

Open Call for Artists

25 x 25 Art Gene's 25th Anniversary Residency

A 25-Day Residency in Barrow-in-Furness – an environmental and climate focus.

In 2027, Art Gene celebrates 25 years of artist-led, environmentally aware placemaking, research, artist residences, exhibitions, and socially engaged art projects – all involving artists and communities in the revisioning of their social, natural and built environments.

Founded in 2002 by artists Stuart Bastik (1965–2024) and Maddi Nicholson, over the past two and a half decades, Art Gene has built a distinctive legacy by hosting local and international residencies, curating exhibitions, and nurturing collaborations. Working with artists, architects, communities and specialists we have explored the evolving relationships between art, industry, and nature, often focusing on local issues and biodiversity in Barrow-in-Furness.

Art Gene is deeply committed to understanding and creatively engaging with place. Our approach considers the social, natural, and built environment as an interconnected whole, enhanced through thoughtful, site-specific artistic practices rather than isolated, standalone works or structures.

To mark our special milestone, Art Gene invites applications from artists or collectives for a 25-day residency in Barrow-in-Furness. This is a unique opportunity to engage with Art Gene's extraordinary portfolio of past projects, our ethos of working for positive change, and our longstanding focus on 'the local', the environment, biodiversity and impacts of the climate crisis.

Barrow is a dynamic, shifting place - shaped by erosion, migration, inequality and industrial innovation. We invite artists, therefore, to explore the interplay between people, place, and the environment and, taking inspiration from an aspect of Art Gene's history, to create fresh, future-facing work that belongs here. The residency encourages artists to look back but to make work that equips us for the years ahead.

What we're looking for

This residency calls for work that specifically develops new or reimagined work that responds to Art Gene's **environmental and climate focus**.

We welcome applications from creatives interested in socially engaged practice and context-driven work that explores connections between environment, people, place, nature, and culture.

Artists in residence will:

- Revisit or reimagine existing projects and extend their dialogue into the future.
- Respond to our archive.

- Develop new work that aligns with our values and context. Work with Maddi Nicholson and the Art Gene team to explore Art Gene's heritage.

The selected resident/s will:

Engage with and explore previous works such as:

- **Fort Uncovered (2014 - 2016)**
An ambitious collaboration bringing together artists, archaeologists and the community to explore, survey, excavate, record and celebrate rare practice trenches, now buried on North Walney National Nature Reserve, where soldiers, cadets and airmen trained for World Wars One and Two. Developed in partnership with Natural England and archaeologist Dr George Nash, outcomes included artworks within the reserve and a mobile app interpreting the site's history. Artworks featured in the 'Stuff' exhibition in the Art Gene Gallery, before being installed on North Walney, where they continue to attract public interest.
- **Extreme Views Programme (2019 - 2021)**
A multi-year programme which brought together artists, architects, planners, and local communities to explore Barrow's *extreme environments* - physical, social and ecological - through exhibitions, residencies and digital events. Art works focused on topics such as the local environment, food cultures, biodiversity and industrial heritage.

Extreme Views Think Tank and Exhibition (2019)

A gathering of 50 delegates, including residents, historians, naturalists and local councillors, with international artists, designers and academics from the UK, Japan, Romania, Hungary and the US. The multi-day think-tank focused on understanding and addressing local strengths and challenges linked to industrial heritage, natural biodiversity, socio-economic resilience. Activities included group walks across Barrow's urban, coastal, industrial and rural landscapes.

Artworks were produced by artists Stuart Bastik, Maddi Nicholson, Louise Adkins, Rachel Capovila, Clara Casian, David Haley, Charlie MacKeith, Di McGhee and Sophie Lindsey and were exhibited in the Art Gene Gallery in an exhibition curated by Nicholson and Bastik.

Owen Griffith's Three Armchair Walks – Extreme Views (2020)

Developed during a lockdown residency, Owen created a series of online virtual walks around Barrow, with a focus on the town's green spaces, civic landscape and potential future landscape: Chapter 1 - Barrow Park; Chapter 2 - Green Corridor; Chapter 3 - Lesh Lane.

Barrow Tarot by Katie Anderson – Extreme Views (2020)

Also developed during a lockdown residency, Katie's tarot deck of cards explore the everyday, the familiar, the hidden and the forgotten elements of Barrow's cultural and physical landscape. They are

designed to facilitate a dialogue between the artist and the public about civic life and the role we have in shaping our future.

Barrow Tarot was been exhibited and performed in the Art Gene Gallery and in an exhibition in the outdoors at Allotment Soup: the Isle of Walney Growing Space. Most recently it featured in the Warburg Institute's exhibition 'Tarot – Origins and Afterlives'. The art work is available to buy in the Art Gene Charity Shop online.

- **Low Carbon Barrow**

A two-year climate initiative funded by the European Regional Development Fund and Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership, with engagement and grant-giving elements led by Art Gene. These included, not exclusively:

Bug Out (2021), a concept touring sculpture designed by Maddi Nicholson and Stuart Bastik to promote and demystify off-grid technologies and low carbon lifestyles.

Low carbon engagement with communities, schools and groups, including Barrow's first Eco Fair, biodiversity focused workshops and activities, solar demonstrations, wormeries, composting, and planting.

Low carbon grants to small Barrow businesses

No More Hot Air exhibition featuring work by Owen Griffiths, Katie Anderson and Hannah Brackston, among many others.

- **Allotment Soup: the Isle of Walney Growing Space (2015 onwards)**
Art Gene's longstanding outdoor and creative project space in Barrow.

This community resource occupies a field, leased from Westmorland and Furness Council on Mill Lane, Walney Island. Much more than just an allotment the design of the site, interventions and actions on it are about simultaneously growing food, habitats, new ideas and people. The field is a site for play and social connection but also for environmental activism and strategic re-wilding of both a local habitat and of people. It continues to serve as a testing ground for sustainable and place-based practice which we invite you to explore. The site features an outdoor classroom, a large pond, a composting system, a small orchard of Cumbrian varieties, soon to be expanded, communal allotments, wildlife habitats biodiversity planting, and more.

Prospective artists in residence will be expected to:

- Propose new interventions or provocations that address contemporary environmental challenges.
- Deliver meaningful public engagement through workshops and/or participatory events/your proposed outcome. Suggested approaches to research and engagement are:

- Reflect on and build from previous projects by Art Gene.
- Conduct 1:1 or small group conversations with past project participants, volunteers or partners to understand the project, process and its impact.
- Host a meet up to test ideas with local individuals or groups.
- Use creative approaches of inquiry such as guided conversations and walks.

[Art Gene will support you in making contact with relevant individuals and partners involved in previous projects.]

- Produce something that can be exhibited in a future exhibition, in the Art Gene Gallery.
- Contribute to Art Gene's ongoing mission of socially engaged, place-based practice.

Residency details

Duration

- 25 days in the period September 2025 to February 2026 with a minimum of 5 public engagement sessions and at least 10 working days based in Barrow (to be agreed with the selected artist).
- You will be expected to present the results of the residency as part of Art Gene's 2027 exhibition. This will be one of your engagement sessions.

Possible locations

Art Gene
Bath Street, Barrow-in-Furness
Cumbria LA14 5TY

Allotment Soup: the Isle of Walney Community Growing Space
Mill Lane
Barrow-in-Furness,
Cumbria LA14 3XX

This 25-day residency is a part of our wider 25th Anniversary Programme, which celebrates Art Gene's continued work with communities to explore and influence the social, natural, and built environment. Our work examines the collisions of art, industry, and nature in Barrow, in particular.

At Allotment Soup we explicitly explore the pressing issues impacting on local people and the biodiversity of this place. This project reflects our commitment to be an environmentally responsible, low-carbon company. We are a founding partner of the Zero Carbon Cumbria Partnership led by Futureproof Cumbria.

Public engagement is a core element of the residency. Art Gene offers strong community connections and established relationships with local groups and volunteers to support this.

Budget & Artist Fees

The total budget for the residency is £10,500, which includes:

- **Artist fee:** £7,500, 25 days fee at £320 per day.
- **Travel & accommodation:** up to £1,500 will be reimbursed on production of receipts.
- **Materials:** £1,500.

You will have free use of our company e-bike when based in Barrow.

A list of local self-catering accommodation will be provided a short distance away from Allotment Soup and Art Gene's Office (the Nan Tait Centre).

Artists are encouraged to use repurposed materials where possible. At Allotment Soup you will have use of the outdoor space, including pond, and large sheltered polytunnels. Art Gene's studios, fabrication workshop and our extensive range of workshop tools and offices are also available for artists' use on a 24-hour basis.

Owen Griffiths, a participatory artist based in Wales, and Artist in Residence in 2021, said of Allotment Soup:

"To begin as a community, to work together with friends, neighbours and allies, we have to work locally. We must dig where we stand. The Allotment Soup site... is an example of local and radical work – hosting global dialogues whilst being firmly rooted in the specificities of a landscape that bears the scars of the industrial revolution. It's a complicated landscape of contradictions, warmth, nature, biodiversity and resilience; it's also located on an island that is shrinking."

How to apply

Art Gene encourages applications from artists interested in socially engaged practice, community building, and sustainability, who are keen to explore the relationships between nature and the environment.

We especially welcome applications from artists with global majority backgrounds, and from those with lived experience of migration to apply, currently under-represented in Art Gene practice.

Our procurement policy supports the local and we welcome applications from artists based nearby in Cumbria, Lancashire or the Manchester-Leeds corridor. The best artist for the contract, based on the ideas expressed in the application, will be chosen, however.

Further information

The residency will be shared online, with a dedicated artist's page on Art Gene's website, and promoted through Art Gene's newsletter and social media.

www.art-gene.co.uk

Art Gene's Allotment Soup: the Isle of Walney Community Growing Space: **www.art-gene.co.uk/project/allotment-soup**

Please be aware that Allotment Soup is a field site, and not fully accessible. There is a step up from the road and a shallow slope to the manual gate. Paths are flat but are unmade (grass and gravel) and can be boggy in wet weather. The site is off grid (with some renewable power available) and has an inaccessible compost toilet (a small space with a step-up). There is level access to our studios and galleries.

How to apply

To apply, please send:

- CV
- Expression of interest, and proposal as to how you would approach the residency and engage with the community, including evidence that you have explored our website and have ideas on how to respond to the existing work/s (up to 2 pages of A4).
- 10 images of your work
- Your access rider, if appropriate (optional)

Also, please complete our [Art Gene Equalities Survey](#). [NB: Please read 'attend' in Qs 1&2 as 'apply'. Thank you.]

Via email to rachael.barker@art-gene.co.uk by **10am on Thursday 7th August, 2025**.

Shortlisted artists will be notified the following week and invited for an online interview on **Wednesday 13th August, 2025**.

If you would like any assistance with the application process, or have any queries, please get in touch.

About Art Gene

Art Gene is an artist-led research and production charity working to regenerate the social, natural, and built environment through an engaged visual arts practice. We work collaboratively in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria with communities, artists, architects, and other professionals.

This residency forms part of **Art Gene's 25th Anniversary Programme** - a moment to reflect on our journey and envision the future. Through research, creative engagement, participatory outdoor events, and the development of new artworks, we invite communities and specialists to join in a conversation about this place and what lies ahead.

Learn more at: www.art-gene.co.uk

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