

PRESS RELEASE

Date of issue: 18 May 2026

**The Bowes Museum's Unheard Voices Project Highly Commended at
Museum + Heritage Awards 2026**



Image caption: The Conversation Wall at The Bowes Museum displays objects selected and reinterpreted by learners from HMP Deerbolt, exploring themes of identity, childhood and collecting.

Photographer: Claire Collinson

The Bowes Museum's *Unheard Voices* project with Novus and HMP Deerbolt has been Highly Commended at the Museum + Heritage Awards 2026 in the Community Engagement Programme of the Year category. The awards celebrate the very best in

museums, galleries and cultural and heritage visitor attractions. The *Community Engagement Programme of the Year* category recognises projects that make a meaningful impact through creativity and collaboration. This year, it attracted a strong field of entries, with The Bowes Museum receiving Highly Commended for *Unheard Voices*.

Unheard Voices is a collaboration between **The Bowes Museum, Novus and HMP Deerbolt**, facilitated by artist **Jonah York** using the museum's exhibitions and collections to engage young male learners in a custodial setting. With both institutions located less than two miles apart, the project creates meaningful connections between place, people and collection.

More than 80 objects from the museum's collection were taken into the prison and were handled, debated and reinterpreted through shared conversation. Working collaboratively, learners selected objects from the museum's collection for display, decided how they should be shown and identified links between them. Themes emerged around identity, childhood, illusion, travel and the human urge to collect and make meaning. Now installed in the entrance to The Bowes Museum, the Conversation Wall displays this co-creation for visitors to reflect on these themes and the process that shaped them.

Unheard Voices is an ongoing project and will continue until 2027, made possible through the generous support of The John Horseman Trust. For more information about the project please visit: <http://www.thebowesmuseum.org.uk/learn/unheard-voices>

The Bowes Museum warmly congratulates all the shortlisted, highly commended and winners from the Museum + Heritage Awards 2026.

Full details of the Museum + Heritage Awards can be found here: www.awards.museumsandheritage.com/2026-winners/

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Notes to Editors:

PRESS IMAGES can be found [here](#)

www.thebowesmuseum.org.uk

About The Bowes Museum:

The Bowes Museum is a charity managing a Grade 1 listed accredited museum and Grade 2 listed parkland in Barnard Castle. Founded by Joséphine & John Bowes 150+ years ago, this purpose-built museum brings together an extraordinary, designated collection of European fine and decorative art as a cultural resource for the people of Northern England, where today we celebrate artists, designers and makers.

The Bowes Museum receives funding from Durham County Council and, as a National Portfolio Organisation, receives support from Arts Council England. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. [artscouncil.org.uk](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

The Bowes Museum is a member of the Discover Durham partnership of attractions, whose commitment is to promote Durham as an exciting and vibrant group travel destination and to provide the travel trade with a professional and knowledgeable service. [discoverdurham.co.uk](https://www.discoverdurham.co.uk)

Admission to The Bowes Museum is £25 for local members (residents of County Durham and Darlington), £28 for members (residents elsewhere), £20 for a day ticket, £22 for a day ticket including gift aid. Under 18s, full time students and carers are free. As a registered charity (number 1079639) The Bowes Museum needs to generate more than half of its income each year to care for the historic collection, buildings and parkland. Your donations are vital to that work. Visit thebowesmuseum.org.uk/support/ for more information.