



**Ever-changing**

**New Art Exchange**  
Nottingham

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# Arts for all

## RIBA National Award 2009

One of 10 regional and national awards

Nottingham's New Art Exchange is a unique place. The largest UK centre dedicated to showcasing culturally diverse, contemporary visual arts is thriving. The many different spaces are always in use. The venue is popular with its core audiences, the BME communities of Forest Fields, Hyson Green and Radford. The 'Oxo Cube' (as the building's known) is somewhat of a landmark. It is helping to regenerate a once-forgotten pocket of the inner city, while connecting the young and old alike with subjects relevant to them. That's the power of the arts and long may they be supported.

Putting up a new building was a small part of the brief. We won the open competition because, to us and our client, the project was much more about sustaining an ambitious contemporary arts centre. Adaptability was crucial here; how else would the place stay contemporary and meaningful to its audiences and serve a range of uses? From carrying out community consultations before designing to performing a post occupancy evaluation of the flexible spaces, all the passion for the project has paid off. Such is the venue's success, we're now collaborating with the client and other stakeholders on New Art Exchange's expansion.

*\New Art Exchange is the only known Arts Council funded project to be built on time and under budget\*

**Harbinder Singh Birdi** Partner

## Something for everyone

New Art Exchange provides a heady mix of visual art, theatre, music and dance to people of all ages and ethnic backgrounds. The ground-floor café is popular too, with queues often forming outside the door.

Entrance is free: [nae.org.uk](http://nae.org.uk)

# Creating an arts centre for the long term

**Project:** New Art Exchange  
**Location:** Nottingham  
**Client:** New Art Exchange  
**Services:** Architecture and artist collaboration  
**Scope:** Regeneration and new build  
**Value:** £3.2m  
**Status:** Completed; Phase 2 underway

Five factors were key to the project's success.

## Listening to audiences and users first

New Art Exchange promotes new arts to new audiences who aren't typical gallery visitors. First, we needed to tackle the threshold fear to attract local visitors and centre users. The solution involved extensive community consultations. The process also embraced a needs analysis, working closely with the client and several community organisations. This highly consultative approach – instrumental in securing grants from several public authorities – will form an important part of the building's phase two plans.

## Bringing everything together under one roof

The original brief asked for two buildings: a gallery and a performing arts centre on separate sites. We proposed one to avoid doubling up on running costs. A single arts hub, with an exciting mix of events, was also a stronger proposition, attracting greater numbers of people.

## Involving the community in the centre's construction

New Art Exchange is built by the community for the community. We designed the structure so that skilled local trades people and their apprentices could construct it. This novel approach helped to build local pride in what was taking shape.

## Focusing on functionality and flexibility

The design concentrates on the building's uses and, consequently, the insides. Main spaces include a double-storey height gallery, performance and rehearsal spaces with sprung floors, arts education facilities, an artist-in-residence studio, staff workspaces and meeting rooms. On the ground floor, a glass screen can be folded back, so the café spills out. Constructed with a concrete frame and exposed finishes, the interior can be easily adapted for future needs. Permanent installations are also adaptable. Site-specific artist works are applied to the building, not built into the fabric. These include screen prints on aluminium plates by sculptor Hew Locke.

## Making every design element count

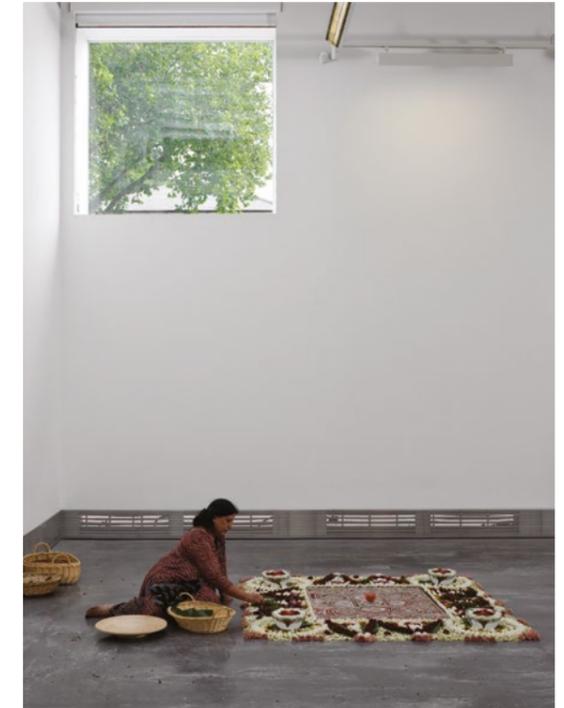
The building's exterior is a blank canvas for what's within. Black brick references the neighbouring red-clay period buildings, while standing out as modern, solid and crisp. Frameless windows in a range of sizes blur the building's levels, playing with perceptions and perspectives. To passers-by, they offer incidental glimpses of artworks, performers and visitors. Looking out, the windows frame the streetscape in surprising ways. A creative exchange in every respect. Keeping running costs low was also fundamental. The New Art Exchange is one of a handful of UK arts centres to be naturally ventilated.

*\The building delivers on so many levels and provides the community with access to a creative space which can be changed and adapted as necessary\*

Michelle Bowen Arts Council England, East Midlands

# 1,360

sq m  
of arts space



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