

Press release

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Design competition: Reimagining Museums for Climate Action

The UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Heritage Priority Area, led by Prof. Rodney Harrison of the UCL Institute of Archaeology, is launching an international design competition on 18th May, International Museum Day.

The competition, 'Reimagining Museums for Climate Action', asks designers, architects, academics, artists, poets, philosophers, museum professionals and the public at large to radically (re)imagine and (re)design the museum as an institution, to help bring about more equitable and sustainable futures in the climate change era. The competition aims to explore how museums can help society transform to a low carbon future, adapt to the impacts of climate change, and safeguard ecosystems.

As the world confronts a global pandemic that is impacting on all aspects of social, cultural and economic life, many of the certainties we may have had about the future seem less concrete. While thousands of museums around the world remain closed, new forms of engagement and experimentation have emerged to rethink the relationship between museums and society. Alongside a profound sense of loss and insecurity, there is hope: hope that the multitude of ways in which communities globally have responded to COVID-19 might inspire new forms of radical action to address the climate and ecological emergency. In this moment, it is particularly important to consider the unique capacities of museums to shape more just and sustainable futures.

Entries will be judged by an international panel of museum, architecture and design, climate change, heritage and sustainability experts. Eight finalists will each receive £2,500 to develop their ideas into exhibits, which will be displayed at Glasgow Science Centre ahead of and during COP26, the United Nations Climate Change conference, in 2021. COP26 is due to take place at the Scottish Event Campus. Glasgow Science Centre, which is situated next to the SEC, will be playing a key role in the conference. The exhibition will be accompanied by talks, workshops and other activities encouraging debate around the future role of museums, in times of rapid environmental change. Emma Woodham, climate change programme manager at Glasgow Science Centre said "the exhibition will make an important contribution to Glasgow Science Centre's overall climate change programme, which aims to inform, inspire and empower people of all ages and backgrounds to engage with COP26, and take action on climate change in their own lives."

The competition has been developed as part of the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Heritage Priority Area's contribution to COP 26. Professor Harrison said "the competition draws on academic research on the heritage and museums sector undertaken over the past 5 years by myself, Dr Sterling, and others (including work undertaken as part of the AHRC-funded Heritage Futures research programme www.heritage-futures.org), which suggests the need to develop new approaches to conservation and management of natural and cultural heritage which acknowledge—and begin to work with, rather than against—inevitable forms of (ecological, social and political) change. COP26 provides a significant opportunity for those both inside and outside of the heritage and museums sector to think creatively about these issues, and to present the latest thinking to a wider audience, whilst also highlighting the significant potential for museums to provide a catalyst for climate action to policy makers and others in the international climate action community."

Competition website (live from 18 May)

www.museumsforclimateaction.org

Competition twitter

@climatemuseums

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The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Heritage Priority Area team – led by Professor Rodney Harrison, Professor of Heritage Studies at the UCL Institute of Archaeology – works with the AHRC/UKRI, the heritage research community, and national and international heritage partner organisations, to draw together and stimulate the development of a wide range of research across the arts and humanities that makes an important contribution to understanding heritage. We also aim to support the interconnections between research, policy and practice, both in the UK and internationally. We take an expansive view of heritage, and aim to encourage and stimulate work that highlights intersections between natural and cultural heritage, and key global challenges. www.heritage-research.org The AHRC Heritage Priority Area's work on the design competition is undertaken in partnership with Colin Sterling (also based at the UCL Institute of Archaeology) as part of his own AHRC-funded leadership fellowship project *New*

Trajectories in Curatorial Experience Design www.experience-design.co.uk, and Henry McGhie, founder of *Curating Tomorrow*, a consultancy which aims to help maximise the contribution that museums, the heritage sector and other organisations and sectors make to support a thriving society, economy and environment www.curatingtomorrow.co.uk.

Glasgow Science Centre is one of Scotland's most popular visitor attractions. It is an educational charity that inspires and motivates people to engage with science. Its vision is a Scotland where all people feel empowered through learning and engagement with science to make positive differences in their lives, their communities and to society as a whole. Glasgow Science Centre's values are to strive for excellence, to be inclusive, innovative and collaborative. Glasgow Science Centre is for all ages, genders, abilities and backgrounds. Its role is not to teach science, but to change the way that people feel and engage with science to build their social, cultural and science capital. The Centre presents the scientific process in an accessible manner to help people develop their own knowledge and understanding, presenting good-quality science without bias. The Centre wants to inspire the next generation of scientists and engineers. The Centre will be playing a key role in the COP26. www.glasgowsciencecentre.org/

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement

In 1992, the world's governments committed to address the rapidly growing threat of global climate change by adopting the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to achieve the "stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system..." The Convention came into force in 1994.¹

Since then, governments and their representatives have met twice a year to monitor progress, evaluate what action is needed to meet the Convention's key goals, and agree programmes of activity that are then to be delivered in each country. Notably, the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 committed its signatories by setting internationally binding targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Paris Agreement of 2015 saw its signatories agree "to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius."² The year 2015 also saw the launch of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, the most ambitious programme ever to secure a sustainable future. The Sustainable Development Goals are strongly linked to activity for the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement.³

COP

¹ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-convention/what-is-the-united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change>

² <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

As mentioned above, signatory countries of the Framework Convention on Climate Change meet twice a year. A meeting is held in Bonn, Germany, in the summer, to help set the direction for the larger, more important conference that is usually held in November or December. This meeting is often referred to as the COP, which means the 'Conference of the Parties'. As the first COP was held in 1994, the next COP will be COP 26, and it is due to be held in Glasgow in mid-2021.

Action for Climate Empowerment

The original Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Paris Agreement, both recognise the crucial importance of involving the public in climate action. They both specify the importance of public education, training of key groups of staff, public awareness campaigns, public participation in climate change decision making, public access to information relating to science and policy regarding climate change, and international co-operation. These six areas are known informally as Action for Climate Empowerment, or ACE.⁴

Museums present a huge potential to support ACE, with somewhere between 80-100,000 museums in the world, reaching hundreds of millions of people each year. They have a wealth of resources that can contribute positively, often uniquely, towards climate action. Governments have recognised the important part that museums, and other educational and cultural institutions, can play in helping achieve the goals of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, specifically mentioning their contribution in the Work Programme for the Paris Agreement, which was agreed at COP 24 in Katowice, Poland, in 2018.⁵



⁴ <https://unfccc.int/topics/education-youth/the-big-picture/what-is-action-for-climate-empowerment>

⁵ https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sbi2019_L03a01E_0.pdf