

Stephen Friedman Gallery

BBC News
Sir Antony Gormley announces 'UK's biggest art exhibition'
Will Gompertz
28 January 2021



Sir Antony Gormley announces 'UK's biggest art exhibition'

Antony Gormley is the first of several artists to set a theme for the virtual exhibition.

Museums and leading artists are inviting the British public to take part in what they hope will be the biggest art exhibition ever mounted. The Great Big Art Exhibition is being launched by Sir Antony Gormley, who is asking people to make an artwork at home and put in their window or garden.



Image: Getty Images

The Angel of the North sculptor said the ambition was to create a country-wide show of imagination and optimism, inspired by the rainbow images people made to celebrate the NHS and keyworkers during the first lockdown.

"At a time when all the theatres and galleries are shut it is wonderful to somehow tap into the extraordinary reservoirs of creativity in the country and celebrate the diversity of range and thought and feelings that exist," Sir Antony said. He has suggested animals as the theme for the first two weeks of The Great Big Art Exhibition. "We want to let the inner animal out," he said. "People will find their inner animal... it could be a whale or a dinosaur".



Image: Balanggarra Aboriginal Corporation / Uwa Centr

Sir Antony chose this cave painting of a kangaroo as a potential catalyst for budding artists. The sculptor has selected several images of animals that might be a useful source of reference, including a drawing of a Rhino by Albrecht Durer and a kangaroo painted with red ochre in a cave in Kimberley, Australia. He also produced a small sculpture of a dog, to illustrate how easy it is to create simple-but-fun ornaments for the home.

"Most of the door frames and window-sills of this house are now covered in a menagerie of these kinds of things," he said. "As they fall, we make new ones, they get replaced."

Every two weeks, a different artist will chose a subject for the public to respond to in what the organisers hope will be a rolling nationwide exhibition, ending on 30 April.

Sonia Boyce, who is representing Britain at next year's prestigious Venice Biennale, will follow Sir Antony with a theme of portraiture. Other artists taking part include the Turner Prize-winners Anish Kapoor and Jeremy Deller, as well as the Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei, who currently lives in Cambridge.

Stephen Friedman Gallery

BBC News

Sir Antony Gormley announces 'UK's biggest art exhibition'

Will Gompertz

28 January 2021



Image: Sir Antony Gormley

their own artwork.

The idea for the project came from Firstsite, a visual arts organisation in Colchester, Essex, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary. Directors at many of the UK's museums have suggested paintings and sculptures that might inspire people as they prepare to paint, draw, sculpt or build

Rebecca Salter, President of the Royal Academy chose Yinka Shonibare's Cheeky Little Astronomer (2013) mannequin. While Sir John Leighton at National Galleries Scotland picked The Progress of a Soul: The Victory (1902) by Phoebe Anna Traquair.



Image: Sir Antony Gormley

If The Great Big Art Exhibition takes off as the organisers hope it will be both a blessing a curse.

A unifying celebration of national creativity would be a wonderful thing at a difficult time, but someone, somewhere will have to document the whole project and store for posterity what could be the most revealing expression of the British character during the 2020s pandemic.