

Digital Democracies News Announcement

For immediate release



LEADING UK ART FESTIVALS CONNECT TO CREATE INNOVATIVE DIGITAL WORK FOR PUBLIC SPACES ACROSS THE UK

In a time of unprecedented reliance on digital technology to connect people, a pioneering two-year national public art project *Digital Democracies* is being launched.

Northampton-based Threshold Studios has been awarded £195,000 to lead *Digital Democracies*, the first commissioning consortium of its kind in the UK. Supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

Connecting three of the UK's leading art and digital culture commissioning festivals, Frequency Festival in Lincoln (Produced by Threshold Studios), Hull's award-winning Freedom Festival (Produced by Freedom Festival Arts Trust) and Brighton Digital Festival (Produced by Lighthouse and Brandwatch), *Digital Democracies* will pioneer the development of democratic and innovative digital work online and in public outdoor spaces, helping to welcome audiences back to our shared civic spaces following the coronavirus pandemic.

The two-year development programme will create opportunities for art and technology to intersect in a reinvention of the civic and social role of public space. Facilitating and establishing partnerships for the testing of new ideas and work, the project will include community workshops, technology masterclasses and tools to inspire new approaches to making art. New commissions will then be showcased to audiences in the public realm, both online and offline, through an extended network of partners and collaborators across the UK.

The first in a series of co-commissioned works, "A Portrait Without Borders" - presented by Kaleider - will be showing at Freedom Festival, 4-6 September 2020. Brighton-based Lighthouse, will also be commissioning an artist to create a new work for *Digital Democracies* as part of Re-Imagine Europe programme in Autumn 2020. More information about the open call for proposals will be announced soon.

Donna Close, Associate Director of Threshold Studios, explained: "Bringing together expertise in outdoor art, digital innovation, social impact and place-based partnerships, we're really excited about this project.

Digital Democracies will ensure that audiences across the UK can benefit from innovative digital art in the public realm - working with artists to explore and share their own sense of place, identity and society.

“Festivals are incredibly well placed to lead the development of this exciting area of work. The experience of outdoor democratic spaces, audience diversity, place-based partnerships, and collaborative working are part of their DNA.”

Digital Democracies responds to the opportunity of collaboration for cultural transformation, as set out in the Culture is Digital report and Arts Council England ten-year strategy. Providing research and development opportunities as well as radically inclusive public cultural experiences to create and test new commissions with public audiences.

Mikey Martins, Artistic Director and Joint CEO at Freedom Festival Arts Trust said: “Although we find ourselves navigating uncertain and challenging times, we’re excited to be involved in this project, working alongside our friends at Threshold and Brighton Digital Festival. At a time when interest in digital work has never been greater, we’re keen to share our experience as a leader in outdoor art to create exciting new democratic digital work as we connect artists, technologists and audiences to high quality digital pieces which will transform public places and spaces.

“People are becoming more aware of the impact that festivals and culture can bring to public spaces and to the audiences that encounter them. Culture and the experiences it offers can have a deep and lasting effect on places and the people who live in them, as well as attract tourists to a place and strengthen the local economy. We’ve certainly seen this first-hand in Hull.”

Our public spaces and the people that animate them are the engines for both place-making and community development, and the crucible where our individual and collective identities are forged. Through diverse multi agency partnerships *Digital Democracies* explores the possibilities of the place-making agenda to increase positive social impact and innovation.

The project is supported by Place Partners: *University of Lincoln, University of Brighton, Hull Libraries, Centre for Culture and Creativity, City of Lincoln Council, Lincoln BIG and NN Contemporary Art Northampton*; as well as esteemed Tech Partners: the digital consumer intelligence company *Brandwatch*, along with hubs for digital innovation *Lincoln Science and Innovation Park, C4Di Hull and Wired Sussex*.

Samantha Lindley, Director of Programmes, Threshold Studios and Co-Director, Frequency Festival continued: “Working with a diverse set of producers and artists *Digital Democracies* aims to understand the challenges within the landscape helping shape commissions and opportunities to build a sustainable and inclusive UK-wide community-of-practice in digital and combined arts.

“Support for the creative industries to build on the UK’s international reputation for creativity is increasingly important. Our national cultural ecology must in turn be strengthened by talented artists from all communities, who have been given equal opportunities to develop their individual creative potential.

“By connecting partners from across the technology sector, universities, local authorities and artists, *Digital Democracies* aims to support, strengthen and invigorate digital innovation in the cultural sector. It will improve and diversify the opportunities afforded by technology through democratising access to networks, expertise and opportunities for artists, producers and audiences.”

For more information about the project, commissions and opportunities visit:

www.thresholdstudios.tv/digital-democracies

Follow **#DigitalDemocracies** on social media for announcements.

Digital Democracies is supported using public funding by Arts Council England and by Threshold Studios, Freedom Festival Arts Trust and Lighthouse through their partners and funders.

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Project website

www.thresholdstudios.tv/digital-democracies
@TS_Studios #DigitalDemocracies

Image: Small Global, D-Fuse at Frequency Festival 2019. Photo credit Electric Egg.

About Threshold Studios

Threshold Studios Ltd is a creative and cultural organisation based in the Midlands. Throughout our 23-year history, cultural equality has been a key driver of Threshold's mission and activity.

As a social enterprise and an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation, we play a strategic role in the development of the creative digital sector, enabling partnerships across the arts, digital and creative media industries, the public sector, grassroots communities and higher education.

We build innovative programmes and opportunities for audiences within the places where the public have ownership and agency, with a particular focus on those from diverse backgrounds and those who are currently under-represented in the arts and media industries.

Key projects include; **Digital Democracies**, leading a national project exploring the intersection of technology and public space; **Frequency Festival**, a biennial international digital culture festival in Lincoln, UK. Since 2011, Frequency has been a city-wide, no barriers festival with a commitment to democratising arts engagement, showcasing digital creativity and providing energetic debate on digital culture; **RADAR**, a creative graduate internship scheme to nurture creative and emerging talent and open access to industry; **Camara Chica**, in partnership with British Council, Threshold established community-based media production hubs within communities in Cuba and Venezuela.
thresholdstudios.tv

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. It supports a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, Arts Council England will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.
artscouncil.org.uk

Frequency Festival

Frequency Festival is a biennial international digital culture festival in Lincoln, UK. Produced by Threshold Studios, in partnership with the University of Lincoln and supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. The event is driven by a dynamic city-wide collaboration of public sector organisations along with support from the business community. The festival embodies the pioneering spirit of digital innovation; sparking debates on digital culture, nurturing talent within the creative industries, and inspiring the digital creative in us all.

Since launching in 2011 Frequency has hosted over 500 local, national and international artists, exhibiting their work to over 75,000 visitors.

Next festival edition is coming up in October 2021.
frequency.org.uk

About Freedom Festival

Freedom Festival Arts Trust is a not-for-profit organisation established in 2013 to deliver Hull's annual Freedom Festival and an in-year programme of work.

Governed by a Board of Trustees and run by a local executive and staff team, Freedom Festival Arts Trust is proud to be responsible for Hull's largest multi-faceted arts festival, committed to contributing towards the social, cultural and economic regeneration of Hull and the surrounding regions.

Freedom Festival celebrates, through artistic and cultural expression, Hull's independent spirit and historic contribution to the cause of freedom. The festival, together with its related year-round programme, is Hull's premier festival event, growing out of the 2007 William Wilberforce commemorations to become the highlight of the city's artistic and cultural programme.

The programme – featuring street theatre, visual arts, theatre, circus, talks and debates, music, spoken word, dance and more – in which the concept of 'freedom' is consistently articulated, is aimed at a wide audience, bringing renowned national and international artists to Hull while providing significant opportunities for local and regional artists.

For 2020, in response to the current climate, the Festival is presenting an online programme that can be enjoyed from Home, and broadcast via the BBC, over what would have been the festival weekend (4-6 September). Featuring international talent alongside local acts, expect robot selfies, timely debates which tackle issues of our time and bedtime stories the kids will remember for years.

To view the full programme, download the app from the App store or visit www.freedomfestival.co.uk.

Freedom Festival is continuing to plan and develop other projects for public space ready for when the conditions are right for audiences to gather together. It hopes to be able to present outdoor work in early 2021 - public health conditions permitting - and a full festival in early September 2021.

About Brighton Digital Festival

Since 2011 Brighton Digital Festival has produced an annual programme of events, taking place over four weeks across the city. The festival celebrates the richness of the creative and cultural industries in our city and explores the ways in which digital technology continues to shape our lives and our thinking. It supports the community to produce an open programme of independent events augmented by high-quality commissioned arts and education programming.

In 2015 Brighton Digital Festival incorporated as an independent Community Interest Company run by the community for the community. Funding from Arts Council England and sponsorship from local companies and institutions ensures the festival remains free for grassroots organisers to deliver great events.

brightondigitalfestival.co.uk

About Lighthouse

Lighthouse is a Brighton-based arts charity specialising in connecting new developments in art, technology, science and society.

For over 30 years, our programme has revealed new ways of presenting artists and the creative industries, how artistic work and practice can cross boundaries and disciplines, and be used as a way of

enhancing digital technology and its place within society.

Key projects include Guiding Lights, the UK's leading mentoring scheme for filmmakers, regular residencies, to provide creative and professional development for a wide range of artists and creative practitioners, Last Dance, a series of events, podcasts, films and blogs investigating the rapid changes affecting UK music and youth culture and Lighthouse Young Creatives a project for 16-25 year olds who want to work in the creative and digital industries, but who don't have the opportunities, facilities and connections they need. The project is for young people from diverse backgrounds, including those not in work or training.

lighthouse.org.uk

About Brandwatch

Brandwatch is the world's pioneering digital consumer intelligence suite, helping over 2,000 of the world's most admired brands and agencies including Unilever, Walmart and Dell to make insightful, data-driven business decisions.

brandwatch.com