

Orleans House Gallery – Summer 2026 Exhibition artist open call

The Brief

We are looking for an artist or a collection of artists to create an exhibition at Orleans House Gallery (OHG) that transforms the environment into a space for exploring imagination in a playful way for people of all ages.

The Play and Imagine programme is one of our main strands of work exploring the question “how does play and imagination impact everyday life?”. We commission artists to explore this question through creative workshops, participatory events, exhibitions, and art.

We are interested in how this question relates to your practice and can develop engagement with our local community. The exhibition aims to celebrate and champion play and imagination across the borough, working with partners in the Council and local communities. We believe that everyone from young to old can play, imagine and should have access to play.

We are particularly interested in this commission exploring any of the following:

- Imagination – exploring with children aged 8+ and adults when we “lose” our ability to play and imagine, and provide a creative space for adults and children to be free, imaginative and playful
- Intergenerational work – creating cultural opportunities for families to play and imagine together; for parents/carers to become “level” with children, and remove barriers to playfulness for adults
- Artist research through installations, exhibitions, or playful experiences exploring the importance and benefits of play and imagination in our lives
- Play as art for adults, allowing spaces for play and imagination
- Participation, co-curation or co-creation with community groups

We are interested in how you might interpret the above and add any other starting points for how you might approach a show with us. We aim to be supportive to the intentions and risks being explored by any artist with whom we are working. As a contemporary art gallery, we support artists from all disciplines and have featured shows that utilise all art forms.

The exhibition will run from April - August 2026 in our main gallery, with the possibility of using other spaces across the Orleans House Gallery ecosystem (woodland, grassland, courtyards).

Reimagination of previous projects is encouraged to meet our budget and timeline.

Engagement

Orleans House Gallery is a family-friendly site offering a wide range of creative workshops and activities for children and their adults to engage with, as well as

ensuring that all our facilities and exhibitions are accessible for families of all shapes and sizes.

As part of the exhibition, we would like to invite the artist delivering the exhibition the opportunity to plan and deliver:

- Let's Get Creative in August 2026, our monthly free creative workshop for families with children aged 4-11 years to engage audiences with the work throughout the summer holidays
- Workshops with community partners, to develop ideas, research, and / or activation engagement on the theme of play and imagination including Marble Hill Play Centre, Richmond Libraries, Richmond Children's Centres and Family Hubs, Age UK and the Riverbank Trust

Please note that these engagement workshops and projects are optional and are not required as part of the exhibition but is the choice of the artist(s).

Audiences

Our vision is for OHG to be a welcoming, accessible and relaxed place for visitors and families of all shapes and sizes. Core audiences to Orleans House Gallery are families, older adults, disabled people, artists and people engaged with the arts. We want to reach new visitors in these categories and increase engagement from young people, artists of colour, emerging artists, and disabled artists.

We would be happy to discuss making the exhibition suitable for those who may have other types of access needs including those with sensory sensitivities, neurodivergence, or who may be deaf, hearing impaired, blind, or partially sighted. The exhibition needs to be accessible to wheelchair users.

Orleans House Gallery will provide:

- £20,000 (excluding VAT) project budget inclusive of all artist fees, technical support, materials and expenses for the delivery of the exhibition. Please note that all costs incurred directly by the artists will be subject to VAT unless registered as VAT exempt. We will work with the artist to make the budget work.
- £3,000 for participatory / co-creation workshops with partner organisations should the artist be interested in consulting with or developing work with local communities (optional)
- £1,400 for delivery of August Let's Get Creative (optional)
- Production management support for installation.
- Producing support for budget and finance, concept development, and partnership relationships
- Fundraising aims: In collaboration with the artist, we will approach ACE and other funding bodies for up to £30k for additional exhibition and participatory elements which will suit this project.

Notes to consider before applying:

1. Best Practice – we want to make sure all artists working with us support themselves and those working with them financially. We want to build strong relationships and will assess whether the project has realistic expectations. We know everyone has high ambitions, and we want an honest conversation from the beginning around these.
2. Cultural Reforesting – going further than the sustainability agenda, our programme aims to be regenerative in terms of our relationship with nature.
3. Play and Imagine – our programme aims to include playful moments for all visitors regardless of age, in order to ensure that everyone can engage with play in their everyday life.
4. Richmond Borough Art Collection – the collection is made up of 4,400 artworks dating from the early 18th century to the present day and focusing geographically on the borough of Richmond. We have an ambition to acquire more work from underrepresented groups, particularly women and artists of colour.

Submissions

If you are interested in putting yourself forward for this project, we would like to invite you to provide the following:

- An introduction to yourself through a link to your website and/or a copy of your CV
- Relevant visual examples of previous work you've exhibited or a link to view
- Initial thoughts (max 100 words and/or 4 images) of your starting points of what you would like to explore in relation to this opportunity

Your submission can be through a brief word document or PDF, a short audio or video clip (no longer than 2 minutes), or through another creative and playful response.

We will be selecting three artists or artist collectives to further develop and discuss their project ideas with Orleans House Gallery. Those selected will be paid £250 per artist or artist collective to attend an interview to share their ideas.

Artists will be selected using the following criteria:

- Initial concept thoughts in response to the brief
- how closely your work and approach aligns with our vision

We are keen to work with artists from a variety of backgrounds with different skills, stories, and experiences. We actively seek applications from our diverse communities including Global Majority, Deaf, disabled, neurodivergent, LGBTQ+, to represent the diverse lived experiences in our projects.

If you have access requirements and would prefer to apply in a different format or would like us to make reasonable adjustments to the interview process, please let us know. If required, please submit an access document that includes an outline of your disability access needs.

Please send applications to dawn.stevens@richmondandwandsworth.gov.uk with the subject line: Play and Imagine 2026

Key dates

These are preliminary top line dates provided as a guide only and may be changed over time.

Applications open	Monday 13 January 2025
Deadline for proposal	9am, Monday 10 February 2025
Interviews	w/c 3 March 2025
Initial artist meeting	April 2025
Artist curating / producing exhibition	May 2025 - March 2026 (to be confirmed with artist)
Exhibition install	Mon 23 March 2026 – Weds 1 April 2026
Exhibition opening	2 April 2026
Exhibition closes	Monday 31 August 2026
Exhibition deinstall	1-3 September 2026

About us

We are a free contemporary art gallery with a year-round programme of exhibitions and activities. Our setting – surrounded by rewilded woodland and beautiful gardens, overlooking the river Thames in Twickenham – is a place where art and the natural world are entwined. We are proud of our artist-led activities for families and the creative opportunities we offer for our local community and beyond.

The Richmond Arts Service vision has the following values, and we are particularly interested in proposals that interrogate or support this direction:

- **Collaborative** – we work with people in innovative and inspiring ways, we invite artists, communities and individuals to create the public programme with us and help develop the arts service.
- **Socially engaged** – we respond to the needs and wishes of local people, widen participation in the arts and connect people from different backgrounds, enabling them to have a say over issues that affect them, and promoting opportunity particularly for underrepresented groups.
- **Experimental** – through the arts we test new ideas and approaches and share our learning to support the work of the borough. This might involve being playful, adventurous, and taking risks.