

Eleven artists unveil creative responses to Milton Keynes

#MiltonKeynes2029 poster campaign celebrates UK City of Culture bid

Following the submission of its UK City of Culture 2029 bid in August, Milton Keynes is still surfing on a wave of creative energy – now unveiling an exclusive new poster series designed to celebrate the stories of the city.

From 28 September, Milton Keynes will be transformed into a giant outdoor art gallery, as the 11 posters go on display at locations around the city, each one shining a spotlight on a different aspect of Milton Keynes' history, cultural identity and hope for the future.

"These posters are a celebration of the creativity, talent and stories that make Milton Keynes such a special place, and each artwork offers a different perspective on our city. It's a reminder that culture can be found everywhere in Milton Keynes and reflects the energy and ambition at the heart of our UK City of Culture bid."

– Councillor Jane Carr, Leader, Milton Keynes City Council

One city, 11 perspectives

The UK City of Culture 2029 bid proved an ideal opportunity to launch a creative showcase of Milton Keynes' burgeoning visual arts scene. Posters were chosen as the ideal medium as they have historically been a platform for urban communications, both official and grassroots, while also offering designers an immediate and accessible way to respond to a place.

Commissioned by local creative agency Pooleyville, 11 artists and designers deeply connected to Milton Keynes were invited to provide their personal creative response to the city, interpreting its history, people, landscape, culture and future in any way that felt most meaningful to them.

The result is a strikingly varied collection of artworks, each offering a unique perspective on the city, expressed through a distinctive visual language. From colourful typographic studies to pencil sketches, reflections on the grid system to

the diversity of urban wildlife, the posters collectively demonstrate the countless ways in which one can express a city's identity, as well as showcasing the breadth of creative talent that has been nurtured in Milton Keynes.

"Milton Keynes has an active creative scene bubbling under the surface. This project is about putting some of that creativity into view – and giving people who live and work in the city the opportunity to define Milton Keynes for themselves.

We wanted to support the City of Culture bid because 2029 could be a genuine opportunity to change the way people see the city, while also creating new opportunities for the artists, designers, cultural organisations and creative businesses already working here. A successful bid would bring attention, investment and new commissions, but more importantly it could give Milton Keynes' creative sector the platform to grow."

– Simon Wright, Pooleyville

Artists and designers

The following artists' designs will be on display online from Wednesday 23 September and available to view around Milton Keynes from Monday 28 September.

Thomas Cuthbertson

Thomas Cuthbertson is an Artist and art therapist with experience of speech and language therapy, inclusive art facilitation and social care work with children, young people, adults and their families. Cuthbertson is the creator of Twenty Four Hour Window, a new zine about a single ordinary day living in Milton Keynes, where the routine of the day gets checked off and nightlife offers something more uncertain and exciting.



"One thing I love about Milton Keynes is how easy and enjoyable it is to run around. My poster takes inspiration from one of many runs alongside a local legend: the Grand Union Canal. What I hope UK City of Culture status will achieve is growing recognition, engagement and investment in the local efforts being made on the ground by local creative individuals and communities."

– Thomas Cuthbertson

[instagram.com/thomascuthbertson](https://www.instagram.com/thomascuthbertson)

Thomas Eke

An artist with roots in both Milton Keynes and London, Thomas Eke works with people to collectively rethink everyday life through art. His practice encompasses teaching, performance lectures, book works and events. This method of work informs a pedagogic approach which centres a belief in equity, citizenry, collectivity and a trust in art as a catalyst for connection and belonging.



"The smiley was born in the same decade (1960s) as the ground was broken for the building of our city. The smiley and our city's parallels continue over the decades, with each of their respective design rationales being for the benefit of the people, for the benefit of our happiness. Each has morphed and stretched and held space for cultures to gather around and find joy within.

The smiley and our city are kindred, simple forms, in which multitudes of identities can find themselves. The smiley and our city are shorthand. The smiley and our city are pre-digital natives, reborn at the millennium for the Digital Age. The smiley and our city are newly discovered by each generation. The smiley and our city, if it weren't obvious already, are just getting started."

– Thomas Eke

thomaseke.co.uk

A photographer and creative director from Milton Keynes, Chris Henley shoots the quiet stuff, the gaps, pauses and the bits in between. Storytelling and narrative play a big role in everything he makes, running through personal and commercial projects. Henley's years spent in design and art direction have hard-wired a taste for restraint, where minimalism, shape and tone are used with intent, not just for decoration.



"1967 marked the founding of Milton Keynes and the birth of a new town. This design celebrates that defining year. The numerals featured were found, photographed and digitised from locations across the city, each rooted in its visual language. Together, they form a graphic interpretation of 1967 that's personal to Milton Keynes, whilst reflecting the diverse and collective community that has shaped our city."

– Chris Henley

chris-henley.co.uk

ChiaChun Li

ChiaChun Li is a Taiwanese illustrator and designer based in Milton Keynes. Her most recent publication, *What's in your bag?* reimagines Taiwanese comfort food through British supermarket finds.



"I've always been interested in noticing the little creatures I come across when I'm out walking, whether on the streets, along the paths, or in the parks. After living in MK, I started to see how much these creatures are part of the city. For me, they bring a sense of joy and make the city feel more alive. You might be walking along and suddenly come across one, turning an ordinary moment into something a little more special. Many of them have been here for years, quietly living alongside the city."

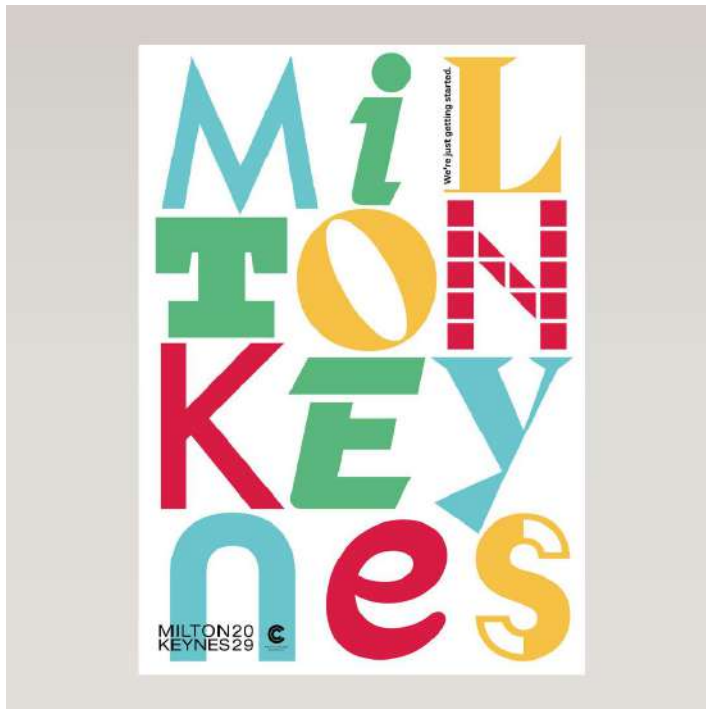
Creatures of Milton Keynes is my way of bringing these little characters together and sharing how I see the city as someone who came from outside the city and now lives here. I also see the project as an opportunity to celebrate a side of Milton Keynes that can easily go unnoticed. If MK achieves City of Culture status, I hope projects like this can contribute to a wider sense of local identity, encouraging people to look at familiar places in a new way, while also showing how artists and communities from different backgrounds can contribute to the story of the city."

– ChiaChun Li

chiachunli.com

Made by Berry

Made by Berry is the creative studio of freelance graphic designer Matt Berry, based in Stony Stratford, Milton Keynes. They work across print and digital design to support SMEs, organisations and start-ups with their communication needs.



"My background is typographic design so it was natural for me to approach it like this. I wanted to explore a way of expressing the city's diversity, bold characteristics and retro heritage with the mixture of typeface styles and colours. It also needed to feel positive and celebrate the strong identity of Milton Keynes."

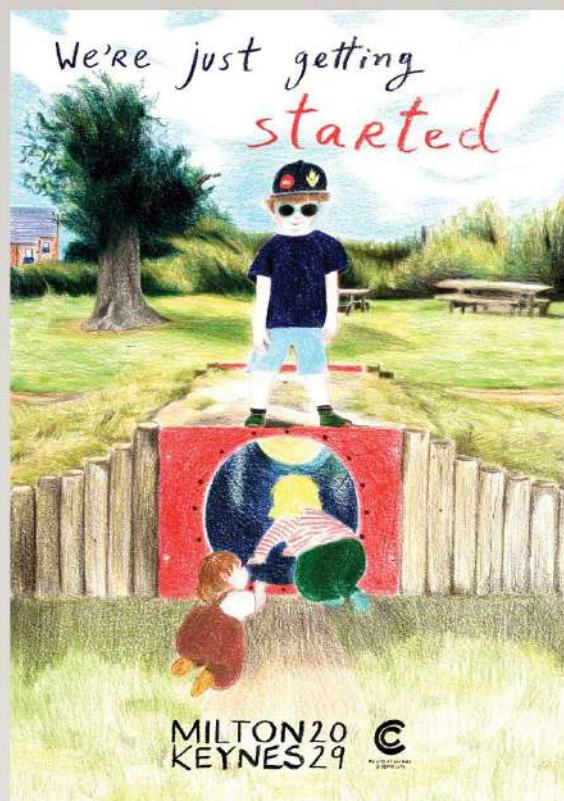
"If MK won the bid, I think it would give the people of the city a powerful way of coming together to celebrate the diversity of its culture across the city and wider areas. I would hope that it empowers the younger generations to feel positive about the place they call home and to be proud of it. It's also an opportunity for the city to transform the perceptions of people across the UK and to ultimately visit the city and celebrate it with us."

– Matt Berry, Made by Berry

madebyberry.com

Marianna Madriz

Marianna Madriz is a freelance illustrator originally from Venezuela, now living and working in London, via Milton Keynes. For the past decade Madriz has collaborated with a variety of institutions, magazines and publishers, most notably illustrating a range of educational children's books. Madriz's published work, *Microbe Wars* (written by Gill Arbuthnott), was shortlisted for the Royal Society's Young People's Book Prize in 2022.



"My poster is a hand-drawn tribute to my nephews: the next generation of MK citizens. My hope is for MK to continue expanding as a cultural playground, so everyone who lives and grows up here can discover what they're creatively capable of and embrace the city even more as their own."

– Marianna Madriz

mariannamadriz.com

Serge Seidlitz

An English/German hybrid born in Kenya, Serge Seidlitz grew up traveling between the UK and Asia, and a steady diet of MTV and Mad Magazine fuelled his desire to become an illustrator. He combines elements from popular culture with diverse influences to create work that forms an iconic and graphic language, and explores original ideas through maps, infographics, character design, and other media.

Following his studies in graphic design at Camberwell College of Arts, he worked as an in-house designer at Cartoon Network before leaving to focus on illustration. Seidlitz clients' include The New York Times, The Guardian, NME Magazine, MTV, VH1, Lush Cosmetics, British Airways, Sony Playstation, Vodafone, Orange, Coca-Cola, and Honda. He won an AOI Gold Award in 2006 and his first solo show was mounted in London in 2011.



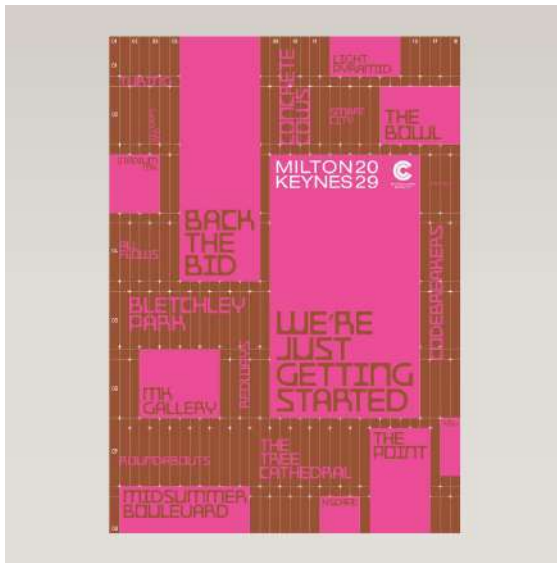
"I wanted to turn the letters of 'We're just getting started' into a bold and eye-catching illustration that captures the energy and variety of Milton Keynes. Each letter becomes a space to explore a different aspect of the city, from sport and culture to technology, food and outdoor adventures. The bright colours and playful details invite people to look closer and discover something new, reflecting just how much there is to do in MK – and how much more there is to come."

– Serge Seidlitz

sergeseidlitz.com

Sahaana Shankar

A graphic designer and visual communicator based in Milton Keynes, Sahaana Shankar specialises in human-centred design, empathy-led visual communication, and the creation of experience-led work that fosters deep connection. As the founder and creative lead of The Break-In Kit, a toolkit designed to support students transitioning from academia to industry, Shankar demonstrates a unique ability to combine product design with emotional intelligence.



"Because Milton Keynes was masterplanned on a grid to scale, I used Swiss minimalism to translate that physical architecture into a typographic concept. The baseline grid directly mirrors the city's 'H' and 'V' road network, using modular blocks to map MK's identity. It links heritage like Bletchley's codebreakers with local staples like the Concrete Cows and Redways. Geometric typography connects our computing history to a smart-city future, while raw concrete brown pairs with electric pink to represent vibrant culture taking over the infrastructure.

Securing City of Culture status would be an incredible opportunity to spotlight Milton Keynes' unique identity beyond the usual clichés. It would celebrate our rich heritage, champion our growing creative community, and show how our iconic modernist design continues to inspire new, forward-looking ideas."

– Sahaana Shankar

sahaana.co.uk

Frances Szweda

An artist and design systems lead based in Milton Keynes. Frances Szweda produces painterly work that explores local architecture, landscape, and flora and fauna.



"MK Central Library was the first thing that came to mind when I think of what culture means to me, growing up in Milton Keynes. My parents took me and my brother there every Friday. We'd borrow all the Goosebumps and Animorphs books and play Encarta MindMaze on the computers. It's where I was first exposed to local artists Boyd and Evans' work, and the giant ladies in André Wallace's The Whisper. It's great to have a reason to paint its rust-coloured bricks and colonnade."

– Frances Szweda

[instagram.com/franky.surname](https://www.instagram.com/franky.surname)

Rookie Services

Rookie Services is the curatorial project of artist Richard Harrison, who collaborates with artists, organisations and communities to make things happen in Milton Keynes. A key project is Shallow Gallery, a free 24/7 public art gallery commissioned by centre:mk on behalf of Arts Central Studios. Alongside this, Harrison has his own artistic practice drawing on modified-car culture and suburban symbolism.



"I like to think about MK as a place of optimism, where you have space to think and explore both ideas and the city itself. The city is young and has so much potential as a centre for culture. The early vision of the city is one of innovation, where new ways of thinking meet folklore, where concrete and glass meet grass and trees."

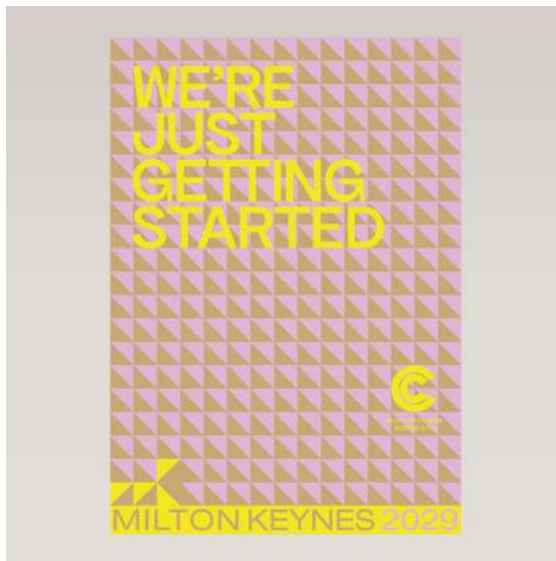
The poster nods to MK's early advertising campaign with the red balloons, borrowing an image from the campaign taken in The National Bowl and playing with it digitally. For me MK City of Culture 2029 is an opportunity for MK to find that original spirit of the city, develop the cultural infrastructure for more new ideas to be supported."

– Richard Harrison

rookie.services

WHP Creative

WHP is a design and digital marketing agency based in Milton Keynes and London. Founded in 2008, they create film, events, digital design and websites, content, creative concepts, design & business strategy, branding and brand design, marketing and e-learning.



"Milton Keynes gets written off a lot: too young, too planned, too many roundabouts. A city of grids and concrete cows, not culture. We think that's exactly backwards, and as a Milton Keynes studio, we would say that.

We started simply, much like the city itself: create a grid, make it easy to navigate, and ensure people get straight to The Point. Placemaking is about pointing to the here and now. Planting a flag and saying this is us, this is where we are. The arrows do that literally. They're directional, they carry movement, and they give the posters a restlessness that suits a city finally sure of its own position and where it wants to go next. A city that can shift, change direction and adapt.

The result: a modular set of simple pieces that recombine into something bigger, with a point to prove. Which is a fair description of Milton Keynes itself. Or a Megazord."

– WHP Creative

whpcreative.com

Milton Keynes' UK City of Culture 2029 bid

Together, the posters, the wider bid-launch campaign and the UK City of Culture 2029 bid itself are designed to overturn the preconceptions and stereotypes that have dogged Milton Keynes for decades. Some people know the city only for concrete and roundabouts; others don't know it at all. But for the 300,000+ who call Milton Keynes home – including the 2,500 people who have been involved in shaping the UK City of Culture bid – who experience its peculiar fusion of the visionary, the eccentric, and the brilliantly functional every day, it is the most extraordinary city in Britain.

With a winning bid, Milton Keynes will have a unique opportunity to re-energise its cultural programme and tell its extraordinary story on the national stage, as well as a platform to celebrate and nurture the extraordinary talent of its home-grown creatives.

The #MiltonKeynes2029 poster campaign has been made possible with the support of centre:mk, Milton Keynes Development Partnership and Unity Place. For images and more information about the poster campaign and Milton Keynes' UK City of Culture bid, contact miltonkeynes@zetteler.co.uk

Notes for editors

UK City of Culture 2029

UK City of Culture is a UK-wide programme, developed in collaboration with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The competition is run by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, inviting places across the UK to set out their vision for culture-led regeneration and takes place every four years.

The 2029 UK City of Culture competition follows the success of previous winning cities: Bradford 2025, Coventry 2021, Hull in 2017 and Derry-Londonderry in 2013. The nine longlisted locations for 2029 are: Blackpool, Inverness-Highland, Ipswich, Middlesbrough, Milton Keynes, Portsmouth, Sheffield, Swindon and Wrexham.

www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-city-of-culture-2029

Pooleyville

Pooleyville is a multidisciplinary creative agency based in Milton Keynes. Drawing on shared passion for and expertise in art, design, technology, socially engaged practice and creative place-making, the studio works collaboratively with community, cultural and commercial partners to embed creativity into the everyday.

pooleyville.uk