



After the Single Use
Rethinking Plastics in Healthcare



EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND

ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

OPEN CALL

OPEN CALL: Artist in Residence

EDINBURGH

Making the Invisible Visible

We invite an artist to join an anthropology research team at the University of Edinburgh to explore the hidden materials, contested values, and material politics of single-use medical devices.

LOCATION

Edinburgh, Scotland

INSTITUTION

University of Edinburgh, School of Social and Political Science

RESEARCH LEAD

Alice Street, Professor of Anthropology and Health, University of Edinburgh

RESIDENCY PERIOD

Full-Time May 2027 OR Part-Time March-May 2027 (2-3 days/week).

Exact schedule will be developed based on artist preference in dialogue with Research Unit

NOTE: No accommodation is provided as part of this residency

FEE

Artist fee: 5000 GBP

Materials: 800 GBP

APPLICATION DEADLINE

23 October, 2026

RESPONSE TIMEFRAME

You will receive a response to your application before 20 December, 2026

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT RESIDENCY

Info.noba@vitenparken.no

ABOUT: AFTER THE SINGLE USE

If the world's healthcare sector were a country, it would rank 5th in global carbon emissions. A significant portion of these emissions come from single-use plastic medical products like syringes, surgical drapes, and diagnostic devices, all designed for disposal. These materials emit toxins and greenhouse gases when burned, leak microplastics and chemicals when landfilled, and pollute marine environments, with direct and indirect effects on human health. After the Single Use (ATSU) is a five-year research project asking: how did we get here, and what would it take to move healthcare towards a circular economy of reuse?

Led by the University of Edinburgh, UK and funded by the Wellcome Trust, the project brings together historians, anthropologists, and public health researchers across eight countries (India, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Scotland, Senegal, Switzerland, Tanzania and USA) to examine the history, present, and future of single-use medical plastics.

Driven by the belief that understanding this crisis requires perspectives beyond research alone, each research unit will host an artist in residence. The eight residencies are independent but connected: selected artists will have the opportunity to meet online and exchange with other artists in residence at the other seven sites, and all eight residencies will contribute to a shared international online exhibition.

The artist in residence program is coordinated by NOBA (Norwegian Bio-Art Arena), Vitenparken, Norway on behalf of the After the Single Use collective. If you have questions about the open call reach out to info.noba@vitenparken.no

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH RESEARCH UNIT

The Edinburgh After the Single Use research team explores the plastic chemicals and materials that are manufactured into single-use medical devices as sites of value contestation. We are interested in the history of these chemicals and materials and the negotiations between different concerns and interests that led to them becoming embedded in our health systems. We research how health systems, international organisations, regulatory bodies, and the medtech industry are responding to growing evidence of environmental and human health harms from these chemicals at every stage of their lifecycle. We ask whether and where the normalization of harmful chemicals and single-use practices in healthcare is being contested, and what kinds of alternative materialities are being imagined for the future.

Our research team comprises: Alice Street (Research Unit Lead), Cat Acheson (Research Fellow), Millie Marriott Webb (Research Assistant), Dani Farrow (PhD Student and Research Assistant).

There are many overlaps and connections between our research areas, but we also have distinct areas of focus:

Dani Farrow: archival research and ethnographic fieldwork in NHS Scotland to understand how infrastructures of disposal and reuse have been built around specific materialities of healthcare, and the challenges people encounter in their efforts to make those infrastructures more sustainable.

Cat Acheson: archival and ethnographic research exploring the role of international organisations and civil society organisations in regulating, governing and resisting healthcare plastics and how these different actors have conceptualized and addressed the chemical materialities of healthcare.

Alice Street and Millie Marriott Webb: research into the ways in which specific materials have become historically embedded in the medtech industry and how the value of those materials is contested in light of growing evidence of harms from healthcare pollution.

Across the team, we are interested in the sensorial and affective qualities of medical device materials, how people have related to these materials historically across spaces of industry, activism and professional practice, and how those relationships have been mediated by technology, infrastructure and regulation. We are also interested in what is made visible or foregrounded in discussions around healthcare plastics, what is made invisible or obfuscated, and the power relations involved in these regimes of visibility.

In addition to traditional methods of participant observation, interviews, and document analysis, we use interdisciplinary and creative methods that proceed by intervention and participation as well as observation and listening. For example, we have created a deconstructed devices database of medical devices that we have taken apart, weighed and chemically analysed in the lab. We are exploring what the visualization and dissemination of this otherwise unavailable data makes possible and what it reveals about the social and material worlds of medtech manufacturing, regulation and healthcare delivery. We are also investigating the ways in which medical devices are represented and marketed by the medtech industry, and how alternative forms of representation might make otherwise unseen stories about chemical exposure and harms visible and impactful in different spaces.

ABOUT THE ATSU ARTIST RESIDENCY

As part of ATSU, eight artists will be selected (one per research location) to join the local research team for a residency period between March-May 2027. This is a research-embedded residency: the focus is on curiosity, exchange, and process. Artists will have the time and space to engage with the research, bring their own perspective and practice to bear, and explore what emerges.

Artists are not expected to illustrate or communicate the research. They are invited to work alongside it — to observe, question, and respond in whatever way feels true to their practice. The aim is a genuine exchange, in which both the artist and the researchers come away with new ways of thinking.

Artistic works in progress will be presented locally at or near the end of the residency period, and the artist will contribute work to the ATSU online exhibition after completion of the residency. The results will be featured alongside 7 other artists in residence projects working with 7 other research groups worldwide. The artist fee covers the residency, the local presentation of work and the production of work for the online exhibition.

WHAT THE ARTIST IN EDINBURGH WOULD ENGAGE WITH

As the artist, you will be embedded in the team, participating in its activities and developing work that emerges from that encounter. This includes access to:

- The research team through weekly meetings, one-to-one discussions, reading groups, and seminars
- Ethnographic vignettes, archival materials, industry brochures, and documents
- A large body of single-use healthcare waste, and a substantial collection of deconstructed medical devices disassembled into individual materials and chemically tested in the lab
- Access to the other ATSU artists and researchers in the network for exchange of ideas

The Edinburgh research team have also previously developed visual exhibition materials for industry and stakeholder engagement. The research team are keen to learn from the artist and explore different ways of telling stories about and with materials in anthropology and art.

Edinburgh has many possible resources on its doorstep, including collections in the National Museum of Scotland and the Surgeon's Hall Museum. It may be possible to arrange one-off visits to particular sites of interest such as the laboratory where we undertook materials testing, or the NHS Scotland sites or archives where we have undertaken fieldwork.

WHAT THE ATSU RESIDENCY OFFERS

Space, equipment and resources available for the residency include:

- The After the Single Use Project Room provides a shared desk-based co-working space.
- Various maker-spaces across the University which include digital making facilities such as 3d printing, laser-cutting, computerised sewing machines, soldering and

microelectronics, support from experienced technicians in learning new techniques. The Engineering makerspace has some larger equipment for structural making.

- A visitor account to the University of Edinburgh which would give access to IT. subscriptions including the in-house AI LLM tool. Access to Adobe software may also be possible for the duration of the residence if required.
- Large format printers and printing services.
- Collaborations with academics from across the university including design informatics and chemistry.
- Participation in the University wide Plastics Research Forum, which brings together academics working on plastics from across the Colleges of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, Science and Engineering, and Arts, Humanities and Social Science.
- Recording studio.
- Other office space is bookable.
- It may be possible to book other space across the University of Edinburgh estate according to artist's needs.

We will help to organize an exhibition of work in progress at the end of the residency and will assist with identifying a suitable location for this either on the University of Edinburgh Estate, a partner-managed location, or a public venue depending on the nature of the work and most relevant audiences for the work.

WHO WE ARE LOOKING FOR

We are looking for someone with a strong interest in the specific themes explored by the University of Edinburgh research team. You will be able to demonstrate an engagement with questions of sustainability, materials and materiality, or health care in your previous practice. We especially encourage artists who work in the mediums of photography and sound to apply, but are open to any form of art practice. We are looking for artists who are curious, self-directed, and comfortable working in an unfamiliar environment.

You do not need prior experience of working with researchers. What matters is that you can articulate why this residency interests you, and that you are genuinely open to engaging with the research. You might be a good fit if you:

- are drawn to questions of health, waste, material culture, and environmental justice
- can work independently and take initiative with your time
- are interested in how knowledge is made; in archives, in fieldwork, in communities
- are open to process-led work without a pre-determined outcome
- are comfortable with ambiguity and willing to learn
- are based in Edinburgh or able to commit to being there during the residency period

APPLICATION CRITERIA AND TERMS & CONDITIONS

There are general criteria for the artist in residence across all 8 locations worldwide. Before applying please read the terms and conditions document for the ATSU Artist Residency for more details on the residency. You can download both of these on the open call webpage.

<https://aftersingleuse.net/news-events/2026/open-call-artist-residence>

HOW TO APPLY

To apply for the ATSU Artist Residency, fill in [this form](#).

The QR code below also takes you to the application form.

