



Tania Kovats, *BIG BLUE* concept drawing, 2026. Courtesy the artist

# New public artworks by Rhona Byrne, Katie Schwab and Tania Kovats will transform University of Southampton's Building 75 development

The University of Southampton, in partnership with UP Projects and John Hansard Gallery, announces a series of major public art commissions for the new Building 75 (formerly known as the North East Quadrant) development at Highfield Campus. Building 75 will provide a much-needed, cutting-edge new teaching and learning spaces that are student-centred by design. The new commissions will embed art into the everyday life of the campus, creating spaces for reflection and exchange among students, staff and surrounding communities.

There are three public art commissions that expand on the principles of the public art strategy, *The Welcoming Campus: Art, People and Nature in Dialogue* written by UP Projects: *The Welcoming Campus*, *Play the Campus* and *Art + Nature*. The artists selected are Dublin-based **Rhona Byrne**, whose socially engaged practice explores the dynamics of space and participation; Glasgow-based **Katie Schwab**, whose work draws on histories of craft, learning and material culture; and Devon-based **Tania Kovats**, whose sculptures mediate our relationship with the natural world. Kovats was selected for the Art + Nature commission following a shortlist of artists invited to develop proposals. The shortlist of artists also included London-based Shiraz Bayjoo and Yorkshire-based Invisible Flock.

The *Welcoming Campus* commission by Rhona Byrne includes two artworks at two key entry points to the building exploring what it means to arrive, belong and be welcome. *Play the Campus* commission by Katie Schwab involves interactive artworks encouraging playful participation and movement around the site. *Art + Nature* commission by Tania Kovats will be a sculptural response exploring dialogue between art, people and nature. The commissions will deliver the vision for an inclusive, accessible campus, with artists encouraged to collaborate with students, academics and local residents throughout the process.

Alongside the three commissions, *Curating the Campus* is a programme developed with Winchester School of Art students to curate the university's art collection within the new building, alongside opportunities to display community artworks in publicly accessible areas.

Commissions are guided by *The Welcoming Campus: Art, People and Nature in Dialogue*, the public art strategy, which positions art as a central part of how Building 75 will be experienced. The public artworks will welcome, challenge and connect, encouraging dialogue between people, place and nature. The project builds on the university's historic and ongoing relationship with sculpture, with new artworks joining existing pieces by Barbara Hepworth and Conrad Shawcross, among others.

Building 75 is a major redevelopment of Highfield Campus, transforming a former car park into a new teaching and learning hub, and incorporating high-quality green space, improved cycle and walking routes, and a connective landscape between the university and surrounding neighbourhoods.

Professor Deborah Gill, Vice-President Education & Student Experience at University of Southampton, says:

*Building 75 represents a step forward for the university in the ways we teach and support learning, but also in how we bring people together. These commissions put art right at the centre of the new campus from the outset, welcoming and inspiring people in equal measure.*

Emma Underhill, Founder and CEO of UP Projects, says:

*By working collaboratively with artists and communities, we're building a sense of shared ownership of these new spaces. I'm excited to see the selected artists translate our vision for Building 75 into tangible artworks that encourage people to pause, connect with one another and enjoy being in the world.*

Woodrow Kernohan, Director of John Hansard Gallery, says:

*An important part of John Hansard Gallery's work is bringing contemporary art outside the gallery walls and into civic spaces, and it's wonderful to see this extending into the University campus. These commissions offer new ways for people to encounter art as part of their everyday experience.*

Carolyn Abel, Director Culture & Tourism at Southampton City Council says:

*Public art plays a vital role in reflecting the diversity and identity of a city. This programme contributes to Southampton's wider cultural vision which is at the heart of the Growth and Prosperity Plan to deliver meaningful change for people who live, work, study and visit Southampton. It's fantastic that the University of Southampton are creating spaces that are welcoming and meaningful not just for a select few, but for all who use them.*

Emma Brown, President of Southampton University Student Union, says:

*Students are at the heart of the Building 75 transformation, from selecting artists to being part of developing the artworks themselves. As the people who will live, study and spend time in these spaces every day, they play a vital role in bringing the project to life.*

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## Notes for Editors

**Rhona Byrne** is an Irish artist whose practice explores connections between people, materiality, and place through public artworks, social sculpture, and participatory installations. Rooted in collaboration and transdisciplinary exchange, her work invites embodied encounters with the physical and social fabric of place.

Recent commissions include *Restless: Liffey Love* Dublin City Council and The Scribble, Maynooth University. Recently exhibited at Works residency at Power House Arts (NYC, 2025). Her work is held in collections of the Arts Council of Ireland and IMMA. Byrne is supported by the Arts Council of Ireland and she teaches at LSAD in Sculpture and Combined Media. [rhonabyrne.com](http://rhonabyrne.com)

**Katie Schwab's** projects begin with textiles. Her artworks are stitched, woven, tufted and knitted. These processes also inform her sculptures, prints and public artworks. Developed through research in archives, community or family settings, her work reflects on the legacies of post-WWII textiles and civic architecture. Schwab's hand-made and collaborative works process histories of rupture and loss, exploring forms of material repair and affective transformation.

Recent exhibitions and projects include; *Relative Ties*, The Women's Art Collection, Cambridge (2026); *a cloud + a fence*, The Line, London (2024); British Art Show 9, Hayward Gallery Touring (2021-22); *small wares*, Vleeshal, Middelburg, The Netherlands (2021); *A Working Building*, The Gallery at Plymouth College of Art [now MIRROR], Plymouth (2019) and *This Interesting and Wonderful Factory*, Clore Sky Studio Commission, Tate St Ives, St Ives (2018). Her catalogue *Sample Book*, designed by Åbäke and edited by Clare Molloy, was co-published by Vleeshal and Dent-De-Leone in 2023. [katieschwab.com](http://katieschwab.com)

**Tania Kovats** (born Brighton, 1966) makes drawings, sculpture, and large-scale site sensitive works in the public realm that explore our experience and understanding of the natural world. While Kovats is perhaps best known for her sculptures and drawings, her work encompasses a range of creative strategies, from map-making to writing, and she is also active as a teacher and author. Kovats' enduring themes are the

experience and understanding of landscape, geological processes, patterns of growth and the intersection of landscape, nature and culture and how art can speak to our critical climate crisis. Recently she has focused on water as her central subject; the seas and oceans, river systems, maritime culture, flooding and tides, necessarily touching on socio-political and environmental concerns alongside our poetic and psychological connection to water.

Kovats' work is held in numerous public and private collections including the Arts Council Collection, London, British Council, London, National Maritime Museum, London, Government Art Collection, London, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, Jupiter ArtLand, Edinburgh, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven and the Speed Museum, Kentucky.

**John Hansard Gallery** is a locally engaged and internationally recognised contemporary art gallery in Southampton. Being part of the University of Southampton, the Gallery aims to create extraordinary encounters with the rich diversity of contemporary art that inspire people and communities to change the world for the better. To realise this, the Gallery creates innovative and critically acclaimed contemporary art exhibitions, events, engagement and research projects that excite, challenge, represent and reach the widest possible public audience. [jhg.art](http://jhg.art)

The **University of Southampton** is one of the UK's leading teaching and research institutions, with a global reputation for research and scholarship across a wide range of subjects. The University combines academic excellence with an innovative and entrepreneurial approach to research, supporting a culture that engages and challenges students and staff in their pursuit of learning. [southampton.ac.uk](http://southampton.ac.uk)

**UP Projects** is the UK's leading public art organisation specialising in socially engaged public art commissioning. We bring world class artists out of the gallery and into public spaces to create new work with communities across the UK and beyond. Our work is always responsive to context often activating unexpected corners of the public realm. [uprojects.com](http://uprojects.com)