

Tish Murtha & Kuba Ryniewicz
Close to Home
4 July 2026 – 4 April 2027
Audio Description

‘This landmark exhibition in Baltic’s Level 3 gallery marks the first time four major series by celebrated documentary photographer Tish Murtha will be shown together in the North East, alongside a newly commissioned body of work by Newcastle-based artist Kuba Ryniewicz.’

Stepping out of the lift on Level 3 we reach the entrance to the gallery. The exhibition title is printed on the white wall outside the entrance in bold black letters.

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On the left-hand wall beside the entrance doorway is a small screen that relays two short videos by Kuba and by Tish’s daughter Ella, talking about the exhibition.

Moving into the gallery the high walls are painted white. Lines of Kuba Ryniewicz’s photographs at shoulder height connect between Tish Murtha’s themed clusters of unframed black and white photographs.

Each titled series of work has a large photographic image that covers the wall from floor to ceiling. There are notes with each title that discuss the context of the work. If you would like to discover more about the notes, please ask a member of the Baltic crew.

The gallery is 30 meters long and 16 meters wide and divided into three main areas.

A third of the way down, from the left, an 8 meters long wall cuts across the gallery creating a partition. Two-thirds down, on the right, another wall cuts across the space. This creates a serpentine route around the gallery.

A number of screens are placed at different points of the exhibition and relay Kuba's film work and clips from a documentary about Murtha.

On the right next to the entrance is an **introduction** to the exhibition printed on the wall in black letters.

The first paragraph tells us-

'Close to Home brings together four major photographic series by Tish Murtha alongside existing and newly commissioned work by Newcastle-based artist Kuba Ryniewicz. The exhibition explores life in the Northeast across generations, placing Murtha's socially engaged documentary practise in dialogue with Ryniewicz's contemporary reflections on community, identity, and belonging.'

Next to the introduction there is a photograph with a tribute to Tish Murtha. Tish stands in a snowy wood with her daughter Ella as a toddler. Tish holds Ella's hand. In her other hand she holds her camera.

Words alongside quote Tish.

'My use of photography and my approach to it is based on the conviction that the fundamental value of the medium is its capacity to provide direct, accurate, and vital records of the conditions, events, and experiences that shape our lives.'

Tish Murtha, 1956 to 2013

The Baltic then thank her daughter Ella Murtha for her help in developing the exhibition.

Turning your back to the entrance Tish Murtha's work starts on the partition wall 10 meters ahead.

Walking straight over to the end of this wall we find the notes for this section of work entitled **Elswick Kids (1978)**

From here we will follow the walls in an anti- clockwise direction.

Beside the notes is a huge 4 meters high by 6.3 meters wide black and white image that covers two thirds of the wall.

In the image two little kids sit together on a low wall. They turn their faces close. Behind them is a wide street of terraced houses and three boys tear towards them grinning as they close in to get in the picture.

Turning left to face the side gallery wall there's a collection of 33 black and white prints. These are different sizes informally arranged in a cloud shape roughly 5 meters wide.

In the photographs the Elswick kids roam and play within their environment in the terraced streets of the West End of Newcastle. Many of the houses have been abandoned and reduced to a shell.

Groups of kids gather in the street. A teenage boy smirks as he holds a toddler up to chalk on an outside wall adding to the graffiti.

A girl jumps on the boot of an abandoned car as if it was a trampoline, her arms extended like wings.

A boy and a dog both gaze up to the sky through the open upper floor struts of a ruined house.

Everywhere children clamber up and around crumbling bricks. A bunch of young kids have climbed up to a bay window and stare out as they cling to the gaping stone structure, it's sash windows long gone.

Two boys pose as they hold up a large empty picture frame. They peer through the hole in the middle creating a framed portrait of their grinning faces.

The notes on this series conclude – 'At its core, Elswick Kids is a portrait of community seen from within. It reflects Murtha's commitment to photographing the world around her with honesty and care, capturing... the strength, joy, and presence of the children who lived it.'

Moving back up to the top entrance wall there's the start of Kuba Ryniewicz's Cornered Study series.

At the centre of the wall running back to the entrance, is a 4 meters high by 3.4 meters wide image of a young man relaxing flat out in a sunny field of buttercups. Shot from behind and low in the grass only the top of his head and the eye and cheek of his face are visible. Shielding his face with his left arm his elbow points to the sky as he rests his hand on his brow.

Moving on to the left and passing the entrance there's an image of an orange cow set back from the doorway. The cow stands in front of a high block of flats. The sun shines on the long rows of windows on the 15-storey building as the bullock turns to stare at us.

Moving along Kuba's work continues.

A dramatic tree study from Sycamore gap, portrait of a young woman, a black and white print of kids playing. The collection is added to by smaller shots some taken with a Polaroid camera.

Turning around the corner onto the long gallery wall we reach the notes on this section entitled- **Cornered Study- (2022 – ongoing)**.

Halfway down the wall is a large image, 4 meters high by 3.4 meters wide. This is a head portrait of a young man with a side view of his lightly stubbled face turned towards the right. His eyes are closed and his lips press together in a calm expression.

His dyed blonde hair is wavy and cut shorter on top with a longer mullet style behind.

He has piercings through his ear lobe and right eyebrow and a yellowed bruise under his eye.

Carrying on down the gallery Tish Murtha's 1979 'Save Scotswood Works' series is displayed.

A collection of 29 black and white prints and a mixture of posters and press clippings are arranged in a group on the gallery wall.

In the photographs men work on heavy machinery. Workers are together in meetings and at sit-ins. On demonstrations they hold their banners high-

'Save Scotswood Works'

'Apathy is Catastrophy'

'Work not Dole'

A poster on the gates proclaims-

UNDER WORKERS OCCUPATION SAVE OUR JOBS'

A man smirks beside graffiti on the wall that reads-

'BOXALL KNOWS F. ALL'

Many pictures of the workers portray individuals-

An engineer works with obvious care on machinery.

In a bar three women sit chatting. Standing behind them, a man holds his pint out to one side as he is kissed and embraced by a woman.

One man sits at a table with his pint of ale and listens as his friend whispers in his ear.

A young man lies back smoking, and a round piece of machinery looks like a halo above his head.

In the corner where the second partition wall cuts across the gallery is an old-style television on metal legs that plays an excerpt about Scotswood works from a documentary that was made about Tish.

Running across the partition wall is a huge black and white image of a protest march in the centre of Newcastle.

The protestors carry a huge white 'Save Scotswood Works' banner. 5 bagpipers dressed in kilts lead the march escorted on each side by mounted police.

They are heading up Newgate Street past the large Northeastern Co-op building.

A group of teenage lads' dash across the empty road in front of the marchers. The photograph is taken from the middle of the road and one lad at the front of the picture is life-size scale making it feel as if we could almost step onto the road from where we stand.

In the middle of the space there are two large flat screens fixed to metal poles that run from ceiling to floor. These relay videos by Kuba Ryniewicz.

The first screen has no sound and relays short videos of people dancing and laughing in a nightclub entitled 'The Club' (2026)

The second screen is entitled 'Good News' (2026)

There are headphones attached to the screen to listen to individuals answer questions that Kuba has devised to show the 'positive aspects of life'. The name and age of those interviewed are displayed in yellow script under their image.

This screen leads to another flat screen attached to the wall that is part of Tish Murtha's series of photographs entitled-

'Youth Unemployment- 1981'

The screen has headphones attached and plays an excerpt from the Youth Unemployment section of the documentary **'Tish'**.

To the left of the flat screen there are 38 black and white prints grouped on the gallery wall.

Youths gathered in the streets, or hang around together bored, playing cards, smoking.

In the smashed window of an abandoned house a teenage boy hangs his arms over the central window frame and stares out at the world. His expression is serious with a down turned mouth. His face and hands are filthy as if he has been raking through the dirt.

Five young men play cards around a kitchen table. One looks at the cards in the hand of the lad next to him. It is an image used by Sam Fender on his album 'People Watching'.

Three lads slouch against a brick wall in amiable conversation. Scrawled in large white letters on the wall above them is 'cops piss off'.

A teenage girl stands with her arms folded and a sullen expression. One lad is asleep on a settee in the daytime.

Above the photographs there's Tish's handwriting scrawled in black letters across the white wall which reads-

'His experiences since then have convinced him that he and the hundreds of others just like him will never be allowed to be anything more than a pool of the growing reserves of a fully expendable cheap labour market.'

On the partition wall to the left is a 4 by 6 meters image.

In a dark, cluttered kitchen a young man sorts empty Newcastle Brown Ale bottles into a carrier bag.

He has shaved hair and a sharp face and wears a pin-stripe jacket over a turtle-neck jumper.

The window is propped open, the white paint on its frame is peeling. The glass is grimy with a long crack across the corner.

Sunlight illuminates a dozen or so empty bottles crammed onto the sink draining area and catches the outline of the lad's face as he stoops forward.

The top of the lad's head barely fits into the image creating an uneasy claustrophobic feeling.

Moving on, down the gallery and then along the bottom wall is Kuba Ryniewicz's Daily Weeding-series.

The wall down to the bottom corner of the gallery is half filled with a colourful close-up image of a slouched, bare-chested man with only his arm, belly, chest, and the top of one leg visible. An orange, black and white banded guinea pig nestles on the man's lap.

The Daily Weeding series (2020-21) was created during the Covid restrictions. The wall text tell that it was 'a time when ordinary details take on renewed significance'. There's a black and white image of the artists empty studio. Collected items lie dormant. There's a feeling of life paused.

A small makeshift metal cross is pushed into the earth in a garden.
Nude men embrace in a group.

A colour image of a pregnant woman in a field, nude, head flung back against an open sky.

In the photos figures are 'often alone captured in quiet, unguarded moments'.

'Together, the works form a reflective portrait of life during lockdown, revealing the beauty, humour, and humanity present in the rhythms of everyday existence.'

An alcove cuts into the bottom wall halfway along and entering we are introduced to Kuba's next series of photos.

Good Eggs - (2024 - ongoing)

In the centre of the space there is a TV at floor level that relays a collection of photographs entitled-

Last Days (2016)

This is a slideshow of black and white photos of each artist from a community who shared studio space at Newbridge Studios in Newcastle, before its closure.

On the bottom wall of the alcove there's a huge colour image.

A green ceramic jug filled with bright yellow chrysanthemums stands on a table in front of a window. The outward view is the concrete side of a tall building.

On the right of the picture a heavily pregnant woman stands in front of the table. She wears pants and no bra. The side on shot is filled with the smooth spherical curve of her swollen belly that protrudes towards the yellow flowers in a vase, brushing against them.

On the side walls of the alcove the images record different settings of nude figures.

In the dark of night, yellow flames leap high from a large bonfire and illuminate a group of 6 figures standing on the right. They are young adults, some dressed only in shoes, having fun, posed together in various stages of undress as if modelling outrageous fashion.

One man in cami cargo pants places his chin on his hand his other arm is flung back towards the fire. He leans into a man in a white T-shirt who is posed leaning back provocatively with his hands on his bare thighs. This man stands bare bottom to bottom with a man who leans away forwards. He rests his arms on another man who wears a striking top in contrasting black and white sunburst stripes. He is part of a tangled huddle of bodies with tattooed thighs and laughing faces bookended by a bare-chested individual in gold lame trousers that shine in the light from the fire.

Other nude figures are found posed indoors

Seated figures pose. A man and a woman sit beside each other. A young man leans forward with his hands clasped and looks into the camera. Another grins with cream around his mouth that he is licking off a man's foot.

2 nude females stand talking in the corner of a studio. Two figures stand outside in a grassy field.

Coming out of the alcove on the gallery wall ahead is Tish Murtha's final series. Elswick Revisited – (1987 – 91)

The first paragraph from the notes tells us-

'Elswick Revisited returns to Newcastle's West End at a later moment of transition, offering a view of Elswick as it continues to change in the aftermath of earlier industrial decline. Rather than focusing on moments of crisis or protest, the series turns towards the rhythms of everyday life...'

The group of 17 prints on the gallery wall reflect the changes in the West End of Newcastle. New ethnic groups from India, Pakistan and China, are represented. Local shopkeepers sit proudly in front of shelves of tins and fresh groceries and cigarettes. One shop has a sign that reads **'Sorry no tick, only tick off the clock.'**

A poster at the end of a street declares-
'Children should be seen and not hurt'

A mother embraces her three children as they lean in close to her. Two little girls hold onto the metal spikes of the fence around their front garden.

At the centre of the group of photographs is the image of a young lad who kneels on a flat roof high above the town. Behind are the tops of 4 tall blocks of flats. In the boy's right hand is a pigeon, he lifts it up towards the sky, its wings stretch out as if about to fly.

Moving on to the partition wall, a huge black and white image portrays three young kids. The image is taken from the waist up. The children sit outside

together in a line with the night sky behind them. There are two boys with a little girl in between them. They are wrapped up against the cold; the boys in jumpers and duffle coats the girl in a turtleneck jumper and striped tracksuit top, her hair tied back in bunches.

Their mouths are open in a gasp of delight, wide eyes looking up to the sky. Their faces glow like 3 little cherubs full of wonder.

The little girl's hands are clasped together in front of her as if in prayer and a single blurred light from a streetlamp hovers above her head like a halo.

This picture concludes the exhibition.

The exit is at the top of the gallery back through the entrance doorway.

A member of the Baltic Crew will be in the gallery to assist and to answer any questions you may have.

This is the end of the audio description.