

Call for proposals***What is it like to hear voices?* artist commission****Submission deadline:** Friday 11 March**Available fee:** £6,000**Background**

Voice-hearing, or hearing a voice in the absence of any speaker, is one of the most unusual, complex and mysterious aspects of human experience. Although typically viewed as a symptom of severe mental disorders such as schizophrenia, voice-hearing is now being recognised as an important aspect of many ordinary people's lives and one that has had profound individual and social significance across cultures and historical periods.

As part of the ongoing, Wellcome Trust funded, *Hearing the Voice* interdisciplinary research project, Durham University is staging an exhibition at Palace Green Library from 5 November 2016 to 26 February 2017. The exhibition, together with its supporting programme of events and activities, will be one of the key means by which the project seeks to improve public understanding of voice-hearing, reduce stigma and discrimination and challenge some of the myths and misconceptions that surround this experience.

The exhibition aims to explore the cultural, clinical, scientific and spiritual contexts of voice-hearing from the medieval to the present and to demonstrate how this phenomenon illuminates fascinating questions about many vital aspects of human experience. The displays will incorporate material from the University's own collections as well as those of other institutions both local and national, including links with Wellcome Collection's *This is a Voice* exhibition. As part of the introductory sections, the exhibition will also contain an artist-created installation exploring what it is like to hear voices; it is that commission to which this brief pertains.

Brief

This commission invites an individual artist or group of artists to create an installation that explores the experience of voice-hearing. One of the most crucial, but most elusive, aspects of developing a better understanding of voice-hearing is having empathy with what it is like actually to experience it. The aim of this commission is to create a space in and means by which this empathy can be facilitated. It should be informed by research and reference material on hearing voices, a package of which will be provided, as well as direct experience of and communication with voice-hearers, which will be brokered by the project team and take the form of a short series of workshops. It should also go some way towards simulating experiences of voice-hearing and give visitors a better sense and more personal understanding of what these experiences can be like.

The installation should:

- aim to simulate experiences of hearing voices for visitors and to help visitors in developing a more personal and empathetic understanding of this phenomenon
- draw on your experience of and communication with voice-hearers as facilitated by the project as part of the installation's development process
- be informed by the research and reference material provided by the project
- include a space in and means by which visitors can respond to the installation, preferably in a shared and evolving way that grows throughout the life of the exhibition. This should allow visitors to respond not only to the installation but also to each other and should be in a format through which all responses can be captured after the end of the exhibition
- respond to and make effective and appropriate use of the gallery space in which it will be shown
- be accessible to all, including those with limited mobility or other access issues

The exhibition team includes individuals from the *Hearing the Voice* project, as well as a curatorial lead and a graphic designer. This team will be curating the rest of the exhibition, including co-curating a section about the Hearing Voices Movement with members of that community, and will work alongside the artist(s) appointed to ensure that appropriate information and material is available to inform the development of the work and for inclusion therein, and that the work contributes sufficiently to achieving the stated aims of the exhibition. Further to this, the successful artist(s) will be expected to undertake Hearing Voices training (run by the Hearing Voices Network and organised by the team) so that they can get a better understanding of voice-hearing and are well equipped to work with people who have these experiences. The exhibition has an underpinning ethics statement, to which the artist(s) will be expected to subscribe and adhere, and a Steering Group, members of which will be invited to give feedback on plans for the installation part-way through the development process.

As part of the exhibition's accompanying engagement programme, the artist(s) will also be expected to deliver a public talk about the development of the work and the final installation.

Please note that the artist will be required to provide, or be prepared to undertake, DBS checks required for individuals working with vulnerable adults.

Allocated gallery space and specifications

This installation will be located in Palace Green Library's Durham University Gallery. It is intended to form part of the introductory section of the exhibition and so will be the starting point for a visit. The space is equipped with two ceiling-mounted digital projectors, trained at existing wall-mounted screens and with audio capability, lighting track and uni-strut system for hanging from the ceiling, a number of power and data points in the walls, and an unframed, upright display case 900 W x 900 D x 2100 H which can take 2-3 shelves of 760 W x 700 D. The gallery is also a route through the building, giving access to the Library's reading room; this should be taken into account in the planning and delivery of the installation.

Exhibition key messages

Through the written interpretation, objects and artworks on display, and interactive opportunities that will form the exhibition, the principal aim is to actively engage many and various audiences in a better understanding of the experience of voice-hearing in its many different forms. Underpinning this aim is a number of key messages. These are:

- Hearing voices can sometimes be an intensely distressing experience, but people find many different ways to cope with this.
- The voices people hear are not always commanding and dangerous or best understood as a symptom of mental illness. There are many different kinds of voice-hearing experiences and they can be part of everyday life for a wide variety of people (and for people at different points in their lives).
- Voice-hearing can be an important source of inspiration (for example, in artistic, literary, spiritual and everyday contexts).
- Hearing voices need not be an isolating experience, but can form the basis of a community.

Timescales

- Briefings – Monday 29 February
 - Guided tour of the exhibition galleries at Palace Green Library, including an opportunity to see the space in which the *Hearing the Voice* exhibition will be held and the installation will sit
 - Briefing on the exhibition as a whole and the role within it of this commissioned section
 - Opportunity to meet and discuss the commission with members of the exhibition team

Commission brief – What is it like to hear voices?

- Submission of proposals – Friday 11 March
- Award of commission – by Friday 18 March
- Research and development, including Hearing Voices training, consultation and workshop sessions (anticipated to be three in number) with voice-hearers – late April/early May
- Delivery of development work, including electronic/virtual presentation to Steering Group – August
- Installation – Monday 24 October – Wednesday 2 November
- Public talk about the development of the work and the final installation – between November 2016 and February 2017

How to apply

Proposal submissions should be sent to Emma Hamlett, Curator (Exhibitions) at Palace Green Library, Palace Green, Durham, DH1 3RN or at emma.hamlett@durham.ac.uk by 12noon on Friday 11 March.

Proposals should comprise:

- A CV or similar for the group or individual applying to carry out the commission, including information on their suitability to undertake the commission and any relevant experience or past projects, particularly evidencing work that engages with sensitive and potentially problematic subject matter and that which sits within a wider exhibition context. This should include confirmation of a current DBS check or willingness to undertake the same
- A small portfolio of images of previous work – maximum of 6 images, no more than 1MB each
- A statement giving an initial response to the brief, detailing your approach to this project, explaining how your work is an effective and appropriate fit, and how your experience equips you to undertake the commission
- An estimated breakdown of costs. Please note: the available fee must cover all time and materials for the commission, including those relating to the workshop sessions with voice-hearers as well as to the installation itself

Informal enquiries ahead of submission

For any enquiries ahead of submission please contact Emma Hamlett, at emma.hamlett@durham.ac.uk or on 0191 334 1214, who will either answer your query or pass it onto someone within the team who can.