

Press Release
For immediate release
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ActionSpace

Symposium 2026: Curating and Coalition

On 26 March 2026, **Curating and Coalition: Challenging and Expanding the Art World in the Wake of Nnena Kalu's Turner Prize Win** brought together curators, scholars, disability advocates and cultural leaders at Kingston University's Town House.

Presented by [ActionSpace](#), in partnership with [Stanley Picker Gallery](#) and Kingston School of Art PhD candidate [Lisa Slominski](#), and supported by Arts Council England, the symposium explored how practices such as Nnena Kalu's are interpreted, supported, and sustained within contemporary art.

[A full recording is now available here, via ActionSpace's website.](#)

Developed in the wake of Nnena's Turner Prize win, the symposium positioned this moment not as a conclusion, but as a prompt for ongoing sector change—foregrounding the curatorial, institutional, and relational conditions that shape how artistic practices are recognised and valued.

Context

Symposium: Curating and Coalition was instigated by ActionSpace and curator-researcher Lisa Slominski's ongoing PhD research at Kingston School of Art, which engages with Nnena Kalu's practice and examines the roles and responsibilities of cultural intermediaries, agency and representation in engendering greater diversity in the contemporary visual arts. Using Nnena's Turner Prize win as an important contemporary case study, the symposium asked how moments of increased visibility can lead to significant and more lasting change across the sector.

The day brought together curators, academics, gallerists, and supported studio leaders to consider the relationships, infrastructures and forms of labour that shape artistic recognition. Across two panels, speakers explored questions of authorship, interpretation, advocacy and access, alongside the vital role of supported studios and other cultural intermediaries in sustaining artistic practice. [Recordings of the presentation](#) are available on ActionSpace's website. The speakers offer critical reflections and practical insights for organisations seeking to engage more thoughtfully and ambitiously with learning disabled artists now and in the future.

“Nnena's Turner Prize win is an extraordinary moment, but it didn't appear suddenly. It sits within decades of facilitation, advocacy, and coalition that have sustained her practice over time.”

— Lisa Slominski

“ActionSpace has received messages from schools across the world saying that Nnena’s Turner Prize win has encouraged their learning disabled students to pursue their dreams because success is within their grasp. We owe it to Nnena and all the other talented learning disabled artists working today to make sure this is not a one-off, but the beginning of a wider movement towards greater accessibility and inclusion in the cultural sector.”

— Sheryll Catto, Artistic Director and CEO, ActionSpace

“If we’re serious about changing the story, we have to shift the focus from the individual to the barriers our systems create. When those barriers are dismantled, our sector becomes richer for it.”

— Peter Heslip, Director of Visual Arts at Arts Council England

Key Takeaways

1. Nnena Kalu’s Turner Prize win marks a structural shift, not just an individual achievement

Speakers emphasised that Nnena Kalu’s win should be understood within a longer history of advocacy, facilitation, and coalition. Her practice has been sustained over decades through her long-term relationship with ActionSpace, a key example of a supported studio structure.

The moment signals important progress but also underscores the ongoing need for structural change across the art world.

“This is clearly a watershed moment for arts and disabilities, a total shifting of the traditional art paradigm.”

— Eddy Frankel, The Guardian, May 2025

2. Supported studios must be recognised as key cultural intermediaries

Across both panels, speakers stressed that supported studios are not simply sites of assistance, but critical infrastructures within the contemporary art ecosystem. They sustain artistic practice, build institutional relationships, and advocate for artists’ work across galleries and museums. At the same time, much of this labour, particularly facilitation, advocacy, and care, remains under-recognised and insufficiently resourced.

“I believe supported studios, as ultraprogressive, inclusive and open-minded spaces, offer us insights into why and, crucially, how we might radically reimagine the artworld, education and society.”

— Richard Phoenix, Art Review, February 2025

3. Expanding curatorial and critical frameworks is essential

The symposium highlighted the need to rethink how artworks are interpreted when an artist’s communication does not align with normative expectations. Practices such as Kalu’s call for more relational curatorial approaches—ones that can hold uncertainty while still recognising artistic agency.

“Kalu works between the elective and the given. This is as true of her drawings as it is of her sculptural works. The repetitive spiralling vortices of her drawings all depend as much on where she leaves off, on their returns and alterations, on flow and variation, as they do on the body

transcribing its actions onto paper. They are riotous and rhythmic, purposeful and compelling. There's no fudging. Kalu deserves to win this year's Turner prize."

— Adrian Searle, The Guardian, 23 September 2025

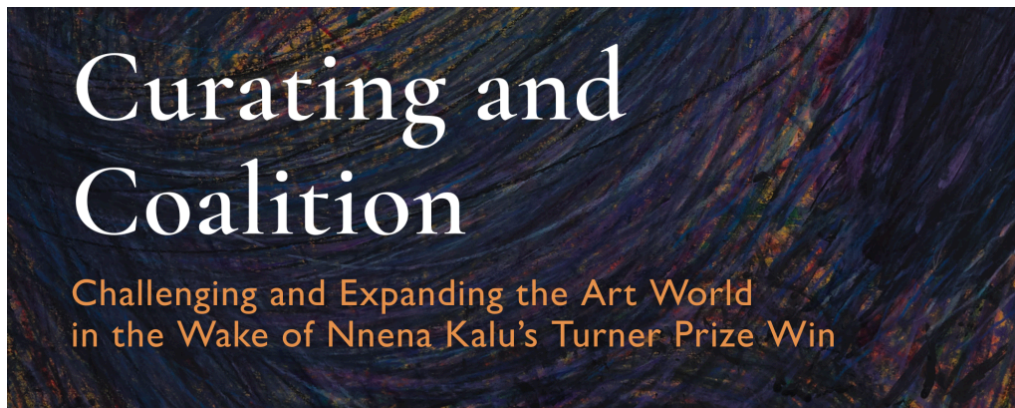
Discussions also addressed the role of biography in interpretation: when contextual framing is necessary, and when it risks overdetermining how work is understood. Raised by Lou Mensah, Founder of Shade Media, speakers reflected on the "burden of representation," whereby artists from marginalised contexts are often expected to stand in for a wider community, rather than being engaged through the specificity of their practice.

Supporting points:

- Risk and trust are essential in creating opportunities for practices that challenge conventional curatorial models
- Critical language must expand to meaningfully engage aesthetic qualities such as joy, rhythm, and accumulation within contemporary art discourse

"Kalu's work challenges the art world to rethink its assumptions about authorship, interpretation, and agency. It asks institutions to expand the frameworks through which contemporary art is understood."

— Lisa Slominski, Curator, Researcher, and Symposium Chair



Resources

Full details, including recordings:

<https://actionspace.org/symposium-2026-curating-and-coalition/>

Panellists & Partners [download](#)

Poster [download](#)

Images [download](#)

Photo credits: Denis Colebourne, courtesy of Stanley Picker Gallery

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ActionSpace

[ActionSpace](#) supports adults with learning disabilities across London, providing access to creative studios, professional guidance, and the support they need to grow as artists. They ensure that learning disabled artists are seen, heard, and fully included at the heart of the visual arts world. By creating opportunities and championing their work, ActionSpace helps artists thrive.

Lisa Slominski

[Lisa Slominski](#) is a writer-curator and PhD candidate at Kingston School of Art. Her practice-based research examines the role of cultural intermediaries in shaping agency, identity, and representation within contemporary art, with particular attention to artists who communicate outside normative verbal frameworks. Titled *A Liminal Site*, her doctoral project develops an original liminal methodology informed by María Lugones' concept of the limen as a relational threshold, foregrounding coalition, praxical awareness, and interpretive responsibility.

Alongside her research, Slominski has an extensive curatorial and editorial practice spanning exhibitions, publishing, consultancy, and public programmes. She has worked with artist Nnena Kalu since 2018, curating her work in exhibitions including *Spring Syllabus* (J Hammond Projects, London, 2018), *Fair Vanity* (Summertime, New York, 2020), and *Attack Decay Sustain Release* (Stanley Picker Gallery, 2026). Kalu's work also features in Slominski's book *Nonconformers: A New History of Self-Taught Artists* (Yale University Press).

Recent research dissemination includes *Curating Difference* in *Art Monthly* (November 2025), an article for *The Conversation* (December 2025), and a paper presented at the College Art Association 114th Annual Conference, Chicago (February 2026).

Slominski is also Senior Art Producer at Contemporary Art Society and a co-founder of *Art et al.*

Stanley Picker Gallery

[Stanley Picker Gallery](#) at Kingston University is one of the leading university galleries and commissioning venues in the UK, working with artists, designers, students, academics and members of the local community to encourage creativity, learning, research and innovation.

Established in 1997 with the ongoing support of the Stanley Picker Trust, the Gallery forms part of Arts Council England's National Portfolio and is a principal cultural interface between Kingston University and its civic communities in South-West London and beyond. From its island location on the Hogsmill River, the Stanley Picker Gallery operates as an "expanded studio" dedicated to commissioning and curating contemporary art and design practice, generating a dynamic programme of exhibitions, events and participation activities staged onsite, offsite and online.

Appointed each year through a public open call, the Stanley Picker Fellowships in Art & Design support a diversity of contemporary practitioners to research, create and premiere ambitious new work, by providing generous grants, free studio space, professional expertise and valuable access to the world-class workshop facilities at Kingston School of Art. Current Fellows include Kat Anderson, FRAUD, Emma Hart, Sophie Huckfield and Abbas Zahedi.

The Gallery's Participation Programme involves working collaboratively with schools, colleges, community groups and local residents of all ages, to deliver a range of creative activities and shared learning and professional development opportunities for students, which engage everyone in the life of the Gallery, its partner venue Dorich House Museum and the wider University.



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