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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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# **THAT OTHER PLACE - PORTLAND**

*b-side's 2026 programme marks the final chapter of a six year journey, and its most ambitious yet. Fifteen artists, two connected strands, and one small island with a lot to say.*



Portland Fair - Robert Twycross photo archive

The Isle of Portland is four miles long, 1.7 miles wide, and hangs off the Dorset coast by a narrow causeway. Since 2020, [b-side](#) has been using it as a lens through which to ask bigger questions; about land, identity, community, and belonging. That project, *Common Lands*, began with *This Land* (Portland's natural and built heritage), moved through *Who Do We Think We Are?* (identity and migration), and arrives this year at its culmination: *That Other Place*.

*That Other Place* is about island-ness, queerness, and otherness - not as marginal conditions, but as creative forces. Ways of seeing and living that can open up new futures. In 2026, it takes shape across fifteen artists working in two connected strands: eleven commissioned for b-side's famous September Festival, and four undertaking year-long explorations of the island that will be shared as part of b-side 2026 and beyond.

As **Rocca Holly-Nambi, Director of b-side, puts it:** "*That Other Place* is about taking all of the otherness from this island and showing how they come together in this cacophony of colour, personality, and open-ness, a bold, living exploration of place. There's something extraordinary in the meeting of artists, communities, and landscape here that you can't find anywhere else."

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## STRAND ONE: THAT OTHER PLACE - A PORTLAND FAIR

Portland once had a Fair. For over 200 years, every November 5th, the streets of Chiswell filled with fairground rides, music, and the peculiar suspended-reality of a travelling show. It ended in 2001 a victim of rent rises, changes in the economy and eventually Covid, and the island has felt its absence since.

b-side isn't rebuilding it. Instead, eleven commissioned artists have been asked to conjure something stranger: a parallel Portland, familiar but off kilter, where the fair's ghost can be heard, felt, and walked through. The work runs across public spaces throughout the Underhill area, free and open to all, opening night is 9th September with the Festival itself running from the 10th to 13th September.

### THE COMMISSIONED ARTISTS

**Buried Giants (Tim Powell and Hannah Price)** bring back the fair through sound alone. *Echoes of Portland Fair* uses binaural audio technology to place visitors inside three dimensional soundscapes - the ghost train, the ferris wheel, snatches of conversation - layered over the streets where the fair once stood. Accessed via smartphone and headphones, it's immersive heritage.

**Gavin Morris / Digital Funfair** installs *Light Hearted*: a giant LED heart, 2.4 metres wide, that only illuminates when two or more people hold hands to complete a circuit. It's a fairground trick updated for the present, a piece that quite literally shows what connection looks like.

**Dawn Parsonage and Peter Hudson (Light Space Color)** work with local people and festival goers to create *And So Our Shadows Dance* - a series of shadow projections cast across Portland's buildings at dusk, built from workshop-made cutouts inspired by the fair's archive and the memories of those who attended it. The shadows spin, dance, and tell stories the fair left behind.

**Deborah Bowness**, who showed at b-side 2024, returns with *Walls Are Talking* - a paper trail of trompe l'oeil paste-ups through Underhill, beginning at Fair Field and winding down through Chiswell. Optical illusions, archive imagery, and reimagined fair ephemera bend the streets into a walking journey through a Portland that might have been.

**Helen Grant builds *Plucky Dip***: a working scale model of a Scotch derrick crane - the kind once used across Portland's quarries - repurposed as a fairground grabber over a ball pit full of handmade lucky charms. It's absurdist, participatory, and centred on the island's industrial past.

**Chloe Mantripp, with collaborators Mike McCallum and Ruby LeStrange,** leads a guided ramble through Portland's landscape with three otherworldly performer-musicians: the Mer-Chicken, the White Hare, and the White Stag/Black Rider. The walk ends at a campfire, a storytelling, and hot chocolate, drawn from local folklore of which on Portland there are masses.

**Carlos Cortes proposes *Ball Run Palace*,** a community built, ever growing ball run that follows the contours of Portland's landscape, echoing the old Merchant's Railway that carried quarried stone down to Castletown. Participants are builders as much as players, assembling and decorating as they go.

**Alexi Marshall runs *Peculiar Arcana*** - two linocut tarot card workshops, one with young people designing cards about Portland's futures, one with elders creating cards drawn from memory.

**Ella Yolande creates a large textile archway** - quilted with dried plants foraged from Portland itself - through which visitors can pass. A portal, a threshold, an invitation to imagine what lies just on the other side.

**Jane C Fox collaborates with an animator to project hybrid figures from her *Encyclopaedia Project*** onto Portland's streets and opes, creatures from a world where species coexist without hierarchy, arriving at the fair as its welcoming committee.

**Paul Le Keux, a Portland resident, curates *Portland Parables*:** a live audio-visual evening in which islanders share stories including fact, fiction, memory, dialect, song, without being required to declare which is which. History, myth, and imagination sit side by side, and the audience is left to find the truth.

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## **STRAND TWO: YEAR-LONG ARTIST EXPLORATIONS**

Alongside the festival programme, four artists are spending the year embedded in That Other Place - undertaking extended research on and with Portland, and sharing their work in progress at b-side 2026.

**Felix C. Bill** draws a line between two things rarely spoken of in the same breath: medical transition and rewilding. Both are processes of transformation that require scientific intervention. Both are deemed political by those who oppose them. Both, at their core, are about a body - human or ecological - becoming more fully itself. Bill will develop a body of flash fiction exploring these parallels, rooted in Portland's own rewilding sites and the stories of queer people with connections to the island.

**Jamal Sterrett** is a movement artist whose practice is rooted in Bruk Up - a philosophy and embodied form developed in Brooklyn that uses movement and connection to land as tools for self understanding and belonging. Sterrett will spend time walking Portland's terrain, letting the island's cliffs, waves, and quarried edges shape his body's responses, and performing a series of site-specific works across the festival weekend, culminating in a nighttime performance on the final evening.

**Liz Lake** wants to know what Portland knows - not its recorded history, but its felt knowledge. Through drawing, printmaking, and conversations with the island's healers, land workers, sailors, and artists, she'll map a different kind of Portland: one attuned to intuition, seasonality, and ways of knowing that sit outside formal institutions. The longer term aim is an Island School, a peer learning programme built in the land where it meets.

**Simon Lee Dicker** starts with a geological fact and follows it somewhere unexpected. Portland's limestone built St Paul's Cathedral. The stone left; the quarries stayed. Dicker reads that extraction through a queer lens - as a geography shaped by absence and misalignment, where the marbled white butterfly now thrives in disturbed post-industrial sites. His research will explore what it means for a place to be monumental elsewhere while becoming something wilder at home.



Portland photo Chris Hornby

## **WHY PORTLAND**

Portland has around 13,000 residents, a working quarry, a history of military occupation, and in September - an arts festival that draws international artists to its clifftops and narrow streets. b-side's model has always been about making ambitious contemporary art free and public, without the restriction of gallery admission or the cultural or socio-economic barriers that make art less accessible to people.

*b-side 2026 runs 10th to 13th September on the Isle of Portland, Dorset. The b-side Fringe and Portland Parade run alongside the main programme. All commissioned work is free and open to the public. For press enquiries and image requests: [pippa@inthebagpr.co.uk](mailto:pippa@inthebagpr.co.uk)  
[www.b-side.org.uk](http://www.b-side.org.uk)*

## **ENDS**

Issued by **In The Bag PR** on behalf of **b-side**

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### **About b-side**

b-side is an internationally recognised and locally loved arts organisation that both embodies and enriches its place of origin - the Isle of Portland in Dorset.

We work with and commission artists who are as excited by the bigger picture as the smallest detail. We invite artists, residents, and researchers to create unique and inventive projects inspired by the themes of 'people' and 'place'. We host big discussions on topics that affect us both locally and globally and create art that exists in unusual and unexpected places.

### **About Arts Council England**

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. Our vision, set out in our strategy Let's Create, is that by 2030, we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish, and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. Between 2023 and 2026 we will have invested over £467 million of public money from Government, alongside an estimated £250 million each year from The National Lottery, to help ensure that people in every part of the country have access to culture and creativity in the places where they live. Until Autumn 2025, the National Lottery is celebrating its 30th anniversary of supporting good

causes in the United Kingdom: since the first draw was held in 1994, it has raised £49 billion and awarded more than 690,000 individual grants. Visit our website to learn more about our work.