

BALTIC

Media Release

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Joanne Coates: *Middle of Somewhere* **The Vasseur Baltic Artist Award** **11 May – 17 November 2024**

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead is pleased to announce further details on an exhibition by artist Joanne Coates, who is the 2024 recipient of The Vasseur Baltic Artist Award.

Opening 11 May 2024, *Middle of Somewhere* is a multidimensional collaborative exploration of rural places, people, and the challenges they face. This new body of work asks questions around the struggles, stereotypes and future of these communities, particularly young women grappling with uncertain futures.

The exhibition will feature an ensemble of photographs, sound, film, and installation. Coates has worked closely with participants to explore parallels between people and places, the memories they hold and the reality for those who inhabit them. The photographs are an intimate portrayal of rural life in decentralised spaces from the Yorkshire dales, England and Orkney, Scotland.



Joanne Coates, Aisling, Before having to leave home, Hoy, Middle of Somewhere, 2024. © Joanne Coates

Rural places are often perceived as idyllic or remote, to most, a peaceful refuge from the urban day to day life. The *Middle of Somewhere* questions notions of the idyllic as Coates continues to work and collaborate across islands like Hoy, the second largest island in the archipelago, after mainland Orkney. Orkney has historically had one of the highest levels of fuel poverty within the United Kingdom. High energy costs, low incomes, Orkney's weather, and older housing stock, which is often hard to insulate to modern standards are all contributing factors.

Coates refuses to gloss over the traditional and picturesque landscape of Hoy and the Yorkshire Dales, collaborating with young women in the community like Aisling to share their stories, worries, hopes and dreams. As Carbon Development Officer for the Carbon Neutral Islands Project on the island of Hoy, Orkney. Aisling has a personal interest in supporting sustainable low-carbon rural communities as well as rural and island community justice, native nature conservation and sustainable renewable technology.

The work within *Middle of Somewhere* echoes the artist's own experiences as a young woman but reflects on the increasing urgency of these ecologies.

Joanne Coates is a working-class visual artist who lives and works across the North of England. Her work explores rurality, hidden histories and inequalities relating to low income through photography, installations, film, and audio. Coates uses photography to question the concepts of power, identity, wealth, and poverty, by exploring the social histories of land, gender, and class to narrate stories that have long been forgotten – or simply never told.

Participation and working with communities are an important aspect of Coates' work, over the years Coates has worked with various groups and organisations to investigate of class, rurality, and community cohesion. In 2022 she was announced the winner of the Jerwood/Photoworks award. Following this accolade, Coates collaborated with twelve women identifying as working-class to produce the timely exhibition, *The Lie of the Land*. Fusing traditional British documentary photography and intersections of socially engaged practice, Coates produced a series of portraits that represented the individual lived experience of the women, within the rural and agricultural setting.

Middle of Somewhere is supported by The Vasseur Baltic Artist Award, in memory of the late Isabel Vasseur, an admired figure who inspired a generation of curators and artists with her fearless approach to putting art in the public realm. Through the 2024 Award, Baltic Legacy Patron, Vasseur continues to support the growth of contemporary art.

Note to the editors

About Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

Baltic is a major international centre for contemporary art situated on the south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, England and has welcomed over eight million visitors since opening to the public in July 2002. BALTIC presents a distinctive and ambitious programme of exhibitions and events, and is a world leader in the presentation and commissioning of contemporary visual art.

Housed in a landmark ex-industrial building, BALTIC consists of 2,600 square metres of art space, making it the UK's largest dedicated contemporary art institution. BALTIC has gained an international reputation for its commissioning of cutting-edge temporary exhibitions. It has presented the work of over 460 artists of 60 nationalities in 220 exhibitions to date.

Baltic is supported by Arts Council England, Gateshead Council and Northumbria University.

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