

ANNUAL REPORT
2023-2024

OH DEERI, APHIDS, Photo: JMA Photography



TRANSFORM



'One of the most important international festivals in the UK'

THE STAGE

ABOUT TRANSFORM

Transform is an engine-room for urgent, of-the-moment performance. Our biennial festivals take over Leeds with powerful performance by local, national and international artists. Year-round, we activate communities through co-creation and support the development of the next generation of artists and arts professionals. We focus on reimagining what theatre can look like and do, celebrating the independent and adventurous spirit of the city, reflecting the socially conscious North, and connecting creatives and audiences to the world.

‘INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS CAN EASILY FEEL DETACHED FROM THEIR HOST CITY. IN BRINGING TOGETHER ARTISTS FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD, THE LOCAL GETS LOST... BUT AT TRANSFORM, THE CHARACTER OF LEEDS IS BAKED INTO THE PROGRAMME.’

THE GUARDIAN



Hollie Miller, Hannah Buckley and Craig Scott, Blood Bone Breath, Photo: JMA Photography

THE JOURNEY SO FAR

In the last 8 years, we have achieved what many said was impossible – building an ambitious, inclusive & international festival during times of adversity. We have delivered 6 trailblazing international festivals bringing extraordinary, socially-conscious performance to Leeds, fuelling a new generation of artists and audiences and establishing a powerful reputation nationally and internationally.

In 2023, **Transform** joined **Arts Council England**'s National Portfolio. This marks a significant step-change in the development of Transform as a year-round organisation, enabling us to significantly increase the capacity of the core team, lay the foundations for our most ambitious festival to date and achieve our mission of being the UK's leading festival for inclusive, international performance. With increased resources, our 2023 edition was our most successful yet, nearly doubling audiences and more than doubling box office income versus 2021-22.

In December 2023, Transform was shortlisted for **The Stage's 2024 International Award**. **The Stage Awards** recognise excellence in the theatre industry and this acknowledgement is a powerful testament to the success of **Transform 23**. **The Stage** described the 2023 edition as 'Transform's most ambitious yet', highlighting our position as 'one of the most important international festivals in the UK'.

TRANSFORMING PERFORMANCE

Changing perceptions about what performance can be, who it is for and how it connects to the world around us.

TRANSFORMING OUR CITY

Drawing on the rich cultural and social assets of Leeds and the surrounding region, making the city a world leading centre for socially conscious performance, a place to confront local and global challenges together.

TRANSFORMING PEOPLE

Inspiring, nurturing and empowering a diverse and ambitious new generation of arts leaders from the North of England including artists, curators, producers, technicians and managers.

TRANSFORM 23

Desire Marea - Photo: JMA Photography

Celebratory and defiant; tender and reflective, **Transform 23** invited audiences to reflect on everything from community and loss, to nature and personal odysseys, with a programme of world-class performance that unfolded across Leeds over 11 days. Original commissions; international presentations, micro-interventions, co-created participatory work, an installation for the public realm and a series of special events inhabited the city's most iconic venues and spaces for **Transform's** most ambitious international festival yet, forging new collaborations and bringing bold new productions to life.

24 performances over
11 days
14 international presentations
8 original commissions
2 exhibitions
1 public artwork
101 artists from across
5 continents and **12** nationalities
12,659 audience members
10 host venues and
30 project partners
63 participants across
8 workshops
38 volunteers

13 rolls of gaffer tape
24 mechanical bunnies
1 adverse weather warning
5,640 marshmallows
12 bean bags
6 rap choir recordings
1 cancelled flight
200 green and purple donuts
14 charity shop coats for chilly Brazilians
2 Leeds United scarves
324 public promises made
70 secrets collected
160 slices of pizza eaten
1 transformative festival

FEATURING

ÁSRÚN MAGNÚSDOTTIR (Iceland)
DESIRE MAREA (South Africa)
PAUL RAMIREZ JONAS (USA)
APHIDS (Australia)
CHERISH MENZO (Netherlands)
MIET WARLOP (Belgium)
MEXA (Brazil)
**HANNAH BUCKLEY, HOLLIE MILLER,
AND CRAIG SCOTT** (UK)
**SILKE HUYSMANS
& HANNES DEREERE** (Belgium)
KATY BAIRD (UK)
DMYTRO LEVYTSKYI (Ukraine)
NASTARAN RAZAWI KHORASANI (Netherlands/Iran)
CHIARA BERSANI (Italy)
ROMA LOUDUN (UK)
NICKY MURMANN (UK)
MAYOWA OGUNNAIKE (UK)
BAKANI PICK-UP (UK)
POPPERFACE (UK)

TRAILBLAZING PERFORMANCE

MAJOR COMMISSIONS AND COLLABORATIONS



Over the two-year festival cycle, **Transform** commissioned and co-presented three major new projects by leading artists with international profiles. To realise the full scale, quality and reach of these ambitious projects, **Transform** took a leading role in driving their development and established collaborations with other national and international arts organisations to support this. Alongside the other Trailblazing Performances in our programme of visiting work, these are exemplars of high-quality contemporary performance practice.



PUMPITOPERA TRANSATLANTICA MEXA (BRAZIL)

A vivid reimagining of Homer's *Odyssey*, combining operatic vocals, 90s pop music and personal stories to create an everyday epic which is both dazzling and entertaining.

MEXA was formed in 2015 following episodes of violence in homeless shelters in São Paulo. **PUMPITOPERA TRANSATLANTICA** was commissioned by **Transform** on the back of a fateful meeting between Creative Director Amy Letman and Director João Dias Turchi in early 2020, following one of **MEXA**'s shows being cancelled on the spot due to Covid-19. Three years and several lockdowns later, this **Transform** commission and co-production with **Casa do Povo** finally made its transatlantic journey over to Europe for presentation at **Transform, Kunstenfestivaldesarts** (Belgium), **Teatro do Bairro Alto** (Lisbon) and **Haufestival** (Germany).

'PUMPITOPERA TRANSATLANTICA is the embodiment of Transform's mission, combining artforms, genres, international perspectives and atypical stories for a wild and poignant performance.' – The State of the Arts



OH DEER!, APHIDS. Photo: JMA Photography

OH DEER!
APHIDS (AUSTRALIA)

Pop culture has a thing for orphans. This playful performance moves away from the idealised orphans of fairy tales to contemplate the reality of coping with bereavement, all with a nod and a wink.

With the themes of the work speaking directly to the lived experience of members of the team and our audiences, **Transform** co-commissioned *OH DEER!* following a visit to **RISING**, Melbourne, courtesy of APAM (Australia Performing Arts Market). Working with a local cast of Leeds-based performers with experience of losing a parent, **APHIDS** created a lively new space to reflect on personal and universal experiences of loss – from Melbourne to Leeds.

'The most amazing thing was investment and belief in an idea that hadn't been made yet. Also the really generous and thoughtful chats around the show – unlike any presenter I've worked with before. The level of belief in it was a privilege and super meaningful.' – APHIDS



Miet Warlop, ONE SONG. Photo: JMA Photography

ONE SONG
MIET WARLOP (BELGIUM)

This spectacular performance is part sports competition, part concert – on an epic scale. The ensemble cast grapple with themes of life, death, hope and rebirth, as well as the bodily realities of sweat, pain and exhaustion.

In its mission to bring large scale, diverse-led, bold international performance to Leeds, and building on the previous success of a co-presentation model in 2022 around a **Back to Back Theatre** tour, **Transform** reunited with **Battersea Arts Centre** (London) to co-present *ONE SONG*. This established a collaborative UK network for presenters with a shared curatorial vision to develop audiences for bold work of scale, allowing us to programme inbound international touring in a way that is financially viable, environmentally conscious and artistically inspirational.

'Dazzling feat of physicality' – The Stage

'Seeing a work of this stature in the UK, is something of wonder but a rarity. It takes you to a new place for a while and before you know it you're back, forever changed. ONE SONG did this for me.' – Artist Peer Review

ENGINE ROOM

Engine Room drives the development of artistic careers and creative practices, from the first public steps to the development of strong, tourable work. As well as offering financial support and presentation opportunities, **Transform** offers artists accessing this pathway bespoke professional and creative development support.

COMMISSIONING **Engine Room** offers artists from the North of the UK who are at a critical moment in their career development a chance to step up and make work of a greater scale and ambition than they have previously. For **Transform 23**, building on a relationship developed through a Transform-hosted residency as part of **Horizon** (performance created in England) in 2021, **Katy Baird** was supported to make *GET OFF* – a journey in search of the ultimate euphoric experience that unites us all.

Co-commissioned by Transform and Battersea Arts Centre with further support from Artsadmin, Tramway, CAMPO, Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts, Cambridge Junction and Horizon. Using public funding through the National Lottery from Arts Council England.



Mayowa Ogunnaika, Where are all the Gods? Photo: JMA Photography

MICRO-COMMISSIONS

Engine Room offers micro-commissions to Leeds-based artists at the start of their careers (curated based on organisational ethos and programme priorities) to develop new ideas, and a platform to share these short works within the festival programme. The artists collaborate with other recipients of micro-commissions and work with leading international artists presented in the festival. **Transform 23** invited **Bakani Pick-up, Mayowa Ogunnaika, Nicky Murmann and Roma Loudun** to each develop an artistic response to **MEXA's PUMPITOPERA TRANSATLANTICA**, drawing on themes of protest, borders and self-revelation.

'It was amazing being given the opportunity to experiment with total enthusiasm from the outset. Never a 'no', always 'we can make this happen' which came from the clarity of what we were being asked to do. Felt like the process was being trusted'
Micro commission artist

THE COLLECTIVE

Since 2018 **Transform** has been committed to supporting young people across Leeds as creatives, curators and change-makers. **The Collective** supports those with under-represented identities to take their first steps towards careers in the arts, develop their agency and voice, and to play a major role in dreaming up bold new projects for Transform festivals.

YOUNG CURATORS

Over 22-23, two cohorts of **Young Curators** were supported to build their understanding of roles in the arts and how creative practitioners can contribute to urgent societal debates. Working with leading local, national and international curators, they participated in professional development sessions and undertook an international research trip to **Mladi levi festival** (Slovenia), on the back of which they curated *Out of the Blue* by **Silke Huysmans** and **Hannes Dereere** (Belgium) within the **Transform 23 festival** programme.



Ásrún Magnúsdóttir, SECRETS, Photo: JAA Photography

FLAGSHIP PROJECT

The **Young Curators** were also supported to commission a flagship participatory project, inviting an international artist of their choosing to co-create a brand-new work with a cohort of **Young Performers** based on themes that matter to them. Through this process, Icelandic artist **Ásrún Magnúsdóttir** was commissioned to co-create new work **SECRETS** with young people from Leeds and Reykjavik, giving voice to the unspoken worries and private lives of teenagers through original music in a riotous piece of gig-theatre.

'The performance is a brilliant showcase of local talent, giving a platform to a multiskilled cast of musicians, singers and spoken-word artists who propel the show with their charisma. Though the secrets may often be dark, the experience itself is joyous.'

– The Guardian

ACCESS, ENGAGEMENT & AUDIENCES

The artists and companies in the **Transform 23** programme were 33% global majority led, 52% female led, 52% LGBTQIA+ led & 24% disabled led. The festival championed an accessible and inclusive model, making use of accessible formats and provisions, including durational events, relaxed performances and installations in the public realm; offering captioned and BSL-interpreted performances across the programme and operating a Pay What You Can ticketing model. All events had an 'open door policy' and all venues were physically accessible.

The festival saw a significant increase in audience numbers compared to previous editions – with 54% of the 13,000 strong audience being new to **Transform**. Bespoke engagement programmes were delivered around visiting shows to contextualise the international programme for local audiences.

Analysis of data demonstrates that **Transform** audiences are comparatively younger & more diverse than the national average of arts attendees (comparing data from **Transform 23** with that of **Arts Council England's** Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Data Report 2021-22), with 52% aged 16-34 (national average 19%), 17% from global majority backgrounds (national average 10%) and 12.4% identifying as disabled (national average 8%).



Photo: JIAA Photography

AUDIENCE FEEDBACK

**‘TRANSFORM 23 MADE ME PROUD
TO BE LEEDS BORN AND BRED’**

**‘VERY WELL COMMUNICATED
MAKING IT SO ACCESSIBLE’**

‘ABSOLUTELY LIFE CHANGING!’

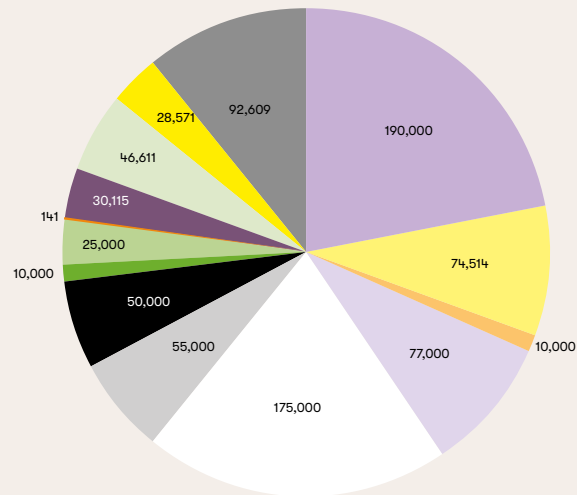
**‘I REALLY CHERISH THE
COMMUNITY THAT HAS BEEN BUILT
AROUND THIS FESTIVAL’**

FINANCIAL MODEL

TRANSFORM INCOME 2022/23 AND 2023/24 (combined)

INCOME YR 1: £307,857
INCOME YR 2: £556,704

Pounds (£)

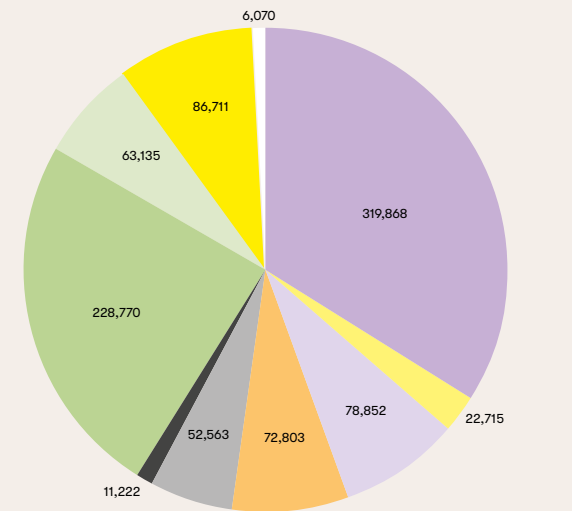


- Arts Council England NPO
- Arts Council England Project Grants
- Other Public Funding
- Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
- Paul Hamlyn Foundation
- Other Trusts & Foundations
- Leeds 2023
- Leeds City Council
- Leeds Playhouse
- Donations
- International funds
- Box Office Income
- HMRC Theatre Tax Relief
- Other Earned Income

Transform is a biennial festival and thus operates a two-year budget model to better represent the financial context. The visual summary below represents the combined income and expenditure over two financial years - 2022/23 and 2023/24 - to account for the organisation's 'development year' and 'delivery year', both which play a vital role in the realisation of the festival.

TRANSFORM EXPENDITURE 2022/23 AND 2023/24 (combined)

EXPENDITURE YR 1: £289,390
EXPENDITURE YR 2: £653,319



- Trailblazing Performance (Artistic Programme)
- Production & Operations
- Freelance Team
- Engine Room (Artist Development)
- Marketing & Engagement
- Overheads
- The Collective (Young People)
- Access & Evaluation
- Core Team
- Other

PARTNERS

VENUES

Carriageworks Theatre, CLAY: Centre for Live Art Yorkshire, Leeds Playhouse, Leeds School of Arts (Leeds Beckett University), Left Bank Leeds, The Light, The Stanley & Audrey Burton Theatre (Northern Ballet), The Warehouse in Holbeck (Slung Low), Trinity Leeds, Yorkshire Dance

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Getaway Girls, Geraldine Connor Creatives, Common Wealth's Young Creatives, Woodhouse Community Centre, RJC Dance, Sable Studio

ACADEMIC PARTNERS

Leeds School of Arts (Leeds Beckett University), Leeds City College

GET IN TOUCH

Transform Theatre Projects
info@transformfestival.org

Transform 23 was produced by **Transform** – in partnership with **Leeds Playhouse** and citywide venues and partners. Supported by **LEEDS 2023: Year of Culture**. Funded by **Paul Hamlyn Foundation** and **Esmée Fairbairn Foundation**. Supported using public funding by **Arts Council England**.

We are also supported by a variety of other partners who contribute to making our festivals and projects happen. With thanks to...

CO PRESENTERS & CO-COMMISSIONERS

Battersea Arts Centre, Casa do Povo, Fierce, Kampnagel, Light Night Leeds, RISING Melbourne, Reykjavik Dance Festival, Take Me Somewhere, Teatro do Bairro Alto

UK FUNDERS

Arts Council England, Backstage Trust, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, Leeds City Council (arts@leeds), The Liz & Terry Bramall Foundation, National Lottery Awards for All England, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Peter Sowerby Foundation

INTERNATIONAL FUNDERS

Australia Council for the Arts, Children Culture fund of Iceland, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands

JOIN US

If you want to be part of making our next festival happen in October 2025 – as a partner, a sponsor, a volunteer, a trustee, an artist, a young person or as a member of our team – come and say hello: siana-mae@transformfestival.org

**‘THE LEVEL OF CARE OF TRANSFORM
IS HOPEFULLY THE FUTURE
OF FESTIVALS.’**

APHIDS



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



Funded by
UK Government

LEEDS
YEAR OF
CULTURE **2023**



**Paul Hamlyn
Foundation**



**Esmée
Fairbairn
FOUNDATION**

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