



CVAN
Contemporary
Visual Arts
Network C.I.C

VISUAL ARTS SECTOR PRIORITIES 2026

London's visual arts sector stands at a pivotal moment. Artists, arts organisations and cultural leaders are facing unprecedented pressures from rising costs, insecure workspace, funding uncertainty, technological disruption and growing social and environmental challenges.

The visual arts contribute significantly to London's cultural identity, creative economy and international reputation. It supports its standing as the best city in the world for culture (Time Out, 2026). Yet without targeted action, many of the conditions that support artists and cultural organisations are at risk.

Drawing on sector consultations, meeting agendas and roundtable discussions with artists, studio providers, cultural organisations and sector leaders, CVAN London has identified five strategic priorities that will be essential to maintaining a thriving ecology over the next five years.

This report calls for coordinated action from policymakers, funders, local authorities, educational institutions and cultural leaders to ensure that artists remain central to London's future.

THE FIVE PRIORITIES

1. Secure Artists, Workspaces and Cultural Infrastructure

The Challenge

Affordable artist studios and cultural workspaces continue to be lost through redevelopment, rising rents and insecure tenancy arrangements.

What Needs to Happen

- Protect affordable artist workspaces through planning policy.
- Develop long-term ownership and stewardship models.
- Recognise cultural infrastructure as essential civic infrastructure.
- Support permanent, affordable creative spaces across London.

Why It Matters

Without affordable places to work, artists are forced out of the city, weakening London's creative ecosystem and cultural diversity.



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2. Invest in Artists, Skills and Future Talent

The Challenge

Rising educational costs, declining arts participation in schools and increasing financial pressures are reducing access to creative careers.

What Needs to Happen

- Increase investment in artists at all career stages.
- Expand bursary and access programmes.
- Support freelance sustainability and career development.
- Strengthen partnerships between education and the cultural sector.

Why It Matters

The future of the visual arts depends upon attracting and retaining diverse talent from all backgrounds.

3. Protect Cultural Freedom, Representation and Inclusion

The Challenge

Political polarisation, inequalities in representation and structural barriers continue to affect participation and leadership across the sector.

What Needs to Happen

- Protect the arm's-length principle.
- Support freedom of artistic expression.
- Increase diversity in leadership and governance.
- Improve access and support for disabled practitioners, carers and underrepresented communities.

Why It Matters

A healthy cultural sector reflects the full diversity of society and creates space for open dialogue and critical thinking.



4. Respond to Technological, Environmental and Social Change

The Challenge

Artificial intelligence, climate change and changing patterns of cultural participation are transforming how artists and organisations operate.

What Needs to Happen

- Invest in environmentally sustainable cultural infrastructure.
- Support digital literacy and responsible AI adoption.
- Protect archives and cultural memory.
- Maintain investment in traditional making skills alongside new technologies.

Why It Matters

The visual arts can help society understand, navigate and respond to complex change.

5. Reform Funding, Governance and Advocacy

The Challenge

Administrative burdens, funding uncertainty and increasing demand on organisations are limiting capacity and resilience.

What Needs to Happen

- Reduce unnecessary bureaucracy.
- Create more proportionate and trust-based funding systems.
- Improve evidence gathering and impact measurement.
- Develop sustainable funding models for the future.

Why It Matters

Artists and organisations need the time, resources and stability to focus on creative and public-facing work.



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