**PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Award winning artist and writer are creating a ‘Virtual Ark’ for endangered species.

*What would a ‘Virtual Ark’ look like? Out of 15,000+ animals threatened with extinction, which ones would you save?*

*And … just what is a ‘biobank’?*

The Virtual Ark will explore these questions; highlight the wonder – and vulnerability – of our extraordinary ‘animal heritage’ and offer guidance as to what we can do to help safeguard the future of these amazing creatures.

Award winning artist **Paul Evans** is working with writer **Rowena Sommerville**, **The Frozen Ark** biobank and **Our Big Picture** to deliver online creative workshops in schools and communities throughout the North of England. During these workshops participants will co-create a virtual 'gene bank' for endangered species. Drawings, poetry and models from these workshops will then be submitted to **Human** VR’s Sheffield-based studio where they will be expertly rendered into beautiful 360 degree digital artwork that will be available to download – and suitable for all devices – later in 2021.

**Quote The Frozen Ark**

*“The ‘Virtual Ark’ is an amazing initiative that will help get the message out to young people, who hold the key to the future of our planet and its biodiversity” said Prof Mike Bruford, Director of the Frozen Ark. “Paul and Rowena’s talents will enable a transformative experience and the use of VR is tremendously exciting. I can’t wait to see what they produce”.*

**Quote from Arts Council England**

*"As concern for the planet and the increasing extinction of animals continues to grow, I'm really pleased that we are supporting a project that raises awareness of this issue using the arts in conjunction with science. I'm sure that the workshops will enable people across all our communities to get involved and consider the implications of this ecological crisis for themselves. I look forward to seeing the digital artwork that results."*

Pete Massey  
Director, North – Yorkshire & the Humber/Northern Economy & Partnerships Arts Council England

*The Virtual Ark has been made possible thanks to public funding from Arts Council England’s National Lottery Project Grants programme.*

**Please credit attached images as per file names. Hi-res images available on request.**

**ENDS\_**

**Notes for Editors**

**Paul Evans**

Based at Yorkshire Artspace in Sheffield, Paul Evans has a passion for artistic co-creation and working with people and communities. His fourteen-year track record of producing award-winning creative public engagement, throughout the UK, includes collaborations with many leading institutions including the BBC, Wellcome Trust and six leading universities: University of Aberdeen, University of Cambridge, Cardiff University, University of Lincoln, The University of Manchester and The University of Sheffield. His work for the Cardiff University CAER Heritage Project was awarded NCCPE Engage Award (2014) and Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Contribution to Community (2017).

Evans is also well known as a painter and is the recipient of a number of prestigious awards including the Eyestorm Gallery Award. His work has featured in a number of publications including 'Nature Morte: Contemporary Artists Reinvigorate the Still-Life Tradition' by Michael Petry, published by Thames and Hudson 2013.

**Rowena Sommerville**

Rowena Sommerville has written and illustrated books for children (Hutchinson/Random), contributes poems to magazines and websites, and will have a poetry collection published by Mudfog Poetry Press in 2021. She has an existing link with Frozen Ark - one of their post- doctoral colleagues was originally turned on to evolutionary studies through Rowena’s poem ‘Silverfish Rap’ which bemoans that creature’s lack of evolutionary change, and which was included in the student’s PhD Thesis.

**The Frozen Ark**

The Frozen Ark is a charitable frozen zoo project that aims to preserve the DNA and living cells of endangered species to retain the genetic knowledge for the future. The project focuses on the thousands of animals that are threatened with extinction.

www.frozenark.org

**Our Big Picture**

Our Big Picture is an arts and heritage social enterprise. We believe that everyone has the right to art in their lives.

Through artists, we work inclusively with our communities to enable everyone to take part in, experience, and enjoy art at its best, resulting in the collective exploration, learning, sharing, and shaping of our home.

We deliver positive experiences where nobody is excluded, including exhibitions in public spaces, workshops, heritage events, and online activities and art communities. In delivering these experiences, we bring new creative opportunities to the area.

We work with everybody, specifically, children, young people, and families, and their wider communities. We work with young emerging artists to well-established international artists.

* We excite and inspire the communities of North East Lincolnshire through arts and heritage projects that are open to everyone – families, children, young people, groups, and individuals.
* We commission and support diverse artists to create, work, and grow in the local area. [Click here for more information.](https://ourbigpicture.co.uk/commissions/)
* We work collaboratively with local, national, and international partners to regenerate North East Lincolnshire through arts and heritage projects.

**Human**

Driven by the discovery of knowledge, technology and culture, Human collaborates with individuals, groups and organisations that make a difference. Launched in 2007 and based in Sheffield (UK), Human is a creative agency with global credentials in design, digital, moving image and immersive experiences. The team works with academics, artists, institutions and global brands on interactive projects for live events and online. Work by Human has been exhibited at numerous international locations and published in print and online around the world. Selected past/present clients include: Channel 4, Sheffield Hallam University, University of Cardiff, University of Leeds, University of Sheffield, University of York, Virgin Records, Warner Music, Warp Films, MTV (Italy), Roewe (China), SCI+TEC (USA), Seaborn Networks (USA), Swatch (Switzerland), Theseus Global (UK/India)

**Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let’s Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where every one of us has access to a remarkable range of high quality cultural experiences. We invest public money from Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and to deliver this vision.** [www.artscouncil.org.uk](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk" \t "_blank)

**Following the Covid-19 crisis, the Arts Council developed a £160 million Emergency Response Package, with nearly 90% coming from the National Lottery, for organisations and individuals needing support. We are also one of the bodies administering the Government’s unprecedented £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Funds. Find out more at** [www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid19](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid19 " \t "_blank)

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