

the Whitworth

Press Release
May 2023

***Economics the Blockbuster* opens at The Whitworth for Manchester International Festival**

Economics the Blockbuster: It's not Business as Usual, a ground-breaking exhibition that explores economics through contemporary art, will go on show at The Whitworth from **30 June – 22 October** as part of Manchester International Festival.



From a community-led drinks company to an art collective reclaiming plantation land, the exhibition and accompanying live programme features a selection of extraordinary art projects that operate as real-world economic systems and include artist commissions, art as business, merchandise with a purpose, and workshops to reimagine and take back the economy.

The exhibition presents the work of 10 artists and art collectives: Asociación de Arte Útil, Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (CATPC) and Renzo Martens, Company Drinks, Goldin+Senneby, Kathrin Böhm and Kuba Szreder (Centre for Plausible Economies), Iumbung Kios, Owen Griffiths and Alessandra Saviotti, Rosalie Schweiker, The Alternative School of Economics and TŷPawb.

A snapshot of the exhibition:

The Alternative School of Economics (Ruth Beale and Amy Feneck) draw on their ongoing conversations with striking workers in Manchester to question how neoliberalism affects our everyday lives and our capacity to imagine our world anew. A façade of an imagined dwelling, quilted political banners made by Manchester-based banner-maker Lou Miller, and audio guides for the imagination will create a space to test our abilities to think of alternative possibilities.

the Whitworth

Artist collective **Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (CATPC)** and artist **Renzo Martens** present their 6-part video series *Plantations and Museums*, making visible the colonial extraction of culture in central Africa that continues to shape museum collections today. CATPC will also present sculptures originally created from clay produced in Lusanga, DRC, now translated into materials drawn from the plantation's extractive economy – cocoa, palm oil and sugar – and sold on the Western market. The sculptures are part of the collective's wider economy of artmaking which directs energy and finance back towards the agricultural site and community in Lusanga.

Company Drinks collaborates with the Whitworth's community gardening group GROW to regenerate a public area of Whitworth Park and test a new community-led economic model. GROW will be adapting methods from Company Drinks' local and community-based drink production and their method of creating new ways of working, trading and existing together, through conversation, care and good company. Together, they will co-produce a new cordial for Manchester and lead foraging expeditions in the city.

Conceptual artist duo **Goldin+Senneby** reimagine the museum as a central bank and apply the logic of quantitative easing to financially reactivate the Whitworth's collection. Using the production processes used for banknote printing, they have re-created the lost printing plate of Albrecht Dürer's enigmatic engraving *Melencolia I*, based on the impression in the Whitworth's collection. The printing plate will be used to create limited runs of editions made available for sale throughout the exhibition.

Centre for Plausible Economies, a platform initiated by artist **Kathrin Böhm** and researcher **Kuba Szreder** combines artistic imagination and economic thinking to consider the values and systems that underpin everything we do. *Re-drawing the Economy* unfolds in the Re-drawing Room, a spatial installation presenting a selection of economic diagrams and images that have shaped our views and expectations on economy. Re-drawing workshops will use a simple pencil to visualise the economies we want, activating a creative dialogue between art, economy and community action.

lumbung Kios will set up its kiosk as a temporary warehouse and outlet in the exhibition and the Whitworth shop, storing and selling artist-made goods. Experimenting with the possibilities of a global networked economy beyond the event of documenta fifteen, the Kios aims to sustainably circulate wares made by artists and their ekosistem for sale to the public. New merchandise will be developed in Manchester during the exhibition, extending lumbung Kios' decentralized network of friendships and collaborations into the city.

The Whitworth's Office of Arte Útil will display case studies selected from the **Arte Útil Archive** of almost 300 international artworks. From an artist-initiated tax haven to a farm as city-park in San Francisco, each case study demonstrates tactics to practice art in a way that enacts local economic change.

Owen Griffiths and **Alessandra Saviotti** will realise *Tablecloth as Toolkit* – Manchester version; a generative artwork that gathers people around a designed table setting to discuss and share ideas for local food and growing systems. It will explore community and solidarity economies which emerge in response to societal urgencies such as climate change, social isolation, biodiversity, capitalism and food poverty.

Artist, designer and organiser, **Rosalie Schweiker** creates a zine of drawings that map the care economy of an art gallery collection. As the collection is both hidden and dense, Schweiker considers conditions of history, use, agency and social equity that are often invisible and yet determine how the future civic role of collections is being rethought.

Art gallery, market and community resource **Tÿ Pawb** will present their thriving ecosystem: trainer restoration, personalised presents, portrait commissions and a play space. The exhibition will become an experimental space for both Tÿ Pawb and the Whitworth to test 'non-art actions' within the gallery.

the Whitworth

Economics the Blockbuster Live!

Economics the Blockbuster brings together the Whitworth's network of individuals and organisations involved in tackling the economic crisis in a programme of talks, workshops, dialogues and debates. Highlights will include:

- Opening the exhibition, feminist economic geographer **Katherine Gibson** will welcome audiences to the show with an opening speech, while visitors will be able to try **Company Drinks x GROW's** new co-produced drink.
- A series of *Re-drawing the Economy* workshops run by the **Centre for Plausible Economies** will take place in the exhibition's central drawing room. The drawing sessions are open to all and are designed to empower people with the thinking and practical tools to recognise what their local economies are made up of, and to redraw them along lines that better serve their community's needs.
- Economic strategists **Decolonising Economics** will run a free workshop on supporting the practical tools to build a solidarity economy rooted in racial justice principles.
- **Company Drinks** and the Whitworth's art, nature and mental health group, **GROW**, will lead foraging trips in Manchester, harvesting herbs and fruits to be used in drink-making sessions in the Whitworth Community Garden.
- **Owen Griffiths** and **Alessandra Saviotti** will activate *Tablecloth as Toolkit* through a series of community meals for local constituents to discuss food economies and forms of interdependence in Manchester.
- Throughout August, Playtime will offer families a month of play across the exhibition, Art Garden and Whitworth Garden Studio. The play takeover builds on the Whitworth's award-winning Playtime series and is being developed in collaboration with **Tŷ Pawb** and Wrexham-based playworkers with the support of Pentagon Play.
- **Ruth Beale** and **Amy Feneck** from **The Alternative School of Economics** will lead a series of conversation-led workshops using the books and banners in their installation to explore what neoliberalism is and how it shapes ideas such as ownership, productivity and community.

the Whitworth

Project Credits

The exhibition was initiated by Alistair Hudson (former Director at the Whitworth, now Artistic- Scientific Chairman of Zentrums für Kunst und Medien (ZKM), Germany) and is shaped by a collaborative group led by Poppy Bowers, Interim Head of Exhibitions at the Whitworth, and including: John Byrne (Liverpool John Moores University), Kathrin Böhm and Kuba Szreder (Centre for Plausible Economies), Ismail Ertürk (Alliance Manchester Business School, The University of Manchester), Alessandra Saviotti (Asociación de Arte Útil), Vicky Carr and Chris Shearston (Textbook Studio), Holly Shuttleworth (Executive Producer, HS Studio), Whitworth staff Ed Watts, Head of Civic Education and Engagement and Hannah Vollam, Curatorial Assistant.

Poppy Bowers, Curator and Interim Head of Exhibitions at the Whitworth said: "At the Whitworth we believe art can be actively involved in shaping a fairer society. Economy affects us all every day, and this timely exhibition features artists who don't just critique economy but are working to redefine it. They each set up working economic models in their locality, driven by the needs, concerns and imaginations of the communities in which they are created. We are so excited to platform these projects, share and activate them with the city of Manchester and beyond."

Kuba Szreder and Kathrin Böhm at the Centre for Plausible Economies said: "Just as our economic systems rely not only on money, but also on care, gifts, and environment, art is not just about paintings, but also about values, communities and resources. Museums and artists alike, instead of being hapless victims of economic forces, can and often play an active role in creating and sustaining more equitable economies."

**For further press information, images and interview requests please contact:
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Notes to editors

A project by the Whitworth, The University of Manchester and presented as part of Manchester International Festival.

Image Credit: *Members and regular pickers of Company Drinks, a community-driven drinks business, forage for hawthorn at Eastbrookend Country Park in Dagenham, East London/Essex.* Photo courtesy of Company Drinks

Artist Biographies – <https://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/upcomingexhibitions/economicstheblockbuster/artistbiographies/>

About the Whitworth

The Whitworth is proudly part of The University of Manchester, operating as a convening space between the University and the people of the city. It was founded in 1889 as The Whitworth Institute and Park in memory of the industrialist Sir Joseph Whitworth for "the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester" and continues this mission today in new contexts. In 2015 the gallery undertook a £17 million redevelopment by architects MUMA, which doubled the public space, creating new facilities to house the collection of over 55,000 works of art, textiles, and wallpaper. Along with expanded gallery spaces, a study centre, learning studio, and collections care centre, the gallery reconnected with its park, with communal gardens and outdoor programmes. The gallery is driven by a mission to work with communities to use art for positive social change, and actively address what matters most in people's lives. This new vision has been developed as part of an international dialogue about how to evolve and adapt museums to a constantly changing world. This work is underpinned by three key concepts: learning together, through making and doing; creating a place of care, consideration, and community; taking action. www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth

Gallery opening times: Tuesday to Sunday 10am-5pm, Thursday late opening until 9pm

With thanks for our official paint sponsor Little Greene.

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About Manchester International Festival & Factory International

Factory International is the organisation behind both Manchester International Festival (MIF), and the landmark new space which will open in 2023, creating a global destination for arts music and culture in the heart of Manchester. Factory International will commission and present a year-round programme of original creative work, music and special events at its new venue, online, and internationally through its network of co-commissioners and partners. It will also stage the city-wide Manchester International Festival (MIF) every other year at its new home and in spaces and venues across Greater Manchester.

Factory International builds on the legacy of Manchester International Festival, one of the world's leading arts festivals, and the first to be entirely focused on the commissioning and producing of ambitious new work. Staged every two years in Manchester since 2007, MIF has commissioned, produced and presented world premieres by artists including Marina Abramović, Damon Albarn, Laurie Anderson, Björk, Boris Charmatz, Jeremy Deller, Idris Elba and Kwame Kwei-Armah, Elbow, Tracey Emin, Akram Khan, David Lynch, Ibrahim Mahama, Wayne McGregor, Steve McQueen, Marta Minujín, Cillian Murphy, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Yoko Ono, Thomas Ostermeier, Maxine Peake, Punchdrunk, Skepta, Christine Sun Kim, The xx, and Robert Wilson.

These and other world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work reflecting the spectrum of performing arts, visual arts and popular culture, staged across Greater Manchester – from theatres, galleries and concert halls to railway depots, churches and car parks. Working closely with cultural organisations globally, whose financial and creative input helps to make many of these projects possible, much of the work made at MIF also goes on to travel the world, reaching an audience of 1.6 million people in more than 30 countries to date.

MIF23 takes place 29 June to 16 July 2023, opening with *You, Me and the Balloons* a major exhibition at Factory International's new cultural space, celebrating three decades of Yayoi Kusama's spectacular inflatable sculptures, shown together for the first time.

factoryinternational.org