



SOMERSET HOUSE

IMPACT REPORT
2023/2024

Somerset House Trust somersethouse.org.uk

INTRODUCTION

2023/24 was an exceptional year for Somerset House with many records broken and aspirations achieved. Total visitors to the site returned to pre-Covid levels for the first time, marking an important milestone as we build towards our 25th birthday year in 2025.

Visitor numbers were aided by two important ticketed exhibitions: **The Missing Thread: Untold Stories of Black British Fashion**, which attracted almost 20,000 visitors, and **CUTE** our most successful exhibition ever, achieving over 122,000 visitors. *CUTE* surpassed all expectations by the end of its run, with much interest from potential partners to tour the show internationally.

Our onsite community of cultural innovators continues to fuel our artistic programme, with 96 residents featured in the programme. This included solo shows by Studios' artists Sonya Dyer and Libby Heaney, the exhibition **Makerversity: Designing for the Real World** and collaborating with Dance Umbrella on London Battle in the Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court. What happens here really does not happen anywhere else.

Our onsite community is also integral to our work to support the widest possible span of creative talent, with 43 residents working with us to deliver our flagship career development initiatives.

As custodians of an historic building in the heart of London, our work to improve the site and our offer to the public also continued with a number of important improvements, including stonework cleaning and new façade lighting.

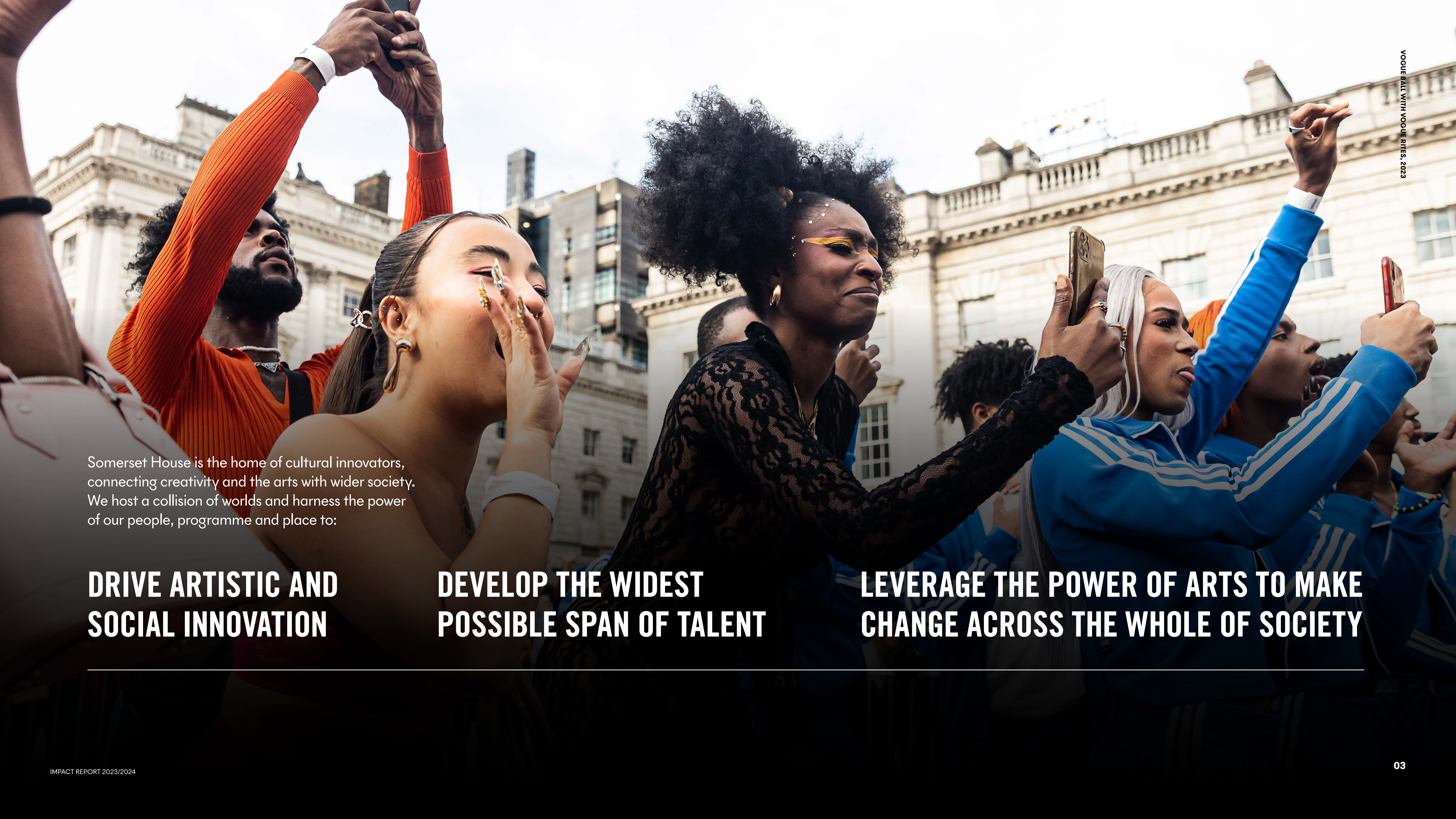
At the time of writing we are in the early stages of recovering from a fire that took place on 17 August 2024, damaging the upper floors and roof where the South and West wings meet. London Fire Brigade and the Somerset House team on site responded magnificently and thankfully all staff, residents and visitors were kept safe.

Although 2023/24 was a very successful year, we must now contend with the post-fire rebuild. Furthermore, it would be remiss not to mention that cooler economic winds are appearing for 2024/25, with noticeable business caution impacting both office leasing and commercial hires, as well as the cost-of-living crisis continuing to impact demand for ticketed events. Simultaneously we have ambitious plans for 2025, supported by a major focus on strategic communications. Our reserves position will enable us to maintain our ambitions, weather short-term economic softening and to continue to offer free events and exhibitions throughout the year.

The team at Somerset House deliver with gusto and dedication year after year while continuing to evolve and reinvent. Now they face an unplanned rebuilding project in addition to rising economic pressures and delivering our 25th birthday plans. I am exceedingly grateful to them, our resident community, my fellow trustees and to all our supporters and partners.

Gail Rebuck
Chair of Somerset House Trust





Somerset House is the home of cultural innovators, connecting creativity and the arts with wider society. We host a collision of worlds and harness the power of our people, programme and place to:

DRIVE ARTISTIC AND SOCIAL INNOVATION

DEVELOP THE WIDEST POSSIBLE SPAN OF TALENT

LEVERAGE THE POWER OF ARTS TO MAKE CHANGE ACROSS THE WHOLE OF SOCIETY

A YEAR IN THE LIFE
OF SOMERSET HOUSE

2.9M

Visitors

702

Members from 365 creative
businesses in our co-working space
Somerset House Exchange, of
which 122 are on bursaries

114

Somerset House Studios artists
across the year

959K

Online cultural
programme audience

351

Days of free exhibitions
and displays

96

Resident artists and creatives
featured in cultural programme

382K

Visitors to cultural
programme

300

Creative-tech and maker members
from 88 different organisations
at Makerversity

66

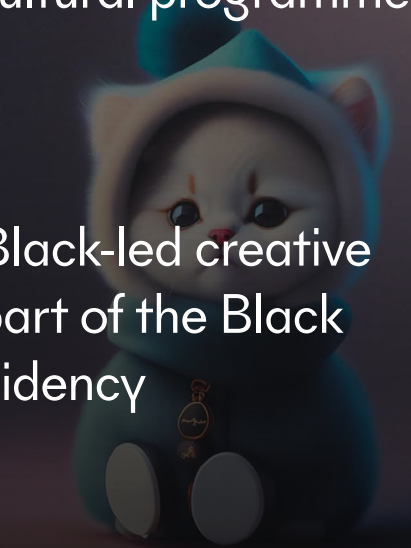
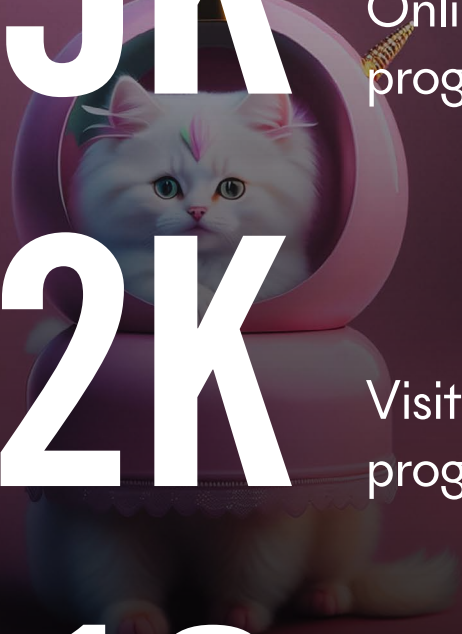
Early stage Black-led creative
enterprises part of the Black
Business Residency

3,319

Young people participating
in inclusive talent engagement
activity in person

125

Creative enterprise residents
occupying 76,000 sq. ft of
dedicated office space



HOME OF CULTURAL INNOVATORS

Our direction is informed by the creative community we nurture as residents; the experience and perspectives we host across backgrounds and creative disciplines and the intersections and crossovers we encourage.

Our Resident Support Programme saw over **1,800 attendees** across a range of events from business advice clinics to targeted artform-led networking events and special interest groups.

Our resident community were also highly present across our public programme, demonstrating the power of the arts to intervene and make change across the whole of society.

The most notable example of this was the **Designing For The Real World** exhibition, which marked the tenth anniversary of Makerversity at Somerset House. We worked with founder Paul Smyth to bring the creative ideation, prototyping and making going on in Somerset House's workshops spaces into the public realm, platforming award-winning projects and ongoing research on topics like sustainable materials, customisable product design, ethical AI and pollution reduction.

"The Makerversity anniversary show is a marvellous example of community-driven design, and a straightforward display of creative ambition."

- WALLPAPER*





SOMERSET HOUSE STUDIOS

Through our artist community Somerset House Studios, we back new talent, new methods and new technologies in a spirit of constant curiosity and counter perspective. The Studios programme highlights are summarised below.

Community highlights:

Meeting the increasing cost of living challenges by offering our largest number of bursary opportunities to date with **27 focused residencies**.

The culmination of our first Jerwood Foundation supported residency for early stage visual artists with enorê, Leila Dear and Ufuoma Essi's G31 exhibition.

Our inaugural Fellowship programme with UAL Creative Computing Institute concluded with a new online commission for Channel, paving the way for an expanded year-long **Creative Technologies Fellowship**.

Our experimental sound, music, and performance series, **Assembly**, returned for the first time in four years with series of new commissions, collaborations, and live premieres. Many of these were developed as a result of artists residencies supported by generous donations to our Young Talent Fund and a number of new works commissioned are set to tour, including to Rewire in the Hague, CTM Festival in Berlin, and Edinburgh Art Festival.

Feedback from artists continually highlights the difference we are making.

"Somerset House Studios is an incredible programme with a genuine community who care for and support each other. The programme listens to artists' needs and responds to these, always adapting to the most urgent concerns. Without the stability, support and friendship SHS has provided, I am not sure I would have been able to continue (both on an emotional and financial level).

- SOMERSET HOUSE STUDIOS ARTIST

92% of artists say being a Somerset House Studios resident is essential or important to maintaining a sustainable creative practice.

85% say they have developed skills, knowledge and expertise as a result of their residency.

82% of resident artists say their profile has grown.

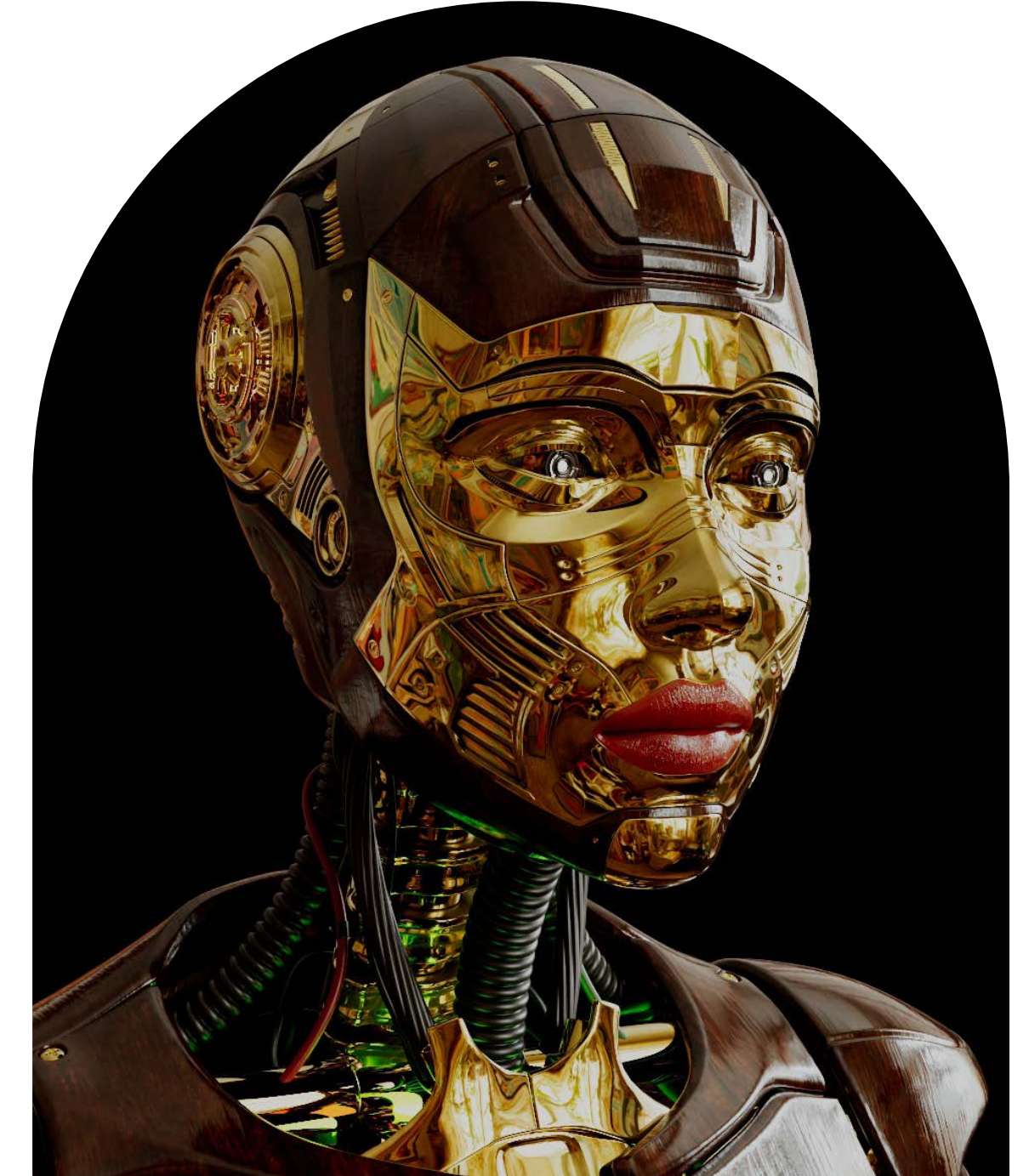
80% have expanded their peer network and **78%** met new collaborators.

75% have received new opportunities and **73%** have increased the scale they're working at.

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

CHALLENGING CONVENTIONS AND ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Our distinctive programme sits at the intersection of different, overlapping artistic and cultural forms. This was a record breaking year, with CUTE our most successful exhibition ever. Our cultural programme included 15 site specific projects.



BLACK VENUS

Exhibition curated by Aindrea Emelife, reclaiming Black women in visual culture.

“The myth of Venus is a complicated one and this fascinating show rises to the challenge...what a good show. Bravo.”

- SUNDAY TIMES

SUMMER SERIES WITH AMERICAN EXPRESS

Eleven nights of live music in the Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court with stellar sets from artists including Gabriels, Alison Goldfrapp, Olivia Dean and Young Fathers.

“Get ready to party in one of London’s most impressive locations for an open-air concert.”

- EVENING STANDARD

SUMMER IN THE COURTYARD

Inclusive programme for all ages with workshops from Somerset House residents and Vogue Ball with Vogue Rites featuring local and international talent from the ballroom community.

“This summer, the stunning Georgian courtyard at Somerset House will host a fantastic programme of fun and affordable events”

- TIME OUT

RASHAAD NEWSOME: HANDS PERFORMANCE

New digital commission as part of Rashad’s Somerset House Studios residency Fathers.

“Hands Performance’ depicts how Black vernacular dance and nonverbal communication carry culture and nurture community”

- LA TIMES

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

CHALLENGING CONVENTIONS AND ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES



LONDON DESIGN BIENNALE

A three-week long global stage for world-leading contemporary design and design-led innovation, creativity and research.

*“With the theme of *The Global Game: Remapping Collaboration*, the event aims to rethink how nations communicate and collaborate.”*

- DEZEEN



THE MORGAN STANLEY EXHIBITION

THE MISSING THREAD: UNTOLD STORIES OF BLACK BRITISH FASHION

Curated by the Black Orientated Legacy Development, this exhibition celebrated the impact of Black British culture on our rich design history and put the spotlight on the legacy of Joe Casely-Hayford.

*“Somerset House’s new exhibition *The Missing Thread* feels more pertinent and timely than ever...a beautiful testament to how the past continues to inspire the future, from generation to generation.”* - DAZED



SKATE WITH SWITZERLAND TOURISM

A beloved staple of London’s winter season.

“Nothing quite as iconic at Christmas time than whizzing around the ice, against the backdrop of Somerset House’s grand neoclassical façade.”

- EVENING STANDARD



CUTE

Record-breaking exhibition exploring the irresistible force of cuteness in contemporary culture, revealing its emotive charge, power and potential.

“The exhibition’s brilliance lies in walking the line between a highly Instagrammable celebration of cuteness and absorbing exploration of its morally ambiguous character.”

- NEW YORK TIMES

PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

CHALLENGING CONVENTIONS AND ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES



LIBBY HEANEY: HEARTBREAK & MAGIC
New virtual reality artwork and physical installation by Studios artist and quantum physicist Dr Libby Heaney. Commissioned by VIVE arts.

“Look behind the curtain and interact with the risk-taking work that’s flourishing within the building”

- MADE IN SHOREDITCH



ASSEMBLY
The return of our experimental music series, which included a number of performances and commissions shaped as a result of Somerset House Studios residencies.

“It was transcendent. It was that moment when you’re at a concert and you know everyone in the room is feeling the same thing as you are, because the music is speaking to everyone.”

- THE GUARDIAN



ZHENG BO: BAMBOO AS METHOD
New commission from Hong-Kong based artist Zheng Bo, transforming our courtyard into a bamboo garden.

“An elegant sanctuary for contemplation and restoration.”
- EVENING STANDARD



NOW PLAY THIS
Somerset House hosts the UK’s leading annual experimental games festival.

“How refreshing to see the breadth and brilliance of what interactive art can be away from the ruthless demands of commerce.”
- THE GUARDIAN

The creation of a black feminist aesthetic must challenge dominant culture's discourse of the black body [as] grotesque and articulate a black liberation discourse on the black body [as] beautiful.
LORRAINE O'GRADY



GWYNETH O'NEILL



INCLUSIVE TALENT DEVELOPMENT

FUELLING CREATIVITY AND ADDRESSING UNDER-REPRESENTATION

We intensify creativity and multiply opportunity, creating the conditions to continually challenge and reinvigorate the status quo. We find, back, develop and invest in a diverse span of creative talent across race, gender, age and stage.

Across 2023/24 the Inclusive Talent Engagement team involved 43 creative enterprise residents, Studios artists, Black Business Residency and Exchange members in delivering an inspiring programme for young people embarking on creative careers.

UPGRADE YOURSELF

As a multi-strand programme, Upgrade Yourself harnesses our unique position as the home of cultural innovators to create meaningful and sustainable opportunities for young people, giving them the skills, networks, experience, and inspiration to support their career aspirations.

In 2023-24, we reached **3,319** young people through the programme strands: Upgrade Yourself Festival, Upgrade Yourself Takeovers, and Creative Industry Placements. Our digital engagement attracted **39,400** participants and we grew our young people network to over **70,000**.

“I feel like I have been really challenged and able to grow a lot within this programme”

- CREATIVE INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS PARTICIPANT

Across our Upgrade Yourself programmes, **79%** of participants identified as underrepresented in the creative sector and **86%** increased their confidence in navigating a career path.

Thanks to the Kusuma Trust, we were also able to launch our first workshop taster day series with Makerversity where 50 young people took part in 6 day-long and 2 week-long workshops led by Makerversity residents with hands-on exploration of fashion, graphics and animation, future technology and much more.



MAKERVERSITY: DESIGNING FOR THE REAL WORLD, 2024

“The workshops made me feel that as long as you’re motivated, anything is possible”

- WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT



POOR COLLECTIVE WINNING LONDON DESIGN FESTIVAL MEDAL

BLACK BUSINESS RESIDENCY

The Black Business Residency (BBR) has continued to evolve, supporting early-stage Black-led creative businesses to realise their potential. Over the last year 66 active participants across three cohorts have been part of the programme, with 19 graduates moving onto an Exchange bursary and a more structured alumni network developed.

Black Business Residency members have participated in Somerset House’s public programme in a number of ways, such as Swallow’s Wing and Colechi running workshops in the courtyard and BBR products being stocked in The Missing Thread exhibition shop. The Black Business Residency (BBR) is sponsored by Morgan Stanley and supported by M&C Saatchi Group.

“Somerset House feels like home and being a part of the BBR has connected me to a network of people who have helped shape the future and trajectory of my business. I feel much more confident in the ability to raise funds for my business and become a successful entrepreneur.” - MISI OGUNLANA, FOUNDER TFB STUDIOS, BBR COHORT 4



HERITAGE, SUSTAINABILITY AND PUBLIC ENJOYMENT OF THE SITE

Over 2.9 million people visited Somerset House and we have continued to animate our public spaces in a myriad of different ways, from large scale installations to workshop activity over the busy summer holiday period when our fountains are an oasis for families.

Conservation - We have continued to stay on top of conservation works in line with our independent surveyor's most recent Quadrennial Report. This has included the cleaning of the stonework, stone repairs and repointing and the protection of sculptures and architectural features on the facades of the New, South and West Wings.

With the kind support of the Edmond J. Safra Foundation, we have completed phase one of our new architectural lighting in the courtyard. The new digitally controlled lighting is brighter and more energy efficient, highlighting the building's architectural features and allowing a full range of dynamic colour settings to be used for our events.

Access - Our Accessibility Action Group has worked through priorities for how we can make our site even more welcoming to d/Deaf and disabled visitors. We have introduced Relaxed Sessions for all exhibitions, which were extremely well received for CUTE.

Sustainability - Action taken over the course of the year included replacing over 500 light fittings with low power consumption LED models. Our cloud-controlled heating solution, implemented in 2022, has **saved an estimated 115 tonnes of carbon**, whilst operational changes made to Skate **reduced energy consumption by 10%**.

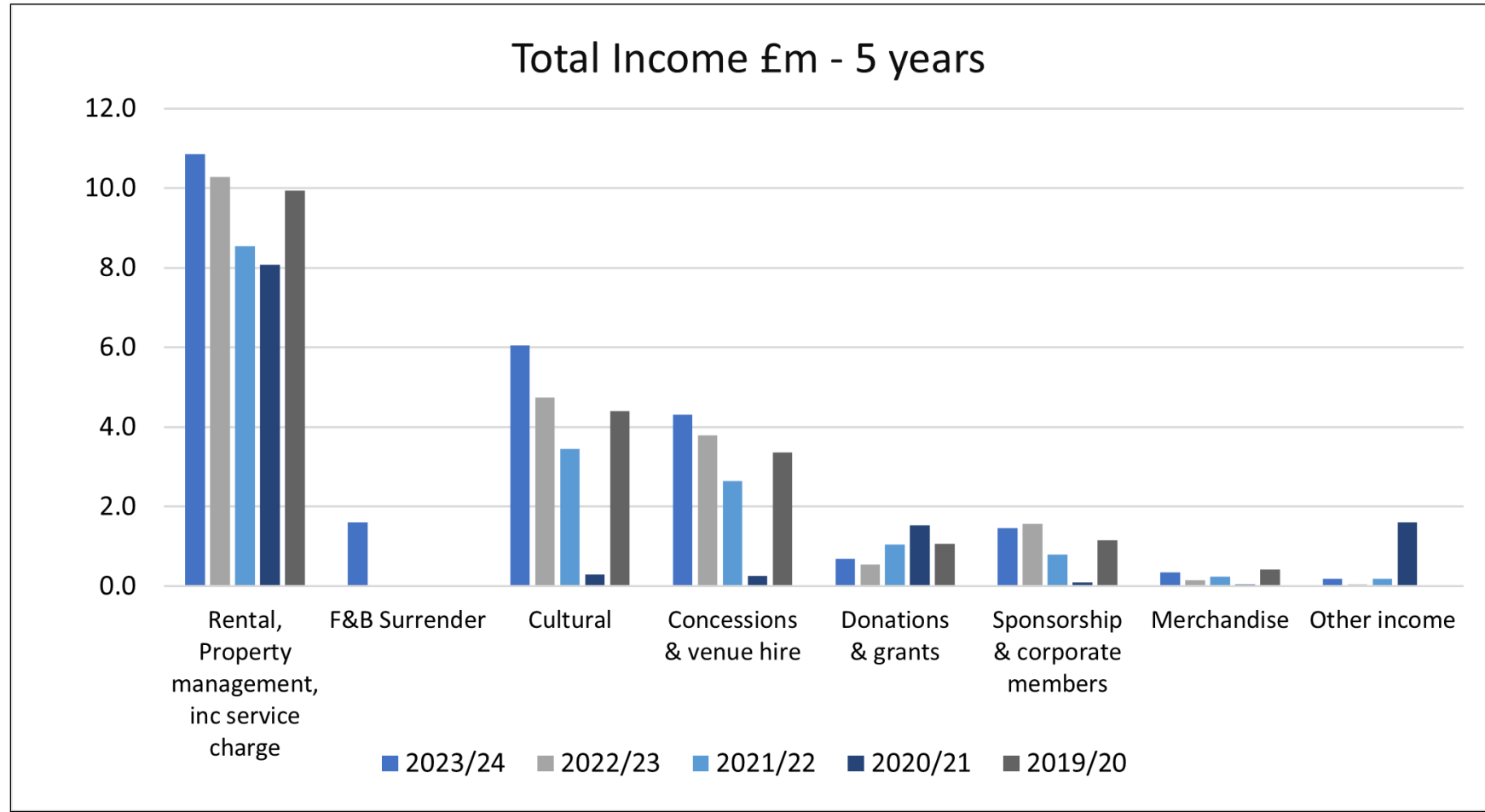
Looking further ahead, we began work with infrastructure consultancy Aecom to develop a prioritised decarbonisation roadmap, which will guide us in future decision making.

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

2023 - 2024

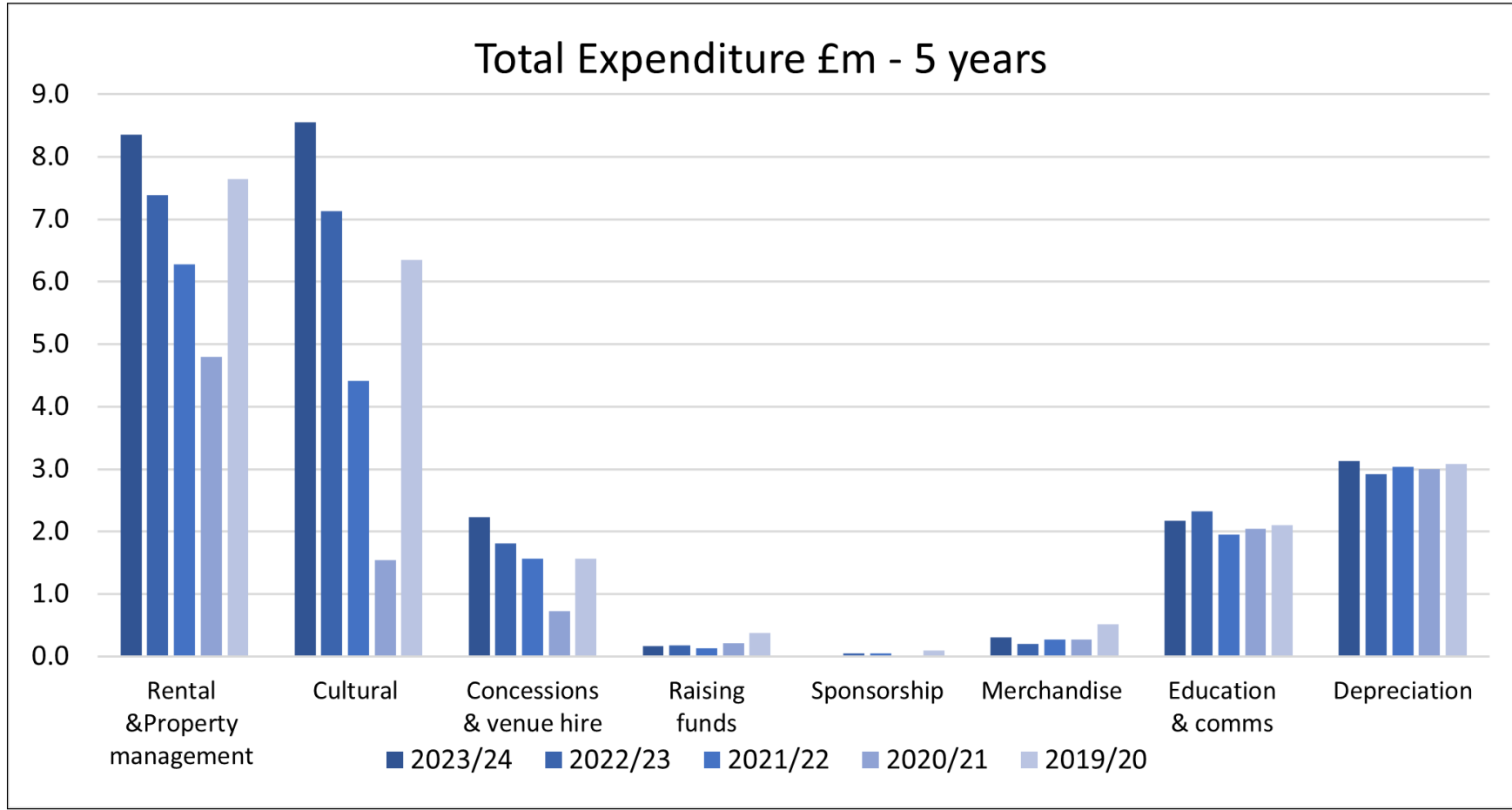
It was a financially strong year for the Trust. Despite budgeting for an enhanced conservation and exhibition programme, we ended the year well ahead of budget with a surplus of £2.2m, excluding the one-off benefit of a catering lease surrender.

TOTAL INCOME AND EXPENDITURE (UNRESTRICTED & RESTRICTED)



Our largest income lines are now back above pre-Covid levels, bolstered by the success of the CUTE exhibition, and by a second paid exhibition, The Missing Thread.

Rental income growth was subdued with voids above target and minimal price increases as Trustees opted to only apply price increases to service charges for 2023/24.



As income increased so did our cost base, with the building and the cultural programme continuing to represent the main elements of our expenditure. Total staffing costs increased by 6% to £6.7m in the year, driven by a return to a full cultural programme. Two major, ticketed exhibitions drove higher overall spending on the programme. We spent £8.4m on property management & conservation (2022/23: £7.4m) with a further £0.6m of planned spend delayed to 2024/25.

Given above-budget performance, Trustees designated funds for upcoming site and capital expenditure, costs for our ambitious 2025 programme as part of our 25th birthday year and towards a new food and beverage reserve. The latter is the result of the departure of our most significant onsite catering partner, which will require considerable future investment in order to deliver the changes and improvements we are looking for.

The Trust continues to pay a peppercorn rent to DCMS in respect of the leasehold.

THANK YOU

TRUSTS, FOUNDATIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS

Buttinghill Foundation
Cockayne - Grants for the Arts and the London Community Foundation
Department of Culture, Media & Sport
Edmond J. Safra Foundation
Garfield Weston Foundation
Goethe-Institut London
Jerwood Foundation
John Lyon's Charity
John S. Cohen Foundation
Kusuma Trust
PRS Foundation
The Rothschild Foundation
Warburg Pincus
Westminster City Council - Carbon Offset Fund and Culture & Community Fund

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Sanrio
Sephora
Strand Palace Hotel
Switzerland Tourism
The Gel Bottle Inc.
Tinder
T. Rowe Price
Whispering Angel & Rock Angel

SOMERSET HOUSE SUPPORTERS' COURT PATRONS & INDIVIDUAL SUPPORTERS

Paul Adams
Felicia Brocklebank
Jennifer Duvalier
Rob and Vanessa Enserro
Carol Fairweather
Melanie Hall
Charles Hoare Nairne
Kanika Kumar
Marcus Lyon
Prue MacLeod
Monica Monajem
Charles Morgan
Jonathan Newhouse
Gail Rebuck
Julien Sevaux
William Sieghart
Sophie Turner Laing

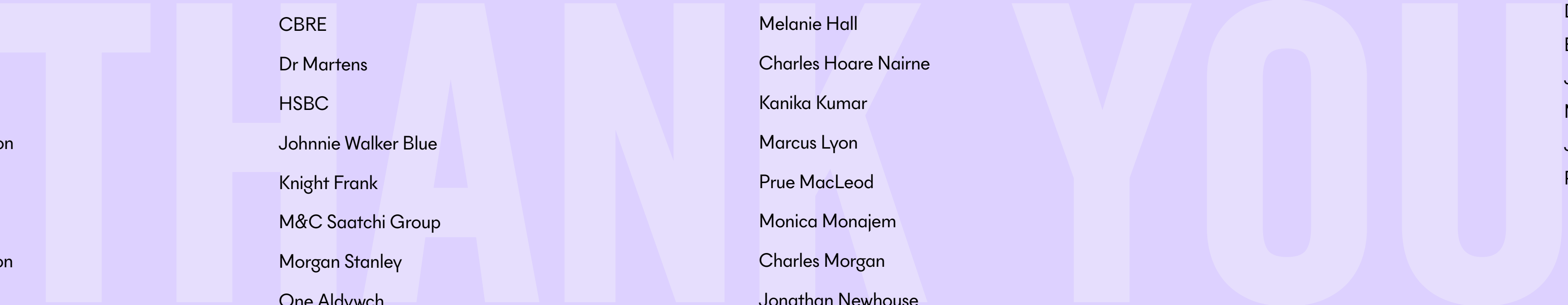
And those who wish to remain anonymous.

COMMISSIONING PARTNERS

ArtCentre, Pasadena
Roberts Institute of Art
Vive Arts
University of Arts London's Creative Computing Institute

TRUSTEES

Baroness Gail Rebuck, DBE (Chair)
Sophie Turner Laing (Deputy Chair)
Martine d'Anglejan Chatillon
Alix Burge
Jennifer Duvalier
Paul Goswell
Melanie Hall
Dawid Konotey-Ahulu
Elliott Linger
Jonathan Newhouse
Monica Monajem
Jessica Tamsedge
Peter Williams



A man in a black tuxedo with a red sash is singing into a gold microphone. He has a joyful expression with his mouth open. The background is dark with some architectural lines.

step inside think outside

somersehouse.org.uk

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