



Design Researchers in Residence: Grown

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FUTURE
OBSERVATORY

OPEN CALL FOR ENTRIES 2026/27

Design Researchers in Residence is Future Observatory's residency programme hosted at the Design Museum. This programme supports thinkers at the start of their careers to develop new research on environmental concerns centred around a particular theme.

Each year the residency accommodates four researchers, working in different design disciplines to develop a piece of independent research in response to the theme and brief. Towards the end of the residency, the work of the four residents is presented in a free display at the Design Museum and in an accompanying print catalogue. There may also be an opportunity to contribute to a material lab in the re-thinking of the Design Museum's collections gallery.

This year's residency theme is Grown. Future Observatory is interested in design research projects that focus on the cultivation of natural, renewable and biodegradable materials.

Design Researchers in Residence: Grown will run from October 2026 – June 2027. The accompanying residency display will run from June 2027 – September 2027.

To apply, please download and carefully read the Call for Entries document before filling out the Application Form. All applications must be submitted by 11:59pm (UK time) on Sunday 6 September 2026 and application enquiries can be directed to grants_futureobservatory@designmuseum.org.

WHAT IS THE DESIGN RESEARCHERS IN RESIDENCE PROGRAMME?

Design Researchers in Residence builds on the museum's flagship Designers in Residence programme, which ran from 2007-2020. Since 2021 the programme has been delivered as part of the Future Observatory research programme at the Design Museum, delivered in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

The residency has two main aims: to provide design researchers in the early stages of their careers time and space away from their regular environment to develop and produce new work, and to offer museum visitors an opportunity to engage with live design research projects.

Each year the residency accommodates four researchers, working in different disciplines, to further develop their individual responses to a theme and brief. Although they will be working independently, they are encouraged to come together and share skills and ideas.

The programme is relatively flexible, taking the needs of individuals and project specifics into account. Typically, however, residents would begin by refining their initial responses to the brief before a period of detailed research, development and testing. Residents are required to commit at least two days per week to the programme during the residency period (October – June) working from the Design Museum at least once a week.

This programme culminates with a showcase in the Residency Studio (June–September) exhibiting different outcomes of the residents' process and research. This showcase is accompanied by a catalogue, which promotes the work of each designer, and raises their profile within the design community and the wider public.

Each resident is provided with a commissioning budget of £6,000, which goes directly towards producing the work that will be presented at the end of the residency. A bursary of £11,400 is also offered to support the development of their career and to fund their practice. This will be issued in agreed stages on appointment. The Design Museum manages the production costs associated with the showcase and the presentation of the work to the public.

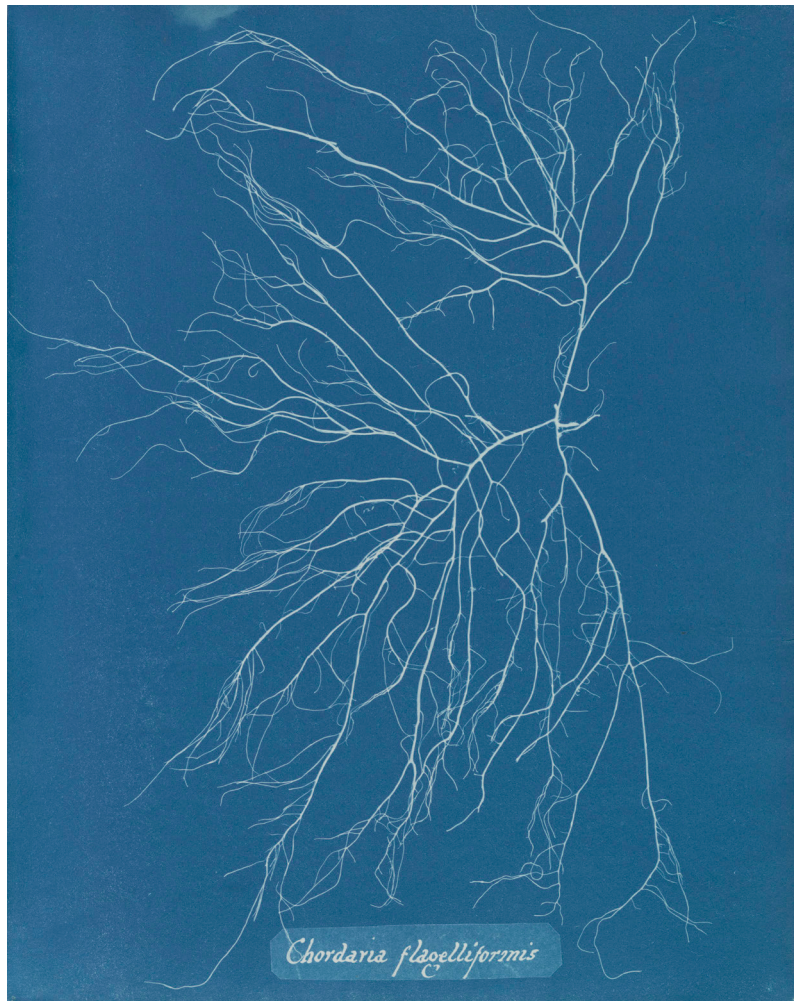
As well as financial support, the programme provides residents with a dedicated studio space at the Design Museum. During this time, residents can benefit from the Design Museum's network, and consulting with the Design Museum's learning, exhibitions, estates and curatorial teams in order to gain a greater understanding of how their work fits within the museum's wider context. The residency is a unique opportunity to exhibit work at a nationally renowned cultural institution, to publish research in

the residency publication and to share work through public programming.

Alongside the above, Future Observatory provides an internal programme of skill-sharing sessions, mentors and crits, which draw upon a network of external organisations, experts and established design researchers who may have knowledge and expertise relevant to each project. These conversations aim to promote critical dialogue, clarify intent and resolve research issues – supporting the development of each resident's practice.

To be eligible, residents must live and work in the UK, have graduated or set up a design-related business within the last five years, and must have demonstrable experience in carrying out independent research.

DESIGN RESEARCHERS IN RESIDENCE 2026/2027 BRIEF: GROWN



Chordaria flagelliformis, from "British Algae: Cyanotype Impressions," by Anna Atkins.
Image courtesy The New York Public Library

Algae, fungi, yeast, natural fibres... grown materials are substances cultivated with living organisms, rather than being extracted from the earth. They are natural, renewable and biodegradable, whether they are grown in a lab or on land.

The UK's bioeconomy is a government growth priority: the [2025 Modern Industrial Strategy](#) names engineering biology as one of six frontier industries, with an ambition for global leadership by 2030. Globally, [the market for mycelium-based materials](#) alone is projected to grow from around \$3.6 billion today to over \$5 billion by 2030, as fashion, construction and packaging industries look for alternatives to plastic, leather and other petrochemical- and animal-derived materials.

Yet the UK's own living landscapes for grown materials are themselves under threat. [Seagrass meadows on the west coast of Wales](#) have depleted by 92% over the last century, while only around 30,000 hectares remain of [Scotland's temperate rainforests](#). The UK's grown ecosystems are as fragile as they are abundant.

Design Researchers in Residence is open to designers and researchers from disciplines including but not limited to: biodesign, fashion and textiles, industrial design, architecture, systems and policy research, material innovation, craft or graphic design.

We are interested in research that spans the hand-made and tactile to the biofabricated and engineered, embedded in natural intelligence. This includes Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), biodesign and biofabrication practices that work with living systems.

APPLICATION PROCESS

The residency is open to designers and researchers from a range of disciplines including, but not limited to: architecture, fashion, digital culture, critical theory, graphics, product design, material innovation and systems-thinking.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must meet one of the following academic criteria:

- Completed an undergraduate degree in a relevant discipline in the past 7 years, including the 2019/20 academic year or more recently;

Or

- Completed a Masters degree in a relevant discipline in the past 5 years, including the 2021/22 academic year or more recently;

Or

- Set up a design-related business within the last 5 years.

In addition, applicants must have at least one year of professional experience in design practice, which may be paid or voluntary.

Alternatively, applicants who have not completed a degree may still be eligible if they have equivalent research experience outside of academic institutions.

Applicants should also demonstrate:

- A clear interest in conducting independent research;
- Some understanding of design research ethics and methodologies.

The deadline for all applications is 11:59pm on Sunday 6 September 2026. Entries received after this deadline will not be accepted.

Designers must provide:

- a) A completed application form
- b) Accompanying visual material

The application form can be found by [clicking here](#).

A shortlist of applicants will be invited for an interview in London or via video call in the week commencing Monday 21 September 2026 to discuss their proposals with members of the curatorial team before the final group of four residents is selected.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

- The Design Museum and Future Observatory are not able to sponsor visas or provide accommodation for visiting researchers. As a result, the residency programme is only open to researchers who live in the UK.
- Owing to curatorial capacity and museum logistics, the residency programme is not open to duos or research groups.

- We positively encourage applications from underrepresented groups and consider candidates who are suitably qualified and eligible regardless of sex, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief, marital status, or pregnancy and maternity.
- Only one application will be accepted per researcher.
- Applications must be in response to the brief and feature new work or the development of an existing project. If an application is based on existing work the development of the work in response to the brief should be clear.
- Only applications submitted using the provided form will be accepted.
- Selected researchers will be expected to commit at least two days per week to the residency during the residency period (November – June). Working from the Design Museum one day per week.
- The selected researchers will be asked to participate in events which engage with the Design Museum and Future Observatory's audiences via networking, press interviews, events, online resources and the public and learning programme. Details of these events are TBC but may include attendance and participation in events in the lead up to, and during, the showcase. These will be discussed in more detail on appointment.
- Design Researchers in Residence may be asked to record their residency by supplying information and visual content on the development of the commission for press, marketing and online content. As part of this they must be prepared to share their process and design thinking as part of the display of their work.

TIMELINE AND KEY DATES

THURSDAY 30 JULY 2026	Call for applications opens
SUNDAY 06 SEPTEMBER 2026	Deadline for applications
W/C 21 SEPTEMBER 2026	Shortlisted applicants invited for interview
W/C 28 SEPTEMBER 2026	Selected researchers notified
W/C 12 OCTOBER	Design Researchers in Residence: Grown begins

NOVEMBER 2026 – JUNE 2027

Residency period (includes concept development, fieldwork and production phases)

Researchers are expected to commit at least two days/week during this period

JUNE 2027 – SEPTEMBER 2027

Grown display open to the public

DESIGN RESEARCHERS IN RESIDENCE 2025/26

Photo: Justine Trickett

The theme for 2025 was ‘Mineral’ and the featured residents were Alfred Yatlong Yeung, Elise Limon, Rafael El Baz and Rosa Whiteley. You can learn more about their research here: <https://futureobservatory.org/programme/exhibitions/design-researchers-in-residence-mineral>

The current display of work from this year’s cohort of Design Researchers in Residence opened on 13 June 2026 and runs until 20 September 2026.

ABOUT THE DESIGN MUSEUM, FUTURE OBSERVATORY AND THE UKRI ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL

The Design Researchers in Residence programme is part of Future Observatory at the Design Museum, delivered in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

The Design Museum

The Design Museum is the world's leading museum devoted to contemporary architecture and design. Its work encompasses all elements of design, including fashion, product and graphic design. Since it opened its doors in 1989 the museum has displayed everything from an AK-47 to high heels designed by Christian Louboutin. It has staged over 100 exhibitions, welcomed over seven million visitors and showcased the work of some of the world's most celebrated designers and architects including Paul Smith, Zaha Hadid, Jonathan Ive, Frank Gehry, Eileen Gray and Dieter Rams. On 24 November 2016, The Design Museum relocated to Kensington, west London. John Pawson has converted the interior of a 1960s modernist building to create a new home for the Design Museum giving it three times more space in which to show a wider range of exhibitions and significantly extend its learning programme.

In April 2021, the Design Museum was awarded £5 million through the Government's Culture Recovery Fund: Repayable Finance programme.

In October 2020, the Design Museum was awarded £2,968,634 by Arts Council England from the Culture Recovery Fund announced by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

In July 2020, the Design Museum was awarded nearly £1 million National Lottery funding through the Arts Council's Emergency Response Fund.

designmuseum.org
@designmuseum

Future Observatory

Future Observatory is the Design Museum's national research programme, established in partnership with the UKRI Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC). We act as a catalyst for the green transition by supporting design research that can have real impact.

futureobservatory.org
#futureobservatory

The UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

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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