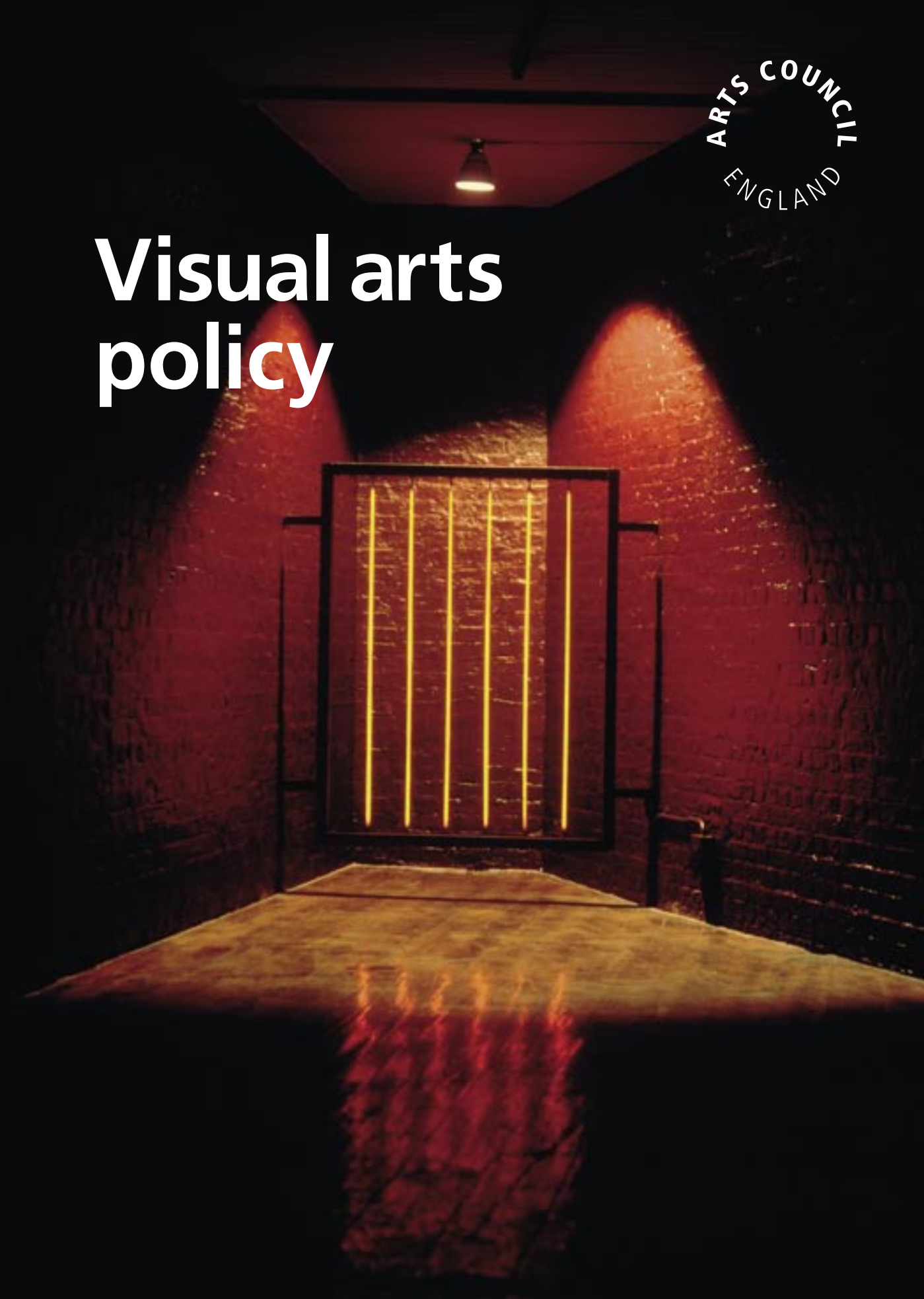


Visual arts policy



Introduction

We will support the development of visual arts in order to achieve our ambition of putting the arts at the heart of national life and people at the heart of the arts. This means enabling artists and arts organisations to take creative risks and pursue new opportunities. Our policy summarises the context for the visual arts and the Arts Council's role. It sets out our vision for the visual arts and the priorities we have set to help us deliver it.

All our arts policies prioritise strengthening and developing the infrastructure for the artform. They identify particular areas of contemporary practice that we want to help develop. They confirm our support for individual artists.

Collectively the policies will help us deliver the six areas of our agenda for the arts: taking part in the arts, children and young people, the creative economy, vibrant communities, internationalism and celebrating diversity.

We are prepared to make choices – sometimes tough ones – about how we commit our funding to respond to the kind of ambitious thinking and high quality work that will take our priorities forward. We believe they will help us develop a confident, diverse and innovative visual arts sector that is valued by and in tune with the communities it serves.

Front cover:

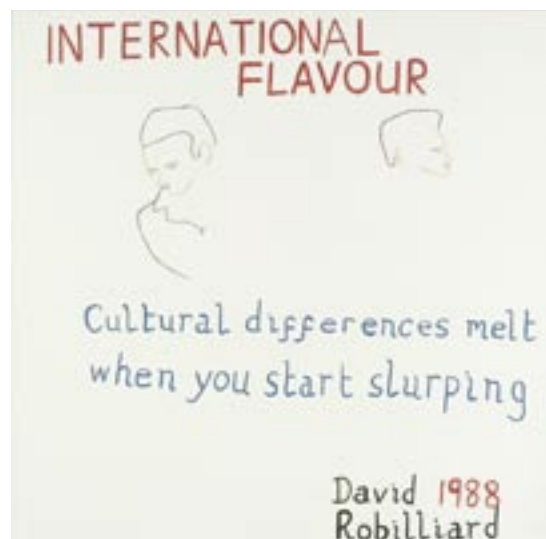
The Light at the End, Mona Hatoum
Arts Council Collection
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The context for the visual arts and the role we play

Contemporary visual artists in England are an international success story and our galleries and promoters are part of a global visual arts network that is drawing increasingly wide audiences, buyers and participants across the world.

Visual arts covers a range of artforms from the established media of painting, sculpture, photography and craft to moving image, new media and live art. There are crossovers with design and architecture. Visual artists are often risk takers. They cross disciplines and work in many contexts: in heritage sites, in architecture and landscape design, in healthcare environments, business, science and industry, and increasingly, with rural communities. Visual artists and their promoters show an extraordinary capacity and appetite to rise to the challenge of any space, physical or virtual, however unpromising it might initially seem, to show contemporary art.

This expansion of the visual arts has led to a vast increase in participation and widened the range of people engaging with contemporary art. A recent survey of over 6,000 people showed that 14 per cent regularly engaged in painting or drawing and a further 14 per cent made craft. Tate Modern attracts some four million visitors a year – more than any other international modern art museum in the world. The Liverpool Biennial welcomes some 350,000 visitors to its events.



David Robilliard, *International Flavour: cultural differences melt when you start slurping* 1988, Arts Council Collection

Copyright – The artist

While galleries remain vital for our experience of art, technology is helping develop new art practices and new engagement with contemporary art through mobile phones and the internet. Contemporary art is, in its turn, increasingly influencing the wider visual culture and is a vital driver of the creative industries.

The visual arts have a complex funding structure. Since the 1980s Arts Council England has focused our investment on developing the contemporary visual arts and has helped establish lead organisations to represent artists, education and debate. We support, often in partnership with local authorities, over 200 visual arts organisations promoting and presenting contemporary art in and beyond the gallery. Our investment, which totals some £38 million a year, takes into account the complexity of the presentation and engagement in the visual arts now. We support large organisations such as the Crafts Council, the Hayward Gallery (part of London's South Bank

Centre), Yorkshire Sculpture Park in Wakefield and BALTIC in Gateshead. We also recognise the contribution of smaller non-building-based agencies, artist-run spaces and independent promoters. These organisations, alongside the Tate galleries and other national museums and the international commercial galleries in London, are the backbone of contemporary art in England.

Investment through the National Lottery has transformed the landscape for spaces for the contemporary visual arts and there has been increased investment, especially from local authorities, in signature iconic work for public spaces.

We believe contemporary visual art is now at a turning point. The growth and impact of the sector, the range of artistic practices and their international reach are an undoubted success but this is not sustainable without a long-term strategy. In 2005, working with the broader visual arts sector,

Arts Council England commissioned the first major review of the presentation of the contemporary visual arts in England.

The review celebrated the success of the visual arts. It argued for greater linkages between the historical and the contemporary. It showed that provision for contemporary visual art generally across the country was still uneven. While income generation and leveraging of new funds is high, the sector faces a range of challenges to sustain the breadth

of activity, including low programme budgets and salaries, and poor working conditions. This is undermining leadership and our international competitiveness.

There is a lack of diversity in the sector and a lack of specialist curators, particularly in photography and new media, live art, craft, design and architecture. If the visual arts are to reflect and meet the needs of audiences and artists in England then they need to become more diverse and socially inclusive.



Our vision for the visual arts

In 2006 we responded to the findings of the review by launching *Turning point*, our 10-year strategy for the contemporary visual arts.

This aims to give the sector the capacity to capitalise on its achievements and the expansion in artistic practice that has taken place in recent years. Its success is dependent on integrated planning and investment to underpin the sustainability and growth of the visual arts. We want to work with the commercial sector to develop new ways of building the market for contemporary art and with the museums and galleries sector to strengthen the links between heritage and the contemporary.

Turning point is a 10-year strategy that focuses on five areas:

- audiences, participation and education
- support for artists
- innovation and risk
- diversity and leadership
- places, spaces and partnerships

Our visual arts policy sets the high-level priorities that will enable us to implement that long-term strategy. To do this effectively will mean prioritising resources and working with other partners. It will also require visual arts organisations that are fit for purpose in the 21st century. Artistic ambition, entrepreneurship, business planning and leadership will be vital.

We recognise the need to improve the environment for artists so that they can develop sustainable careers. We will continue to work with our partners to improve artists' earnings and working conditions. We will promote wider recognition of their professional status and offer a range of development opportunities, both national and international.

We see an opportunity to build partnerships with government and the local authorities to develop workspace and open studio programmes that bring artists, often working collectively, into contact with the public.



Bridget Riley, *Movement in Squares*, 1961,
part of the exhibition celebrating 60 years
of the Arts Council Collection

Copyright – Getty Images
Photo – Peter Macdiarmid



Our overall ambition is for people, wherever they live in England, to be able to experience and be stimulated by the best in the visual arts from this country and from around the world. We recognise the importance of digital technologies and we will support the development of innovative ways to distribute work and to enable people to engage with the visual arts.

Contemporary art adds value to Britain's competitive edge in innovation and the creative industries internationally. If we are to remain a world leader in the arts and creative industries, our artists and producers must have the skills to adapt to change in the working environment and in technology.

We would like to see the current definition of the creative industries expanded to include the visual artist, acknowledging the fluid nature of visual arts practice and the portfolio working lives of many artists. We'd like to see more support for visual arts producers and agencies and more opportunities for artists and producers to work with other disciplines. We'd like to see broader recognition of the ways in which visual artists contribute to sustainable communities particularly in the areas of education, health and criminal justice where access to high quality visual art and architecture can make a demonstrable difference.

Spaces for artists to live and work in our cities and in rural communities have a social as well as economic value. The visual arts have played a significant role in the growth of the creative quarters that have developed since the 1970s around artist studios. As property prices have risen, artists have been squeezed out. We want to see the development of new artists' workspace.

Our priorities for visual arts 2007–2011

To support a more confident, diverse and innovative arts sector, which is valued by and in tune with the communities it serves

- We will fund a portfolio of organisations that are contemporary in their approach and committed to engaging people in their work in new ways. We will continue to review the organisations we fund and prioritise those developing more sustainable business models to give their work greater impact and reach
- We will support the development of visual artists. We will help create the time, space, money and networks that artists need to have sustainable careers. We will work with local authorities to support the development of workspace and open studio programmes in both urban and rural contexts

To enable more people to take part in the arts as both audiences and participants

- We will work with artists and arts organisations and our partners in the visual arts, in both the public and commercial sectors, to develop new forms of engagement, particularly through innovative use of digital technology

To contribute to the development of the creative economy

- We will help grow the market and audience for contemporary art, developing partnerships with museums, private trusts and foundations and the international commercial galleries to develop collections of contemporary art outside London

To help create vibrant communities across the country

- We will develop the impact of visual arts in the wider community, working with visual arts practitioners and partners in rural and urban environments and in education, health and criminal justice sectors to help develop sustainable and well-designed communities

To celebrate diversity

- We will support leadership and the development of a more diverse workforce in the visual arts. We will work with partners, to ensure there is an improved range of pathways into the profession – particularly those from culturally diverse backgrounds. We will help create more mobility between national and regional organisations

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