

Parakeets, Plants, Heat Pumps and Hoovers: the Design Museum's new display explores the boundaries between the artificial and natural world



(Top and bottom left) *Artificial* at the Design Museum, photo credit Rob Harris. (Right) 24/25 Design Researchers in Residence, photo credit Justine Trickett

Design Researchers in Residence: *Artificial*

Open 17 June – 21 September 2025 | the Design Museum, London

PRESS IMAGES AVAILABLE [HERE](#)

- Tomorrow marks the opening of *Artificial*, a new free display at the Design Museum exploring how design research can address the climate emergency.
- The works featured in *Artificial* unravel the invisible relationships woven into everyday life, examining the perceived boundaries between what is 'natural' and what has been created by humans.
- This display is part of the museum's flagship *Design Researchers in Residence* programme, hosted by its in-house design research programme Future Observatory in partnership with the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

Tomorrow the Design Museum opens *Artificial*, a thought-provoking new display showcasing innovative responses to the climate crisis. Presented by

Future Observatory in partnership with the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the free display explores the perceived boundary between what is 'natural' and what is made by humans, finding that the two are in fact intricately intertwined.

On show from 17 June to 21 September 2025, the featured works emerge from the Design Museum's Design Researchers in Residence programme – a long-standing annual residency that supports emerging designers who respond to a chosen theme.

The 2024/25 residents – Christie Swallow, Hani Salih, Laura Lebeau and Neba Sere – have spent the past eight months exploring the theme of *Artificial* and questioning the limits of human-centred design in a more-than-human climate crisis. Their work interrogates the artificial relationships woven into everyday life – from urban ecosystems and manufactured materials to institutional knowledge and political infrastructures – and explores the ways in which design can help us imagine a future rooted in care, collaboration and coexistence.

Christie Swallow invites us to convene with the parakeets in St James's Park – a thriving but controversial community of non-native birds roosting in the manicured, man-made green spaces of London. Meanwhile Hani Salih draws us into the layered bureaucratic complexities behind the seemingly straightforward task of installing a heat pump in a British building. Laura Lebeau dismantles ideas about what "things" are made of, tracing the environmental impact of mass-produced domestic appliances. And finally, Neba Sere opens a space to decolonise our understanding of plants by sitting with the emotional and sensorial legacies of displacement, commodification and extraction.

Designed by Kaye Song, with elements fabricated by Flimsy Works, the display focuses on circularity and the use of sustainable materials. It is accompanied by a dedicated limited-edition publication, designed by Émilie Loiseleur and edited by Abbie Adams and Leilah Hirson-Comley, which expands on the residents' research. Free copies will be available at the museum and a digital version can be downloaded from Future Observatory's online library.

Christie Swallow: *Paracologies*

Artist, researcher and maker Christie Swallow will present 'Paracologies', a project that asks visitors to move beyond an outdated idea of what is native

and therefore natural, and question who gets to belong in the artificial ecologies of transplanted urban nature. Parakeets are not a naturally occurring species in the British Isles, a non-native species of bright green bird that live in the manicured parks of London. Christie's research asks us to question who gets to belong in the artificial ecologies of transplanted urban nature.

Through in-depth collaborations with musicians and performers, the project has fostered more-than-human communication by composing music for parakeets. Throughout their research, Christie has also stitched together layers of information, stories and histories in the form of a 'Para Quilt'. Translating textual information to textile allows people to touch, feel and learn as they walk through the parks. Through the travails of the parakeet, Christie hopes to better understand how we might coexist on this damaged planet and foster solidarity across species boundaries.

With a background in architecture, Christie Swallow's practice engages with ecology, technoscience and heterodoxy through methods of counter-mapping. Christie has previously undertaken residencies at the European Commission, the University of Birmingham and Hanger CIA. They were the 2020 recipient of the RIBA Boyd Auger Award and previously studied at The University of Cambridge and the Royal College of Art.

Hani Salih: *Hot Mess*

Hani Salih is a researcher, writer and curator who works at the edge of a long list of disciplines, practices, and ideas. His research untangles the process of trying to install a heat pump in a British building to reveal the barriers embedded in the system, from local on-the-ground communities to developers, planners, civil servants and senior government officials.

Deploying lessons from systems theory and herd and swarm intelligence, and by studying how flows of resources occur naturally in systems found in nature and are managed and maintained, Hani invites viewers to consider an alternative planning system rooted in nature-mimicry and less historically contingent ways of thinking about organising large interrelated systems.

Hani's interests are informed by a foundation in critical spatial thinking and architecture, furthered by studies at the London School of Economics that led to a focus on the systems and the infrastructure that shapes our lives.

Hani is a curator and moderator at De Dépendance in Rotterdam and was formerly Co-Curator of the International Architecture Biennial in Rotterdam (2024) and Senior Researcher at The Quality of Life Foundation.

Laura Lebeau: *Harmless Appliances*

Industrial designer Laura Lebeau works across technology and speculative design, focusing on imagining radical sustainability strategies to define the future of consumer electronics, as well as experimenting beyond the expected aesthetic codes of technology.

Her research 'Harmless Appliances' traces the hidden materiality of everyday objects to uncover the upstream impact of mass-produced domestic appliances before they are even purchased. By focusing on an icon of British mass-produced design – the humble Henry Hoover, designed and manufactured in the UK – Laura explores how the most ordinary object can reveal complex networks of material sourcing, manufacturing infrastructure, and the potential for longevity through repair.

Exploring the transitions between natural 'raw' materials and synthetic 'product' materials for component manufacture, Laura's research pushes the boundaries of materiality to imagine a harmless Henry Hoover that moves even further towards regional supply chains, facilitating hyper-local repairs, as she speculates on and challenges the assumed immutability of mass-manufactured, global supply chains.

Laura has a master's degree in industrial design from the Strate, School of Design. She spent five years at Map Project Office and is currently a Senior Designer at BLOND where she collaborates with some of the most innovative and well-known companies in the world.

Neba Sere: *Ancestral Plants: Anarchive*

Neba Sere is a spatial practitioner who advocates for diversity and inclusion in the architecture profession. Her project 'Ancestral Plants: Anarchive' invites viewers to decolonise their understanding of plants by examining the relationship between anthropocentrism and colonisation.

In collaboration with Umi Lovecraft, Neba Sere has reflected on the top-down structures of Western plant archives – dominated by hierarchies and classification systems – and contrasts this with the highly emotional and

sensuous legacies of their displacement, commodification and extraction. The research starts with five key plants: Banana, Cocoa, Coffee, Palm oil and Sugar – cash crops that have played a foundational role in British economic wealth, historic colonial trade routes and continue to this day to shape global consumption habits and exploitative labour conditions as well as impact the climate.

Anarchive opens up a space for care, collective learning, and reconnection to overlooked plant knowledge.

Neba is an associate professor at The Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, where her research focuses on decolonisation and decarbonisation. She also co-leads decosm with Umi Lovecraft and is the co-director of Black Females in Architecture. Her previous roles include Senior Project Officer with the Greater London Authority's Regeneration Team and leading youth projects at Build Up Foundation, where she is now a Trustee.

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There will be a free tour of the display with curator Abbie Adams on Thursday 19 June 2025, 1 – 2pm, as well as a panel discussion with the four Design Researchers in Residence in the museum's auditorium on 20 September 2025.

Justin McGuirk, Future Observatory director says: *“As ever, the Design Researchers in Residence make us view the world with fresh eyes. This year they reveal the complexity behind such everyday things as hoovers, heat pumps, parakeets and the food we eat. Each is shown to be a fault line challenging our perceptions of what is natural and what is artificial.”*

Abbie Adams, Future Observatory curator says: *“This year's residents unravel the systems and values that shape how and what we design. Through stitching, mapping, repair and co-creation, they guide us from a factory floor in Somerset to a church in London's White City estate; inviting you to listen to the voices of plants and convene with parakeets. In doing so, they examine the artificial relationships at the root of ecological collapse.”*

Tim Marlow, Director of the Design Museum, says: *“Design can play a pivotal role in how we approach the ongoing climate crisis, and our next generation of emerging designers and creatives have the power to*

transform our relationship with the Earth, designing in collaboration with and alongside the natural world, not against it. I hope the work of our Design Researchers in Residence leaves people feeling inspired but more importantly asking questions and considering the ways in which we interact with the natural world in our everyday lives."

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About Design Researchers in Residence

The Design Researchers in Residence programme supports emerging designers at the start of their careers to spend a year developing a new research project in response to a theme. It builds upon the Design Museum's flagship designers' residence which has supported emerging designers since 2007. Former residents include Asif Khan, Adam Nathaniel Furman, Jade Folawiyo and Lawrence Lek. Previous themes for the programme were 'Restore' and 'Islands'. Design Researchers in Residence is part of the museum's Future Observatory, a national design research programme based at and coordinated by the Design Museum and supported by the UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

[Design Researchers in Residence | Future Observatory](#)

About the Design Museum

The Design Museum is a multifaceted museum, an ever-changing space for the public, industry and education to come together and explore new ideas. A registered charity, the museum's innovative exhibitions, partnerships, research and learning programmes evidence how design can enable this planet and its inhabitants to thrive. Our landmark building in Kensington is the centre of our national network and a global hub for the transformative potential of design.

[Home - Design Museum](#)



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About Future Observatory

Launched in November 2021, Future Observatory is the Design Museum's national research programme for the green transition. Based at the museum, it is coordinated in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), which is part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). Acting as both a coordinating hub for a nationwide programme, as well as a research department within the museum, Future Observatory curates exhibitions, programmes events and funds and publishes new research, all with the aim of championing new design thinking on environmental issues. In July 2022, AHRC and the Design Museum launched Future Observatory: Design the Green Transition, a multi-million-pound fund bringing UK design researchers, universities and businesses together to catalyse the transition to net zero and a green economy, now benefitting over 100 higher education institutions and 75 industry and local authority partners across the nation. It is the largest publicly funded design research and innovation (R&I) programme in the UK.

[Future Observatory](#)



About UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation, funds internationally outstanding independent researchers across the whole range of the arts and humanities: history, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, languages and literature, design, heritage, area studies, the creative and performing arts, and much more. The quality and range of research supported by AHRC works for the good of UK society and culture and contributes both to UK economic success and to the culture and welfare of societies across the globe.

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