

Press Release: Thursday 6 July 2022

## PoliNations

Programme announced: a celebration of cultural diversity in the UK taking place in an urban oasis

Birmingham, 2 – 18 September 2022



An artist's render of PoliNations, Image courtesy of Trigger, THISS, Carl Robertshaw, Bronia Housman.

- Trigger Collective has announced the programme for **PoliNations**, a garden of magical proportions taking over Birmingham's city centre from 2 – 18 September for a celebration of cultural diversity in the UK through the lens of British horticulture.
- **Giant architectural trees** standing 11m tall in Victoria Square will burst with a cloud of colour and confetti in the grand finale weekend combining the joyful spirit of Carnival, Holi, and Mardi Gras.
- Emerging and internationally renowned artists from the UK such as **Soweto Kinch, Kofi Stone, Horse Meat Disco, Rikki Beadle-Blair, Jaivant Patel, Symoné, and Daniel Lismore** will present free live music, spoken word, dance and drag performances.
- Highlight events include two spectacular long weekend festivals: **Poetry & Performance Festival (9–11 September)** in partnership with BBC Contains Strong Language and the **Ballistic Seed Party (15–18 September)**.
- Diverse daily activity to inspire the mind, body, and soul will include workshops, sensory experiences, garden tours, and talks by stellar speakers such as food grower and writer **Claire Ratinon**, author **Jon Drori**, and activist and gardener **Sui Searle** spanning topics such as freedom of expression, decolonising the garden, and sustainability.
- All events will be free and open to everyone.

Today, Trigger Collective has announced the programme for PoliNations, a super garden of magical proportions taking over Birmingham's city centre for 17 days this September. Commissioned as part of UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK, PoliNations will roll out in the final month of the Birmingham 2022 Festival. The Co-Directors of arts organisation Trigger, known for its bold and inclusive live events, and who have been working with a wide-range of creative partners, said the programme would be "a proud celebration of cultural diversity in the UK through the lens of British horticulture".

Inspired by the fact that the majority of plants in our city gardens come from overseas, PoliNations will celebrate the cross-pollination that has shaped British culture. Across two spectacular long weekend festivals, a community planting weekend, and a daily programme of inspiring activity, PoliNations will present artist commissions, talks, workshops, garden tours, and performances spanning live music, spoken word, dance, and drag. All events will be free and open to everyone

Taking place in Birmingham, one of the most multicultural, creative and green cities of the UK, which has 'Tree City of the World' status, PoliNations will highlight stories of migration shared by plants and humans alike. The epic programme will shine a light on our differences, similarities, roots and freedoms.

**Angie Bual, Creative Director, Trigger, said:** *"The idea behind PoliNations derived from the wave of Black Lives Matter protests that happened at the same time as the coronavirus lockdowns, when more and more people were reconnecting with nature. These phenomena made me think about my own identity and place in the UK, and at Trigger Collective we began exploring the relationship between plants, cultural identity and civic activism. We were surprised to find out that most of the plant life in our city gardens has travelled in from outside of the UK and wanted to use the vibrancy of plant life as a metaphor to understand why we're multi-cultural. Together we make the world more beautiful and interesting, and we've been doing this in the UK for thousands of years. Migration isn't a recent action - it's as old as the rose, apple and lavender are to our gardens. The PoliNations programme is the result of collaborations with members of many diverse communities and it's a true celebration of cultural diversity, individuality and self-expression."*

**Martin Green, Chief Creative Officer at UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK and the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, said,** *"PoliNations will be a joyous celebration of the incredible creativity and cultural diversity across the UK today. We're thrilled to have commissioned the festival as a part of UNBOXED, and that it will also provide a spectacular free event for everyone in the final month of the Birmingham 2022 Festival. Audiences from the region and far and wide will be able to experience an event that embraces diverse forms of art, and myriad ways to tell captivating personal and collective stories that reflect the magnificent richness of our society."*

## THE SUPER GARDEN

PoliNations was inspired by the surprising fact that over 80% of plants found in UK city-gardens originate from overseas.

Audiences will discover a super garden in Birmingham's town centre, with giant architectural trees and thousands of colourful living plants beautifully arranged in zones ranging from meadow to forest. As part of a partnership with Birmingham City Council, plants from the PoliNations garden will go back out to re-green the city.

The visionary team behind the super garden, Trigger Collective, include experts in horticulture, arts, science and architecture, brought together by arts organisation Trigger. The Collective includes: Angie Bual (The Hatchling), Carl Robertshaw (Björk, Kylie Minogue, London 2012 Olympics Ceremonies), set and costume designer Bronia Housman (Bristol Old Vic, Take That, Sadler's Wells), design and architecture studio THISS (The Bartlett, UCL, 2021 Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism), and award-winning horticultural designers Chris and Toby Marchant (RHS Chelsea Flower Show medal-winners, Hauser & Wirth Somerset).

## ICONIC PLANT SCULPTURES AND WALKING WORKS OF ART

Beyond the super garden's living plants, throughout Victoria Square and Chamberlain Square visitors will discover **Iconic Plant Sculptures**, inspired by the incredible diversity of plant-life in the UK and their equally colourful origins and uses ranging from protest to ritual and wellbeing. Designed by Carl Robertshaw, the sculptures will feature soundscapes created by local and international artists, in collaboration with Olivier Award-winning sound designer Tom Gibbons.

Throughout the finale weekend, Ballistic Seed Party (15–18 September), a cast of **Walkabout Performers** led by artist and performer **Symoné** (Guinness World Records) will personify the iconic garden plants. Dressed in Met-Gala worthy costumes designed by **Clary Salandy** (Mahogany Carnival Design) and American costume designer and drag queen Joey A Frenette, aka **Bourgeoisie** these walking works of art will animate the super garden and conclude each day with a choreographed performance at Sunset. Among the cast is the celebrated performance artist aka 'living sculpture' **Daniel Lismore**.

## PROGRAMME HIGHLIGHTS

The PoliNations programme will unfold across two main stages including the Main Stage and Mother Tree Stage, as well as a workshop dome, Wondersphere. Highlights include two extraordinary weekend festivals, a daily programme of diverse and inspiring activities and a community Plant Up! project open to the public.

### *The Ballistic Seed Party*

**Thursday 15 – Sunday 18 September, 2022**

The Ballistic Seed Party will be a four-day weekend finale celebrating self-expression with queer, South Asian, African and Caribbean artists from the West Midlands and beyond leading the programme. Thursday offers a day of glitz and glam for all the family. Friday evening offers an Indian summer's evening of dance and music curated in partnership with **Sandwell & Birmingham Mela**, the biggest Asian music festival in Europe. Saturday will host an all day – all night party in the spirit of Carnival, Holi, and Mardi Gras brought to life thanks to collaborations

with **ACE Dance and Music**, the national touring company based in Birmingham, Sandwell & Birmingham Mela and **Symoné's** cast of Walkabout Performers. On Saturday festival goers will also get to see the tree canopies bursting in a cloud of colour and confetti. Sunday will present local live music from Birmingham and the West Midlands, including **Kofi Stone**, **TrueMendous**, and **Rosie Tee**.

Across this four-day festival, unmissable events celebrating self-expression and queer culture at the Main Stage include **The Catwalk Extravaganza** hosted by the formidable performer, writer and director Rikki Beadle Blair, which will present queer collectives and individual performers for stunning fashion, lip-sync, make-up and dance battles produced in partnership with Darren Pritchard. Meanwhile the **Family Catwalk Extravaganza** - part theatre, part competition - ensures all the family can join in. **Yshee's Drag Party** hosted by Drag artist Yshee Black will also unite an extraordinary group of talent for a showcase of drag, dance and cabaret to reflect on the theme of 'growth.' At the Mother Tree Stage, **Drag Queen Storytime**, a children's story hour capturing the imagination and play of the gender fluidity in childhood, will give kids unabashedly queer role models. While at Chamberlain Square, visitors can attend free costume-making workshops at the **WonderSphere** with esteemed designers Clary Salandy and Bourgeoisie aka Joey A. Frenette in preparation for the final party on Saturday.

Elsewhere in the Ballistic Seed Party, **music** will feature renowned disco collective **Horse Meat Disco**, playing alongside the UK's most exciting new talent including rapper and hip hop artist **Kofi Stone** and leading Afro fusion collective **Balimaya Project**, world music group **The Turbans**, and many more. Visitors will discover vibrant **Rangoli** street art by Ranbir Kaur unfolding across Chamberlain Square and Victoria Square and will be able to have their hands decorated by **henna** artists.

### **Poetry & Performance Festival in partnership with BBC Contains Strong Language** Friday 9 – Sunday 11 September, 2022

The Poetry & Performance Festival in partnership with BBC's **Contains Strong Language** festival will highlight 22 poets from across the Commonwealth including both regional and UK poetry talents. Special performances will include 'White Juju' a live musical performance written in response to the Black Lives Matter movement, Black British History and lockdown by saxophonist and rapper **Soweto Kinch (Mercury Prize Nominated)**. **Jasmine Gardosi (Birmingham Poet Laureate Finalist)** will present 'Dancing to Music You Hate' a genre-defying performance by the poet, slam champion and beatboxer whose poems explore sex education, LGBTQ+ issues and mental health. Further programming includes screenings of animated films created as part of **BBC Words First, Contains Strong Language Radio Club** workshop sessions with local schoolchildren and more artists to be announced.

### **Plant Up!**

**Friday 2 – Sunday 4 September**

During the opening weekend of PoliNations, the public are invited to attend the **Plant Up!** which will see diverse local community groups and schools planting flowers in the super garden accompanied by Head Gardeners from **The Birmingham Botanical Gardens**.

In preparation for the Plant Up! weekend, over 1000 local people have been growing marigolds around Birmingham. The groups involved in the city-wide growing project reflect the diversity of Birmingham's communities, ranging from youth to elderly groups, from expert gardeners to total beginners, including refugee groups, women's groups, and disability action groups.

## DAILY PROGRAMME

### Wellbeing & Relaxation

Unfolding beneath the giant and otherworldly tree installations, daily events to relax the body and mind will span the PoliNations site. Each day begins the **Awakening**, a soundscape (by internationally renowned composer **Max Perryment** and co-created by Tom Gibbons, PoliNations' award-winning Sound Designer) and closes with the **Sunset Shift**, a light and soundscape (created by Lighting Designer Matt Daw, Sound Designer Tom Gibbons and Composer Max Perryment, in partnership with Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, part of Birmingham City University) inspired by the sound of the bullroarer and transitioning the super garden from day to night time.

Daytime offerings also include **Yoga, Pilates and Tai-Chi** provided by local groups, **Into the Garden: horticultural tours** led by experts from **The Birmingham Botanical Gardens**.

### Iconic Lunchtime Talks

A series of Iconic Lunchtime Talks hosted by drag artist **Yshee Black** will delve into topics including freedom of expression, protest, decolonisation, sustainability and wellbeing, including a special series curated by organic food grower and author **Claire Ratinon** with artist and educator **Sam Ayre**. Talks include: 'Horticultural Appropriation' by Claire Ratinon and Sam Ayre, **Sui Searle** and Dr. Ros Gray on 'Decolonising the garden', **Jon Drori** on 'the histories and roles of plants in our lives,' and **Sue Stuart Smith** and **Chris Marchant** on 'The Well Gardened Mind.'

### See, Taste & Touch

**Tea Tuk Tuk Chai Wallah** in partnership with Dishoom Restaurants will be a place to enjoy a cup of tea every day, whilst exploring the history of the beverage and its journey to the UK. **From Soil to Sip** will invite participants to discover fragrant seeds and plants and brew the perfect mix of herbs and spices. This sensory experience is presented by performance company, Spectra, who hold neurodiversity at the heart of their work. At the TukTuk visitors will also encounter dance performances led by renowned contemporary Khatak dancer **Jaivant Patel**, and performers dressed in specially designed costumes as part of a partnership with British Council - **Pakistan/UK: New Perspectives 2022, PoliNations**. **Touch Tours** of the super garden will also be offered across on selected days for the site for those who are blind, partially sighted or would benefit from a tour of the site exploring textures and sounds.

## VIRTUAL SUPER GARDEN

For those who cannot access the festival, as well as those who can, the PoliNations app launching in July, will invite audiences to step into a virtual super garden, create flowers and watch them come to life in augmented reality.

PoliNations is one of 10 major creative projects commissioned as part of UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK, which are the result of collaboration across science, technology, engineering, arts and maths and bringing hundreds of free events and activities across the UK in 2022. PoliNations is presented as part of **Birmingham 2022 Festival** and also in collaboration with **Birmingham City Council**.

More information can be found via [polinations.com](https://polinations.com)

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### About UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK

[UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK](https://unboxed2022.uk) is a celebration of creativity taking place across the UK in 2022, designed to reach millions and bring people together. It features free large-scale events, installations and globally accessible digital experiences in the UK's most ambitious showcase of creative collaboration. Produced by some of the brightest minds in science, technology, engineering, arts and maths, UNBOXED features ten major multi-site and digital creative projects that share new ideas and possibilities for the future. Events and activities take place from 1 March to 2 October 2022 – from the Outer Hebrides to Southampton and from Omagh to Swansea, and across traditional and online media. UNBOXED: Creativity in the UK is funded and supported by the four governments of the UK and is commissioned and delivered in partnership with Belfast City Council, Creative Wales and EventScotland.

[unboxed2022.uk](https://unboxed2022.uk)

### About Trigger Collective

PoliNations is produced by Trigger Collective and led by Bristol-based arts organisation Trigger. Trigger Collective includes experts in horticulture, arts, science and architecture, including creative director **Angie Bual** (The Hatchling, Trigger), designer and artist **Carl Robertshaw** (Björk, Ellie Goulding, London 2012 Opening & Closing Ceremonies), set and costume designer **Bronia Housman** (Bristol Old Vic, Take That, Sadler's Wells), events specialist **Dock Street Events** (Manchester International Festival, Hull UK City of Culture, London 2012 Ceremonies), architectural studio **THISS** (The Bartlett, UCL, London Met), and horticulturalists **Arbor-Nova** (RHS Chelsea Flower Show medal-winners, Hauser & Wirth Somerset, Maggies, Royal Marsden Hospital).

### About Trigger

Trigger are shapeshifting creatives who dream-up, create and produce free, bold live and digital events which care for the community. Trigger reimagine and revive public spaces, interrupt daily life, and put audiences and togetherness at

the heart of everything they do. Their varied output, ranging from The Hatchling – a groundbreaking puppetry and kite flying experience – to WithYou, a free innovative digital service created in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, is inclusive, accessible and aims to shine a light on the creativity of local communities and underrepresented talent. Trigger is for everyone, and everyone is invited.

### **About Birmingham 2022 Festival**

The Birmingham 2022 Festival unites people from around the Commonwealth through a celebration of creativity, in a six-month long programme, shining a spotlight on the West Midlands' culture sector.

Running from March to beyond the conclusion of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games in September, the festival aims to entertain and engage over 2.5 million people in person and online.

Delivering over 200 projects across the region including art, photography, dance, theatre, digital art and more the festival will embrace local culture and generate lasting change and a creative legacy beyond the games with funding to community led projects from Birmingham City Council's Creative City Grants scheme.

Major support has been dedicated by Arts Council England, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Birmingham City Council and Spirit of 2012. The Birmingham 2022 Festival is grateful for further support from British Council, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, National Lottery Community Fund, Canada Council for the Arts, the High Commission of Canada in the UK, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, Create Central, Creative New Zealand, UK/Australia Season 2021/2022, and Birmingham 2022 Organising Committee.

### **About Plant Up!**

The public opening of PoliNations will be preceded by a community co-planting project, Plant Up. Over 550 participants from local community groups will co-plant 600 marigolds in the super garden accompanied by Head Gardeners from Birmingham Botanics. The marigolds have been grown by over 1000 community members, raising the plants from seed over the past months in preparation for Plant Up. The groups involved in the mass growing project reflect the diversity of Birmingham's communities, ranging from youth to elderly groups, from expert gardeners to total beginners, including refugee groups, women's groups, and disability action groups. Among the local communities involved include Saheli Hub, a women and girls group focused on community wellbeing; Kinmos, a mental health charity; Women with Hope, a charity dedicated to improving the lives of women asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants; Open Theatre, working with young people with learning disabilities on non-verbal physical theatre; the Czech and Slovak Club, which promotes the welfare and culture of the Czech and Slovak community living in UK; the volunteer growing group Highbury Orchard Community; and Birmingham Cathedral.

### **About BBC Contains Strong Language 2022**

BBC Contains Strong Language 2022 is a collaboration between between the BBC and Verve Poetry Festival, Birmingham, partnering with PoliNations, Birmingham Commonwealth Games Committee, and is supported by Arts Council England, the British Council and Creative Lives

## **BIOGRAPHIES**

### **Angie Bual (Creative Director and Joint CEO, Trigger)**

Angie is the creative director and founder of Trigger, an independent arts organisation based in Bristol. She is the Creative Director of The Hatchling – the world's first flying puppet in the form of a dragon which premiered in Plymouth in August 2021 to over 30,000 spectators and led the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations in June 2022. Angie is also the Creative Director for the WithYou, a free innovative digital service created in response to the Covid-19 pandemic that helps to connect isolated hospital patients and care home residents to their loved ones by bringing shareable voice messages and music playlists together for them in one playable audio track. WithYou was shortlisted for the HTN Award for most promising pilot in 2021 and is currently live in 14 wards across the UK.

Angie is a Clore Fellow (Theatre), and has produced for organisations including Fuel, National Theatre of Scotland, Edinburgh Art Festival and the Science Museum. She is also on the board for the London Area Council for Arts Council England. Angie won the Creative Producer Arts Foundation Award.

### **Carl Robertshaw (Designer and Artist)**

Carl Robertshaw is a unique multidisciplinary designer and artist, working with an inclusive approach at the intersection of performance, engineering and fine art. Over the past 25 years Carl has enjoyed collaborating with artists such as Bjork, Kylie Minogue, Hussein Chalayan, Take That, Peter Gabriel, Anohni, Coldplay, Editors and Ellie Goulding. Carl's work has been celebrated on world stages such as The Super Bowl 50 Halftime Show, New York's Radio City Music Hall, Manchester International Festival and the 2012 London Olympic opening and closing ceremonies.

Carl is a Graduate of Central St Martins School of Art and Design with a Degree in Graphic Design. He is also 5-times World Sport Kite Champion. Carl's passion for kites and for science, art and nature feed directly into his work. He has made installations for The Hayward Gallery, ArtEvento Italy and The London Design Biennale that explore fluid dynamics and wave patterns in light and air. Carl enjoys an ongoing relationship with Oxford Space Systems developing deployable satellites with designs currently operating in Low Earth Orbit.

### **James Jordan Alexander Bartholomew aka Yshee Black (Drag Artist and Associate Artist, PoliNations)**

The self proclaimed Alison Hammond of drag, Yshee Black is loud, bubbly and always up for a laugh. Known for her high energy performances, she is recognised for hosting a lipsync competition in Birmingham called The Church of Yshee that she started in 2017. In addition to hosting and producing events around the UK, she hosts the Popbuzz Year Book that interviews Canada's Drag Race, Drag Race Down Under and Drag Race UK Series 2 & 3 Alum. Currently she is working in London with Tuckshop on various projects such as The Crown drag competition and the West End Drag Panto Dick Whittington.

### **Clary Salandy (Costume Designer)**

Clary Salandy is one of the founders of Mahogany Carnival Design, cofounded with artist Michael Ramdeen in 1989. As the name would suggest, the company designs Carnival costumes, in the art form of "Mas Making" and they are known for their larger than life designs. The pair are both native to Trinidad and are designers in their own right; Clary studied at The Wimbledon School of Art and worked at Central St Martin's in London, whilst Speedy studied Structural Engineering. They set up shop in Harlesden, North West London in 1996 and have been there ever since.

The Mahogany Carnival team's award winning collaborations have been featured around the world and act as a catalyst for bringing together people from culturally diverse backgrounds. Their credits include Notting Hill Carnival (annual), the Millennium Dome Opening Ceremony, Trinidad Carnival, Chingay 2000 and the upcoming Queen's Platinum Jubilee Pageant.

### **Bourgeoisie aka Joey A. Frenette (Costume Designer)**

Bourgeoisie is an Arts Council certified globally talented artist, and widely experienced costume designer. They've worked across the UK and Europe performing in various queer spaces. They've worked on costumes for various theatre events including The Hatchling and the upcoming PoliNations with Trigger. Their private costume design practice is centred around burlesque, drag and cabaret.

### **Bronia Housman (Set and Costume Designer)**

Bronia is a designer who has been making sets and costumes for theatre, opera, dance and pop music performances for eighteen years. Since deciding to leave her position as associate designer to Es Devlin where she worked on projects such as the closing ceremony of the 2012 Olympic Games, she has worked freelance and as a design tutor at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. Her most recent projects include The Wizard of Oz (Salisbury Playhouse) Hedda (Bristol Old Vic, BOVTS), The Snow Queen and The Railway Children & Mrs Beeton Says (Redgrave Theatre, BOVTS). She trained in set and Costume design on the Motley Theatre Design Course after studying theatre at Kent University.

### **THISS Architecture and Design Studio**

THISS is an RIBA chartered, London based architecture and design studio led by Tamsin Hanke and Sash Scott. They work on commercial, residential and conceptual projects at all scales, across the UK and abroad. Their projects are typically collaborations with clients who share their adventurous perspectives and are seeking a taste of the spacious and material experience of nature, woven into their day-to-day environment. They develop and uncover unique and exciting spaces with a strong grounding in context and place and use carefully selected materials, low-impact

methodologies and digital crafting tools wherever possible. Their work was recently included in the Seoul Biennale of Architecture and Urbanism (SBAU) featuring their Resilient Monument project.

### **Chris and Toby Marchant (Arbor Nova Horticultural Consultants)**

Chris and Toby Marchant work through Arbor Nova Ltd as horticultural consultants, drawing on the knowledge, contacts and expertise they developed over 30 years running the Orchard Dene Nurseries. They earned their reputation supplying a range of 1400 plants, grasses and ferns to some of this country's leading Landscape Designers. Their most recent work includes the supply of plants and planting skills to numerous Gold medal winning gardens at Chelsea Flower Show, the growing and layout of all planting material for private and public schemes such as Durslade Farm, the Hauser and Wirth Gallery Garden in Somerset designed by Piet Oudolf.

Toby's early background of Garden Design and Construction and intensive horticultural practice, allowed him to develop extensive knowledge of plant propagation and commercial cultivation techniques. Chris works with professional designers to optimize plant selections and compositions on larger schemes. She has been designing, teaching and writing on the broad subject of planting selection and design for the past 25 years. Through Arbor Nova Ltd, their individual skill sets complement to focus on their shared vision and drive for more creative use of perennials in landscapes.