



OPEN CALL 2026 BRIEF

THAT OTHER PLACE – A PORTLAND FAIR

COMMISSION FEE: UP TO £2500

DEADLINE 9th FEB 2026

APPLY HERE: <https://www.curatorspace.com/opportunities/detail/bside-open-call/10148>

b-side invites proposals from artists working in any medium for new, temporary, site-responsive commissions as part of **b-side 2026**.

Theme: Common Lands – That Other Place

The 2026 festival is part of our wider area of interest - Common Lands which considers the Isle of Portland as a microcosm through which to explore our connections to land, locality, and community. Under the Common Lands umbrella, previous festivals have explored - 'This Land' (the unique natural and built heritage of Portland), and 'Who Do We Think We Are?' (identity and migration). We are now inviting artists to explore another strand of Common Lands; 'That Other Place' — what happens when our current land isn't working? How can we learn from otherness to create new lands where we might all better live together? One doorway to this 2026 playground of new imaginations will be...

That Other Place – A Portland Fair

"For centuries, the Isle of Portland held an annual fair each November 5th. The natural home of the amusement fair was Chiswell, a neighbourhood street adjacent to Chesil Beach. Each year the street would be closed and travelling showman would erect the latest fairground rides, twisting and turning within feet of people's homes. For the people of Portland, the fair was an absolute highlight in the calendar. Visitors would also flock to the Island to enjoy the annual spectacle. It was therefore a major disappointment

when the fair ceased to be. A combination of rent rises, difficult Councils and the Covid pandemic."

David Palmer

Portland once had a Fair — a real one — full of colour, noise, sweets, rides, and the brief suspension of reality. We've been rummaging through local resident and Fairground owner David Palmer's archive of photos and memories from the Fair, which ended in 2001, and it's clear it meant a lot to the Island. The famous Portland Fair was a hugely popular event, an annual event for more than 200 years.

It was part childhood rite, part magical interruption to everyday life. But we're not here to rebuild or reinstate the old Fair plank-by-plank.

In 2026, we want to **reawaken the experience of it** — in a stranger, twistier, sideways sort of way. Think of it as a Fair on a parallel Portland: familiar but off-kilter, a place where weird echoes, alternate histories and "what ifs" come out to play.

That Other Place is a mirror-Island, a near-twin, a parallel universe that looks like Portland... until it doesn't.

We're inviting artists to help us slip between these two worlds.

What We're Looking For

We're excited by proposals that:

- Stretch, twist, bend or lovingly prod reality
- Play with the idea of a parallel or "other" Portland
- Invite people in — to interact, wander, reminisce or get delightfully lost
- Respond to the Island's stories, landscapes, communities and quirks
- Make imaginative use of site, space, or atmosphere
- We are open to work in any medium - visual artists, performers, sonic explorers, digital conjurers, community weavers, installation-builders — all welcome.

What's on Offer

- A commission fee of up to £2500
- Production support to help you bring your idea to life
- Curatorial and practical support from the b-side team
- Access to local knowledge, archives and community connections
- Marketing, PR and promotion
- Stewarding and invigilation of artworks

Who Can Apply?

Anyone! We welcome proposals from artists at any stage in their career. b-side values diversity and is working to make the application and commissioning process accessible to all and welcomes proposals from those currently underrepresented in the arts.

How to Apply

What you will need to tell us:

1. A proposal describing your idea and how it plays with *That Other Place – A Portland Fair*
2. A little about your practice (portfolio, links, CV, online links)
3. Any early thoughts on site, participation or approach
4. A sense of what you'd need to make it happen (tech, scale, access, support)
5. An outline budget
6. Please apply via the Curatorspace portal, there is a straightforward application form which leads you through, asking all the questions above and an FAQ section which should answer any questions you might be thinking of.
7. If you would like to apply via video we can also accept proposals in this format (please see instructions below which includes questions to cover)

Applying by Video/Audio

As well as written proposals, we can also accept audio and video responses too.

If you want to submit your whole proposal or part of it via video or audio, please take a look at the process below:

1. Record your video or audio in response to the application form.

2. Upload it to an unlisted YouTube link, or a Google Drive/Dropbox folder.
3. Add an accessible link and any relevant passwords to your CuratorSpace form in the relevant question boxes. If you have recorded your whole application via video (except contact details etc), then please paste the video link in every question box. If you have recorded your response in answer to specific questions, then please paste the video/audio link in the corresponding question boxes.

Please remember to include any passwords for password protected links.

The questions which you should answer in your recording are listed below.

- A brief summary of your/your arts collective's idea (approx. 200 words or 1.5 min video/audio recording)
- A detailed description of your/your arts collective's idea (up to 500 words or 3 min video/audio recording)
- A summary of your/your arts collective's practice (approx. 200 words or 1.5 minutes video/audio recording)
- How you envisage audiences engaging with the work you are proposing (approx. 500 words or 3 minutes video/audio recording)
- How your proposed artwork will be experienced on the Isle of Portland and at b-side 2026. (approx. 300 words or 2 minutes audio/video recording)
- Any technical support you/your arts collective will need to show your work at b-side 2026 (approx 100 words max or 1 min recording)
- Amount you/your arts collective's are applying for and a budget breakdown showing how the funds will be spent. Budget headings: Artist Fee / Materials and/or Technology / Installation costs on the Isle of Portland / Other (approx 1 min)
- Images or weblinks illustrating your/your arts collective's proposal and/or previous work.

Note: We understand that presenting your work on video/audio is different, so we will accept reasonable differences in the timings above. But your application must be no longer than 15 mins total when watching or listening.

If you cannot make an application on the online portal CuratorSpace then please contact maddi@b-side.org.uk for alternative options.

What happens after you have sent a proposal?

- We will acknowledge receipt of your proposal if you have sent it by email (if you were not able to use the Curatorspace portal). A message acknowledging receipt will be sent to all artists applying via Curatorspace shortly after the deadline.
- The selection panel will read every single proposal and make a shortlist of artists to interview
- We understand how long it takes to create proposals and we appreciate the time everyone takes with this. It's controversial we know, but we can't give everyone detailed feedback on all Open Call proposals, this is because we regularly receive 100's of proposals. We read and re-read all the proposals carefully, we talk about them and importantly we look for a good balance of work for the event and our audiences.

We look for a mix of art forms, sites/venues, duration, scale, challenge, engagement, participation, research areas - lots of things contribute towards our decisions and of course we want to make all our projects and events the very best they can be. These are the factors we take into consideration when we are selecting work. So if you don't get shortlisted, please don't be discouraged or give up.

- Interviews will take place online over 1 or 2 days (depending on how many proposals have been shortlisted), the dates for this are March 25th/26th. Interviews last approx 30 minutes.
- Selected artists will be sent a contract and the fun begins! You will be allocated a commission manager from the b-side team to bounce ideas off, help you connect with people of Portland, find sites etc if needed.

About b-side

b-side commissions site-responsive work for public spaces on the Isle of Portland, Dorset (UK) revealing aspects of the island, its environment and communities that are often overlooked. We commission artworks that speak to this magical place, and to our island's relationship to elsewhere. We commission work that is thoughtful, maverick, subversive, poetic or just simply delicious looking. The artworks we commission come together over a 4 day period, every September. Check out our website to see more about what we do, how we work, and also more about the Isle of Portland www.b-side.org.uk

Access

We deeply value diversity and are working to make our application and commissioning process accessible to all. We welcome proposals from those currently underrepresented in the arts and particularly from disabled artists. We will endeavor to work with artists to mitigate barriers to making their work for the festival. We welcome access documents from artists at any stage of the process. Some more info on access documents <https://www.accessdocsforartists.com/>

Equality Monitoring

We are collecting information from artists applying for this opportunity for reporting purposes to funders and to find out who we are reaching and who is missing. You will find these questions on the Curatorspace description of the project.

PROPOSAL TIMELINE

Deadline for proposals	Feb 9 th 2026
Shortlisted artists notified by	March 16 th 2026
Interviews	March 25 th /26 th 2026
Notification of Outcome	April 3 rd 2026
Research and Development Meet up	April 15/16 th 2026
Work installed	Sept 05 - 09th 2026 (or by arrangement)
b-side 2026 public dates	Sept 10 - 13th 2026
Feedback and evaluation	Sept 2026

Please note:

- Artists will be selected on the basis of their initial proposal and will then have further opportunity to research and develop the final work if they are selected.
- All applications not using the Curatorspace portal will be acknowledged on receipt.
- All unsuccessful applications will be notified at earliest opportunity.
- We regret due to our limited team capacity it is not possible to give feedback to all unsuccessful applications (please see above) however, we aim to give feedback to all shortlisted applicants who are selected for the interview stage.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON B-SIDE 2026

- b-side takes place over a four day period with installations and events at a number of locations across the Isle of Portland - a tied island based off the South coast of Dorset, in England.
- New artworks/commissions form the core programme of b-side with artists also contributing to talks and other events prior to or during the festival.
- Proposals for artworks and interventions are temporary. We are interested to see if the work you propose is also site responsive to somewhere on the Isle of Portland, and we list below a selection of sites on the island we have used in the past, as well as further research links that may be of interest to you.
- We welcome proposals that involve working with Isle of Portland residents and festival visitors as individuals or groups for more intimate, reflective artworks and interactive encounters.
- Proposals should be for new work but may be part of a larger or on-going project.
- We expect artworks to have a presence throughout b-side 2026 or if event based to include a number of performances or audience opportunities.
- Applications are invited from artists/arts collectives at any career stage.
- This commission offers up to £2500 to make work for the b-side 2026. This covers the artist(s) fee and all costs including travel/transportation, all materials for production, installation and deinstallation of work.

- Applicants are welcome to bring additional funding from other sources to support their proposal if it is greater in ambition than our commission levels allow.
- The selected artist / artist collective must either be physically present or available online for the 4 days of b-side 2026. Past events have shown us that audiences and artists get much more out of the experience if the artist is present with their work and able to engage with visitors during b-side.
- If and where appropriate, the selected artist / artist collective will have access to curatorial support, installation assistance, venue/site facilitation. Artists will also have the opportunity of using our b-side shop front project space - 77 Fortuneswell, on the Isle of Portland for use as private or public facing research, meeting or work space and engagement venue prior to b-side.

FURTHER CONTEXT AND INFORMATION

Information about the Isle of Portland, Dorset, UK

Portland is a curious island with a very particular history and ecology offering huge scope for research and inspiration. Located in the South West of England just off the coast of Dorset and approached via a narrow causeway, this hulk of limestone, bounded by steep cliffs and treacherous seas is unlike anywhere else in Dorset.

Prior to the first road bridge built in 1839 linking it to the mainland, it was an isolated agricultural community sustained by farming and fishing and with its own unique ways and customs. Many ancient land use and management practices continued long after joining the mainland.

However Portland has been dramatically changed and influenced over the years by quarrying and military appropriation and secret experimentation, resulting in what is now widely regarded as an industrial landscape and economy. It is a small island just 1.7 miles across and 4 miles long, it's coastal edges subject to the forces of nature, eroded by the sea, landslips and rock falls, its interior removed by quarrying and mining. With an ever-increasing population, space is at a premium and land use contested. As policies of growth and the impact of climate change collide, the opportunities to develop a sustainable community are challenged.

More recently tourism is seen as the growth industry, as former quarries are re-wilded as nature reserves and Portland's unique ecological, historical and leisure attractions are increasingly recognized by climbers, divers, walkers, bird watchers, naturalists,

geologists and historians. Portland, as a community and place, encapsulates in miniature the characteristics of what is happening in a wider world context

ISLAND SITES AND RESEARCH LINKS

The Portland Fair took place in the Underhill area of Portland and we will be looking to site most of the commissioned artworks in this area or nearby.

Video compilation of Portland Fair 1995-2001 created by local historian Stuart Morris



Get to know Portland

You can explore a rich historical archive created by Portlander Geoff Kirby at The Portland Museum online Archive, which includes information on many of the sites and venues used for previous b-side events as well as information about Portland and its history and geology

<https://archive.portlandmuseum.co.uk/>

Previous sites b-side sites and venues:

- Chiswell Community Garden
- The Esplanade and Quiddles café, Chiswell
- Fancys Farm
- The Engine Shed
- High Angle Battery
- The Stadium Bowl
- The Governors Community Garden (The Grove)
- Easton Gardens
- St Georges Church
- Portland Bill area

This Dorset Explorer website mapping system is useful for exploring many different layers of information on Portland

<https://gi.dorsetcouncil.gov.uk/dorsetexplorer#map=10.33/50.79691/-2.31539/0&basemap=1/100/100>

End.