

# Liverpool Biennial

Looking back  
at Liverpool  
Biennial 2023

# Introduction

- This report looks at the impact of the 12th edition of Liverpool Biennial, 'uMoya: The Sacred Return of Lost Things', which took place from 10 June – 17 September 2023. The 12th edition was curated by Khanyisile Mbongwa.
- During the festival we presented outdoor artworks and events across the city alongside free exhibitions at venues including Cotton Exchange, Tate Liverpool, Bluecoat, FACT Liverpool, Open Eye Gallery, Victoria Gallery and Museum and World Museum (National Museums Liverpool), and the historic Tobacco Warehouse.
- We presented the work of 35 artists and collectives from 6 continents, including 15 new commissions.
- For families, schools and the wider community, the Learning Programme included a selection of online and physical resources, including a Children's Guide, sensory pack, wellbeing routes to navigate the Biennial and workshops inspired by the work of Biennial artists.

We would like to thank Khanyisile who brought not only her thinking but also her feeling and care to the city and to us as an organisation during her time working with us. We are also grateful to all the artists who brought so much passion and imagination to this extraordinary Biennial.

We would like to thank Arts Council England, Liverpool City Council and Culture Liverpool, UK Trusts and Foundations, International Agencies, and corporate supporters, as well as individuals from our Collector, Director and Commissioning Circles for their ongoing support.

And of course, as we celebrate our 25-year history, a big thank you goes out to all our delivery and venue partners across the city. We look forward to strengthening our relationships with partners across Liverpool City Region as we prepare for the next edition.

We look forward to welcoming you all to Liverpool Biennial 2025!



Sandra Suubi, 'Samba Gown' Procession at Liverpool Biennial 2023.  
Photography by Pete Carr. Courtesy Liverpool Biennial

# Summary

- Evidence for this report is based on the responses of the Biennial's visitors, delivery partners and key stakeholders. These responses were collected through visitor surveys (conducted on site or filled in online), through interviews with visitors at several venues during the summer and through partner interviews.
- Building on findings in 2018 and 2021, the evaluation explores the impact of Liverpool Biennial 2023 (LB2023) against four intended outcomes, reflecting our organisational and charitable aims, presented in the four chapters of this report.

## **The four intended outcomes of Liverpool Biennial 2023 were:**

- 1** Liverpool Biennial acts as a catalyst, bringing together venues, arts organisations and other civic partners to engage diverse audiences and increase collective value.
- 2** Liverpool Biennial's cultural, social and economic impacts contribute positively and sustainably to the experience of individuals, families and communities and the city.



- 3** Liverpool Biennial has a clear placemaking role that works with Liverpool's cultural status to help make the city a vital place to live, work, study and visit.
- 4** Liverpool Biennial plays a leading role in the UK and international contemporary art scene and in the reputation of Liverpool as a cultural destination.

This report provides statistics and background information, measuring our performance against each of these outcomes, as well as comments from visitors and partners.

Liverpool Biennial commissioned The Audience Agency to deliver an independent evaluation of Liverpool Biennial 2023, a full report is available upon request.



Albert Ibokwe Khoza, "The Black Circus of the Republic of Bantu", 2023. Liverpool Biennial 2023 at Tobacco Warehouse. Courtesy of Liverpool Biennial. Photography by Mark McNulty.

# Findings

Liverpool Biennial 2023 audiences were diverse and had a wide range of motivations for visiting.

**Outcome 1: Liverpool Biennial acts as a catalyst, bringing together venues, arts organisations, and other civic partners to engage diverse audiences and increase collective value.**

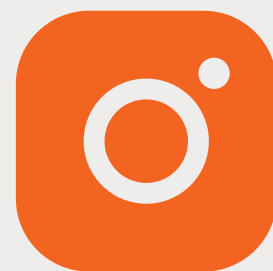
- Liverpool Biennial 2023 continued to generate positive social impacts on the city.
- The Biennial brought together a wide range of partners, including museums and galleries, other arts organisations, civic partners, businesses, and funders, to deliver a programme to appeal to a diverse range of audiences.
- The Biennial attracted audiences of all ages, with 25% aged between 25-34, and 8% of visitors had children in their group.
- Visitors were split equally between audiences identifying as specialists in contemporary art (academic or professional interest), enthusiasts (interested as a hobby/passion) and those with a general interest for visiting.



- 18% of presented artists identified as d/Deaf, Disabled or as having a long-term health condition, which was a significant increase from 2% in 2021, reflecting a long-term commitment of the Biennial to inclusion and representation.
- There was also a parallel increase in visitor figures with 9% identifying as a D/deaf and/or D/disabled person, or as having a long-term health condition and 17% identifying as neurodivergent (24% of those with a specialist interest in contemporary visual art).
- 50% of our audiences identified as White: British (compared to 70% in 2021). White Irish was a significant group at Liverpool Biennial 2023 at 12%, as were Gypsy, Roma, or Irish Traveller (4%), Black/Black British (4%) and Asian/Asian British: Chinese (3%). A considerable number of people (17%) opted to self-describe their ethnicity.

**Audiences had a wide range of motivations for visiting Liverpool Biennial 2023 and awareness and engagement with Biennial communications channels was higher than in the previous edition.**

- The most common overall motivations for visiting LB2023 were 'to be intellectually stimulated', 'to learn something', 'curiosity', 'to be inspired' and 'for enjoyment'.
- The most common main motivations were 'contemporary art is an important part of who I am', 'to spend time with friends and family' and 'to be intellectually stimulated'.
- Awareness of Liverpool Biennial's communications channels amongst audiences was overall higher in 2023 than in 2021. Almost two thirds of audiences saw or engaged with Liverpool Biennial's new website, or engaged through word of mouth (38%), the printed guide (37%) and Instagram (26%).





Unmute Dance Theatre and guests, 'uMoya', 2023.

Photography by Pete Carr. Courtesy of Liverpool Biennial.



Liverpool Biennial 2023 attracted new audiences and many returning visitors, showing a greater depth of engagement with the Biennial compared to previous years.

**Outcome 2: Liverpool Biennial's cultural, social and economic impacts contribute positively and sustainably to the experience of individuals, families and communities and the city.**

- Liverpool Biennial 2023 engaged an estimated 101,911 individual visitors (across an estimated 763,140 visits).
- 46% of visitors were first time visitors.
- 64% of returning visitors had come to LB2021 and 62% to LB2018, a third of previous audience members had visited in 2010 and 28% in 2009 or earlier.
- Especially notable at was a significant increase in the number of events visited by each individual. At LB2023 this was an average of 7.5, compared to 4.2 for LB2021 and 4.1 for LB2018.



- 37% of audiences live within Liverpool City Region  
12% were from other areas of the North West, 30% were from the UK outside the North West and 21% travelled internationally.



- 44% of total audiences visited from outside the area specifically for LB2023, with 41% of LB2023 audiences staying overnight, the majority of these in hotels, bringing significant additional spend into the city. This was combined with high engagement with this edition, as demonstrated through the average of 7.5 Biennial events visited.

**The economic impact of the Biennial on Liverpool saw a significant increase in 2023.**

- The estimated economic impact of Liverpool Biennial 2023 was £13,181,039, significantly higher than previous years, with increased additional spend from audiences visiting from outside the area.

## Audience travel at LB2023 supported positive environmental impacts.

- The audience survey results point towards positive environmental impacts, with only a quarter of audiences travelling to LB2023 by car:
  - 39% travelled by train
  - 13% walked
  - 10% travelled by bus
  - Almost all (91%) travelled around Liverpool city centre on foot during their visit (with 14% using public transport and a smaller 10% taxi/Uber and 7% car)



**LB2023 was relevant to audiences and had a positive impact socially, on wellbeing and in terms of enjoyment.**

- Personal impacts of a visit to LB2023 were significant across all areas asked about in the audience survey, with many describing the Biennial as:

**interesting**  
**thought-provoking**  
**inspiring**  
**stimulating**  
**educational**  
**challenging**  
**relevant**

- Audiences agreed that their experience at Liverpool Biennial ‘...felt relevant to what’s going on in the world’ (89%), ‘...felt relevant to me’ (77%), ‘...left a strong impression on me’ (78%) and ‘...made me feel interested in new things’ (86%).
- 70% agreed that their visit ‘...allowed me to spend quality time with friends, family or other attenders’ and 71% that it ‘...had a positive impact on my sense of wellbeing’. For 69%, the LB2023 experience ‘...was different to things I’ve been to before’.
- 93% agreed that their visit ‘...was enjoyable’ and 94% that ‘I would come to something like this again.’
- 83% agreed that ‘Liverpool Biennial is welcoming for everyone, regardless of their knowledge of contemporary art’ and 85% that ‘Liverpool Biennial presents exceptional work’.

One of the fundamental highlights for visitors was getting to see parts of the city that they may otherwise not have opportunity to, with references to non-traditional art spaces and historically significant areas of the city.

“One of the reasons we love coming is the use of interesting, unusual spaces. It’s quite fascinating to see these parts of the city.”

(Visitor)





Liverpool Biennial 2023 Family Days.

Courtesy of Liverpool Biennial. Photography by Rob Battersby.

Liverpool Biennial has an important placemaking role

**Outcome 3: Liverpool Biennial has a clear placemaking role that works with Liverpool's cultural status to help make the city a vital place to live, work, study and visit.**

- 97%, agreed that 'it's important for Liverpool to stage events like this' and 88% agreed that 'Liverpool should put on more cultural events.'
- 93% agreed that 'Liverpool Biennial has a positive impact on the city's cultural offer' and 77% that 'Liverpool Biennial builds a sense of excitement in the city.'
- 73% agreed that 'I'm more likely to visit Liverpool again as a result of my experience' (it is notable that 13% responded 'not applicable' to this question, presumably those living in Liverpool).

For many interviewees, there was a feeling that Liverpool champions and celebrates culture, and Liverpool Biennial was regarded as a crucial contributor. The theme of this year's Biennial was viewed with utter significance by some visitors, as it explored important and relevant topics, whilst drawing connections to the city's own role and history.

“I think with our connection to both the arts and our colonial history as well, especially with regards to that inward examination, it's a very important thing to occur because it makes us question our historical and current values towards these big hitting topics, which are still ongoing processes.”

(Visitor)

For infrequent and first-time visitors, the Biennial offered the perfect opportunity to get to know the city better. Others simply welcomed the opportunity to attend a significant cultural event outside of London.

“For me - somebody who hasn't been to Liverpool before - it was an amazing way to experience the city and to really get a sense of its history. This speaking back to history from these very local sites was really interesting.”

(Visitor)

## Partners identified LB2023's contribution to celebrating Liverpool

For many partners, Liverpool Biennial 2023's contribution to Liverpool was fundamentally its celebration of the city and what it has to offer.

“For me this year's Biennial was a return to form. It had a clarity of intent and a quality of delivery that has been missing for a couple of editions. It was generous to its audience and the city. I felt it raised the bar of expectations again, which can only be a good thing.”

(Partner)

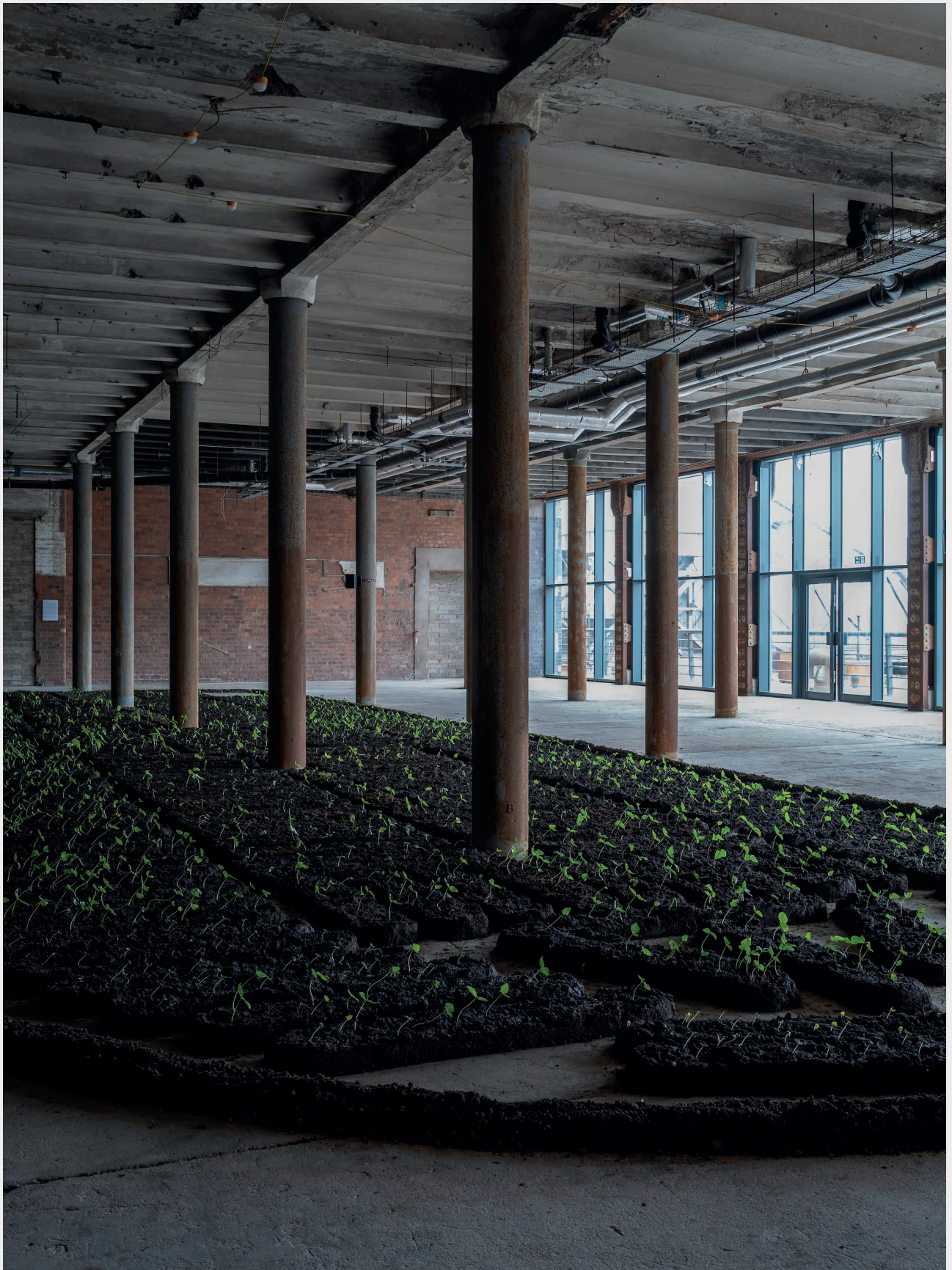
“After the commercial appeal of Eurovision in Liverpool, it offered an experience with tremendous amounts of thoughtfulness, emotion, nuance - it showed that we, as a city, deliver both well.”

(Partner)

“Liverpool Biennial is an excellent example of place-making and investment in the city's cultural development.”

(Partner)





Binta Diaw, "Chorus of Soil", 2023. Liverpool Biennial 2023 at Tobacco Warehouse. Courtesy of Liverpool Biennial.  
Photography by Mark McNulty.

LB2023 attracted significant numbers into Liverpool from outside the city.

**Outcome 4: Liverpool Biennial plays a leading role in the UK and international contemporary art scene and in the reputation of Liverpool as a cultural destination.**

- 37% of audiences lived within the Liverpool City Region with a further 12% from the North West, 30% were UK visitors outside the North West and 21% were international visitors
- 4% of total visitors outside the local area planned a trip to Liverpool specifically for the Biennial.

Partners felt that Liverpool Biennial has a significant role in both the UK and international contemporary arts scene.

“LB’s role has been significant in developing exhibition-making and supporting innovative work.” (Partner)

“Capturing Liverpool’s braveness in curation, making the city continue to be known for brave innovative thoughtful and intelligent art.” (Partner)

“Making sure Liverpool holds its place on the international arts circuit, recognised as a city that challenges and excites.” (Partner)

“Brings a lot of international artists to the city of Liverpool.” (Partner)



Partners felt these roles were achieved by working with renowned artists and curators and maintaining strong standards of curation, which they felt resulted in attracting national and international attention and attendance.

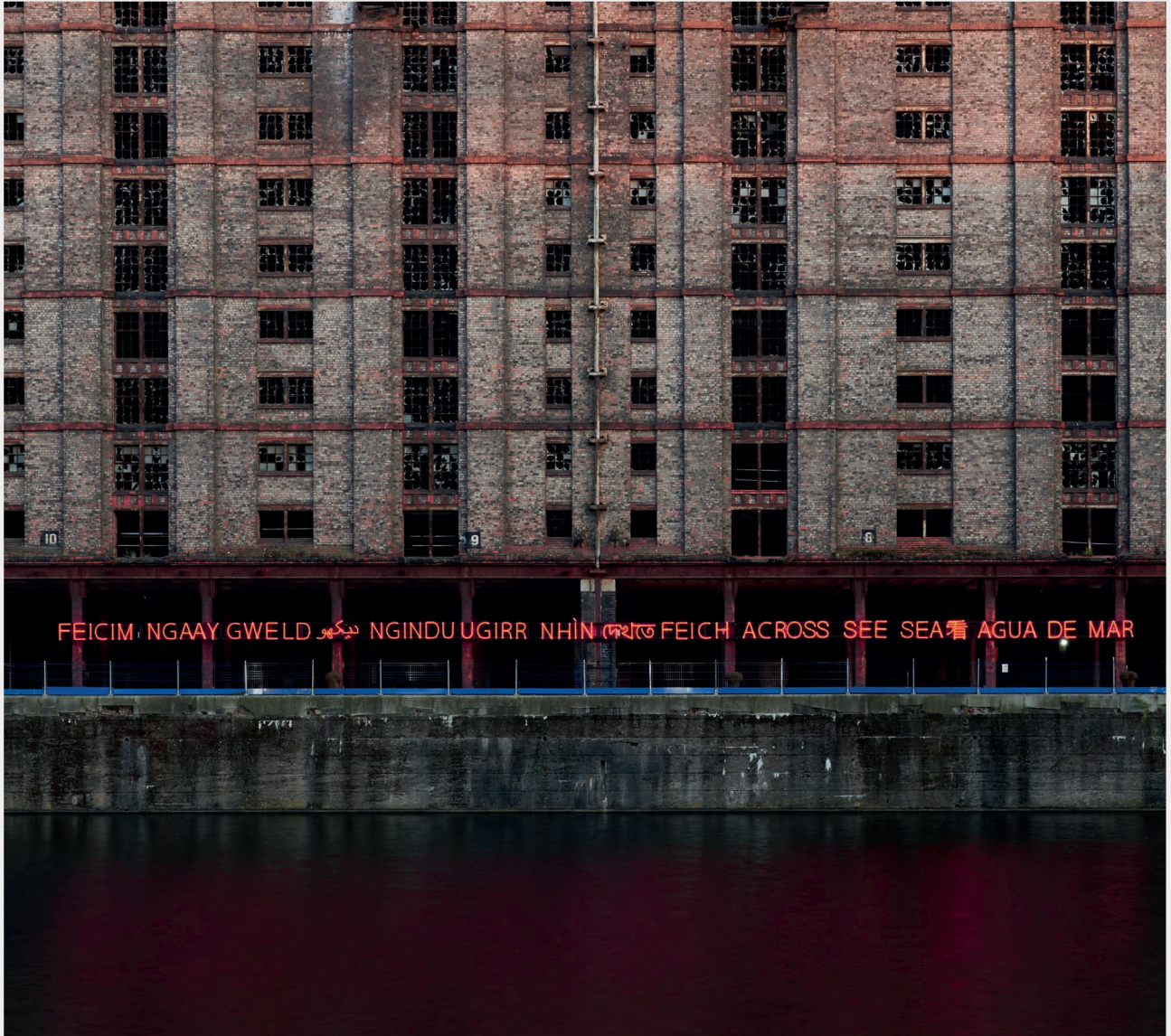
“Through the considered process and approach. Developing a legacy for cultural development in the city and leading the national and international development of contemporary art in the UK.”

(Partner)

“It attracts a national audience to Liverpool and gets the attention of the arts press, which is challenging for arts organisations outside London. Since I have been in Liverpool due to the pandemic, international audiences seem to have been reduced and so it is difficult to comment here. However, the Biennial appoints curators of international standing.”

(Partner)

The press campaign for the festival resulted in more than 340 pieces of coverage across print, broadcast, and online media - excluding key newsletter and social media mentions – and garnered coverage globally including in Europe, North America, Africa and Asia.



Brook Andrew, "NGAAY SEE", 2023.

Installation view at Stanley Dock, Liverpool Biennial 2023.

Photography by Rob Battersby. Courtesy Liverpool Biennial.