

**Press Release
September 2023**

Create London announces a new moving image commission titled *Flood Barrier* by Turner Prize-nominee Catherine Yass alongside a wider public programme supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Create London is pleased to announce *Flood Barrier*, a new moving image commission by British artist Catherine Yass (b. 1963) that will premiere at a free outdoor screening at Valence House Museum in Valence Park, Dagenham on Friday 22 September, followed by special screening events at the ICA on Tuesday 14 November and at Turner Contemporary on Saturday 18 November 2023. The film will be installed as part of *The Princess Alice Disaster* exhibition at Valence House Museum from 26 September - 21 October 2023, before touring to Eastbury Manor House, Barking in October 2023. Raising awareness of rising sea levels and urgent environmental changes, the work's launch will coincide with the 70th anniversary of The Great Flood of 1953.



Still from *Flood Barrier* by Catherine Yass. Image courtesy of the artist.

The film is centred around Barking Creek Flood Barrier, which straddles the River Roding where its estuary meets the River Thames. Engineered in 1983, the barrier was originally built to prevent devastating flooding expected to take place every thousand years. However, in the wake of rising sea levels and urgent environmental changes affecting East London, the barrier has taken on a new critical role. As predicted by the 2021 Climate Central environmental study, the huge guillotine-like structure poised above the water is likely to come down and cut off flooding routinely in coming years, seemingly pointing to our collective guilt in the face of the climate crisis. The barrier stands in place of Creekmouth village, which suffered severe flood damage 70 years ago, erasing 55 Victorian houses, a school and a church built for chemical plant workers. As shown in the film, the structure is also adjacent to Beckton Sewage Works, where a large population of gulls contradictorily thrive on sewage pollution. As well as

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feeding off the insects around the sewage spills, the birds absorb the polluted water and often die from the poisons and substances found in their stomachs. According to data from the Environment Agency, the River Roding has the highest number of 'forever chemicals' of any river in England.

Nominated for the Turner Prize in 2002, London-based artist Yass is widely recognised for her distinctive photographic and film-based work. Her practice disrupts notions of power through the disorientation of the camera and the distortion of colour. With *Flood Barrier* Yass uses this visual language to allow viewers to see the structure and its surroundings from a new perspective, showing the urgency of the environmental and political issues it embodies. The artist's films are frequently turned upside down or filmed from unusual perspectives, often from a camera mounted on the moving objects they depict. As the image begins to unravel so too do our assumptions about how we perceive the world, and new orientations and possibilities open.

Where Yass' past work has been concerned with how environments are constructed and experienced by their inhabitants, this new moving image work extends her practice by zooming in on the relationship between architecture and the natural world, observing how gulls interact with the concrete barrier. Filmed partly from drones at precarious angles, the footage reflects the instability of the barrier and the climate crisis. The bird flight paths are also recorded using vintage wind-up 16mm cameras and out of date film as a way of conserving energy. On a production level, this led to light leaking into the camera to create intense and unexpected colours. On a symbolic level, the process became an analogy for flooding and a reference to the fact that birds have an extra colour cone in their eyes compared to humans. This use of colours contrasts with the monochrome severity of the concrete flood barrier going down, to reveal the limitations of vision, and that what humans see is only one possible vision amongst many others. With this in mind, the artist sees the vision of a bird, or any animal, being as valid as human vision. By analogy all people interpret the world differently, and their viewpoints are equally valid whatever their experience, ethnicity, age, gender or ability.

"If anything is to change environmentally, we need to listen to these diverse voices and pay attention to other species" says Yass. "Climate change has been hastened by the mainstream voice of capitalist interest, most directly by the water companies not putting their profits back into sewage treatment but more generally by industries putting profit before sustainability. So diversity and sustainability are inextricably linked."

For this reason, the participation of co-producers Progress Project - a charity for Barking & Dagenham teenagers with varying abilities - is central to the project, challenging the normative point of view and advocating for inclusivity and diversity. They chose coloured filters through which to see the surroundings, and these became reference points for the use of colour in the film. They also contributed to the soundtrack with Martin Osman, a sound artist based in Barking, gathering sounds from underwater, beneath bushes, under reeds and inside reverberating old waste pipes.

A season of public events and activities supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund

2023 marks 70 years since the Great Flood of 1953, which led to widespread flooding in the East of England and is often considered the worst natural disaster Britain experienced during the 20th century. *Flood*

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Barrier by Catherine Yass forms part of a broader season of programming, entitled *Breaking Waves*, exploring and raising awareness of the link between our contemporary climate crisis and industrial heritage. Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and curated and delivered by Create London, the programme will include commissioning opportunities for local filmmakers, after-school workshops and masterclasses, open air painting classes, bird watching and mudlarking sessions with the local community and more. In addition, disappearing histories of life in Thames Ward will be documented with oral histories experts, residents and creative practitioners, giving a voice to those traditionally excluded from historical records. Full details of the programme and how to get involved will be announced in the coming months.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

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Credit lines

Flood Barrier by Catherine Yass was commissioned by Create London, funded by Art Fund and Arts Council England, with additional support from The Elephant Trust.

The associated engagement programme, *Breaking Waves*, was made possible with the National Lottery Heritage Fund, with additional support from Arts Council England and Art Fund.

About Catherine Yass

Born in London, England in 1963, Catherine Yass lives and works in London. A retrospective of Yass' vertiginous filmic oeuvre was presented at Ambika PS in 2021. In 2019 she was commissioned to make a photographic work for the Supreme Court and in 2017, RIBA held a performative screening of the artist's film, *Aeolian Piano*, alongside the presentation of archival material from the BBC and the RIBA of the former's TV Centre in West London. Solo exhibitions include Milton Keynes Gallery (2014); Alison Jacques Gallery, London (2012) a mid-career retrospective at De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea (2011); The Phillips Collections, Washington D.C. (2011); Stedelijk-Hertogenbosch Museum, The Netherlands (2009) and St Louis Art Museum, Missouri (2009).

Selected to represent Britain at the Indian Triennale at the Museum of Modern Art in Delhi in 2001, Yass was shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 2002 and, in 2005, she took up a British Council Residency in China. Yass has completed major commissions for The Jewish Community Centre, London (2013); Rambert Dance Company, London (2013) and Merce Cunningham, Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York (2003).

Her work can be found in a number of private and public collections including Tate, London; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh; Bibliotheca Albertina, Leipzig; National Museum of Women in the Arts Collection, Washington D.C.; The Jewish Museum, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York and Queensland Art Gallery, Australia.

Yass currently teaches MA Photography at the Royal College of Art, London. She lives and works in London.

Coinciding with *Flood Barrier*, Yass will also be launching 'NHS Swimmers', a new permanent public artwork at Paddington Square later this year. Taking over a 24-metre-long wall of the neighbouring St Mary's Hospital,

the large-scale collaborative photographic installation features and celebrates NHS workers. The commission is part of the Paddington Square Public Art Programme, curated by Lacuna and commissioned by Sellar on behalf of Great Western Developments Ltd.

Create London

Create London commissions socially-engaged art, generous architecture and bold infrastructure that is woven into the fabric of everyday life. Our work is driven by a belief that transformative and radical ideas can derive from working long-term within local communities. We bring world-class cultural experiences to areas where it is least expected, providing inclusive moments for individuals to expand their imaginations, foster collective action and support thriving communities. Recent projects include co-commissioning the Hackney Windrush Art Commissions with Thomas J Price and Veronica Ryan OBE, for which the latter artist won the 2022 Turner Prize; the RIBA award winning *A House for Artists* by Apparata Studio and Grayson Perry's first public sculpture *Inspiration Lives Here* in Barking Town Centre. Create London is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation. [createlondon.org](https://www.createlondon.org)

Valence House Museum

Valence House Museum, led by Barking and Dagenham Council's Culture and Heritage Service, is set within landscaped grounds that includes herb gardens, a Second World War vegetable plot, traditional fruit orchard and apiary. The site, which also includes an accredited Local History Archives, a café and two education spaces, is surrounded by a medieval moat and situated within Valence Park on the historic Becontree Estate in Dagenham. Valence House Museum's core collection totals 20,000 objects, consisting of a range of artefacts which reflect the history and development of East London from Prehistory to the modern day. [valencehousecollections.co.uk](https://www.valencehousecollections.co.uk)

Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. It provides millions of pounds every year to help museums to acquire and share works of art across the UK, further the professional development of their curators, and inspire more people to visit and enjoy their public programmes. Art Fund is independently funded, supported by Art Partners, donors, trusts and foundations and the 135,000 members who buy the National Art Pass, who enjoy free or discounted entry to over 850 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and receive Art Quarterly magazine. Art Fund also supports museums through its annual prize, Art Fund Museum of the Year. The winner of Art Fund Museum of the Year 2023 is The Burrell Collection. [artfund.org](https://www.artfund.org)

Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. We invest public money from the Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. [artscouncil.org.uk](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk).

National Lottery Heritage Fund

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we Inspire, lead and resource the UK's heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities, now and in the future. Follow @HeritageFundUK on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use #NationalLotteryHeritageFund. Since The National Lottery began in 1994, National Lottery players have raised

over £46billion for projects and more than 670,000 grants have been awarded across the UK - the equivalent of more than 240 lottery grants in every UK postcode district. More than £30 million raised each week goes to good causes across the UK. heritagefund.org.uk.

The Elephant Trust

The Elephant Trust was created in 1975 by Roland Penrose and Lee Miller with a view to develop and improve the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the fine arts in the United Kingdom. It is committed to helping artists and art institutions/galleries that depart from the routine and signal new, distinct and imaginative sets of possibilities. elephanttrust.org.uk

ICA

The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) is London’s leading space for contemporary culture. We commission, produce and present new work in film, music, performance and the visual arts by today’s most progressive artists. In our landmark home on The Mall in central London, we invite artists and audiences to interrogate what it means to live in our world today, with a genre-fluid programme that challenges the past, questions the present and confronts the future. Our history of presenting and promoting visionary new art is unrivalled in London: from Kenneth Anger to Kathy Acker, Kano to Klein, Jackson Pollock to Jean-Michel Basquiat, Gay Sweatshop to Forensic Architecture, Pop Art to queer techno. The ICA continues to celebrate risk and champion innovation, and experimentation across the arts – a playground and a home for today’s most vital artists. The ICA is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation and supported by the DCMS Culture Recovery Fund. ica.art

Turner Contemporary

Turner Contemporary is one of the UK’s leading art galleries. Founded to celebrate JMW Turner’s connection to Margate in 2001, the David Chipperfield-designed gallery opened in 2011. Our work extends beyond showcasing world-class exhibitions, to driving the social and economic regeneration of Margate and East Kent and transforming lives in one of the most deprived areas of the UK. Since it opened, Turner Contemporary has welcomed over 4 million visits, put over £70 million back into the Kent economy and connected with thousands of people from the local community through our world-class programme. Entry to the gallery and all of our exhibitions are free. To ensure our doors stay open to all, we rely on donations from individuals as well as trusts and foundations. turnercontemporary.org

Eastbury Manor House

Eastbury Manor House is a Grade I listed Elizabethan gentry house set in historic gardens, owned by the National Trust and operated by Barking and Dagenham Council’s Culture and Heritage Service. Built by Clement Sysley during the reign of Elizabeth I on rising ground with views of the Thames across marshland to the south, the house has important historic links to the river and to the development of this area of East London. eastburymanorhouse.org.uk

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Art Fund



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