

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

**BALTIC**

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**Press Preview:** Friday 3 July 2026



*Youth Unemployment*, Tish Murtha © Ella Murtha, all rights reserved

Opening on 5 July 2026 at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, *Close to Home* is a landmark exhibition curated by Baltic that brings together four major series by celebrated documentary photographer Tish Murtha, alongside a newly commissioned body of work by Newcastle-based artist Kuba Ryniewicz.

Born in South Shields in 1956, Murtha returned to Newcastle after university to document life in her community of Elswick. Her photographs capture the social impact of industrial decline with honesty, empathy and urgency, offering a powerful account of working-class life in the North East during the late twentieth century. Developed in close collaboration with Murtha's daughter, Ella Murtha, the exhibition honours Tish's vision and the ongoing stewardship of her archive. Her work remains a vital record of lived experience and a compelling reminder of the inequalities that continue to shape communities today.

For the first time, Baltic presents works from four key series: *Elswick Kids* (1978), *Elswick Revisited* (1987–91), *Save Scotswood Works* (1979) and *Youth Unemployment* (1981). *Elswick Kids* captures the everyday lives of children growing up in Newcastle's West End, revealing moments of freedom, friendship and play against a backdrop

of economic hardship. A decade later, *Elswick Revisted* documents changes within the community, including increasing cultural diversity. *Save Scotswood Works* records the struggle of workers resisting the closure of a major industrial employer, while *Youth Unemployment* remains one of the most powerful portraits of young people growing up amid economic decline and political neglect.

Working closely with Modern Films, the exhibition will also feature the acclaimed documentary *Tish*, directed by Paul Sng and produced by Jen Corcoran. Narrated by Maxine Peake, the film offers an intimate portrait of Tish Murtha, celebrating her unyielding spirit, enduring legacy and belief in the transformative power of art. The documentary reflects the continued relevance of Murtha's work and its powerful resonance today.

Ella Murtha said: "*Working with Baltic on this exhibition feels very special. It's a privilege to be able to keep me mam's story alive, to share the love she had for the people and places she belonged to and celebrate that work here, in the place she called home.*"

Responding to Murtha's legacy, Kuba Ryniewicz presents a newly commissioned body of work created for the exhibition, shown alongside selections from his earlier photographic archive and building on his ongoing exploration of portraiture and community. Distinctive for his lightness of touch, Ryniewicz blends elements of fashion photography, regional histories and personal stories, foregrounded by intimacy and vivid characterisation. Working with local communities, the photographs explore joy, resilience and everyday life in the North East today, offering a contemporary perspective that sits in dialogue with Murtha's documentary vision.

Created during the COVID-19 lockdowns, *Daily Weeding* (2020–2021) reflects life confined to home, gardens, and solitary walks. Small details—pigeons overhead, a dandelion pulled from soil—become vivid markers of daily life. Figures are often photographed alone, from someone among drying sheets to another crowned in gorse, capturing quiet moments of everyday existence.

The work also builds on Ryniewicz's ongoing series *Cornered Study* (2022–ongoing) and *Good Eggs* (2024–ongoing). *Cornered Study* alternates between formal portraits and spontaneous moments, revealing tattoos, jewellery, and folds of skin, drawing on a queer lineage of portraiture established by Peter Hujar, Catherine Opie, Collier Schorr, and Paul Mpagi Sepuya. *Good Eggs* captures intimate domestic scenes—friends eating, laughing, and inhabiting everyday interiors—exploring care, connection, and chosen communities, while also reflecting how Ryniewicz brings together the visual language of his editorial work for fashion magazines with the sensibility of his personal photographic projects.

Kuba Ryniewicz commented: "*I am very excited and honoured to share my work, especially photographs of my community alongside such a legend, like Tish. Both voices give a different perspective on what it is to be living in Newcastle/Gateshead and showing the special people of the North.*"



Presented alongside Tish Murtha's work, Ryniewicz's photographs extend the exhibition's exploration of everyday life, community and place in the North East. While Murtha documents working-class life in Newcastle during the late twentieth century, Ryniewicz offers a contemporary perspective shaped by lockdown and ongoing dynamics of friendship, intimacy and creative community. Together, the works reveal how ordinary moments—friendship, play, resilience and creativity—continue to shape the social fabric of the places we call home.

Bringing together two powerful photographic voices, *Close to Home* celebrates the enduring impact of Tish Murtha's work while presenting Ryniewicz's dynamic new response in the city and the region that shaped them both.

**- ENDS -**

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

**Tish Murtha** was a British documentary photographer best known for her powerful documentation of marginalised communities and her exploration of social realism and working-class life in the North East of England. Born in South Shields in 1956, she later moved to Elswick in the West End of Newcastle upon Tyne. The third of ten children, Murtha grew up in a household where life was often difficult—yet what the family lacked in material possessions they made up for with creativity, talent and spirit. She left school at 16 and worked a variety of jobs, from selling hot dogs to working in a petrol station.

After finding an old camera in an abandoned house and receiving encouragement from friends, Murtha enrolled on a photography course at Bath Lane College in Newcastle. Her lecturer encouraged her to apply for the Documentary Photography course in Newport — newly established at the time and the only programme of its kind in the UK — and helped her secure an education grant that made it possible for her to attend.

At Newport, Murtha studied under David Hurn of Magnum Photos. She absorbed his teaching and approach to documentary practice, graduating in 1978 before returning to Newcastle. There she began documenting the lives of her friends, family and neighbours, investing time in building relationships of trust with those she photographed. Murtha was deeply committed to representing the lives of marginalised communities from the inside, producing work that combined empathy, political awareness and lived experience.

Murtha's work is held in numerous public collections including the Arts Council Collection, British Council, National Portrait Gallery, Tate Britain and the Museum of London. Her photographs have been exhibited widely both nationally and internationally.

Murtha died on 13 March 2013, the day before what would have been her 57th birthday. As an organ donor, she went on to save the lives of four women and restore the eyesight of four men.

The Tish Murtha Archive is managed by her daughter, Ella Murtha. Baltic is privileged to be working closely with Ella Murtha to conceive the presentation of the work in this exhibition. Ella has posthumously published several books of her mother's photography, including *Youth Unemployment*, *Elswick Kids* and *Juvenile Jazz Bands*. These titles are now out of print, and a new publication titled *Vandalism on a Grand Scale* will be released with pre-orders opening on 14 March 2026—the date that would have been Tish Murtha's 70th birthday.

Ella Murtha was also closely involved in the making of the documentary film *Tish*, directed by Paul Sng and produced by Jen Corcoran. More recently, musician Sam Fender licensed several of Murtha's photographs for the artwork of his album *People Watching*.

**Kuba Ryniewicz** was born in Poznań and now lives in the North East of England. He studied philosophy in Poland before moving to Newcastle upon Tyne in 2004 to study photography. After graduating with a degree in Contemporary Photographic Practice from Northumbria University, he established himself working across fashion and editorial photography as well as participatory art projects, often collaborating with passers-by or with young people in schools.

Ryniewicz challenges traditional portraiture and travel narratives, using the languages of landscape, history, fashion and culture to reveal overlooked and unheard stories. His work explores identity, migration and place, reflecting his experience of living between cultures.

His photography has appeared in publications including the Financial Times, Creative Review, Butt Magazine, Dazed, Luncheon and Fantastic Man, and has been exhibited at venues including Somerset House (2027), Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art (2019), Newcastle Contemporary Art (2022) and Workplace Foundation (2023). He has also produced content for some of the biggest fashion hosues gloabably, including Burberry, Balenciaga, Loewe and Gucci.

### **About Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art**

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art is a major international centre for art situated on the south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, England. It has welcomed over 10 million visitors since opening in July 2002. Baltic presents a distinctive and ambitious programme of temporary 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 houses 2,600 square metres of art space, making it one of Europe's largest dedicated contemporary art institutions. Baltic has presented the work of over 877 artists of 78 nationalities in 266 exhibitions to date including Joy Labinjo, Hew Locke, Heather Phillipson, Antony Gormley, Cornelia Parker, Daniel Buren, Lubaina Himid, Steve McQueen, Jenny Holzer, Judy Chicago, Lorna Simpson, Imran Perretta, Huma Bhabha and John Akomfrah.

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