



Role profile

Roles: Two artists

Project: The Rum Story Re-Imagined Project

Organisation: Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners

Overview of role

We want to appoint two separate artists to produce creative responses to The Rum Story and its history.

The Rum Story and its history

The Rum Story in Whitehaven tells the history of the Jefferson family's business, which involved rum, shipping and the trading and enslavement of African people. The history of the Jefferson family sits alongside a wider history of Whitehaven as a significant shipping port, built first on mining and then by the wealth generated by the Transatlantic trade of enslaved African people. The town was one of the most important UK ports. This allowed some people to generate wealth through involvement in trading enslaved African people.

Set in the original 1785 shop, cellars, bonded warehouse and courtyard of the Jefferson family business, the attraction depicts life in 18th century Whitehaven. The ground floor immerses visitors in an Antiguan rainforest before sugar plantations. The first floor looks like a ship and covers what life was like in African villages before people were enslaved, the Transatlantic trade and trafficking of enslaved African people, and making rum. The second floor is about rum, the navy, the Jeffersons, prohibition, pirates and Whitehaven.

The Rum Story Re-Imagined Project

The Rum Story is for everybody but like many heritage attractions, it's not yet engaging everyone. It was created in 2000 and needs to be more accessible, welcoming, inclusive, thought-provoking and engaging. The way it currently tells history aligns with how it is told by the wider heritage sector and dilutes the extent of Britain's role in the Transatlantic trade of enslaved African people and how it profited. The [Rum Story Re-Imagined](#) is a partnership project between Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners and Anti Racist Cumbria that aims to address these issues and put Whitehaven firmly on the UK heritage map.

[Anti Racist Cumbria](#) is a charity, tackling racism through action and education to create a forward-thinking and actively anti-racist Cumbria. [Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners](#) is a not-for-profit organisation, which is the custodian of Whitehaven Harbour and owns The Rum Story. All revenue generated is reinvested back into the harbour and wider estate for the benefit of its community.

Guiding principles for the project are safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, empowerment, inclusion, equity and accessibility. Here are the project's aims:

1. Lots more people from all walks of life visit The Rum Story and come back again
2. The attraction is more accessible, thought-provoking and innovative
3. A complete history is told, including less well-known narratives
4. People get interested in our shared heritage - curious about how past links to present
5. Local people actively participate in preserving and sharing Whitehaven's heritage
6. The team becomes upskilled on best practice in telling histories of enslavement
7. Wider social and economic benefits are generated for the local area

Phase 1 (2025-26) has been made possible by The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Its focus is on finding out how people think we should achieve our aims, using these ideas to create a recommendations report and implementing some of the early recommendations to improve the attraction. We are reaching out to individuals, businesses, creative and community organisations, schools, universities, researchers, think tanks, funders, government, museums and more to gather feedback/ideas - through workshops, events, surveys and meetings. Phase 2 (2026-30, subject to funding) is about putting the rest of the recommendations into place.

The Transatlantic trade of enslaved African people is a challenging history to confront. Sometimes this has led to people avoiding accepting how Britain benefited from enslaving African people, and how much it was involved. This project is interested in exploring how that history can be told in an honest, in-depth way. The attraction talks about enslavement, but the way history is told is often shaped by who had the power and means to dominate the narrative at the time. We want to ensure that narratives not currently told or told in a harmful way in The Rum Story are heard and told better.

The brief for both commissioning opportunities

There are two separate commission opportunities here - each worth £4,500. We want two separate artists to each create an artistic response to The Rum Story's history – in a way that supports the re-imagined Rum Story to:

- Become more accessible, thought-provoking and innovative
- Tell a more complete history, including less well-known narratives
- Get visitors interested in their heritage and curious about how past links to present
- Get locals actively engaging with Whitehaven's heritage.

The chosen artists will create works of art for the collection and long-term display at The Rum Story from January 2026. We are not specifying what art form or creative medium should be used. It could involve painting, sculpture, photos, installations, performance art, film, digital creations, music, poetry, craft, mixed mediums, or something else.

The artworks should be inspired by histories connected with The Rum Story/legacies of those histories. The artist should work with, and in response to, existing historical source materials. Artistic responses should address the lack of representation of the stories of Black people in the collections and displays at The Rum Story. They should help bring the personal identity and agency back to those people who were living in slavery/connected to the history of The Rum Story.

There should be some public engagement/community workshop delivery as part of the response. Artworks need to be an appropriate size and format to be incorporated into The Rum Story.

We are looking for artistic excellence, experience of creating artworks, interest in working with historic archives and collections, and awareness of the historic context in which the artworks are being commissioned to ensure that Black people living in slavery/affected by its legacies are made visible in The Rum Story.

We hope that these creative responses will:

- Involve creative interventions where there are gaps in primary source material
- Find ways of centring Black voices
- Help make The Rum Story a more human and caring space
- Take something inherently traumatic and find ways to subvert that or reclaim it
- Help redress the balance and create visibility for people who were enslaved.

Budget

Including commissioning, materials, travel, all costs and transferring ownership and copyright of your artwork to The Rum Story for long-term display, the budget for each commission is up to £4,500.

Time frame

Activity	Dates
Confirm artist chosen	Sep 2025
Artists create and produce the artworks	Oct - Dec 2025
Final commissioned pieces installed at The Rum Story	Jan 2026
Display opens to the public	Feb 2026

How to apply

Send Katy your proposal by 12pm on 13 August - either on paper (up to 2 sides of A4) or as a video (max 5 mins long). Tell us:

- Why you want to work on this project
- What you would do in response to the brief (including timescales/costs)
- How your proposal will help The Rum Story become more accessible and thought-provoking, help to tell a more complete history, and get people engaging with their heritage.
- Why you are suitable
- Links to your web presence/examples of previous work
- Contact details for two referees

CVs can be appended but must be additional to your proposal and no more than 2 sides of A4.

Proposals will be selected based on:

- How well you respond to this brief
- If we believe your proposal can be realistically delivered in the timeframe within budget
- You having relevant skills, knowledge and experience

Further details

We'll ask shortlisted artists to come in and discuss their proposals with us early September at The Rum Story. We are intending to do this on 4 September so please keep this date free.

We are seeking at least one of the two artists to be Black African Caribbean.

Feel free to contact Katy on katy.haigh@rumstory.co.uk or 07846 066 986 to discuss this opportunity and visit rumstory.co.uk/about/rum-story-re-imagined to learn more.

We will pay artists 25% of the fee upfront to help cover the cost of materials etc., an interim payment of 25% of the fee, and a final payment of 50% of the fee.

Care package

Delivering this work will involve working closely with challenging and potentially triggering histories of enslavement and its legacies. Because of this we will:

- Support artists, including giving time to discuss with the project team, all aspects of the commission or to debrief after meetings/events
- Allow artists to use spaces while they are unused, such as desk space or meeting rooms
- Offer the use of organisational resources, such as printers, where possible
- Offer access to free training opportunities that are available to the wider project team
- Offer access to free [racial trauma and wellbeing support](#) from Rowan Carr, who is qualified in Embodied Coaching and Somatic Approaches to Healing Racial Trauma.