

# THE EAST LEEDS OBSERVATORY ARTIST BRIEF

## Introduction to LEEDS 2023

LEEDS 2023 will be a landmark year of culture for the city and region. Our ambitious and ground-breaking programme will transform people's perceptions of Leeds, confirming it as an international centre of cultural activity and cementing its reputation as a cultural giant in the world.

Showcasing creativity across all forms of culture, we will partner with local, national and international artists, creatives and storytellers to deliver a series of world-class signature events across the year. From dance to design, art to architecture, poetry to pop, sculpture to sport, there will be something for everyone.

### 1. The East Leeds Observatory – Introduction

The East Leeds Project, in partnership with LEEDS 2023, is seeking expressions of interest from artists and/or creative teams to help us imagine and realise a mobile observatory to tour East Leeds and beyond in 2023.

The project has been inspired by the upcoming 300<sup>th</sup> birthday of John Smeaton in 2023-24. Smeaton was a self-taught engineer, inventor and collaborator. He is recognised as the father of civil engineering in the UK but his legacy is global and has enduring relevance. He built his own observatory at Austhorpe in East Leeds, where he was born in 1724 and died in 1792.

The East Leeds Observatory takes Smeaton's incredible legacy as a point of departure for seeking intersections between his twin passions of astronomy and engineering, and visual culture. We want to explore the possibilities for a mobile structure which can operate simultaneously as a functional observatory, a creative lab for art and science, and a visually dynamic work of kinetic/sculptural design. Our ambition is that the Observatory will be at once a work of public art, mobile architecture and a place to come together: a space for collective conversations, observations and imaginings about everything under the sun, moon and stars as seen from East Leeds.

Following the Observatory's initial tour in 2023, we hope that the project will continue to inspire and engage new audiences with Smeaton's legacy into the future.

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### 2. Design Brief

We are inviting ambitious proposals for this unique project and urge you to dream big! We realise that applicants are unlikely to have expertise in astronomy and the technicalities of creating a functioning observatory. That's OK - we will bring any external expertise required into the project at the next stage.

What we would like you to think about now is how you would propose to create a mobile structure that could potentially operate in this way. For example, on a basic level the East Leeds Observatory could be a shipping container on the back of a flat-bed truck with an aperture in its roof to enable us to look at the night sky. But we envisage something rather more dynamic and beautiful.

We want to commission a bespoke structure that is magical, has the wow factor and stimulates curiosity wherever it goes, with kinetic / moveable elements to enable it to open and close: elements that will genuinely situate the project at the intersection of art, science and engineering. We'd like to see innovative use of materials to create something magnetic and compelling with tactile, intriguing surfaces – this is one sculpture you may definitely touch! The structure may also directly reference Smeaton's work in some way. It will also need to function as a platform and starting point for a public events programme that will animate the Observatory's tour, co-produced with local people and organisations.

At this stage, we are seeking light-touch expressions of interest from artists and/or collectives and creative teams who are interested in working with us on this ambitious and extraordinary project. We want to hear from creative people with the vision, skills and experience to help us reach for the stars and create something unique and memorable for the people of East Leeds and beyond to experience and enjoy.

From the expressions of interest we will shortlist up to three artists or teams who will each receive a fee of £600 to spend up to **two** days working up their initial ideas to pitch level\*.

\*Based on Artist's Union England recommended rates of pay 2021. Available at <https://www.artistsunionengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/AUE-RATES-OF-PAY-GUIDELINES-2021.pdf>

The East Leeds Observatory project, and the scale of its budget, is funding dependent. From the three shortlisted proposals, one design will be put forward for greenlighting by LEEDS 2023. We will know if the project has been successful and its confirmed budget in July 2022. As an indication of the level of its ambition, the scale of the budget for the Observatory structure (fabrication and materials) is £40,000 - £70,000, with an artist fee of £10,000- £13,000.

Although we are not asking you to supply any design ideas at this stage, it is useful to set out what shortlisted applicants will be asked to consider at the next stage:

- The Observatory must be mobile and easy to move and to set up, either as an adaptation of an existing vehicle or a structure that can be towed on a trailer
- It must be wind and watertight and durable enough to be on tour in outdoor locations for a period of at least 7 months
- Security and maintenance requirements
- The structure must have public access
- It must be able to accommodate groups of people and have spaces to host activities (e.g. film screening, exhibition or live streamed event) inside and/or on and outside the structure
- Health and safety considerations associated with public access
- The Observatory must have intergenerational appeal and take into account the widest possible range of additional access requirements
- The design must centre environmental sustainability - we are interested in proposals that make use of recycling and reuse, and sustainable forms of energy
- Proposals will need to consider the future decommissioning of the structure and this must be reflected in the choice of materials and construction method

- A series of micro-commissions may be offered at a later stage for artists and designers to create additional elements for the Observatory, e.g. signage, lighting, furniture. Applicants may choose to indicate where their proposal creates opportunities for these additional commissions

### Key dates

Monday 9 May	Artist's brief goes live through an open call
Friday 27 May, 5pm	Deadline for expressions of interest (three weeks)
Friday 3 June	Offers made to shortlisted artists
From Monday 6 June	Briefing meetings with shortlisted artists
6 - 24 June	Artists/teams develop proposals, including visuals (three weeks)
Friday 30 June	Preferred artist/team notified
Thursday 7 July	Preferred proposal put forward for greenlighting

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## 3. Application and selection process

### How to apply

Although this commission is open to all, we recommend that the **lead applicant** has at least five years' professional experience of working on relevant projects in the public realm or with public access. Applicants must be able to either demonstrate the technical and fabrication skills required to undertake the project or indicate that this is a specialism you would need to bring into the conversation or partner with.

Please supply the following by the deadline of **5pm on Friday 27 May**:

- Name and contact details for the lead applicant - someone we can get in touch with about your proposal
- Details of your team (if applying with others) and/or anyone you would collaborate with or reach out to – **including fabricators if necessary** and not already part of your team
- A statement outlining your interest in this commission, what you can bring to it and any initial ideas about your approach
- Information detailing relevant previous experience and projects, including links to online content

Applications should be made online via CuratorSpace at [www.curatorspace.com](http://www.curatorspace.com) (search 'East Leeds Observatory')

### Access

We are committed to making this process as accessible as possible for applicants with additional access requirements. We recognise that the timescales are tight and will create a barrier for some applicants, which is why we are keeping the expression of interest stage as light touch as possible.

If you would like to supply your application in an alternative format, please get in touch and we will do our best to help.

## **Selection**

Expressions of interest will be assessed by Kerry Harker and Claire Irving (Artistic Director and Communities Director, East Leeds Project), Jane Earnshaw and Abby Dix-Mason (Leeds City Council/Smeaton300) and Kat Boon (Producer, LEEDS 2023).

## **Assessment Criteria**

The panel will consider the following criteria when assessing Expressions of Interest:

- The artist/team demonstrates the relevant professional experience needed to fulfil the ambitions of this project
- The artist/team shows a clear understanding of the Observatory's aims and requirements and provides an initial indication of how it will meet them
- The artist/team demonstrates an understanding of the technical skills required to deliver the Observatory including whether these skills are already within the team or to be brought on through partnership

Feedback will be offered on all applications, if requested – please let us know in your application.

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## **4. FAQs**

### **Do I need a formal qualification to apply?**

No. We are not asking for a CV because we want you to tell us, in your own words, what experience/s you have that make you best placed to take on this commission. We value real world experience as much as formal education qualifications.

### **Do I need to be based in Leeds to apply?**

No – this commission is open to everyone and there are no restrictions on age or geographical location.

### **Do I need to supply a detailed budget at this stage?**

No – please only supply the information requested at this stage. Three shortlisted artists/teams will be asked to supply more detailed information, including an outline budget, at the next stage.

### **When is the deadline?**

Please send us your expression of interest by 5pm on Friday 27 May.

### **Who can I discuss my application or ideas with?**

Please contact the East Leeds Project on [info@eastleedsproject.org](mailto:info@eastleedsproject.org) with any queries and we can arrange a time for a conversation.

### **Will I get paid for my ideas?**

There are no fees for supplying an expression of interest. Three shortlisted applicants will be paid £600 each to develop their ideas in the next stage of the process.

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## **5. Further Information and Resources**

## About

### East Leeds Project

We are a practitioner-led visual arts organisation based in Gipton. We work with art as a social action and aim to bring about positive change in our community through sustainable, equitable and accessible approaches to contemporary practice, working with artists, local people and other partners. We facilitate the emergence of spaces in which dialogue and practice can take place, centring the role of artists and inviting in other voices to challenge, celebrate and help us build together an authentic and mutual supportive community of practice at the local level.

[www.eastleedsproject.org](http://www.eastleedsproject.org)

### LEEDS 2023

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<https://leeds2023.co.uk>

### John Smeaton – Useful Links

[Engineering Timelines - John Smeaton \(engineering-timelines.com\)](http://engineering-timelines.com)

[John Smeaton - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Smeaton)

