

**SCIENCE
MUSEUM
GROUP**

Foreground

New art for new audiences. Without boundaries.

Artist Commission Brief

May 2019

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1. Background

1.1. The commissioning partners

The Science Museum Group is the world's leading group of science museums, comprising the Science Museum, London, the National Railway Museum, York, the National Science and Media Museum, Bradford, the Science and Industry Museum, Manchester, Locomotion, Shildon and the National Collections Centre in Wiltshire. We share our internationally significant collection of items relating to science, technology, engineering, medicine, transport and media with over five million visitors each year. In addition, global audiences can search and discover our collections online. We regularly work with artists across our sites, adding to the permanent collection, developing exhibitions and galleries, and contributing to our events programme.

Foreground brings new art to new audiences. Our programme concentrates on bringing international-quality cultural provision to areas and audiences who have little access to cultural provision due to geographic, economic or social constraints. Working primarily in the South West of England, Foreground deliver an ambitious programme that spans commissioning new temporary and permanent artworks in the diverse social and physical structures of communities, and inspire audiences of all ages through learning, participation and critical discussion.

1.2. The project

The Science Museum Group (SMG) and Foreground seek to commission a contemporary artist or artists¹ to respond to SMG's most ambitious project for a generation. This project will create a new purpose-built home for the Science Museum Group Collection at the National Collections Centre in Wiltshire, enabling local and global audiences to explore more of the collection than ever before.

Like most major museums, much of the Science Museum Group Collection is not on permanent display at any one time. With limited public space for display, many collection items are in storage, undergoing conservation work or out on loan, inspiring audiences at institutions around the UK and beyond.

The items not on display are by no means secondary or inferior – they represent an unparalleled national resource for the public and have the potential to tell new stories about the impact of science on our lives. Our aim is to unlock this resource, set a benchmark for sustainable collection care and celebrate the national and international significance of Britain's scientific and cultural heritage.

In 2016 SMG embarked on an ambitious project to transform public access to the Science Museum Group Collection. The core activities are:

- Building a new home for the collection at the National Collections Centre in Wiltshire. With the addition of this new facility over 80% of the collection will be stored at the National Collections Centre, enabling objects to be more easily displayed within the

¹ Throughout this brief we refer to 'the artist' for ease and clarity. However, we welcome interest from artistic partnerships, collaborations and collectives.

Group's [five museums](#) and when loaned to other organisations. The facility will open regularly to the public, school groups and researchers from 2023.

- [Cataloguing, digitising and re-locating more than 300,000 objects](#) from our existing object store in west London to the National Collections Centre. Our rapid digitisation programme is unprecedented for the science heritage sector and will create one of the most extensive scientific collections to be universally accessible online.
- [Engaging audiences with the stories embedded in our collection](#) through a wide-ranging programme of participation projects, public events, creative commissions and online content. This will ensure the collection becomes better understood, used and admired by people around the world.

1.3. The Science Museum Group Collection

The Science Museum Group cares for the [nation's preeminent collection](#) of science, technology, engineering, medicine, transport and media. These include:

- 7 million items of photographic, archive and library material
- 140,000 medical items, including the long-term loan of the Wellcome Collection of 114,000 items
- 49,000 items relating to commerce and industry
- 26,000 scientific instruments
- 20,000 items relating to railway locomotives and technology
- 18,000 items relating to railway life and work
- 17,000 items of photographic, cinematographic and televisual technology
- 8,000 artworks

This collection is astonishingly varied and surprising. It tells stories of creativity, ingenuity and humanity which reveal the embeddedness of science in every aspect of our lives. The significance and relevance of the collection is indicated by the following examples:

- Barbara Hepworth's sketchbook, featuring drawings of her daughter's ear operation at the London Clinic in 1948
- A unique fire making collection including items ranging from Eskimo fire drills to Japanese fire steels and some of the earliest examples of Bryant and May safety matches
- A collection of the earliest apparatus for recording and reproducing sounds
- A science teaching collection which is unparalleled in the UK and internationally
- A vast collection from the Met Office which provides a detailed record of the activity of the most important British meteorological institution
- The best microscope collection in the UK in terms of both breadth and completeness

The National Collections Centre houses some of the most spectacular, significant, powerful and moving items in the Science Museum Group Collection. These include

- One of the most significant collections of vehicles adapted for people with disabilities anywhere in the world
- A concrete column from the fifth floor of the Swansea's Weaver building, the first reinforced concrete building in Europe
- A Citroen DS19 'driverless' car from 1960
- A pioneering early deep-sea diving suit

- The Whitaker Tunnelling Machine used to dig part of the Channel Tunnel in 1922
- The world's first amphibious hovercraft

The Science Museum Group has commissioned and worked with a wide range of contemporary artists, many of whose work is represented in the collection. Examples include Chila Kumari Singh Burman, James Capper, Nikhil Chopra, Tacita Dean, Marlene Dumas, Dunne and Raby, Angus Fairhurst, Dryden Goodwin, Antony Gormley, Thomas Heatherwick, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, Cornelia Parker, Marc Quinn, David Shrigley, Conrad Shawcross, Yinka Shonibare, Suzanne Treister and Darrell Viner.

1.4. The National Collections Centre

The National Collections Centre in Wiltshire is located on the former RAF Wroughton airfield. Covering 545-acres, this multipurpose site is made up of large open areas, native woodlands, runways and one of the UK's largest solar farms.

The Science Museum Group has owned the site since 1979, relocating 35,000 large objects and 500,000 library and archive items to the site over the last 40 years. These objects are currently stored in former aircraft hangars and some purpose-built stores. A series of renovation projects have added offices, a reading room and conservation facilities. In 2013 a solar farm was completed and has since contributed renewable energy into the national grid (representing over three and a half times the electricity used by the Science Museum Group).

The National Collections Centre also hosts research and development projects in collaboration between the Science Museum Group, science, engineering and film industries and academia. Recent examples include testing solar and wind powered mobile phone technology, TV and film-making, large-scale smart motorway technology and the 'Hive' research space for the built environment with the University of Bath.

Enhanced public access is at the heart of our vision for the National Collection Centre. By 2023, the site will house most of the Science Museum Group Collection in a purpose-built collection management facility, which will open regularly for public tours, school and research visits. Over the next decade the National Collections Centre will be transformed into a centre of excellence for collections management, museum-led innovation and learning.

1.5. Foreground's Work

Foreground's programme varies in location and format and has manifested in diverse locations across the South West of England driven by our commitment to bringing the highest quality cultural provision to areas and audiences who have little access due to geographic, economic or social constraints. This has resulted in acclaimed programmes of work delivered over extended periods of time, building audiences and legacy for cultural activity in areas where there has previously been little or no provision.

Projects have varied from a series of commissions and cultural programmes in the Somerset market town of Frome between 2008 and 2017 to a series of permanent contemporary art commissions for primary schools in Bristol between 2016 and 2019,

which is the most significant programme of commissioning art for statutory educational contexts in the country. Foreground's work in Frome began with town-wide contemporary art projects and ended with the creation of the multi award-winning curated market The Frome Independent, which significantly contributed to the economic and social revival of the town.

To create these programmes Foreground works with artists who are interested in engaging directly with the particular character and context of a place and collaborating with diverse audiences on art and ideas. Foreground have been involved with commissioning and supporting physical constructs and interventions which create a sense of place, works which imbue an existing community event with new purpose, and new work that feeds the evolving identity of social structures.

Foreground brings the work of leading international artists such as Douglas Gordon, Tue Greenfort, Roger Hiorns, Jim Isermann, Cornelia Parker, Oliver Plender, Richard Woods and Heather and Ivan Morison into the everyday environment of ordinary places and develop new talent to explore the inspiration of people and place, providing significant opportunities for emerging artists to create work for innovative contexts.

2.The Commission

2.1. Objectives

The commissioned artist must respond to the following objectives:

- To celebrate the special qualities of the Science Museum Group Collection and express the creative potential of a 'collection in waiting'.
- To engage with communities in Wiltshire and the South West around the Science Museum Group's enhanced presence in the region.
- To raise awareness of the National Collections Centre as a site that uniquely combines history, science and landscape.

2.2. Artist's role

The appointed artist will be required to produce work in response to the Science Museum Group's ambitious project and the development of the National Collections Centre in Wiltshire. As the site is in a transitional phase, and the focus of this commission is on building active relationships with audiences and communities, there is neither a pre-determined location for, or requirement to produce, a single, physical final outcome from the commission at the National Collections Centre.

The artist is therefore encouraged to be experimental in their response and to think about work that might not have a single material output as the final piece but instead result in an organic series of works or outcomes over time, both at the National Collections Centre and off-site, be that in physical, social or digital locations.

The commission aims to engage the local community with the Science Museum Group's enhanced presence in South-West England, and the artist is encouraged to make community participation a significant part of their process. The programme runs over several years, and the artist is encouraged to develop their work in line with the site development and community engagement (see project milestones in section 3.3).

2.3. Audiences

The target audiences for the National Collections Centre are broad. They include:

Local communities

The long-term vitality and sustainability of the public programme at the National Collections Centre relies on proactive engagement with local audiences. We will create opportunities to cultivate the local audience, aiming to give residents of Wroughton, Swindon and Wiltshire a sense of connection with the site. This may include events, tours and talks which reveal the scientific, technological and industrial heritage of the South West and opportunities to tell stories about the fascinating past of RAF Wroughton itself.

The art commission should specifically engage with this final group, whilst not excluding broader audiences. The artist is encouraged to consider the National Collections Centre not only as a collection of objects, but also a collection of relationships. There is the potential to work with existing 'communities of interest' (these could be professional -

such as curators or archivists within the Science Museum Group and beyond - or geographic) or to develop new communities of interest between the National Collections Centre, local and regional residents to form relationships that could inform the commission's content and audiences.

The artist will also be asked to contribute to SMG and Foreground's legacy planning around audience development, community engagement and the future cultural offer at the National Collections Centre.

Formal and informal educational groups

The National Collections Centre has the potential to provide unique, memorable and engaging experiences for schools, locally and nationally. We will develop an educational programme which recognises the uniqueness of the site (as distinct from visiting a museum) and the unrivalled potential of our collections to enrich classroom teaching and build Science Capital.

'Collections curious' audience

The National Collections Centre will appeal to heritage enthusiasts, dedicated museum fans and passionate specialists in the fields of technology, engineering and science. This audience will be driven to visit by a desire to see objects and discover more about their history. They will visit on pre-booked public tours and during semi-regular Open Days.

Academics, students, researchers

The new home for the collection (currently under construction) will be accessible to academics, students and researchers wishing to engage with specific objects or groups of objects. We will cherish our existing audience of historians of science, technology and medicine, whilst identifying strategic opportunities to reach a broader range of disciplines, including the digital humanities and heritage science. We will explore building close relationships with partner institutions (e.g. universities in Bristol, Reading, Oxford and Cardiff) and develop plans for long-term regular collections access by students.

3. Practical Information

3.1. Access to the National Collections Centre

The artist will have access to the Science Museum Group Collection, buildings and staff at the National Collections Centre as necessitated by the scope of their project. Access will need to be planned carefully around restrictions necessary for the move of the collection and construction of the new collection management facility. The collection can be explored [online](#), where many images of the collection are being published for the first time.

Space can also be made available at the National Collections Centre for the artist to use. This is likely to change over the course of the project, probably starting with a small office space but with the potential for a larger space towards the end, which could be studio, exhibition or engagement space. The successful artist will be asked to develop a plan for how they might work across different spaces at the National Collections Centre.

Staff from the Science Museum Group and Foreground will work with the successful artist throughout the project.

3.2. Selection process

Responses to this brief will be reviewed by stakeholders from the Science Museum Group, Foreground and an external advisor. A shortlist of artists will be invited to present their work to a selection panel at the National Collections Centre. Artists may be contracted in stages based on the phased development of their proposed project. Artist's responses will be subject to feasibility studies carried out by the Science Museum Group and Foreground for cost and suitability.

The selection panel is comprised of:

- Katy Barrett, Curator of Art Collections, Science Museum
- Tilly Blyth, Head of Collections and Principal Curator, Science Museum
- Jessica Bradford, Keeper of Collections Engagement, Science Museum
- Jill Constantine, Director, Arts Council Collection
- Simon Morrissey, Director, Foreground
- Sian Williams, Programme Director: One Collection, Science Museum Group

3.3. Timescale

Project milestones

February 2019	Construction of new facility began at the National Collections Centre
Spring 2020	Construction complete
Summer 2020	Transport of objects to National Collections Centre begins
2021	Photography of transported objects completed
2022	Transport of objects to the National Collections Centre and unpacking of objects completed
2023	New facility opens to public tours, school and research visits

A more detailed schedule is available on request

Timescale for the commission

Initial proposals will be accepted between 16 May and 4 August 2019, with shortlisted artists invited to the National Collections Centre for a day in October 2019. The selected artist will start work in late 2019.

The Science Museum Group's ambitious project ends in 2023. The artist is asked to propose how they might plan a part-time project over the full extent of the programme's timetable, with a possible public-facing final delivery in 2023.

3.4. Budget

The budget for the art commission is £70,000. This includes, but is not restricted to fees, insurances, concept development, prototyping, materials (testing and production), and artist accommodation and travel. A full break down of the commission budget will be confirmed at contract stage. The artist can also be supported to apply for further funding to expand the project, including to the Wroughton Solar Park Fund.

3.5. Project management

The commission will be overseen by the Curator of Art Collections at the Science Museum and the Director of Foreground, with support from the Keeper of Collections Engagement at the Science Museum. They will be responsible for liaising between the artist and the institution and will help to facilitate feasibility studies and manage internal processes.

3.6. Response to the brief

In responding to this brief please provide a PDF document including:

- A concept for how you would respond to the brief
- Rough timetable and budget for working across the 4 years of the project
- CV and examples of previous projects

Any questions should be directed to the Curator of Art Collections, Dr Katy Barrett via art.commissions@sciencemuseum.ac.uk.

Please send proposals to art.commissions@sciencemuseum.ac.uk or via:
Martha Clewlow
Project Management Support Assistant
Science Museum
Exhibition Road
London SW7 2DD

The deadline for all submissions is 4 August 2019.

Appendix: Images of the Science Museum Group Collection and the National Collections Centre



Model of 'Nipper', Object no. 1993-866



Model of Trolleybus, Object no. 1957-86



Set of 12 Apollo mission patches, Object no. 1972-413



Cylinder watch in silver case, Object no. 1916-146



Sir Patrick Moore's Russian Lunar Globe, Object no. 2014-549



Saturn Robot, Object no. 2015-406



One of William Ascroft's 533 sunset studies, Object no, 1888-156/6



Preparation of the collection for its move to the National Collections Centre.



Items from the collection in the west London object store.



Items from the collection in the west London object store.



Items from the collection in the west London object store.



Items from the collection in the west London object store.



Items from the collection in the west London object store.



National Collections Centre (NCC), with solar park visible in the distance.



Construction begins at the NCC.



Aerial view of the NCC.



Hangar currently used for object storage at the NCC.



Hangars at the NCC visible through trees.



A specialist collection store at the NCC.



Collection in storage at the NCC.



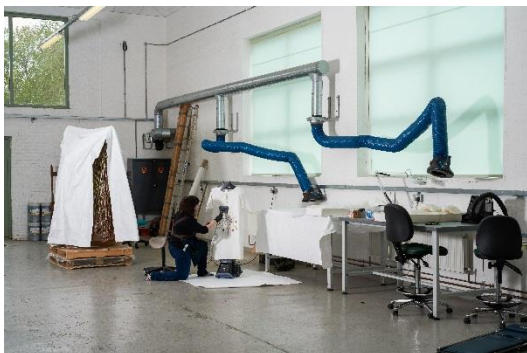
Collection in storage at the NCC.



Collection in transit at the NCC.



Collection being researched at the NCC.



Collection being conserved at the NCC.



Collection being researched at the NCC.