the queerest art forms to the mainstream. Love it or hate it, a whole new category of pop star has been born from one of the oldest, queerest art forms – queer cultural rebirth loud and clear.

### **Nurture.**

By now, the millennial generation has made quite a name for themselves and generation X and Z are following close suit. According to the ONS 2020 survey, the millennial generation "continue to be the most likely to identify as LGB<sup>(18)</sup> in 2020".<sup>(19)</sup>

Overall, this could suggest two things. One, there are more queer people in younger generations. Two, there are more queer people in younger generations that feel empowered to say so.

None of this is to say that the work is complete. Across the globe nearly seventy countries criminalise the LGBTQIA+<sup>(20)</sup> community. In the UK, homophobia is still a huge social problem and transphobia is in fact rising<sup>(21)</sup> Programmes like RuPaul's Drag Race even contribute to new, often prescriptive norms of queerness. Nonetheless, there is no denying that culture has been a huge frontrunner in the fight for LGBTQIA+<sup>(22)</sup> rights. Once again, art and culture empower people to speak up, and loudly.

<sup>18</sup> LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual).

<sup>19</sup> [ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2020](https://ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2020)

<sup>20</sup> LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual).

<sup>21</sup> [humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation](https://humandignitytrust.org/lgbt-the-law/map-of-criminalisation)

<sup>22</sup> [stophateuk.org/about-hate-crime/transgender-hate/](https://stophateuk.org/about-hate-crime/transgender-hate/)



Salman Toor, *Four Friends*, 2019. Courtesy of the artist and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

# IT'S ALWAYS YOU



Wai Kin Sin, *It's Always You Signed Poster (Collective)*, 2021. Courtesy of the artist and Blindspot Gallery.

# Present

## Ecological Renaissance: the roots are here, the ground is fertile.

An Ecological Renaissance is not here yet, but it does have roots. For them to grow they must be cultivated and once they've grown, they'll need to be nurtured, indefinitely.

Each of the three previous Renaissances grew because they had roots planted in fertile soil. Many different factors were at play, but two key things were consistent – the social impetus, and the role of art and culture. In terms of an Ecological Renaissance, the social impetus already exists. But support for art and culture is essentially lacking.

The UK public want to make change and the social impetus is there. According to the 2021 Lifestyle Survey (OPN) by the Office for National Statistics, 75% of adults worry about climate change in the UK.<sup>(23)</sup> The survey found that those who are worried are more likely to make lifestyle changes. However, it also reports a sense of “helplessness” and the lifestyle changes that are being made are not yet enough.<sup>(24)</sup> This implies a need to turn the narrative away from fear and towards empowerment. And that is precisely what art and culture can offer.

Crucially, empowerment in this context involves environmental justice. Social and environmental action go hand in hand. As a recent report by Greenpeace and the Runnymede Trust outlines: “Black people, Indigenous Peoples and people of colour across the globe bear the brunt of an environmental emergency that, for the most part, they did not create.”<sup>(25)</sup> In the UK, people from lower socio-economic backgrounds breathe more polluted air and have less access to green space. This disproportionately affects Black and Brown communities and people with disabilities. Adapting to extreme weather also disproportionately affects people with disabilities – as outlined in a 2022 report by McGill University.<sup>(26)</sup>

Art and culture have the power to create the right conditions for people to engage fully with the climate crisis. Art and culture can make it real and present. They can help deliver not just the science of net zero but an equitable societal response – as the short case studies in this chapter demonstrate.

<sup>23</sup> [ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/dataonpublicattitudestotheenvironmentandtheimpactofclimatechangeintheuk](https://ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/dataonpublicattitudestotheenvironmentandtheimpactofclimatechangeintheuk)

<sup>24</sup> [assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/985092/BEIS\\_PAT\\_W37 - Key Findings.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/985092/BEIS_PAT_W37_-_Key_Findings.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> [greenpeace.org.uk/news/environmental-justice-glossary#BIPOC](https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/environmental-justice-glossary#BIPOC)

<sup>26</sup> [internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/drcc\\_status\\_report\\_english\\_0.pdf](https://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/sites/default/files/drcc_status_report_english_0.pdf)

# Breathe: 2022: local consciousness-raising.

## What is it?

Breathe:2022 is a public art project against air pollution. Over 1000 drawings of six local activists have been pasted across the London borough of Lewisham – particularly near the South Circular road, a major polluter in the area. The activists come from a range of local groups. Choked Up, Mums for Lungs, Clean Air for Catford and the Ella Roberta Family Foundation. These groups call vital attention to environmental racism. In London, Black people are more likely to breathe illegal levels of air pollution than white and Asian groups. In England, Black people are nearly four times more likely than white people to have no access to outdoor space.<sup>(27)</sup>

## Who's involved?

This project was a collaborative effort. It was commissioned by the Albany for London Borough of Culture 2022 and funded by the Mayor of London. The Albany is a thriving community-led theatre which also has a garden where they grow food. The artist was Dryden Goodwin and the project was produced by Invisible Dust – an organisation that brings together art and science to "help people connect emotionally with climate change."<sup>(28)</sup>

## What's the impact?

This project has inspired a new wave of environmental consciousness in Lewisham. The project is ongoing so its impact continues. In the meantime, its mixed approach raises awareness, and engages and educates in a variety of ways.<sup>(29)</sup>

- Empowering and connecting local activists to continue their work while listening and collaborating with them.
- Over 13 million people have viewed the artwork to date. These have been seen on over 200 underpasses, roadside hoardings and train stations right across Lewisham, London and nationwide – additional exposure made possible through a partnership with JCDecaux's Community Channel initiative.
- On a day of community air action, the Horniman Museum worked with 513 people on a series of workshops, talks and installations.
- Drawing Breath Schools is set to engage with 132 pupils and 12 Art Teachers from 5 secondary schools across Lewisham. The end result will be a co-created animation which will be projected on the side of the Old Town Hall in Catford.
- Dryden Goodwin is working on an animation of the drawings. The final piece will be projected onto the Old Town Hall in Catford every night for two weeks.
- Spurred in part by this project, and We Are Lewisham more broadly, Lewisham Council has invited Artists for Change to be involved in decision-making.
- Goodwin's original drawings were also shown at the Wellcome Collection as part of the exhibition In the Air. They sat alongside a compelling documentary about environmental racism by Choked Up. The Wellcome Collection also has its own school programme for all its shows.

<sup>27</sup>[www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/environmental-racism-report-summary/](http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/environmental-racism-report-summary/)

<sup>28</sup> [invisibledust.com](http://invisibledust.com)

<sup>29</sup> Invisible Dust.





Participants of *Breathe:2022* standing outside Catford Town Hall, Lewisham. Courtesy of Invisible Dust

# Misery Medicine: Plant Magic: nature, community & empowerment.

## What is it?

*Misery Medicine: Plant Magic* is a nature walk for QTBIPOC, facilitated by experts in their field – be it fungi or plants. Each workshop is a walk around a local wildlife area followed by a space for conversation and creative response. Some weeks the participants might draw or make a print. On other weeks they might write in response to the session. The session is free to everyone who comes, or by donation. For the [Brent Biennial](#), *Misery Medicine: Plant Magic* hosted workshops for children too. The session gained a lot of interest from the community and parents in the area.

## Who's involved?

This is an ongoing event run by [Misery](#) – a mental health collective and sober club night centring QTBIPOC. They are a grassroots collective and occupy a space between art, culture and collective action. They host sober parties, do radio shows and many different events, as well as collaborating with a host of established museums including the [Somerset House](#), [Science Museum](#) and the [Victoria & Albert Museum](#). The group was founded by writer and musician, Aisha Mirza. However, they are keen to stress that *Misery Medicine: Plant Magic* came largely from the work of community herbalist, Rasheeqa Ahmad. Throughout the project, Misery has collaborated with many facilitators and is part funded by Arts Council England.

## What's the impact?

Community and empowerment are at the heart of this project. "I grew up in a city and always had an appreciation for nature, but it was definitely one of the first times that I really understood what it was about."<sup>(30)</sup> The workshops encourage participants to engage with urban nature in new ways. This sort of grassroots consciousness-changing is essential to deliver on COP27's paradigm shift.

The workshops are oversubscribed every month and demand is growing. In their very first session, over 100 people attended. Since then, every session has sold out within a day, even before they've advertised on social media.

This suggests that the appetite for changing perspectives is huge. People want to rethink how we exist in the world. What Misery shows is just how important it is to have spaces where people feel comfortable and supported. Here, making the event QTBIPOC enables this to happen. As Aisha notes, "obviously anyone doing work in ecology is brilliant and needed – but this [project] is going to be about Black and Brown people again. Because even the ways in which we engage with nature are deeply colonised."<sup>(31)</sup>

It's also important to see this sort of grassroots work in a wider context. Other grassroots organisations deliver similar projects, but not for the QTBIPOC community. Together, they are all doing important groundwork in changing people's approaches and behaviours in the city.

<sup>30</sup> Interview Transcript with Aisha Mirza.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

# Misery medicine: plant magic

@miseryparty x

@hedgeherbs x

@fungi.futures

12-4pm



free



bipoc only



tickets in @miseryparty bio!



theme: ripening  
bring a cup, jar & paper/cloth bag

saturday 3rd september 2022

burgess park

# Misery medicine: plant magic

@miseryparty x

@hedgeherbs x

@fungi.futures

12-4pm



free



bipoc only



tickets in @miseryparty bio!



theme: warmth  
bring a cup, jar & paper/cloth bag

saturday 1st october 2022

hampstead heath



# Young London Print Prize: schools, art & expression.

## What is it?

Young London Print Prize (YLPP) is an art competition for young people based around the environment. It works with schools and colleges for six months each year. All the work is created and judged by young people.

The programme is delivered in four stages:

1. The **first stage** focuses on capacity-building. Free resources are provided along with free teacher training sessions. These are designed to enhance teachers' skills as artists and educators.
2. The **second stage** stage focuses on primary schools. There are free in-school workshops provided to pupils in Years 5 and 6, aged 9-11. In the workshops, they learn about environmental art and create their own submission to the Prize.
3. The **third stage** brings together a panel of Young Curators. These are Year 12 students, aged 16-17. They come from schools and colleges across London and all study art. Together, they spend time learning about ecology and careers in the arts. Then, they judge all the entries for the Prize.
4. The **final stage** celebrates young people as artists. The winners are exhibited at Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair alongside 500 world-renowned printmakers.

## Who's involved?

YLPP was launched in 2019 and in 2022 became a community interest company. The programme is backed by a cross-sector group of funders, contributors and collaborators. They include small-scale cultural organisations, major property companies and sustainability consultants and communicators, as well as law advisors, social investors and local councils. The schools themselves are located in low-income communities across London.

## Whats the impact?

YLPP empowers thousands of young people to express their hopes and ideas about the environment. The programme develops their artistic skills and ecological thinking. For many, this has a transformational impact – nurturing individual confidence and well-being. "I see myself different" were the words of Zahra Alam, aged 10, who won second prize in 2021.

YLPP also aims to diversify the contemporary art world and develop young people's environmental understanding. The programme builds bridges between education and careers. It reveals pathways into the culture sector and introduces the Curators to people from similar backgrounds who work in the arts.

Finally, YLPP challenges institutional priorities. Arts education is under intense pressure in the state system. YLPP acts as a champion and advocate for high-quality provision. It also advocates for environmental action in schools and beyond the campus.

The reach of this programme has been as follows:

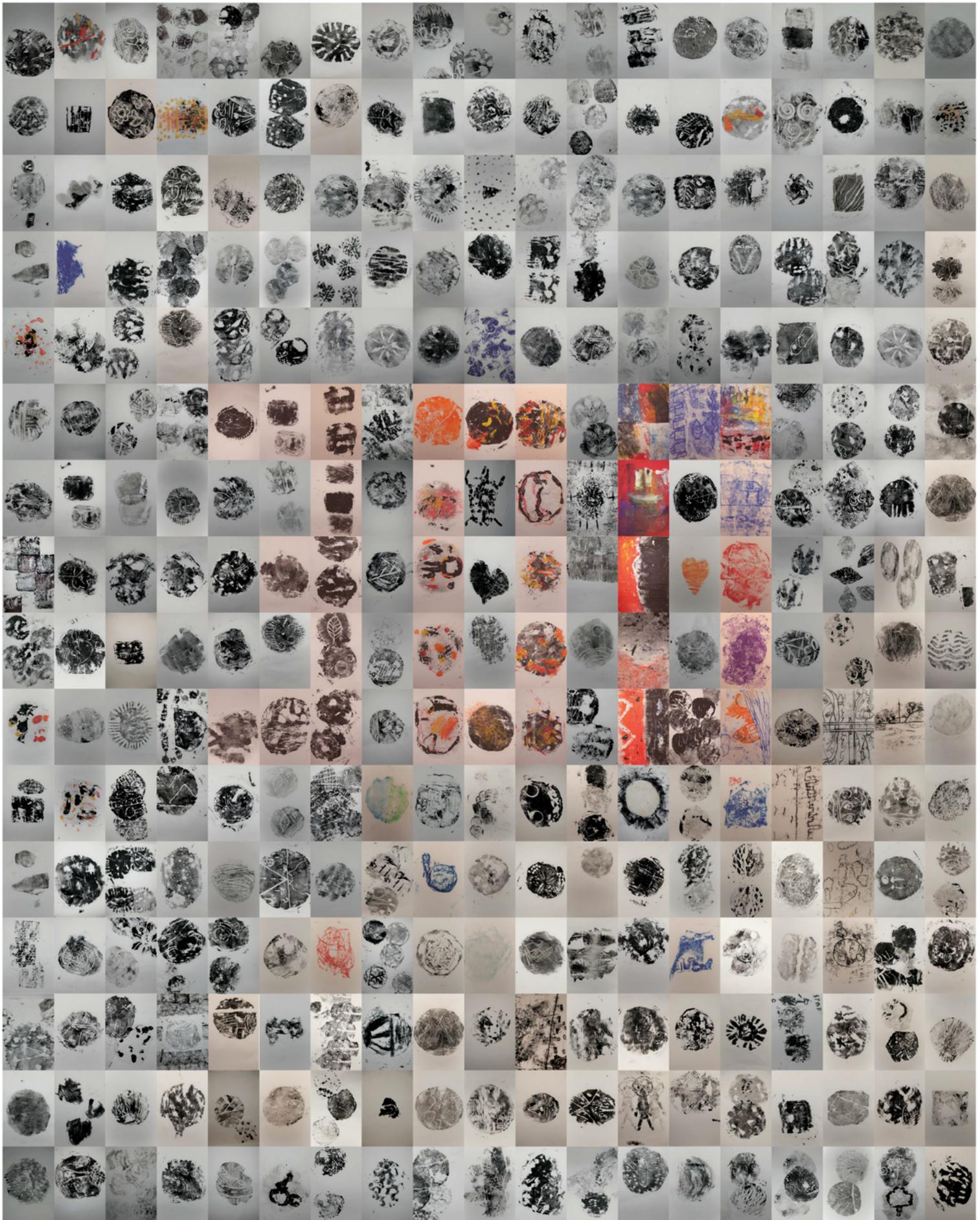
- In 2020, 459 young people took part. 100% of teachers said they wanted to take part the following year and that they would recommend the programme to other schools and colleagues.
- In 2021, YLPP doubled in size, with nearly a thousand participants and 21 schools involved.
- In 2022, a total of 1,309 young artists were involved from schools in low-income neighbourhoods across London. All the winners were showcased on the Piccadilly Lights in the lead-up to COP27.



Young London Print Prize, 2021 winners at the Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair. Courtesy of YLPP.



Young London Print Prize, 2021 workshops. Courtesy of YLPP.



Art can change the world (again), 2022

# Future

## Recommendations: what you can do now, for tomorrow.

If we accept this premise that the climate crisis is not just a science problem, it follows that science-based targets may never be enough. Not because they aren't meaningful and important. But because they struggle to capture the cultural dimensions of environmental breakdown. There is an elusive and profoundly human aspect to this crisis.

When we look back at the history of social change, what we often see is a mix of culture, creativity and technological innovation. Our problem at the moment is too much emphasis on efficiency and regulation and not enough emphasis on dialogue and mobilisation. Both matter. Only one is happening. So what can you do?

Here are three suggestions:

### 1. Test your strategy.

Scope 3 emissions present an enormous challenge to most companies and councils. While the priority remains to reduce and avoid emissions first, for the emissions that remain the usual remedy is offsetting. But the price of carbon offsets is set to rise exponentially. [Bloomberg report](#)<sup>(32)</sup> suggests that offset prices could increase fifty-fold by 2050 – rising from an average of \$2.50/ton in 2020 to a range of \$11 to \$215/ton as soon as 2030.

What art and culture offer, in a million different forms, is a way to influence the choices of people that you don't control – your customers and supply chain, or your residents and citizens. Art and culture are vehicles to persuade people to come on the journey. They're how you get people thinking and sustain their interest. They're essential tools to mobilise people in our networks and communities to act consensually and sustainably.

So the question is, where are the cultural programmes and the creative partnerships in your strategy? And are they embedded in the process of climate action from the outset – in concept development, ideation, procurement and delivery – or just the bit you think you need an artist for?

### 2. Borrow ideas and connect people.

Professor Costas Markides at the London Business School points out that most good ideas already exist. The challenge isn't innovation in a traditional sense. It's converting good ideas and scaling up. That rings true in this arena.

There are inspirational people already working hard on the approaches that we need. Indeed, many of them have already been piloted.<sup>(33)</sup> Take housing and regeneration. If you're building (or refurbishing) a thousand new homes and want to make the place sustainable, don't just focus on the building fabric.

<sup>32</sup> [about.bnef.com/blog/carbon-offset-prices-could-increase-fifty-fold-by-2050/](https://about.bnef.com/blog/carbon-offset-prices-could-increase-fifty-fold-by-2050/)

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.artistsinresidence.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/AIR\\_Evaluation2020.pdf](https://www.artistsinresidence.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/AIR_Evaluation2020.pdf)

It's also about how people will live there. Appoint an artist in residence for one year. Think of them as an activist or community organiser, not a painter. Someone who can tell the story, galvanise residents through creativity, and build a shared commitment to a zero-carbon neighbourhood. It's not a new idea. Just a good one.<sup>(34)</sup>

In practice, every local authority should also map and connect cultural organisations involved in climate action in their borough. We recognise the intense resource constraints they face, but every council can still play an essential convening role. There are brilliant examples of local action already out there. Arts Council England found that 49% of organisations funded through their national portfolio had produced, programmed or curated work on environmental themes<sup>(35)</sup>. Councils can connect these people, who, in turn, will help each authority meet its net zero targets.

In addition, there are crucial choices made every month in the allocation of CIL (CIL) and other forms of planning gain, as well as a requirement in the NPPF (paragraph 93) to consider local strategies to improve health. Investing money in cultural programming that addresses climate change, public health outcomes and democratic engagement is a completely valid, progressive decision to make.

### **3. Launch a new agency.**

Perhaps above all, we need to reappraise the role of artists themselves – what they are and what they do. Instead of placing them in a box marked leisure and entertainment, we should see them partly as service providers. If they exist in a box at all, it's marked invention, facilitation and communication.

The truth is, art and culture can help solve some of our most pressing business problems – including net zero. It's not just about objects and sculptures, or museums and galleries. It's about local governments and the private sector too. Local governments and the private sector are all too familiar with commissioning think tanks or consultants. Why then does it feel somehow luxurious or risky to work with an artist or creative?

At the same time, cultural practitioners need to embrace the idea of working with private businesses and – if they choose – pitching their work confidently as an instrumental tool to help solve immediate real-world problems.

What we need is a broker or an agency – like an A&R department that scouts artists for record labels. This agency would match the talent in the creative industries with the sustainability teams that now exist throughout the public and private sectors.

Proof of concept could logically be funded by NESTA or Arts Council England. The detailed proposition could be created by a diverse group of artists working with sustainability leads from the private sector. Then the agency itself could be set up as an independent business or community interest company, funded on a commercial basis after an initial two-year pilot.

<sup>34</sup>[heearlscourtdevelopmentcompany.com/the-site/artist-in-residence](https://heearlscourtdevelopmentcompany.com/the-site/artist-in-residence)

<sup>35</sup>[www.artscouncil.org.uk/news/how-culture-combating-climate-change](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/news/how-culture-combating-climate-change)

# Footnotes

- 1 COP (Conference of the Parties).
- 2 [cop27.eg/#/presidency/eventsThematic](https://cop27.eg/#/presidency/eventsThematic)
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 [Learning about climate change in, with and through art, Julia Bentz, 2020.](#)
- 5 <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create/strategy-2020-2030/our-vision>
- 6 Today, we call these artists 'Italian' but, during their lifetimes, Italy was not a united state.
- 7 *Northern Renaissance Art*, Susie Nash, 2008.
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- 9 *Forgery, Replica, Fiction: Temporalities of German Renaissance Art*, Wood, Christopher, 2008.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Cheryl A. Wall, *When the Negro was in Vogue, The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction*, 2016.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 [imaginations.glendon.yorku.ca/?p=13328](https://www.imaginations.glendon.yorku.ca/?p=13328)
- 16 Ursula le Guin dealt with a lot of themes of gender and sexuality, but did not identify as queer.
- 17 QTBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour).
- 18 LBG (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual).
- 19 [ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2020](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2020)
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- 29 Invisible Dust.
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- 34 [hearlscourtdevelopmentcompany.com/the-site/artist-in-residence](https://www.hearlscourtdevelopmentcompany.com/the-site/artist-in-residence)

# Credits

This discussion paper was co-authored by Izzy Yon and Matt Bell, with detailed input from partners and advisory teams. Izzy and Matt are the co-founders of Young London Print Prize.

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