Baltic Open Submission 2026

19 September 2026 to 04 April 2027

Audio Description

by Louise Ainsley

The exhibition is situated on the ground floor opposite the entrance to the lifts.

The outside wall is painted a light grey and the entrance to the exhibition is on the left side of the wall. To the right of the entrance doorway is the exhibition title in bold black letters-

Baltic Open Submission 2026

Then underneath in smaller letters the exhibition dates and '**supported by Fenwick**'.

Across the wall are designs by **Millie Carmel Jobson** the brand and catalogue designer. Painted on the light grey walls are bold blocks of colour in light pink and pale lilac/blue, over painted with black squiggles and splodges and mark making matching the designs that appear in the exhibition catalogue.

To the right of the exhibition title, in 5 columns, are the names of the 121 artists and makers based in the northeast of England whose work is featured in the exhibition.

On the left-hand side of the entrance there's a television size screen that shows Baltic Bites, a series of short videos of interviews with the artists.

Moving into the gallery the walls are painted in the in a dark grey colour with a tinge of green and the works of art are softly lit. Some areas are bathed in coloured light coming from sculptures and from videos playing on two large television screens. The black slate tiles on the floor reflect the light in hazy pools. Near the top of the left side wall is an open entrance that leads to an annex room.

The walls are hung with individual and clusters of paintings, prints and mixed media pieces. Sculptures stand on plinths, some surrounded by low wire barriers.

Directly opposite the entrance is a monolithic concrete wall 12 feet wide. It is the first of 3 walls made from chunky slabs of concrete.

The walls stop just before they reach the high ceiling and echo the shapes of buildings that are part of Northeastern geographic history, referencing the 3 blocks of flats at Shieldfield in Heaton in particular.

These shapes are mirrored with concrete slabs that are attached to the main gallery walls and form an industrial aesthetic on which to display a selection of works.

The large concrete walls are set parallel to the top gallery wall. The 3 walls are staggered down the middle of the exhibition space. The first one to the left the second in the centre and the third to the right.

We will follow the gallery walls around the exhibition in an anticlockwise direction and weave between the concrete walls on the way. This will then lead us to the annex room where the exhibition concludes.

This audio description gives an overview of the exhibition by considering various 'clusters' of artwork to give a flavour of the many different styles of work in the exhibition.

Turning left from the entrance, notes about the Exhibition are printed in black letters on the top wall. The first paragraph informs us;

'Spanning painting, photography, sculpture, ceramics, textiles and film, the exhibition reflects the breadth and diversity of artistic practice across the region. It invites you to explore the diverse perspectives, shared histories, and experiences that make up life in the North East.

It goes on to tell us;

The exhibition emerged from an open-call process, which received an incredible 1,140 applications.

With your back to the main gallery, on the wall to the right is the first work in the exhibition. A photograph by **Hazel Plater** entitled **'Josephine in Meadow Well'.**

Josephine is a black woman, who worked as a nurse in the NHS. She stands tall in the place she encountered racial abuse in Meadow Well in the 2000's. Her red coat matches the red of the St George's flag that flutters on a pole behind her. Josephine worked to overcome prejudice and became an important member of the community.

This presents a theme that runs through the exhibition; the experience of living in this region and the sense of place and belonging.

Moving in an anticlockwise direction past the entrance two large portrait photographs in thin gold frames hang side by side on the top wall. **Zarah Khan's** photographs entitled **'Sore Thumb' 2026** continue the theme of identity and Khan's experience of growing up on a council estate as a mixed-race person. One photograph portrays a young dark-haired woman wearing a sari standing outside a corner shop. In the other photograph the same young woman is in a pink tracksuit and cream Ugg-style slippers, holding a Chihuahua dog in her arms as she stands on the street.

Directly opposite the photographs, a large painting hangs in the middle of the first concrete wall. **John Eric Rothwell's 'Enchanted Woods'** illustrates trunks of trees tinged with purple as they push up through blue shadows, capturing 'the enchantment and atmosphere hidden within the woods'.

To the right of the painting is a smaller black and white print, **Steven Marshall's 'Pathway to Deletion'**, echoing the rising trunks, like a black standing stone framed by stark white and deep shadows. Closer inspection reveals the print to be created through the image manipulation of a warped upside-down head; the overstretched chin creating a long gaping mouth in the centre.

Following the top wall, approaching the corner**, Jenny McNamara's** work entitled **'Pink and Orange'** is a sculpture created from 9 blocks of rippled glass. The blocks are built up 3 by 3 into a window shape that sits on a narrow plinth several feet out from a light box on the wall. The box glows with pink and orange stripes. The rippled glass blocks catches and distorts the straight lines of coloured light into twisted patterns in the glass.

In the space between the first concrete wall and the corner is **'Siphon (Propagation IV)' by Sue Loughlin.** Laid on a waist high stainless-steel table two blown glass hollow vessels are shaped like internal organs; the larger is opaline, the other ruby. A latex tube runs from a narrow glass opening in the end of the ruby vessel into a similar narrow opening in the opaline vessel connecting them.

There is a visceral contrast between the curved fleshy-coloured vessels and the cold, clinical stainless-steel. The glass and the table catch and reflect the pink light that spills out from the rippled glass sculpture in the corner.

Moving past the corner, on the side wall, there's a line of three photographic works displayed on a concrete slab. The photographs document changes to the physical environment of decommissioned places in the Northeast;

The shattered pile of a partly demolished building in the centre of Newcastle. A photograph of cooling towers in Teesside juxtaposed against a felled tree sit inside a Corten steel frame. Finally, a work entitled **'Previously Wet 'n' Wild'** that records the dipping lines and curves of abandoned waterslides silhouetted against the sky at the now demolished leisure complex.

Next is a 50 inch TV screen on the wall that plays moving film images from 3 artists. The screen has headphones attached and a broad grey bench to sit on.

Turn to the left to pass between the first and second concrete walls

On the left-hand wall are 3 works that record daily scenes using a dark palette lifted with reds. The first, **by Margaret Nilsen**, is a large monotone, grey-metallic scene built up on a black background of a family who build a den and play in the woods.

The next is **'In the Dock'**, an oil painting by **Jon Old.** A huge ship, its main body painted a solid red, overshadows a man bobbing in a small boat as he repaints the dark blue under section.

The third work is by textile artist **Rhiannon Robinson. 'Murmuration'** is created from printing ink, cotton, polyester thread on canvas.

The artist was captivated by the flowing shapes of murmurations created by tens of thousands of starlings.

On a background of pale reds and greys, muted white capital letters spell out; 'Take to the sky, swooping and swirling into spheres, planes and waves, constantly pulsing between dark and light as they turn their bodies to and fro...'

Black lines are sewn swooping and swirling over the words; hundreds of dots are sewn sweeping inside the lines echoing the motion of the starlings.

We turn to the right to head back between the second and third concrete walls. On the right-hand wall a 5 ft high salvaged bus window on a low plinth juts out into our path. This work is by **Kitty McKay** and entitled **'Public space archive (with keys)'**.

Illuminated by L.E.D strip lights around its frame, the half-arched window has been etched with patterns scratched out by a set of keys.

The works on this wall reflect life in a public space;

Sophie Robson gives us a photograph entitled **'Danny',** who is a resident of Jaywick. Danny stands with his arms held wide in an exuberant welcome to the sun that streams down on Danny's uplifted face and on a cul-de-sac parked up with rows of vehicles and a skip filled with debris from a nearby bungalow.

In his photograph **'Redcar Wind Turbines,' Andrew Pounder** Captures 'the evolving character of the North East coast.'

A boat sails between 7 towering brilliant-white wind turbines anchored in the vast Northeast Sea against a huge sky.

Notes tell us that the scene; 'leverages a dramatic sense of scale, with the solitary vessel dwarfed by this new industrial presence.'

Lewis Hobson reflects on life under austerity. **'A Light Still Shines'** shows us a grid of welded steel set in a frame and painted green. The grid has been rescued from a council estate where it was used to cover broken windows. Only tiny holes were left in the metal, but light shining through the holes revealed that people were still living behind the oppressive windows.

Moving across from the concrete wall to the gallery wall, there's a group of 6 works that are relationship-driven and portray the close bonds of friends and family.

There's a 'warts and all' portrait of a father, two siblings' side by side, a mother and daughter sunbathing. A painting of dirty cups and dishes stacked by the kitchen sink tells the story of a family meal.

At the left side of the group is a Stoneware plate by **Carole Ann Hall** with a portrait of a middle-aged couple and their black cat entitled **'What will we do when the kids leave home?'**

Enhanced by gold lustre their unblinking faces stare out at us, she with tousled red hair and he with a small black moustache and monocle. The loud blue flowery wallpaper behind the couple is created from vintage ceramic transfer patterns.

Following the gallery wall down to the corner, 3 paintings on the bottom wall depict scenes of local historical interest; The first depicts sheep shearing and gathering fleeces. The second is a colourful, frenzied scrum of battling bodies in the '**Sedgefield Ball Game.**' In the third a crowd is gathered on shore to view the wreck of the tall ship **Diamante** at the Black Middens, North Shields in 1898.

Between the paintings, on a waist high plinth, there's a small sculpture that sits on a slowly rotating stand. This is **Sally Pilkington's** Earthenware clay and glaze **'Multi-Moon'**. The pale, spherical sculpture has many faces and would fit comfortably within cupped hands. The moon is smooth ceramics that protrudes from its face to form 6 pointy noses. Between each nose is an eye and under each nose is a mouth with different expressions- a smile, a frown, a tight circle mouth.

As the sculpture turns slowly its faces change. The artist tells us; 'Expressing the feeling of being pulled in too many directions at once'.

Next on the wall is a group of 4 paintings that consider the experiences of motherhood.

'Safe Hands' by **Kate Sweeney** produces a large study of hands formed around a loose torso shape using an experimental watercolour effect with rust, elderberry, pink felt-tip, Haribo sweets and charcoal on paper. The difficulty and unpredictability of the process makes her think about ideas of what it means to be a parent.

'Corrector' by **Kirsty Macrae** is a detailed study of a broken makeup compact. After the birth of her baby the artist paints the objects around her in a domestic setting. 'Corrector' is painted in oil on board. The broken mirror lid lies beside the half-used flesh pink powder. The black plastic lid and container sit on a beige surface and cast a dull blue shadow at the base.

'4:00 AM' by **Gina-Maria Marchella** is a delicate digital drawing that explores the duality of motherhood. Two drawings of a mother nursing her child are tangled

together; rust-brown lines sketch her sitting up, eyes open, with dishevelled hair in the throes of sleep deprivation. In the other, charcoal-grey lines portray the mother sinking back holding her heavy child, resigned to her duty.

Junior Durrani's work '**Shut Down**' is an oil painting on canvas. As a father the artist is aware of the passing of time. His painting catches his wife in fluffy slippers, wrapped in a blanket nursing their infant child as she lies back on a pink sofa with a spaniel at her side.

Opposite, on the last concrete wall, are 3 playful artworks with sites rooted in people's memory.

'St Mary's Icehouse' by Roy Weatherley is an acrylic painting on canvas. The lighthouse on St Mary's Island becomes an upturned ice-cream splattered on the rocks with the bottom of the cornet pointing into a wide blue sky. A single gull circles the giant ice-cream, the constant sea-side menace.

Next is **Rachael Cutmore's** large, oil on canvas painting '**I was happier when we could drink on that hill**'

The artist uses a vibrant palette to create a dreamlike memory. A large, lime green field curves uphill to a block of flats on the horizon against a clear blue sky. A pink candy floss cloud floats above the hill and the figures below. A rosy hued pub stands along a lane on the bottom left. There's a purple track around the grass at the bottom of the hill where a couple dance beside a wooden picnic bench. A dog is playing with birthday balloons on the grass and a dog and ducks occupy another table at the front of the painting.

Rachel Cutmore is exploring alcohol culture, nostalgia, fleeting moments of joy and the distortions of looking back.

Next is '**Cloud Gazing**' by **Jessica Christie**.

4 plaques, hung in a 2 x 2 square, capture different fragments of sky and cloud formations in delicate blues, greys and creams. The plaques are placed higher on the wall making the viewer look up as if they too were cloud gazing.

At the end of the wall move across the aisle and turn left to follow the gallery wall up. There's another screen on the wall that plays moving film images from 2 artists. The screen has headphones attached and a backless wooden bench in front.

Beyond the screen, set in a square are a group of 4 gritty black and white photographs documenting fishermen working on their boats.

Next to the photos is a framed screen print by **Gail Bryson** entitled '**Alnmouth Buoy**'. A bright orange buoy bobs in the sea beside a large stone block that is covered in dark

green seaweed. The bold colours emphasise the contrast between the shapes and colours of natural and non-natural forms.

At the end of the wall is the annex doorway. Turning right we move down the annex towards the bottom wall. We pass artworks on the top and side walls and on a plinth table on the right a collection of ceramics created by ex-veterans.

The bottom wall has concrete slabs, mirroring the sections in the main gallery. Here are 3 works using mixed-media materials.

'The Exquisite Creation of Big Foot' by **Theo Bolante** is printed on washi paper – Japanese paper made with long inner-bark plant fibres rather than wood pulp. The long strong fibres are known as the 'masculine' element.

The artist creates a photographic head and shoulders image of an intriguing creature – a human face, wrapped in fur, bear-like, created from thick, black tinsel. His eyebrows are raised and his eyes stare downwards encircled by white face-paint making them seem larger. His mouth is firm with a cigar-like red vape protruding from the side of his mouth.

Notes tell us that the work– 'was influenced by Theo Bolante's experience of being gay and closeted, as well as his questioning of masculinity as a caricature of gender. By drawing on ...Bigfoot, the artist connects its likeness to masculine machismo.'

The image has been cut into strips, 2 centimetres wide, that hang down over a different image hidden underneath.

A fan blows air over the strips and as they wave and flutter, a second more feminine portrait, wearing large beads and pearls, is tantalisingly revealed beneath the macho image.

The second artwork is a collage and then the third is a tapestry in a square, black frame. **Yunuen Pérez** has handwoven a small square tapestry entitled **'At Home #2'**. The corner of a one storey house with a red roof and contrasting pale green walls is portrayed with a blue sky and green tree behind. A large window with purple *surrounds* looks out onto bushes in the garden made from knotted wool. Notes tell us 'Through composition and varying densities and knots, her tapestry conveys hope for a brighter future.'

Moving to the right from the bottom wall we reach the long side wall that will take us back to the annex entrance. The wall displays a selection of works from the **Youth Open Call.** A wide collection of 43 artworks is arranged in a non-hierarchical scatter hang. As part of the Open Submission, 11–17-year-olds were invited to enter works around the theme of 'Local'.

In a sweep across the wall there are drawings, paintings and mixed-media works, some framed others fixed like posters to the wall or displayed on shallow shelves.

On the very left of the wall is a small TV screen equipped with a pair of headphones that relays a 5-minute video by Albie documenting his live performances on the streets of Sunderland.

Along the gallery wall are several **Iconic landmarks;**

A pencil drawing of a tower from Durham Cathedral and a colourful watercolour and ink picture of the tree at Sycamore gap under the Northern lights. There are paintings of Saint Mary's lighthouse and of the Newcastle bridges over the Tyne.

'Guardian', a work by Emily R Wool, uses natural materials to create the Angel of the North in coloured felt, embroidery thread, and a button head.

Scenes from Newcastle city; An ink drawing of the Emerson Chambers now Waterstones. Next a painting of the Fenwicks' store building with the famous Christmas window display and 'Merry Xmas' written in the sky.

Henry's photograph 'Around the Tyne' uses a 360-degree camera to present the Millenium bridge and Quayside area in a tight spherical shape like a compact world, the footbridge arching giddily over the Tyne.

Nature; There's a photograph of a jumping deer and paintings of country scenes. A fabric and chicken wire artwork of the critically endangered Wall butterfly. Violet draws the woods near Penshaw Monument with fallen branches left to rot, showing nature nurturing itself.

A large framed monochrome photograph by Surann entitled- 'Whose environment?' shows contrasts between natural landscapes and human-made pollution. She layers images superimposing a bullock over an image of a man with Hartlepool Power Station in the background.

The local community;

Willow captures a group of her friends in her painting entitled 'Local Faces Not Places'.

'Bad apples' by Matilda. On a shallow shelf is a small sculpture made from two tin cans squashed and twisted and painted to look like apples with the ring pulls sticking up like stalks. One is painted red and the other pale green, with a cream centre so they look like half eaten apple cores. Next to the sculpture is a large, framed photograph that shows the tin apples discarded on a shelf in a public space. Matilda comments – 'The apples represent how people my age can be viewed and the stereotypes against us in Walker.'

Amelia's- 'Everyone passes through here' is a photograph of a glass fronted bus stop. A woman and two teenagers sit waiting for the next bus, and a young woman sits reading a

book. Amelia concludes that ‘Whether you are waiting at the bus stop or simply driving or walking by it, you are always a part of someone’s journey.’

This concludes the Baltic Open Submission exhibition.

There will be a member of the Baltic crew present in the gallery to answer any questions you may have.

The exit is through the annex door then turn right and back through the entrance.

This is the end of the audio description.