

Wonderlab commissions artist for centrepiece

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York's forthcoming Wonderlab gallery has found an artist to create a stunning centrepiece for the upcoming £5 million venue.

The National Railway Museum of York, which oversees the new Wonderlab, has picked Yorkshire artist Pippa Hale to create the installation. Visitors will get to see the result of Pippa's work when the centre opens in spring 2023.

It will provide a breath-taking headline moment amongst about 20 other rail engineering-themed exhibits.

The art piece will feature a collection of large interactive blocks to encourage visitors young and old to design, build and play together. It is the latest iteration of Pippa's interactive play environment – 'Play Rebellion' – previously installed at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead. It continues Pippa's interest in the relationships between play and creativity, but this time it will have an engineering twist.

Produced in partnership with charity the Snappy Trust in York, the creative space will be enjoyed by young people of all abilities. As well as Pippa's commission, another 15 gallery exhibits have been ordered from three suppliers. These suppliers include Unusual Projects based in Elvington and Amazing Interactives based in Thornaby-on-Tees. A second artwork will be commissioned before the gallery opens to the public.

The exhibits are designed to help visitors think like engineers, and range from large scale immersive experiences to tabletop activities and a large demonstration space. Children will be able to build a bridge, enter a wind tunnel and take part in experiments around the themes of power, motion and control.

Rose Mockford, lead interactive gallery curator at the National Railway Museum, said: "Wonderlab will be a dynamic, dramatic, and multi-sensory gallery to help visitors think and act like engineers. From standing stationary amongst the most impressive locomotives in the world, Wonderlab will take visitors on an active journey which will excite and inspire young people about the world of engineering. I am grateful to all the groups and industry experts who have given their time to ensure Wonderlab will be a relevant and engaging experience for everyone."

Pippa said: "I am thrilled to be working with the National Railway Museum on this permanent installation. It will have fixed and moveable parts that visitors of all ages can use to create their own structures. The new shapes are inspired by drawings, plans and photographs from the museum's own archives in terms of form and colour.

"I'm also excited to be working with National Railway Museum volunteers and the Snappy Trust to ensure the artwork challenges visitors of all ages and abilities. The aim is to create a fun and sociable experience that encourages creative thinking, teamwork and risk taking for everyone."

Lead designers De Matos Ryan were appointed to work on Wonderlab in November 2019 and, despite the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the team worked closely and collaboratively with the National Railway Museum to complete the concept and developed design stages.

Building work is expected to last around a year beginning in spring 2022 with a completion date of spring 2023.

The project to build Wonderlab is part of the National Railway Museum's Vision 2025 development which will see widespread transformation across the museum's galleries and buildings. For more information, visit www.railwaymuseum.org.uk/2025.

Image supplied by National Railway Museum