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Five RCA artists shape New Contemporaries 2026

Key details

This year's New Contemporaries features five RCA artists, continuing a long lineage that links the college to the UK's most exciting emerging talent.

Date

4 February 2026

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8 minutes



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For 75 years, [New Contemporaries](#) has marked a moment of arrival — introducing a new wave of British artists to watch.

The organisation leads the march in supporting artists at a pivotal early stage in their careers, selected through an open call. At a moment when cultural visibility is increasingly hard-won, this support has never felt more urgent. The programme offers focus in a world saturated with overstimulation, and community within a culture that so often privileges individualism over collective exchange.

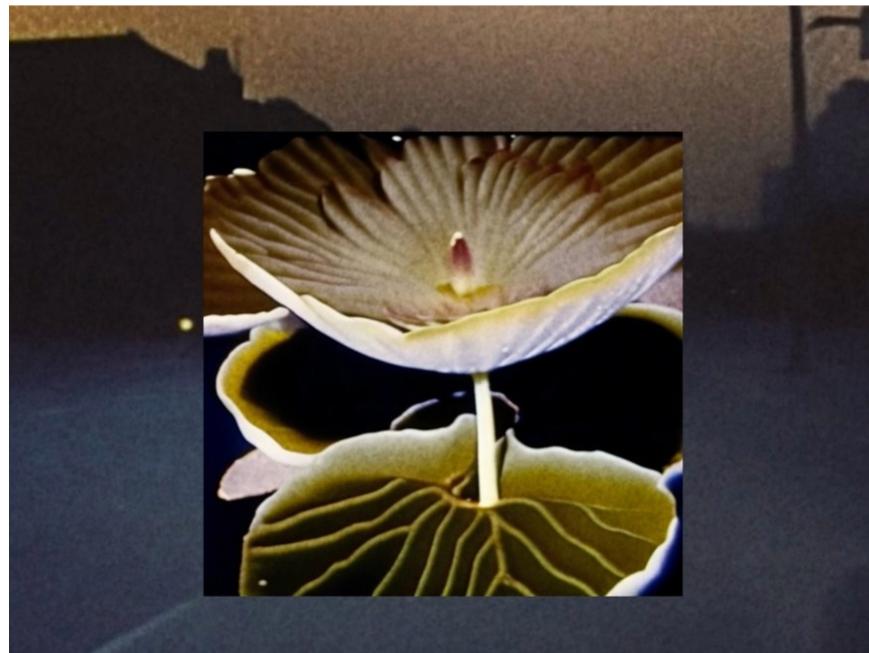
This year, 26 artists are being showcased at [South London Gallery](#) before the exhibition tours to MIMA (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art). The works span a wide and evocative range of themes – from responses to the climate crisis to darker imaginings of dystopian futures – all inviting audiences to reflect on the social, political, and environmental realities shaping contemporary life.

Artist selector Grace Ndiritu explains that this breadth is intentional: “We have chosen a diverse range of artists from across the UK, working in a variety of mediums and from distinct points of view. The works are visually arresting, but they also aim to bring moments of joy and beauty into an increasingly difficult world.”

The RCA and New Contemporaries share a long-standing relationship. Several early participants – including David Hockney and Paula Rego – were alumni of the Royal College of Art. This year’s cohort continues that lineage, with five RCA students and alumni presenting work across a range of mediums, united by a distinct and critically engaged perspective.

Below, the RCA artists share what it means to be included in this rarefied list, and how their ongoing practices are reflected in the works on show.

Gregor Petriković (Photography MA, 2023)



"Sincerely, Victor Pike was born from a personal necessity" - Gregor Petriković



Install of Gregor Petriković's film, *Sincerely, Victor Pike*

"The opportunity to be part of New Contemporaries feels like a full-circle moment. I actually used to live in the flats

opposite the South London Gallery, and I made much of this work in that room. To now have the piece presented in a gallery I've admired for so long feels incredibly special. Beyond the personal connection, this is my first institutional group exhibition in London. I'm honoured to be part of such a strong cohort selected by Pio Abad, Louise Giovanelli, and Grace Ndiritu. Making work can often feel solitary, so seeing the project installed with this level of care, and sharing space with so many artists I respect, gives me real momentum to keep pushing the practice forward.

"I like the threshold between analog and emerging AI technologies. *Sincerely, Victor Pike* was born from a personal necessity: due to a memory issue, I spent seven years audio-journaling and recording conversations to keep track of my life. When I listened back, I found these incredible pockets of humanity - what in the film I call the 'fluffy edges' of our personalities – that you just can't really script.

"I wanted to preserve that messiness, but I didn't want a standard audio piece. I began experimenting with early, proto generative video tools. At that stage, the technology was glitchy and imperfect, which I found beautiful. It mirrored the fragility of the audio. Ultimately, these tools aren't the subject of the work, but rather a new lens through which I look at the same old questions of what it means to be human and also how technology changes the way we tell stories.

"At its core, the work on show is about human consciousness and the need to tell stories. I'm interested in what happens when you position these synthetic, generative visuals against very raw, genuine human audio. It creates a strange dissonance that, paradoxically, forces you to listen closer to the nuances of unscripted reality that algorithms miss." – Gregor Petriković

River Yuhao Cao (Contemporary Art Practice MA, 2021)



Behind the scenes of River Cao's film, *The Glass Essays*, installed at New Contemporaries 2026





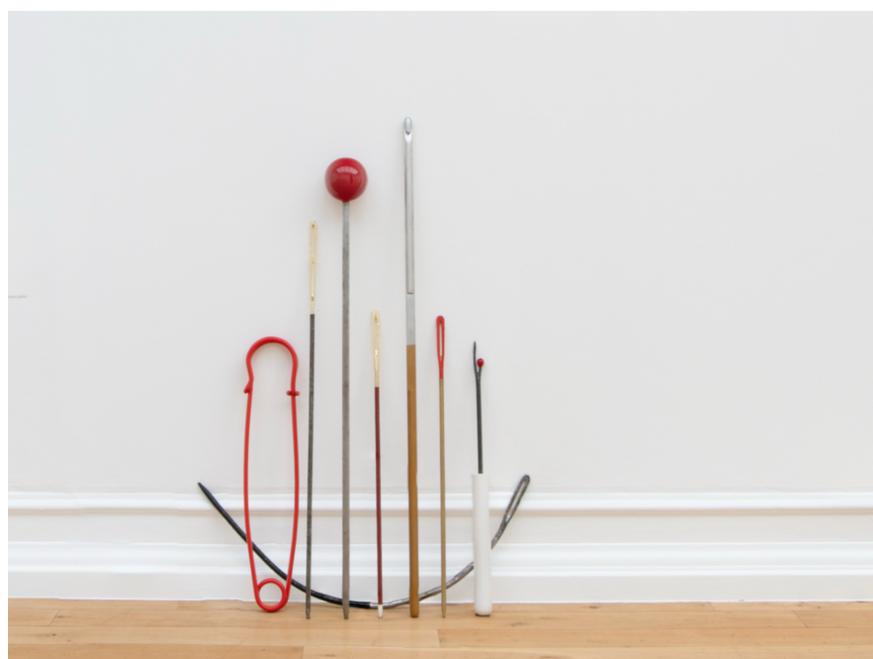
Install of River Yuhao Cao's film, *The Glass Essays*, at New Contemporaries

"Being part of New Contemporaries allows me to become part of a vibrant, inspiring, and experimental community. It opens up many possibilities for future project collaborations and enables me to engage with a wider and more diverse audience.

"Taking inspiration from Anne Carson's skeletal image, *The Glass Essays*, experiments with the ritual of mourning as a psychoanalytic method in filmmaking, and a mode of exploring fluid identities and queerness. The film arose from my own memories of my grandparents working in funeral processions in their hometown in Nanxian, Hunan, China, where they would travel and perform with a mobile truck-stage across the region. *The Glass Essays* re-examines the performative role of lamentation in regional Chinese cultures through a queer lens, a process of fluidity and ritualisation as a way to confront the past and its ghosts.

"Through this lens of mourning in regional Chinese folk traditions, I reconstruct landscapes from my early memories of Southern China, while uncovering the perspective of the revenant." - [River Yuhao Cao](#)

Makiko Harris (Contemporary Art Practice MA, 2023)



Makiko Harris' sculpture installation, *Sentinel*, is a continued exploration of her sewing needle sculpture series

"Being selected by New Contemporaries 2026 has felt like a homecoming. I arrived in the UK in late 2021, and my first few years in London were fun but rocky and somewhat rootless. To be selected by one of the most established organisations in contemporary art in the UK is a massive honour and has felt hard-won. I am ready to continue putting fuel on the fire of my practice and am grateful to the New Contemporaries platform for supporting me in doing that.

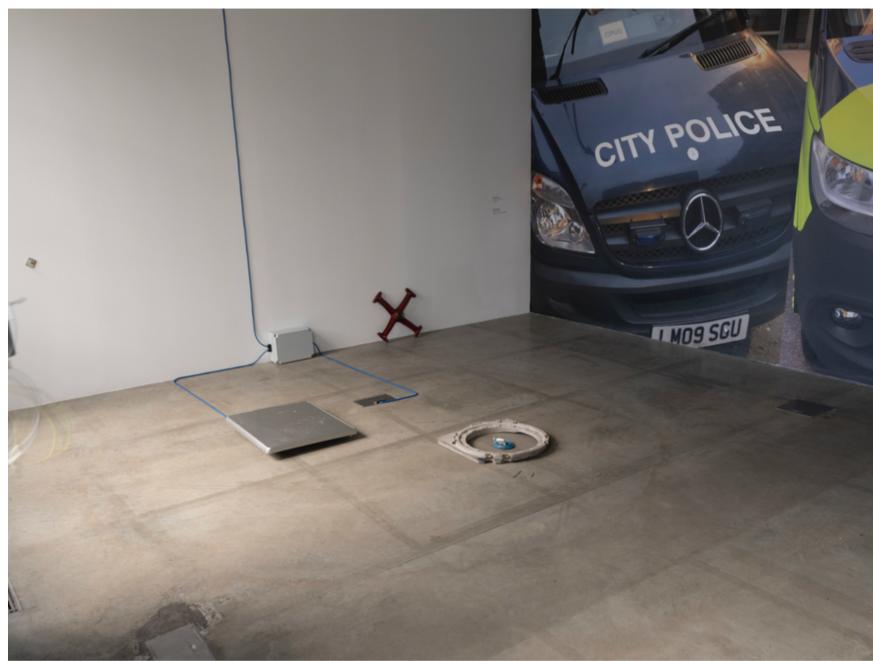
"My sculpture installation *Sentinel* is a continued exploration of the sewing needle sculpture series. The works were originally inspired by memories of doing handcrafts with my grandmother in Japan. When she passed away a few years ago, I inherited her sewing box. The needles are a powerful symbol of repair, care, and love – as well as a tool in my grandmother's creative agency. Enlarging them to up to 2m tall, I anthropomorphize them, turning them into weaponlike tools but also watchful, bodily presences. Standing upright in the space, they function as sentinels, guardians on the viewer's path and tools towards their relational and creative liberation.

"I am at a point in my practice where my process is becoming increasingly relational. Thematically as my work continues to explore connection, intimacy, and embodiment, the people in my life have become an integral part of my process. Friends, lovers, family, and the wonderful community of creatives around me not only inspire but also have a hand in the work. From start to finish, at least 10 people are involved, and that is before shippers, my wonderful gallery family, curators, and collectors are involved. I wouldn't have it any other way. The work is who we become to ourselves and to each other in the process of making, as much as it is the final work." - [Makiko Harris](#)

Shaun Doyle (PhD candidate, Arts & Humanities MPhil/PhD)



"Cop Socker is an action that involves me putting a dirty sock on the windscreen wiper of a police vehicle." - Shaun Doyle



Install of Shaun Doyle's work, Cop Socker, at New Contemporaries

"The New Contemporaries show has been wonderful; a well organised, fantastic structure, with a genuine consideration for the needs of the artists involved. It is a privilege to be included in such a prestigious show.

"The artwork of mine that's featured in the exhibition is called *Cop Socker*. It's an action that involves me putting a dirty sock on the windscreen wiper of a police vehicle. Prior to this I've walked around without any shoes on to collect dirt with my feet. When my socks are filthy, I put one on the windscreen wiper of a police car, take a photo with my phone and walk away, leaving the sock there. There are twenty-three works in the series. I put this work forward for New Contemporaries because it's a very direct and accessible work and one that sums up my practice very well.

"It's a deliberate strategy of mine to use public space to create artworks; a methodology that is intended to ensure that the production of knowledge that this action represents, takes place in open view, and that the resultant art-objects interact directly with the real world." - [Shaun Doyle](#)

Yimin Xiang (MRes SoAH, 2021)



Yimin Xiang's work at New Contemporaries

"Before joining the RCA MRes, I studied at Camberwell, so New Contemporaries has never felt distant to me. I used to drop by South London Gallery quite often after work, sometimes just to wander around. Because of that, being part of this long-standing exhibition still feels genuinely exciting. Now that I'm in the final year of my PhD, I view this opportunity as a significant milestone and a moment of acknowledgement. Receiving this response from an institution and from peers is incredibly encouraging at this stage, and it gives me the confidence to keep pushing my practice forward.

"The selected work reflects my long-term interest in how images circulate, how they are appropriated, remade, and translated across media, as well as their material existence. I'm particularly interested in what happens to images as they move between different media and formats, and how meaning shifts along the way. In this work, I use the metronome as a metaphor for regularity, rhythm, and mechanical structure. For me, it points to the invisible systems that organise images, such as repetition and standardisation, while also suggesting a tension between control and slippage. Even within a seemingly stable rhythm, small variations and disruptions always emerge, and that is where my interest lies.

"At the moment, I'm especially interested in the printing process itself as a way of thinking. Printmaking allows time, pressure, error, and material resistance to become visible. Recently, I've been looking closely at the history of printmaking and the printing industry, as well as hierarchies within images and how printed image archives are formed: who gets preserved, what gets reproduced, and what quietly disappears. Through this, I'm trying to define print not just as a method of reproduction, but as a critical tool that can question systems of visibility, value, and historical memory." – [Yimin Xiang](#)

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