

Unique UK-wide tour lifts mental health Journey of the Mind opens at New Art Exchange, Nottingham, on 28 January



All photography courtesy of WSWF unless stated otherwise.

Journey of the Mind is a touring exhibition by arts organisation Without Shape Without Form (WSWF).

Following a Queen's Award for their involvement in a successful lockdown food bank project, which served 1 million hot meals, WSWF's touring exhibition addresses themes of mental health post-Covid.

Having recently closed a successful exhibition at the Arnolfini, the latest edition is set to open at New Art Exchange in Nottingham, running from 28 January to 22 April 2023. With the support of the Arts Council, they are presenting new commissions by Canadian artist Kanwar Singh and British animator Christian Wood. Specifically for Nottingham, the public programme includes a local football partnership to tackle issues around mental health.

The exhibition is travelling along varied places within the UK, Birmingham, Glasgow, Bristol, Nottingham, and encourages cross-cultural dialogue through accessible messaging and an engaging public programme.

WSWF

WSWF is a unique arts organisation within the UK. Founded in 2017 to champion the universal value of Sikh teachings and heritage in a contemporary context, the volunteer team creates moments of multicultural exchange and dialogue around art, spirituality and mental health. With universal relevance, Sikh teachings explore how to find peace during troubled times, encouraging focused practice, a strong sense of community and service to others.

WSWF – from food bank heroes to UK tour



A view of the exhibition display.

For everyone

WSWF, an independent arts organisation and gallery run by a team of 41 volunteers, understands the word Sikh to mean learner. Determined to overcome preconceived ideas about Sikh teachings, especially those who want to pigeonhole it as a religion, WSWF advocates it as a way of life that is relevant to everyone – regardless of their background.

Modest beginnings

The arts organisation was founded with modest ambitions. In 2017 they held their first exhibition, planning to run a brief 15-day event for the local community in Slough, and relying on ad hoc promotion through social media and word of mouth. If a hundred people showed up, it would have been a success according to the organisers. Over 4,500 people attended the opening day.

Following their unexpected success, the Arts Council approached the WSWF founders and encouraged them to apply for funding. In 2019, with support secured for their second exhibition, they marked the 550th birth year of the first Sikh Guru (teacher) – yet like so many others at that time, the Covid-19 pandemic unfortunately cut the exhibition short. But that wouldn't deter them from their mission.

Food bank heroes

Following the curtailment of WSWF's exhibition programme due to the pandemic, they were determined to keep pushing ahead.

The result was a testament to the ambitions of the volunteer team. As part of the wider GMGG Charity, their volunteers helped launch a food programme which distributed 470 tonnes of food across a 90-day period – serving over 1 million hot meals by working with 135 charities around London, which in turn won them a Queen's Award.



Touring the UK

As lockdown restrictions began to lift, WSWF knew their mission to bridge the gap between art and mental health was more important than ever.

Considering the sustained period of isolation and the tragic loss of life from the pandemic, they developed the idea for the Journey of the Mind exhibition.

WSWF began researching where the Sikh and South Asian community was primarily based, but sought out venues with a strong reputation, central location and high footfall so they could reach as many people as possible. Many venues responded positively, especially as a collaboration with WSWF would help them reach communities typically overlooked by the UK arts establishment.

The New Art Exchange – focusing the mind and football



The New Art Exchange in Nottingham is a special arts venue. The surrounding Hyson Green has a vibrant and diverse community yet faces significant socio-economic challenges – a marked change from previous exhibition locations, such as Bristol.

WSWF's workshops were developed with the needs of the local community in mind, placing a particular emphasis on Simran, a focused practice for the mind. This will include an immersive experience to promote good mental health, with additional events around sound and theatre. All will be free.

Journey of the Mind will take place across the full exhibition spaces, including the main gallery on the ground floor, mezzanine area and street gallery, with further programming taking place in the learning spaces and the performance studio.

“Journey of the mind’ is an exploration and a celebration of what we all have in common, as communities, as a society and as human beings. We are extremely excited to share this exhibition with our audiences and to engage with them in a wider dialogue about the power of unity and the exceptional universality of the mind. ‘Without Shape Without Form’ are offering a unique perspective on how Contemporary Visual Art can build long lasting bridges between all communities and we look forward to celebrating this important work at New Art Exchange.”

– Saad Eddine, CEO and artistic director, New Art Exchange

Kanwar Singh

Taking equal inspiration from Caravaggio and Sobha Singh, Kanwar Singh is a digital painter who is well-known and respected within the Sikh community.

Kanwar’s digital paintings tell stories from Sikh history, often relaying moments with a deep symbolic resonance and cinematic sense of drama. For Journey of the Mind, his paintings pay tribute to influential Gurus and hope to increase awareness about their teachings.

For the artist, the series reflects his own personal journey. Born in Amritsar, India, Singh emigrated to Canada with his family in the early 1990s. As he became more interested in Sikh history, this gave him a sense of purpose as an artist and he has since devoted his career to sharing these stories.

Christian Wood

Christian Wood, a motion designer and graduate of University of the Arts in London, is not from a Sikh or South Asian background. Yet, WSWF were keen to commission him to emphasise the open nature of Sikh teachings and to underline the multicultural focus of their programme.

Wood was commissioned to produce four animations which instructs visitors how to engage with Sikh teachings and practice through his idiosyncratic dynamic visuals and bold colours.



Attendance figures have been very strong throughout the tour

Programming

As the UK-wide tour continues, the content of the exhibition remains the same but the public programme is reconceived to suit the local context.

Keen to reach those who may feel the arts are not relevant to them, a special football initiative, entitled Nottingham Minds, will collaborate with local youth groups to address mental health.

Multicultural exchange in the UK



A packed crowd for a public event as part of the exhibition programme

As WSWF believe the themes of the exhibition are universally applicable, they wanted to encourage audiences to lower their guard and not come with any preconceived ideas about Sikh teachings or the South Asian community. Designed by Studio Rejane Dal Bello, the branding of Journey of the Mind was intentionally designed to be accessible and invite curiosity.

The response from visitors has been overwhelmingly positive. One South Asian visitor said, "I have never seen a Sikh inspired art exhibition in the UK" while others unfamiliar with Sikh teachings have expressed their enjoyment with the exhibition, saying "I felt so calm. I haven't felt that way ever before." Another added: "I don't think I will be the same after this."

Real impact

By the time the exhibition concluded in Bristol, the third leg of the tour, over 23,000 visitors will have attended the exhibition and a further 2,500 people will have engaged the public programme. Adding to this, their digital footprint includes another 20,000 website visitors and 50,000 impressions on Instagram.

The demographic breakdown of their audience reflects their multicultural ambitions. Approximately 63% of their attendees are White British, with 11% Asian. Their audience is also significantly younger than the typical arts audiences – with 13% between the ages of 13-21 and 29% between 22-29.



WSWF is making a serious impact through the arts within the UK



Notes to editors

For more details about the Journey of the Mind exhibition or Without Shape Without Form, please contact Sabine Zetteler on sabine@zetteler.co.uk.

Without Shape Without Form

Without Shape Without Form (WSWF) is a volunteer-led UK arts organisation that bridges the gap between art, spirituality, mental health and culture.

WSWF brings Sikh history and culture to the contemporary context to encourage exchange. Promoting awareness, understanding and discussion about the mind, the gallery and programme have been created to engage with local communities on a regional, national and international level.

WSWF's purpose is to connect, engage and share ideas through the arts to help make sense of the world today.

Upcoming tour dates

The New Art Exchange, Nottingham
28 January - 22 April 2023
Free entry

Final location TBC
2023

Previous dates

Library of Birmingham, Birmingham
18 November - 4 December 2021

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow
6 October - 23 October 2022

Arnolfini, Bristol
5 November - 4 December 2022

WSWF

Mini-documentaries

Library of Birmingham (Nov '21) – A programme that brings a city together and where the tour began.

[youtube.com/watch?v=UxEpYhvgLmY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxEpYhvgLmY)

Kelvingrove, Glasgow (Oct '22) – Introducing the Creative Mind Workshops which merge spirituality and creativity to improve mental health.

[youtube.com/watch?v=BdZIWeE-f3Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdZIWeE-f3Q)

Arnolfini, Bristol (Nov '22) – How our understanding of contemporary art can be expanded to make our worlds bigger.

[youtube.com/watch?v=eG9Zvz6JZME](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eG9Zvz6JZME)