

SIDE

AMBERSIDE

AmberSide Trust
Charity #: 1160760

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12th January, 2026

SIDE AT BALTIC

Side to establish curatorial office in Baltic expanding Working-Class Documentary into a New Era

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - Side, the internationally recognised home of humanist documentary photography and film, which has spent nearly fifty years recording and preserving working-class lives, will establish a curatorial office at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead in February 2026.

The move is both a pragmatic response to the pressures facing arts organisations today and a bold step into a new creative direction. It will enable Side to bring its collection to a wider audience, commission and co-create new work, and deepen its commitment to education and community practice across the North East and beyond.

Side was founded in 1977 on Newcastle's Quayside by the Amber Film & Photography Collective as a space for lens-based documentary rooted in the realities of working people. From shipyard workers to new communities arriving in the region, Side has made the lives of those too often absent from arts spaces visible. Its AmberSide Collection, recognised by UNESCO, is a growing archive of photography and film that continues to respond to the present: migration, precarity, resilience and everyday solidarity.

The decision stems from the realities of today's cultural landscape. With public funding shrinking and the cost of running independent venues escalating, many arts organisations today are facing closure. Side and Baltic have chosen to cooperate in a mutually beneficial agreement.

As a cultural tenant within Baltic's building, Side retains its autonomy and individual voice while both parties can collaborate on exhibitions that recognise the importance of photography as an art form and bring continued visibility of working-class culture to a high volume of diverse audiences.

From 2027, Side will work with Baltic in developing presentations across a range of exhibition and programmable spaces within the landmark industrial building, a former flour mill.

Just as importantly, this move frees Side to invest more deeply in what has always set it apart as an arts organisation: education and community work. With new capacity, Side will expand projects with schools, youth groups and neighbourhoods, creating hyper-local displays that place documentary art back into the communities where it is created.

Laura Laffler, Managing Director of Side said: *"Working-class culture is living culture — it doesn't belong in the past. Our move to Baltic is about making sure the voices and experiences of ordinary people around the globe remain visible, urgent and valued in the present. Rooted in the North East, connected internationally, we will continue to commission, co-create and champion work that speaks to resilience, struggle and collective imagination."*

Sarah Munro, Director of Baltic said: *"We're delighted to welcome Side as a cultural tenant in spring 2026. Photography is crucial to Baltic's programme. Our audiences have been enthusiastic and visited in high numbers to exhibitions of photography by Chris Killip and Martin Parr to Franki Raffles, Joanne Coates and Phyllis Christopher."*

We want to represent the communities that live in the locale of the gallery and who visit Baltic frequently. Collaborating on these presentations will be exciting as we approach our twenty-fifth anniversary, and Side look to their 50th year. It is important that Side's collection, its legacy and their future survive and thrive. In these challenging times it's vital to find new ways of working together."

This new chapter coincides with a moment of reflection and renewal. In 2027, Side will mark 50 years since its establishment, while Baltic will celebrate its 25th year. Together they will create a platform where history and the present meet, where real people's lives (from the North East and further afield) remain central to our region's cultural spaces, and where documentary is made, seen and valued.

- ENDS -

MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

- This announcement comes at the conclusion of the "Transforming Amber" National Lottery Heritage Fund project, which set out to rethink how Side works and how the AmberSide Collection is shared. Over the past year, this project focused on strengthening the organisational foundations of Side, improving access to the AmberSide Collection (both digital and physical), and finding new ways to make it visible, relevant and active for more people than ever before. This announcement with Baltic marks the first stage of a wider programme shaped through this work from The AmberSide Trust. Further announcements, including new opportunities for public access, will be shared across 2026.
- Side was founded in 1977 by Amber Film & Photography Collective. It was the only UK gallery dedicated to humanist documentary photography at the time.
- Side is operated by The AmberSide Trust. The AmberSide Trust, a registered charity, (No. 1160760) preserves and conserves the AmberSide Collection and ensures public access via programming and education programmes. Through The AmberSide Trust, the AmberSide Collection is secured and shall remain intact and accessible in the North East of England.
- The AmberSide Collection comprises over 20,000 photographs, 100 films, and 10,000 slides, featuring both historical and contemporary documentary work. It is inscribed into the UNESCO Memory of the World Register as being of "of outstanding national value".
- Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art is a major international centre for art situated on the south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, England. It has welcomed over 10 million visitors since opening in July 2002. Baltic presents a distinctive and ambitious programme of temporary exhibitions and events and is a world leader in the presentation and commissioning of contemporary visual art. Housed in a landmark ex-industrial building, Baltic houses 2,600 square metres of art space, making it one of Europe's largest dedicated contemporary art institutions.
- Baltic has exhibited the work of over 877 artists of 78 nationalities in 266 exhibitions to date including Joy Labrinjo, Hew Locke, Heather Phillipson, Antony Gormley, Cornelia Parker, Daniel Buren, Lubaina Himid, Steve McQueen, Jenny Holzer, Judy Chicago, Lorna Simpson, Imran Perretta, Huma Bhabha and John Akomfrah.