

## Preparing for disaster

### Create London announces a collaboration with Material Cultures and Yasmeen Lari: *'Rising from the Water: Designing in a Climate Emergency'*

*"There's so much money in disaster relief, but we need to put much more effort into disaster preparedness."*

– Yasmeen Lari



Photography by Jimmy Lee.

Create London's *'Rising from the Water: Designing in a Climate Emergency'* is an experimental architecture project in collaboration with Material Cultures and Yasmeen Lari, exploring how we can build in cohesion with the land, within the context of the climate crisis. The project culminates in a temporary installation exploring climate change, industrial heritage and building in wet and flooded areas.

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1–30 June 2024, check the London Festival of Architecture listing for opening hours<sup>1</sup>  
A House for Artists, 36 Linton Road, Barking IG11 8SE

Residents of the Thames-side borough of Barking & Dagenham in East London have long lived with the possibility of their homes and businesses flooding – a risk that is only increasing with the effects of climate change. In tandem with the London Festival of Architecture on 1–30 June, Create London is turning the talents of a rising generation of architects to explore sustainable building solutions in the face of flood risk.



Photography by Thierry Bal.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.londonfestivalofarchitecture.org/event/architecture-commission-designing-in-a-climate-emergency/>

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Photography by Thierry Bal.

Create London's *'Rising from the Water: Design in a Climate Emergency'* is a seven-day workshop programme and installation led by design and research practice **Material Cultures** and architect **Yasmeen Lari**, winner of RIBA's 2023 Royal Gold Medal. The workshop will see a group of young people and student architects come together to build a temporary installation through the innovative use of plants that might form the future of construction and protect our natural heritage. The resulting work will be on public display in Barking throughout June 2024 during the London Festival of Architecture.



Photography by Jimmy Lee.

*Rising from the Water: Designing in a Climate Emergency* is a part of *Breaking Waves*, a series of free events and creative activities raising awareness of the connection between climate crisis and industrial heritage. *Breaking Waves* was commissioned by Create London and made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. The architecture commission is additionally supported by the British Council.

## 70 years after the 'Great Flood'

Today, thousands of people in Barking and Dagenham live in places that are susceptible to flooding or have flooded in the past. Historically, the most devastating deluge to hit the area came in 1953, when a North Sea storm surge struck the East of England and the Thames rose to claim factories, homes, and even an entire village. In Barking, Creekmouth Village – a factory settlement of around 50 homes – was submerged by three feet of water on 31 December 1953.

*"The flood of '53 ruined the cottages, the water was so deep. [...] the houses were really uninhabitable after [...] the walls never dried out, they were constantly damp. Although there were always rats in the area, when the bank burst it brought a whole flood of rats..."*

– Maria Williams, former Creekmouth Village resident and member of the Creekmouth Preservation Society

Rendered uninhabitable by the flood, Creekmouth Village was abandoned, and residents, including Maria Williams, were relocated to the nearby Thames View Estate. The loss of the village and the devastation wrought by the Great Flood was one of the principal motivators for the construction of the Thames Barrier, and the subsidiary Barking Creek tidal gate. Today, these measures protect 125 square kilometres of London – around 1.42 million people and around £321 billion in residential property.<sup>2</sup>

## The future of Thames flood preparations

For the last 40 years, the Thames Barrier has effectively mitigated flood risk in East London, closing 221 times<sup>3</sup> in that time, and with increasing frequency in recent

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<sup>2</sup> <https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2024/05/08/coverage-of-thames-barrier-celebrating-40-years-protecting-london/>

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years. However, as outlined in the Thames Estuary 2100 Plan<sup>4</sup>, in the face of a rapidly changing climate and rising water levels, more will need to be done.

Alongside the planned adaptations and extensions to the barrier, Create London is looking to ensure that the architects of tomorrow are creatively engaging with the problem in a sustainable, materially innovative way, while also raising awareness among local communities about the flood risk to their local area.

Through the week-long workshop programme, architecture students and young people from the local community will be guided through a process of design and experimentation towards the fabrication and assembly of a large-scale temporary installation, while learning how to work with locally sourced bio-based materials, such as willow and reeds, like those found at the water's edge at Barking Riverside.



Yasmeen Lari outside Darya Khan Village Women's Centre. Photograph: Courtesy Heritage Foundation of Pakistan. © Heritage Foundation of Pakistan.

The first workshop (18–19 May) explored reed and willow as building materials, taking lessons from the Darya Khan Village Women's Centre<sup>5</sup>, the stilted bamboo structure that Yasmeen Lari designed in 2011 in response to floods in Pakistan. Participants considered how Lari's design principles could be applied in the context of the UK, in terms of local materials and construction practices. The workshop was

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/thames-estuary-2100-te2100>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/thames-estuary-2100-te2100news.trust.org/item/20110727233000-ubow8>

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facilitated by experienced bio-material specialists: basket weaver Molli McMillen<sup>6</sup>, and master thatcher Mark Harrington<sup>7</sup>.



Photography by Thierry Bal.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.molliemcmillen.co.uk/basket-weaver-background>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.masterthatching.co.uk/>

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The temporary installation will come together over the course of the second workshop (25–29 May), in which participants will put to practise their new skills in thatching, weaving and working with reed bundles through the building process. This phase will be facilitated by Mark Harrington and timber expert Andi Amirshah.

Over the course of the workshops, participants will develop the construction skills with bio-based materials that will be central to sustainable architecture practice, culminating in the temporary outdoor installation that will inspire conversation about how architecture can embrace natural materials within the context of the climate crisis.



The Material Cultures team. Photograph by Stephanie Sian Smith.

## 'Designing in a Climate Emergency' at London Festival of Architecture

The completed installation will be on display at A House for Artists throughout June 2024 as part of the London Festival of Architecture, sparking discussion about climate change, industrial heritage and flood risk in and around Barking.

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Photography by Jimmy Lee.



## Notes to editors

For further information, image and interview requests please contact Emily Ward at [emily@zetteler.co.uk](mailto:emily@zetteler.co.uk) or on +44 (0)7800 995697.

Installation images due: 31 May 2024

Access information:

- Wheelchair accessible
- Level access
- Assistance dogs welcome

## Credit lines

- *Rising from the Water: Designing in a Climate Emergency* is a part of *Breaking Waves*, a series of free events and creative activities raising awareness of the connection between climate crisis and industrial heritage. *Breaking Waves* was commissioned by Create London and made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. The architecture commission is additionally supported by the British Council's Architecture Design Fashion department's International Biennales and Festivals programme. With thanks to the architecture students and young people who took part.
- A House for Artist's public programme is supported by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and The Rayne Foundation.

## Create London

Create London commissions socially engaged art, generous architecture and bold infrastructure that is woven into the fabric of everyday life. Its work is driven by a belief that transformative and radical ideas can derive from working long-term within local communities. Create London brings world-class cultural experiences to areas where it is least expected, providing inclusive moments for individuals to expand their imaginations, foster collective action and support thriving communities. Recent projects include the RIBA award-winning A House for Artists by APPARATA architects; Grayson Perry's first public sculpture *Inspiration Lives Here* in Barking town centre; sculptural street furniture by Heather Peak & Ivan Morison across the Becontree Estate and a Wildlife & Wellbeing Trail in Barking Riverside, including sound artwork by Joseph June Bond.

[createlondon.org](http://createlondon.org)

## **National Lottery Heritage Fund**

Using money raised by the National Lottery, the fund inspires, leads and resources the UK's heritage to create positive and lasting change for people and communities. Since the National Lottery began in 1994, National Lottery players have raised over £43 billion for projects and more than 635,000 grants have been awarded across the UK. Follow @HeritageFundUK on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use #NationalLotteryHeritageFund  
[heritagefund.org.uk](https://heritagefund.org.uk)

## **British Council**

The British Council is the UK's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities. It supports peace and prosperity by building connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and countries worldwide through its work in arts and culture, education and the English language. The Council works with people in over 200 countries and territories and is on the ground in more than 100 countries.  
[design.britishcouncil.org](https://design.britishcouncil.org)

## **A House for Artists**

The first of its kind in the UK, A House for Artists is an ambitious model for affordable and sustainable housing tied to long-term public engagement in Barking town centre. Designed by architectural studio APPARATA, it provides flexible living and work space for fourteen artists and their families. In return for reduced rent, the artists deliver free creative programmes for the neighbourhood in the ground floor community hall, shaped in dialogue with the community. The building received the Neave Brown Award for Housing from RIBA in 2023, and was also nominated for the Stirling Prize and the Stephen Lawrence Award. A House for Artists was co-commissioned by Create London and London Borough of Barking & Dagenham, delivered by Be First Generation and supported by the Greater London Authority.

## **Dr Yasmeen Lari**

Pakistan's first female architect Dr Yasmeen Lari is an architectural historian, conservationist and philanthropist. Her work driving Pakistan's journey from international modernism for the elite to zero-carbon architecture for the masses was rewarded in 2023 with RIBA's Royal Gold Medal, making her the second woman to receive it since 1848. Her other awards include the Sitara-i-Imtiaz, the Hilal-i-Imtiaz, the Fukuoka Prize from Japan and the Jane Drew Prize from the UK. She devised Barefoot Social Architecture (BASA) to provide social and ecological justice to marginalised sections of society. Lari holds honorary degrees from Politecnico Di

Milano and Oxford Brookes University and is an Honorary Fellow of Jesus College at the University of Cambridge.

## **Material Cultures**

Material Cultures is a design and research practice working at the intersection of natural materials, low-embodied-carbon construction and construction technology. It argues for the reintegration of architecture and agriculture, understanding buildings as irrevocably linked to landscapes of extraction. Bio-based materials are low in embodied carbon and offer an alternative to the globally sourced, carbon-intensive, socially destructive materials commonly used in the construction industry. Through its work, Material Cultures challenges the systems, technologies, processes, supply chains, regulations and materials that make up the construction industry with the aim of transforming the way we build.

The practice works across different scales, from materials, interiors and buildings to the landscapes from which they emerge. It designs buildings, working to integrate bio-based materials and minimally processed minerals into efficient construction systems. Material Cultures conducts strategic research into how these ideas can be applied at scale and how this can relate to a broader move towards regenerative land management practices. The team teaches across a number of institutions, including the Architectural Association and Central St Martins in London and the ETH in Zurich, and run construction skills programmes through the learning platform, MAKE. In 2023, the practice published Material Reform, a series of essays exploring the cultures, systems, and infrastructures that shape the architectural industry and the destructive ecologies it fosters.

[materialcultures.org](https://materialcultures.org)