

NEWS RELEASE

14.07.22

## ALICJA BIALA'S MONUMENTAL PUBLIC ARTWORK 'MERSEYSIDE TOTEMY' UNVEILED AT LIVERPOOL'S PIER HEAD.

- *Merseyside Totemy* visualises statistics and figures related to the impact of climate change on the Liverpool City Region, one of the areas most at risk from rising sea levels caused by climate change\*.
- The colourful 4.5m totems have been unveiled next to the Royal Liver Building.
- Artwork is latest project commissioned by Liverpool Biennial in partnership with Liverpool BID Company and will remain in situ until Summer 2024.



Alicja Biala, *Merseyside Totemy*, 2022. Courtesy Liverpool Biennial and Liverpool BID Company.  
Photo: Rob Battersby

Liverpool Biennial and Liverpool BID Company today unveil a monumental new public artwork by artist Alicja Biala, addressing the urgent issue of the impact of climate change on Merseyside. The work, titled *Merseyside Totemy*, will be open to the public at St Nicholas Place, Princes Dock from today (14 July) and will remain in situ for two years.

*Merseyside Totemy*, part of Biala's *Totemy* series and formed of three totems, brings together statistics around climate change aiming to visualise the issues Merseyside

faces in terms of rising sea levels and flooding by situating them using local examples.

Each totem features 3 ribbon flags pointing to three areas of Merseyside threatened by rising sea levels: Liverpool City Centre, Formby and Birkenhead. The flags reference international maritime signals, an alphabet of phrases used by ships around the world to communicate with one another.

Visitors can digitally interact with each totem via the QR codes at the base of the sculptures to access information on the data that determines its proportions, gathered by the artist and researchers Jason Kirby and Timothy Lane from Liverpool John Moores University. The data represented shows what Merseyside could look like in the year 2080 if ice caps continue to melt and sea levels continue to rise at their current speed.

With data around climate change typically being presented to the public in an intangible and unrelatable way, *Merseyside Totemy* aims to strike a hopeful note with visitors. By acknowledging that the effects of climate change are already being felt, the conversation must shift towards the positive possibilities for mitigation and action, rather than prevention.

The totems have been produced at Castle Fine Arts Foundry Liverpool using materials that reference traditional shipbuilding, including painted and rusted mild steel, whilst the patterns on the work are inspired by the maritime history of the region, specifically the colourful buoys that appear along the Merseyside coastline. The plinths for the totems are based on stone filled gabion baskets that would usually be used to build sea defences and every material used in the creation of the work has been chosen to ensure maximum longevity and reusability. Further information on plans for the sustainable afterlife of the work will be revealed in due course.

As part of the project, global built environment consultancy Arup have supported a series of workshops with the artist in schools located in areas that are likely to be most impacted by coastal changes. The workshops have looked at climate change solutions through an innovative and optimistic lens, enabling students to learn how to represent their own data in exciting and engaging ways.

The artist has also been working with local schools and the Liverpool Biennial Learning Team to create a 'Climate Wish' card game that will help young people to navigate difficult and often worrying conversations around climate change. Later this year, the resource will be made available in school libraries across the Liverpool City Region and online to encourage everyone to make their own Climate Wish. Children in the region will be around retirement age in 2080, meaning that they will experience these effects of climate change within their lifetimes.

**Sam Lackey, Director, Liverpool Biennial, said:**

"We're thrilled to unveil *Merseyside Totemy* today, bringing large-scale public artwork to the city and encouraging important discussions about the climate crisis.

With much of Merseyside set to feel the impact of rising sea levels within the next century, Biala's work is strongly situated in the context of the local area, presenting important data in a way that can connect with everybody who passes by.

We hope that this new work will serve as a starting point to spark ideas and conversation around what can be done to mitigate the effects of climate change across our region."

**Bill Addy, chief executive of the Liverpool BID Company, and chair of LVEN (Liverpool Visitor Economy Network),** said:

"Public art has the power to transform our streets, squares and public places. Our commitment to supporting the presentation of art is a vital part of how we create a catalyst for future activity, how we make places more attractive and inviting to live, work, visit and explore.

I am excited for people to see this work. It will bring a colourful and thought-provoking addition to our famous city-skyline. With the addition of a new sculpture on The Liverpool Plinth, two artists have unveiled their work in this corner of the city. There is such an appetite for new art in the city and we're delighted to be bringing new and exciting work for people to discover and enjoy."

Limited edition etchings by Alicja Biala, created exclusively for Liverpool Biennial, have been released to coincide with the outdoor installation of *Merseyside Totemy* and are available to pre-order at [biennial.com/editions](https://biennial.com/editions).

**Ends.**

**Notes to Editors:**

Alicja Biala

*Merseyside Totemy*

Commissioned by Liverpool Biennial and Liverpool BID Company, with production supported by Arup and Castle Fine Arts Foundry.

Until Summer 2024

St Nicholas Place

Princes Dock

Liverpool

L3 1QW

Free Entry

[www.biennial.com/collaborations/alicjabiala](https://www.biennial.com/collaborations/alicjabiala)

**Press enquiries:**

For further press information or images contact:

Lucinda Riding, Marketing & Communications Manager, Liverpool Biennial

[lucinda@biennial.com](mailto:lucinda@biennial.com)

**Social Media**

Join the discussion online at:

Facebook /liverpoolbiennial

Instagram @liverpoolbiennial

Twitter @biennial  
#LiverpoolBiennial  
#MerseysideTotemy

\* According to research by Climate Central

With special thanks to Hotel Indigo for supporting our launch event.

### **About Alicja Biala**

**Alicja Biala** is a Polish artist working across a range of different media and scales. Biala initially gained attention with her large-scale public paintings, followed by her politically charged Polish Cut-Out series. She has since worked across multiple scales, ranging from architectural sculptures to large interior sculptural lighting, etchings, paintings, and more. Her work incorporates a mixture of pagan themes that bring the political and personal spheres of contemporary life into close proximity. She has received widespread press, multiple awards, and is in numerous private and national collections. Biala is currently studying at Royal College of Art and Royal Drawing School in London.

### **About Liverpool Biennial**

**Liverpool Biennial** is the largest and longest-running festival of contemporary visual art in the UK. Since its inception in 1998, the Biennial has become renowned in the international contemporary art world, bringing together a wide array of international voices and artistic practices. Taking place every two years, Liverpool Biennial activates public institutions, historical sites and extraordinary locations across Liverpool, ensuring major commissions and legacy projects in the public realm including *Liverpool Mountain* by Ugo Rondinone (2018), *Evertro* by Koo Jeong A x Wheelscape (2015) and *Everybody Razzle Dazzle* by Sir Peter Blake (2015). Pioneering an innovative approach underpinned by a year-round programme of research, education, residencies, projects and commissions, each biennial edition introduces renewed thinking and scale of production. Having commissioned over 380 new artworks and presented work by over 530 celebrated artists from around the world, the Biennial is built on a longstanding commitment to connecting international artists with local practitioners, communities and the general public. Liverpool Biennial is funded by Arts Council England, Liverpool City Council and founding supporter James Moores.

### **Liverpool BID Company**

**Liverpool BID Company** is a private, not-for-profit organisation, representing the interests of over 1,000 levy paying businesses in Liverpool city centre, across two BIDs (Business Improvement Districts) - Retail & Leisure BID and Culture & Commerce BID

The aim of Liverpool BID Company is to:

- Bring added value to levy payers and build on the core services already provided by Liverpool City Council and Merseyside Police
- Ensure both BID areas are clean and secure for businesses and visitors, and have the right environment for the private sector to succeed - whether a retailer, restaurant owner, or legal and financial service
- Work with the city and charities to tackle street dwellers
- Drive footfall and develop activity where needed
- Champion the voice of the levy payers it represents, pushing forward their agendas and making things happen

The Liverpool BID areas cover some of the most iconic locations in Liverpool city centre:

- The eclectic and diverse independents of Bold Street

- The thriving restaurant and hotel scene of Castle Street
- Liverpool's ever-evolving high street - from the iconic brands on Church Street and Williamson Square, to the high-end boutiques of Metquarter
- The professional and financial services around Old Hall Street
- Mathew Street and Cavern Quarter - the birthplace of The Beatles, a focal point in the city's music heritage, and a colourful nightlife scene
- The famous Waterfront and Royal Albert Dock, Three Graces and Pier Head
- St George's Quarter and St John's Gardens and William Brown Street

For more information about Liverpool BID Company, please visit:

[Website](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

### **About Arup**

**Arup** is the creative force at the heart of many of the world's most prominent projects in the built environment and across industry. Working in more than 140 countries, the firm's designers, engineers, architects, planners, consultants and technical specialists work with our clients on innovative projects of the highest quality and impact.



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



Liverpool  
City Council

**Culture  
Liverpool**

Founding Supporter  
James Moores

Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art Limited is a company registered in England and Wales / Company No. 3659361 / Registered Charity No. 1073956 / VAT Registration No. 732988395