



Design Researchers in Residence: Mineral

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FUTURE
OBSERVATORY

OPEN CALL FOR ENTRIES 2025/26

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

This year's residency theme is Mineral. Future Observatory are interested in design research projects that are interrogating the UK's mineral landscapes through case studies, field research and by building human and non-human relationships.

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 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.

Each resident is provided with a commissioning budget of £6,000 and a bursary of £11,400, as well as studio space at the museum and a programme of mentorship, training and seminars from experts both in and outside the Design Museum.

To apply, please download and carefully read the 'Call for Entries' document before filling out the 'Application Form'. All applications must be submitted by midnight (UK time) on Sunday 14 September 2025 and application enquiries can be directed to mineral@designmuseum.org.

Design Researchers in Residence: Mineral will run from October 2025 – June 2026. The accompanying residency display will run from June 2026 – September 2026.

WHAT IS THE DESIGN RESEARCHERS IN RESIDENCE PROGRAMME?

Design Researchers in Residence is Future Observatory's programme for design researchers hosted at the Design Museum. The residency supports thinkers at the start of their careers to spend a year developing a new research project in response to a theme. 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, 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 for them to work at the Design Museum. Residents are also set up with mentors throughout the course of their residency and they can also benefit from the Design Museum's network. The residency is a unique opportunity to exhibit work at a nationally renowned cultural institution, to publish their research in the residency publication and to share their work through public programming.

The museum, Future Observatory and AHRC will provide an internal programme of skill sharing sessions, mentors and crits. Together these are intended to expand residents' networks with external organisations and experts who may have knowledge relevant to each project. These conversations aim to promote critical dialogue, clarify intent and to resolve issues. Alongside these exchanges, residents consult with the Design Museum's learning, exhibitions, facilities and curatorial teams in order to gain a greater understanding of how their work fits within the museum's wider context.

To gain one of the places on the programme, applicants must respond to an open submission and brief, set by Future Observatory. Previous briefs have covered site-specific interaction, collecting, community, thrift, the pursuit of imperfection, identity, disruption, migration and support. To be eligible, residents must live and work in the UK, have graduated recently, and must have demonstrable experience of carrying out independent research.

DESIGN RESEARCHERS IN RESIDENCE 2025/26 BRIEF: MINERAL



Brickfield Firing by Oliver Udy courtesy of Rosanna Martin

Minerals, concentrated in the Earth's crust, are a finite resource.

Global demand for critical minerals is accelerating, particularly with the transition to renewable energy systems. The International Energy Agency estimates that by 2040 the demand for key minerals like lithium, cobalt and rare earth elements will be four times greater than today. These materials are integral to the manufacture of clean energy technologies, including wind turbines and electrical networks, which are central to the UK's net zero goals.

From kaolin pits in Cornwall to salt mines in North Yorkshire, the UK's geological landscape is scarred by centuries of mineral extraction. These materials are not only held in geological strata, the mineral composition of soil and water plays a crucial role in supporting biodiversity and regulating

ecological processes. Mineral fertilisers are used to provide plants with nutrients to grow. These delicate dynamics, often overlooked, are integral to the health of both natural and agricultural landscapes.

Simultaneously, there is a second mineral landscape in our urban environments, veins of ore embedded in discarded consumer electronics. Post-use materials represent a critical untapped resource.

Can net-zero goals be sustained through the continued extraction of finite mineral resources? How can design research better understand the UK's dependence on these minerals?

We are currently seeking proposals for the next cohort of Design Researchers in Residence. This residency aims to support research that critically interrogates intersecting mineral landscapes in the UK – geological, ecological and urban – through case studies, field research, and by building human and non-human relationships.

We are looking for practitioners working across industrial design, architecture, bio-design, systems design, policy research, material research, craft or graphic design. Projects may engage with a range of related themes, including but not limited to: mapping nutrient cycles and supply chains, mining ore streams, material science and the circular economy. We welcome applications that reflect on how we source, use, and repurpose minerals, and reckon with the full lifecycle of matter.

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, products, materials and systems.

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 2018/19 academic year or more recently.

Or

- Completed a postgraduate degree in a relevant discipline in the past 5 years, including the 2020/21 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.

Applicants who have not completed a postgraduate degree will 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.

This residency is suitable for those who are considering or currently undertaking a PhD. Current PhD students will have to demonstrate that they will suspend their studies for the duration of the Residency and that their supervisors approve of their application.

Deadline for all applications is midnight Sunday 14 September 2025. 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 here:

<https://futureobservatory.org/research/apply-for-funding/apply-for-funding-mineral>

The completed application form should be sent to: mineral@designmuseum.org

A shortlist of applicants will be invited for an interview in London or via video call in the week commencing Monday 22 September to discuss their proposals with a panel of experts 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

FRIDAY 08 AUGUST 2025

23:59, SUNDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2025

W/C MONDAY 22 SEPTEMBER 2025

W/C 29 SEPTEMBER 2025

W/C 13 OCTOBER 2025

OCTOBER 2025 – JUNE 2026

JUNE 2026 – SEPTEMBER 2026

CALL FOR PROPOSALS OPENS

DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS

SHORTLISTED APPLICANTS INVITED FOR INTERVIEW

SELECTED RESEARCHERS NOTIFIED

**DESIGN RESEARCHERS IN RESIDENCE: MINERAL BEGINS
RESIDENCY PERIOD (INCLUDES CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT,
FIELDWORK AND PRODUCTION PHASES)**

**RESEARCHERS ARE EXPECTED TO COMMIT AT LEAST TWO
DAYS/WEEK DURING THIS PERIOD.**

MINERAL DISPLAY OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

DESIGN RESEARCHERS IN RESIDENCE 2024/25



Photo: Justine Trickett

The theme for 2024 was ‘Artificial’ and the featured residents are Christie Swallow, Laura Lebeau, Hani Salih and Neba Sere. You can learn more about the exhibition and their work here: <https://futureobservatory.org/programme/exhibitions/design-researchers-in-residence-artificial>.

The current display of work from this year’s cohort of Design Researchers in Residence opened on 17 June 2025 and runs until 21 September 2025.

ABOUT THE DESIGN MUSEUM, FUTURE OBSERVATORY AND ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL (AHRC)

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 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.

designmuseum.org
@designmuseum

FUTURE OBSERVATORY

Future Observatory is a new national programme for design research supporting the UK's response to the climate crisis. The programme is coordinated by and based at the Design Museum in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), as part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). Future Observatory aims to accelerate how we find solutions to the most pressing issues. It brings design researchers together with the networks that can help them have an impact on achieving the UK's environmental goals.

futureobservatory.org
#futureobservatory

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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