

Stephen Friedman Gallery

The Guardian
Great Big Art Exhibition invites locked-down Brits to put creativity on show
Lanre Bakare
28 January 2021

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People encouraged to make art on themes chosen by famous names and display it in their windows

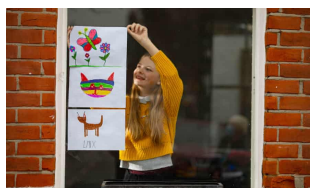


Image: The project's first theme, chosen by Antony Gormley, is animals. Photograph: David Parry/PA

Some of British art's biggest names, including Antony Gormley, Sonia Boyce and Anish Kapoor, are encouraging Britons to turn their front windows into a gallery as part of a nationwide initiative to create a "magical patchwork of creativity".

The Great Big Art Exhibition was launched on Thursday by Gormley, who is the first artist to choose a theme for people at home to be inspired by as they create work to contribute to what organisers are calling the nation's largest ever exhibition.

Gormley chose the theme of animals for participants to riff on, and people are encouraged to make their artworks out of what they have at hand. The results – be they paintings, sculptures or something less traditional – are to be placed on a front porch, balcony or window.

The Angel of the North artist said the project would follow on from the NHS rainbow campaign, when thousands of rainbows were put in front windows to show solidarity and support for the health service. He said: "I think we could now celebrate the diversity and extraordinary range of creative talent there is in Britain. People will say, 'I'm not an artist I don't draw things', but I think actually everybody can, once they get going."



Image: Shalomy, 10, Benjamin, six, and Stephanie, eight, display their animal artworks in a window. Photograph: David Parry/PA

Historical works from UK galleries are being made available for download so they can be used as a template or inspiration, and participants are encouraged to collaborate virtually with others, from sports teams or schools to religious groups.

Boyce, who will represent the UK at the next Venice Biennale, has chosen the second theme, portraits, to follow Gormley's, and the project will run until April. Gormley said the lockdown had created a "huge reservoir of potential" creativity. "I'm saying let's funnel this energy into making things," he said.

Directors of Tate, the British Museum, the National Portrait Gallery, the National Galleries of Scotland, the National Museums Liverpool and others have selected works including Lubaina Himid's Freedom and Change, Yinka Shonibare's Cheeky Little Astronomer, Darvish Fakhri's portrait of the dancer Akram Khan and Claude Monet's The Water-Lily Pond.

Other artists who are supporting the project include Etel Adnan and Simone Fattal, Tai Shani, Jeremy Deller, David Shrigley, Ai Weiwei and Ryan Gander.

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Art has proven to be a popular lockdown pursuit for Britons. Coffee table books have been released featuring artists including Mickalene Thomas and George Condo with do-it-yourself guides to making art.

Care home residents and art students have embraced making work in isolation, while initiatives such as Artists Walk have displayed pieces by artists including Deller in front windows as part of curated local art exhibitions that can be viewed safely from outdoors.

Sally Shaw, the director of Firstsite, the Colchester-based arts organisation behind the initiative, said the project was about spreading happiness and creativity as the country deals with the long lockdown, with art galleries closed.

“The doors to our collections and galleries might be shut but our imaginations are forever open. Making, showing and experiencing art has created so much joy, connection and solace for many thousands of people,” she said.