

Press release

Earthly Paradise: Radical Living in the UK

William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow

3 October 2026 – 28 March 2027



From left – right: Photograph of Edward Carpenter and his partner George Merrill, c.1900 (1). Digital image provided by The John Rylands Research Institute and Library, The University of Manchester'; *The Ghetto, 43 Kitchen*, 1993, Tom Hunter.

This autumn, William Morris Gallery presents *Earthly Paradise: Radical Living in the UK*, a major touring exhibition that explores the people and places that have helped shape art and activism across Britain over the last 200 years. Through objects, painting, drawing, photography, sound and archival material, *Earthly Paradise* highlights individuals and communities that defied contemporary conventions and the homes they created to explore their new visions of society. The exhibition considers the role that money and class have played in providing access to these spaces and the freedom to challenge social norms. It traces the roles activist groups and those excluded from and overlooked by mainstream society have played in imagining new ways of living and seeing the world.

Earthly Paradise is part of Art Fund's £5.36 million Going Places programme, a series of exhibitions touring the UK, created by museums working together to share their collections. Made possible with major support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and The Julia Rausing Trust, the exhibition has been developed in partnership with Tŷ Pawb in Wrexham, Blackwell – The Arts & Crafts house in Bowness-on-Windermere and Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh, who are working together under the name Four Lanterns.

Spanning two centuries, the exhibition spotlights the homes of many important British artists and thinkers, including William Morris's Red House; Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant's modernist home, Charleston; Cedric Morris's Benton End; Derek Jarman's Prospect Cottage; and Dial House, the self-sustaining anarcho-pacifist open house founded in 1967 by Penny Rimbaud and Gee Vaucher, members of the influential anarchist punk band Crass.

The urge to live differently is central to the lives and practices of many artists, writers and thinkers. Challenging the rules and restrictions of mainstream society often begins at home. *Earthly Paradise* recognises that utopian visions and burgeoning ideologies found in venerated works of art and literature can also be found in the domestic and the everyday.

The first section of the exhibition begins in the late 1700s and ends in the middle of the twentieth century. It is inspired by the passionate beliefs of William Morris about the importance of the home and includes artwork and domestic objects from figures including the Ladies of Llangollen, C R Ashbee, Oscar Wilde, Ethel Mairet and Lee Miller. Artworks, archive photography and household items will highlight the stories of individuals and communities searching for new ways to live, questioning ideas of marriage, class and gender, as well as our relationship to nature. Communal living, the fight for the acceptance of same-sex relationships and alternative politics, spiritual and religious practices will also be explored. In their search for some kind of utopia, we follow individuals and communities to post-industrial spaces, countryside communes and solitary environments dedicated to contemplation and self-expression.

Documentation relating to William Morris's engagement with housing activists during rent strikes at the Old Nichol slums in East London in 1885 acts as a bridging point to the second half of the exhibition, which takes us from the end of the Second World War to the present day. Working against a backdrop of tumultuous social, political and economic change, these artists and collectives focused on the importance of home and community in creating an equitable society. Works by Matrix, Craigmillar Festival Project, Leeds Animation Workshop and Castlemilk Womanhouse demonstrate the relationship between feminist activism and the lived environment. Anti-racist housing movements are explored through the work of Nubia Way, the paintings of Raksha Patel and GLC Race & Housing Action Team member Danièle Lamarche's

photographic documentation of Bangladeshi families squatting and seeking safety from racial harassment in 1980s East London.

Photography from the 1990s by Martin Parr, Sunil Gupta and Smiler express our changing relationship to the home in the wake of the 1980 Right to Buy scheme, introduced by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. The closing section of the exhibition will consider the increasing impossibility of domestic security through a new commission by Abel Holsborough and works by David Spero. If homes are vital spaces for self-expression and personal freedom, what does this mean for those without a secure, safe and affordable home of their own?

Earthly Paradise: Radical Living in the UK is curated by Hadrian Garrard, Director of William Morris Gallery; Linsey Young, independent curator; and Tayyabah Tahir, Assistant Curator at William Morris Gallery. The exhibition has been developed with the Four Lanterns network and brings together works from the collections of the William Morris Gallery and Blackwell – The Arts & Crafts house, alongside works from collections across the UK including Tate, National Trust, National Portrait Gallery and the Lee Miller Archive. It will be accompanied by ten newly commissioned and freely available texts that draw out some of the many perspectives explored in the exhibition by writers including Charlie Porter, Sheena Patel, Dr Lucy Brownson, Natalie Olah and Adam Sutherland.

Following its presentation at William Morris Gallery (3 October 2026 to 28 March 2027), *Earthly Paradise: Radical Living in the UK* will tour to Tŷ Pawb, Wrexham (April – September 2027), Blackwell – The Arts & Crafts house, Bowness-on-Windermere (October 2027 – February 2028) and Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh (March – September 2028).

Hadrian Garrard, Director, William Morris Gallery, said, "William Morris was in an open marriage and wanted to completely blur the lines between domestic life and making and experiencing art. He was friends with gay men and women, anarchists and revolutionaries - and he lived radically in the ways that we see many other artists live through history. This show looks at how the home has acted as a site for challenging societal norms – what that has meant through history and what the possibilities are for this in today's world."

Jenny Waldman, Director, Art Fund, said, "This inspiring exhibition, bringing to life powerful stories of how artists shaped the world around them, will be seen across the country thanks to Going Places. This new programme sees museums working together to share their collections and connect with communities in new ways. We're hugely grateful to The National Lottery Heritage Fund and The Julia Rausing Trust for supporting this ambitious programme and we hope people will enjoy this exhibition at the William Morris Gallery and then as it travels to Wrexham, Windermere and Edinburgh".

The largest collaborative programme of its kind, Art Fund's Going Places brings together 20 museums from across the UK to share and celebrate the nation's remarkable collections. Four Lanterns is one of six museum networks working together to create touring exhibitions inspired by local histories, stories and landscapes.

Responding directly to museums' needs for more sustainable, collaborative ways of exhibiting, Going Places enables collections to travel across the country, reach more people and take on new meaning in different places.

Going Places is an Art Fund programme made possible with major support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and The Julia Rausing Trust, with additional support from a generous group of trusts, foundations and individuals. The Four Lanterns network is supported directly by the Woven Foundation. Art Fund is continuing to fundraise to reach the full potential of the programme and make the biggest impact for museums and visitors across the UK.

Earthly Paradise is also supported by The Ampersand Foundation.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The exhibition will be on view from 3 October 2026 to 28 March 2027.

Gallery opening hours are Tuesday to Sunday, 10am – 5pm; Admission free (suggested £5 donation).

About William Morris Gallery

Owned and run by Waltham Forest Council, William Morris Gallery is the only public Gallery devoted to William Morris: designer, craftsman and radical socialist. Housed in the Grade II* listed building that was Morris's family home from 1848 to 1856, it displays the world's largest collection of his work. In recent years the Gallery has developed an ambitious programme of contemporary and historical exhibitions by artists including Jeremy Deller, Yinka Shonibare CBE, Althea McNish and May Morris. Other special exhibitions have explored 20th-century political posters, African textiles and the Japanese folk craft movement.

William Morris Gallery
Forest Road London

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wmgallery.org.uk

About Art Fund

Art Fund is the national charity for museums and galleries. For over 120 years, it has helped institutions across the UK to develop and share their collections, invest in people and expertise, grow their audiences and inspire the next generation.

Art Fund connects museums and people with great art and culture through funding, advocacy and initiatives, because access to art is vital for a healthy society. It champions the sector through the prestigious Art Fund Museum of the Year Award - the world's largest museum prize - and supports museum professionals through dedicated training and grant programmes.

Independent and people-powered, Art Fund is supported by 142,000 members who buy a National Art Pass, as well as generous contributions from individuals, trusts and foundations. The National Art Pass offers free or discounted entry to hundreds of museums, galleries and historic places in the UK, 50% off major exhibitions, a subscription to Art Quarterly magazine and Art In Your Inbox newsletter.

artfund.org

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Our vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future. That's why as the largest funder for the UK's heritage we are dedicated to supporting projects that connect people and communities to heritage, as set out in our strategic plan, heritage can be anything from the past that people value and want to pass on to future generations. We believe in the power of heritage to ignite the imagination, offer joy and inspiration, and to build pride in place and connection to the past.

Over the next 10 years, we aim to invest £3.6billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to make a decisive difference for people, places and communities.

heritagefund.org.uk

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About The Julia Rausing Trust

The Julia Rausing Trust has been established in memory of the late British philanthropist Julia Rausing, (née Delves-Broughton), who died in 2024.

The Julia Rausing Trust will see £100 million donated to charities and organisations in its first year and annually thereafter.

Julia Rausing co-founded The Julia and Hans Rausing Trust in 2014. She was widely known for her unwavering commitment to philanthropy and her impactful contributions to a wide range of UK charitable causes. She was instrumental in building the Julia and Hans Rausing Trust into one of the largest philanthropic funds in the country, donating £400 million to causes across Health, Welfare, and the Arts, primarily within the UK.

The Julia Rausing Trust is a registered charity (number 1213572).

juliarausingtrust.org

About The Ampersand Foundation

The Ampersand Foundation is a UK grant-awarding charity dedicated exclusively to supporting the visual arts. It funds high-quality exhibitions and visual arts projects, provided they are free to the public at least one day per week. Additionally, the Foundation supports the expansion of public collections, collection care, artists' residencies, and fellowships, with a primary focus on organisations and projects within the UK.

theampersandfoundation.com

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