

Forbes

Liverpool Biennial, UK's Largest, Free Contemporary Art Festival

Joanne Shurvell

May 21, 2021



One of Teresa Solar's five 'Osteoclast' sculptures at the Liverpool Biennial, 2021

The 11th edition of the Liverpool Biennial, the UK's largest free festival of contemporary visual art, opened at venues across the city this week and runs until 27 June. The brilliant lineup of artworks in *The Stomach and the Port* considers the body and ways of connecting with the world. Nine new exhibitions complement the outdoor sculptures, installations, sonic and digital commissions and online event program on the Biennial Online Portal, which launched in March.



Rashid Johnson, *Stacked Heads*, at Canning Dock Quayside, commissioned by the Liverpool Biennial

The Stomach and the Port, curated by Manuela Moscoso who was previously curator at Tamayo Museo in Mexico City, showcases the work of 50 leading and emerging artists and collectives from 30 countries around the world, including 47 new commissions for the Liverpool Biennial. The biennial includes well known artists like Judy Chicago and Rashid Johnson, as well as this year's Turner Prize shortlisted artist collective Black Obsidian Sound System.

Previous editions of the biennial have included big names like John Akomfrah, Mona Hatoum, Yayoi Kusama, Takashi Murakami, Yoko Ono, Ai Weiwei and Franz West. But the Liverpool Biennial is also an art exhibition of thrilling surprises and discoveries, thanks to works from many lesser known artists and the fascinating venues that showcase them in one of the UK's most vibrant and creative cities.



Tate Liverpool PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAHY

Presented across the city, in nine new and historic locations, the biennial has taken over the former department store, Lewis's Building, Dr Martin Luther King Jr Building, the Lush Building, Liverpool Central Library and Cotton Exchange to install site-specific exhibitions, while new exhibitions have been created with the city's major art venues, Tate Liverpool, FACT, Bluecoat and Open Eye Gallery.



Eric Beltran's Cumbia posters at Lewis's Building, Liverpool Biennial PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAHY

As the title *The Stomach and the Port* suggests, the exhibition explores concepts of the body, as well as Liverpool's history as a port city, an active agent in the process of modernisation, change and colonialism. Manuela Moscoso said: "*The Stomach and the Port* reflects on systems of exchange, how borders are not only geographic but also political and subjective constructs. Rooted in decolonising our experience of the world, the artists collaboratively present a re-calibration of the senses and a catalyst for change." The Biennial's series of outdoor sculptures and installations by seven artists celebrate Liverpool's iconic architecture and public spaces. They also emphasise the body/port connections. Rashid Johnson's *Stacked Heads*, a large-scale sculpture at Canning Dock Quayside, is made up of two distinct head parts in the style of a totem – made from bronze and furnished with plants. Teresa Solar's five bright orange sculptures in her work *Osteoclast (I do not know how I came to be on board this ship, this navel of my ark)* resemble human bones made into giant kayak-like structures.

Tate Liverpool

New commissions and existing works by Ines Doujak and John Barker, Linder, Jutta Koether and Ebony G. Patterson, are presented, alongside works from Tate's collection including Judy Chicago, Nicholas Hlobo, Martine Syms, Anu Pöder and Ithell Colquhoun. Jamaican-born artist Ebony G. Patterson's sculptures and eye-catching wallpaper highlight marginalised groups, including Black communities and women. *Masterless Voices*, a video work by Ines Doujak and John Barker is one of the highlights of the biennial. The lively video was inspired by indigenous South American peoples' belief that textiles are carriers of knowledge, history and cultural memory. Two large screens in another gallery show the work of American artist Martine Syms who performs gestures, turns of phrases and expressions, making a comment on how Black gestures and idioms have been commercialised.

Open Eye Gallery

Zineb Sedira's large-scale sculptures and photographic prints from her series *Sugar Routes*, depicting sugar extracted from different parts of the world and housed in a modern warehouse in Marseille, are shown with Alberta Whittle's engrossing film reflecting on the effects of colonialism, *between a whisper and a cry*. Both artists depict the transatlantic movement of enslaved people, showcasing how different forms of the past still exist today.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Building

David Zink Yi's video installation *Horror Vacui* combines footage of rehearsals of the Cuban Latin band "De Adentro y Afuera" with images of Afro-Cuban rituals. The film highlights the music's use of polyrhythm and how it represents the plural construction of identity that counters binary positions.

Cotton Exchange



Sculptures by Sonia Gomes at the Cotton Exchange, Liverpool Biennial PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAPHY

Sonia Gomes, Xaviera Simmons, Invernomuto & Jim C. Nedd present sculpture, photography and music, each drawing on narratives within the layered and entangled histories of the American experience. Simmons examines the construction of “whiteness” in relation to the history of slavery and its legacy. The former Cotton Exchange is symbolic of the city’s economy and societal history; the building is explicitly and integrally tied to a time in the 19th and 20th century, when wealth and economic prosperity depended upon the enforced movement of people, enslavement, trade and labor.

Lewis's Building



An installation by Reto Pulfer at Lewis's Building, Liverpool Biennial

PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAHY

Eleven artists are showing works over three floors of a grade II listed nineteenth-century building that formerly housed Lewis's department store. Highlights include Camille Henrot whose graphic paintings and sculptures investigate co-dependency between parent and child and bodily transformation. Upstairs are dramatic sound and textile installations by Lamin Fofana, Reto Pulfer, and Alberta Whittle who also has a piece at Open Eye gallery. Mexican artist Erick Beltrán's colorful posters for his installation *Superstition* relate to Latin American Cumbia music and dance. His work can also be seen and heard in a number of Liverpool's black cabs.

Lush Building

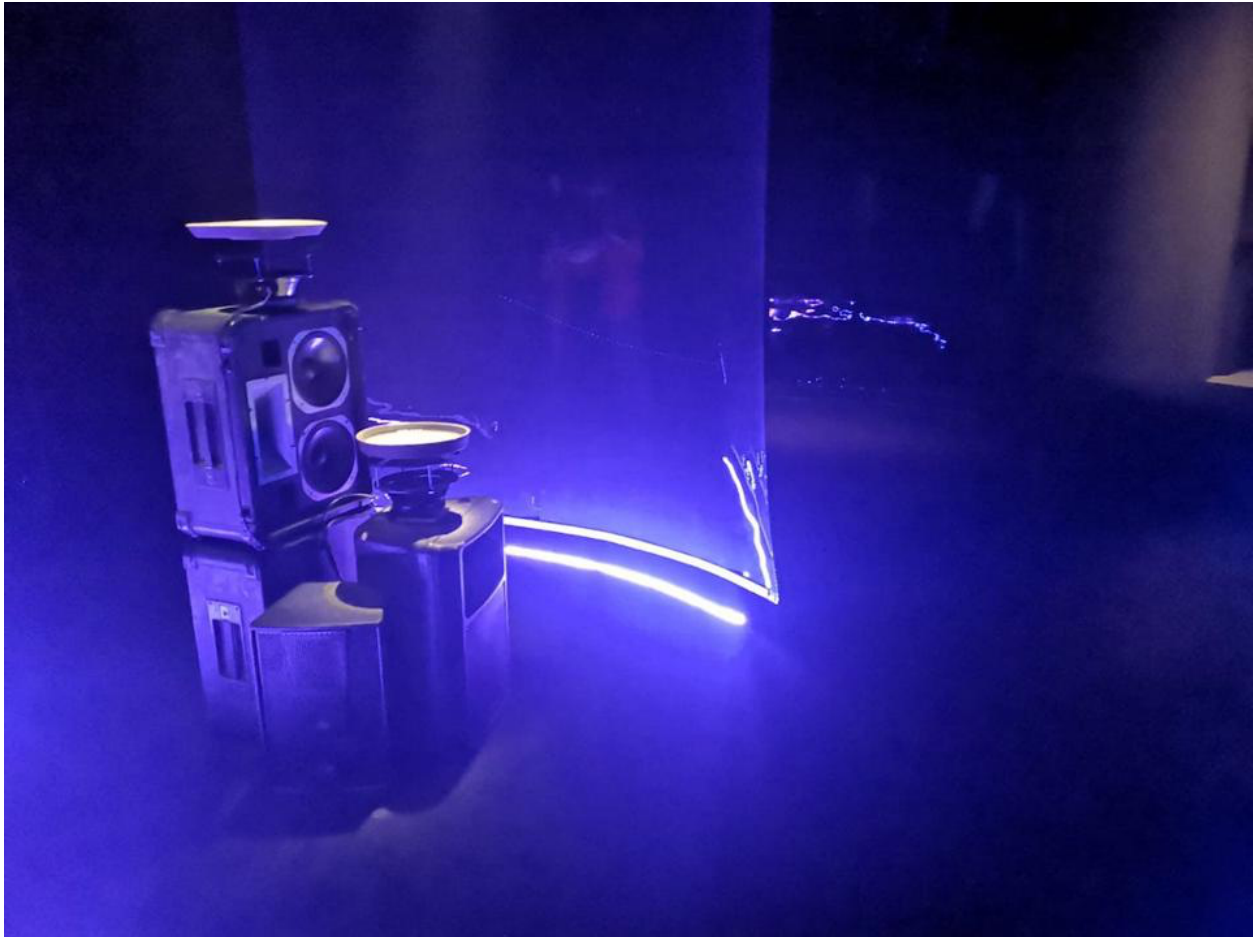


Christopher Cozier, 'turbulence' at Lush, Liverpool Biennial PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAHY

On the top floor of popular soap company Lush, there's an extensive gallery space that the Biennial is using to show politically inspired work by Christopher Cozier whose striking oil blot drawings on fabric highlight the global oil economy's impact on the Caribbean as a direct consequence of colonialism. Around the corner, Ayesha Hameed's arresting sound installation, *I sing of the sea*, charts the first undersea telegraphic cable between India and Britain during the British Empire.

In another room Neo Muyanga's *A Maze in Grace* traces the history of the hymn "Amazing Grace" to its origins within the city of Liverpool, home to its composer, English slaver-turned-abolitionist John Newton, from where the song then travelled to the US, becoming an emblem of the Civil Rights Movement.

FACT



Black Obsidian Sound System at FACT, Liverpool PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGGRAPHY

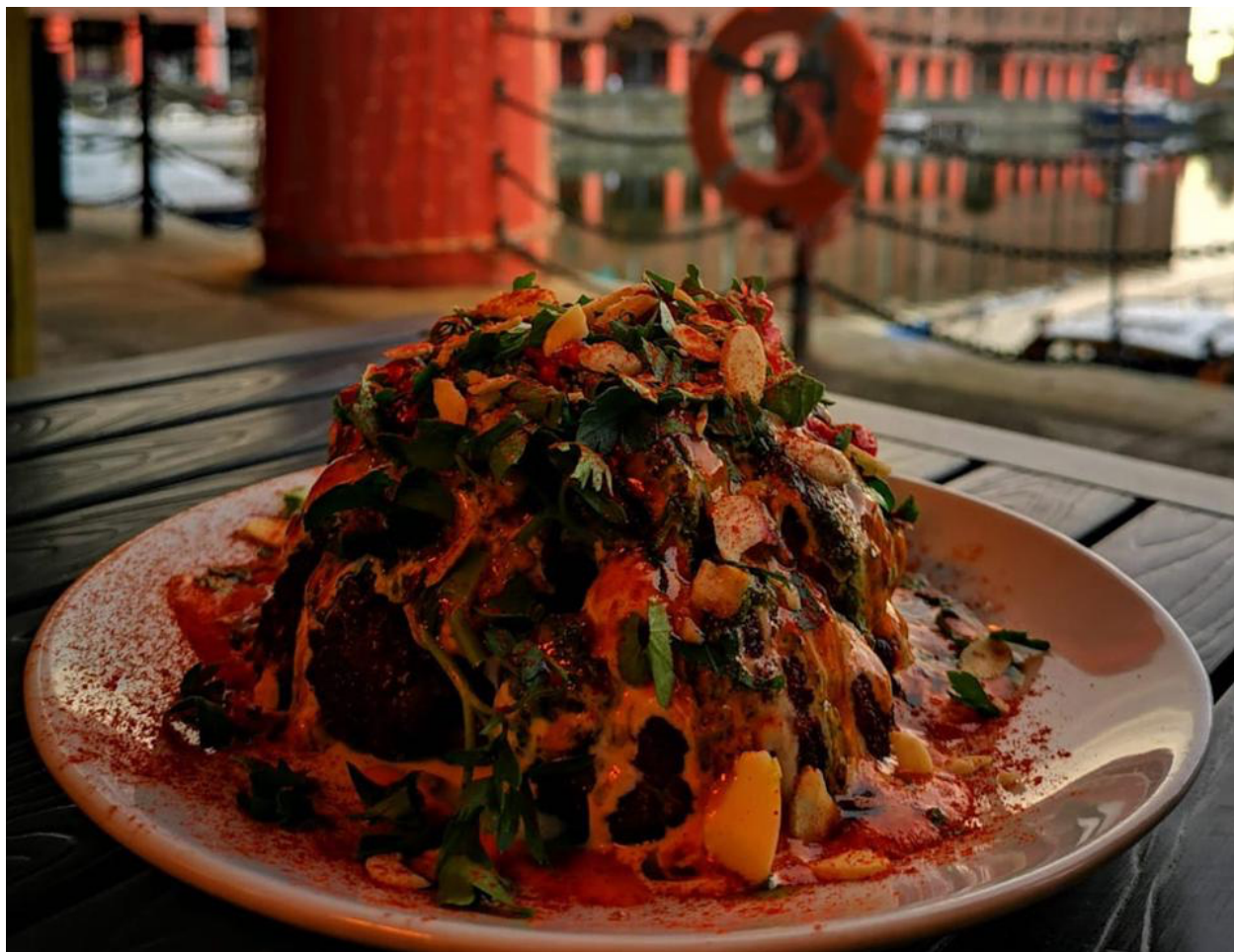
The UK's leading art, film and new media center, FACT presents *The Only Good System is a Soundsystem* (2021), a new audio-visual commission by Turner Prize shortlisted collective **B.O.S.S. (Black Obsidian Sound System)**, positioning sound system culture as a space of communal strength, where kinship is formed and reciprocated, against a background of repression and discrimination in the UK. Along with film works by **Zheng Bo** from his *Pteridophila* series, including a new film created for the Biennial, the installations suggest ways of coming together that move beyond our experience as individual humans, incorporating the world of humanity, nature and technology.

Bluecoat



Bluecoat PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAPHY

Paintings by Jadé Fadojutimi explore the constant exchange between bodies and their environment as our identities continue to evolve. Films including *Jíbie* by Laura Huertas Millán and *Fog Dog* by Daniel Steegmann Mangrané, together with sculptural works by Roland Persson, Kathleen Ryan and André Romão, propose ways in which we belong to the world beyond our physical boundaries, considering ourselves as nature, not just part of it.



Disco cauliflower at Maray, Albert Docks, Liverpool PAUL ALLEN/ANDFOTOGRAPHY

Liverpool's Albert Docks are a must-visit destination on any trip to the city. In addition to Tate Liverpool, the Liverpool Museum and a selection of shops, the dock area is a great place to eat. Restaurants, most with terraces, line the quayside. A top restaurant choice is buzzy Maray, inspired by the vibrant district of Le Marais, Paris with a Middle Eastern sharing menu featuring Fattoush Salad, Lamb Shoulder Shawarma and the brilliantly named "disco cauliflower" a delicious concoction of baked cauliflower, chermoula, harissa, tahini, yoghurt, pomegranate, almonds and fresh herbs.

The Stomach and the Port runs until 27 June 2021 (with the exception of Open Eye until 6 June, Tate Liverpool until 20 June, FACT until 29 August, Bluecoat until 5 September).