

More Than AI Sandbox

Ecology, technology, intelligence.

More than AI sandbox is a programme to support makers to experiment creatively with AI, recognising it as one of many diverse intelligences in our world, and create a new prototype.

Image: Luke O'Donovan



Summary

More than AI Sandbox is a programme to support makers to experiment creatively with Artificial Intelligence (AI), recognising it as one of many diverse intelligences in our world, and create a new prototype.

Watershed is inviting creative SMEs, artists, designers, technologists and creative practitioners to propose new and distinctive ideas responding to the theme of More than AI. We will commission six teams to develop their ideas to prototype with an award of up to £45k each.

This document explains the theme, the opportunity and the application process.

If you have any access requirements that mean this document does not work for you please contact Emma Boulton on myworld@watershed.co.uk.

More Than AI Sandbox is part of the MyWorld IDEAS programme, supporting small companies with high-risk ideas through community building, research and development and audience engagement locally and internationally.



More Than AI

The last few years have seen a rapid rise in the power of machine learning, and wider access to tools for using it to do 'human-like' work (holding conversations, creating images, recognising objects). This has led to much greater public consciousness about the presence of so-called Artificial Intelligence (AI) in many aspects of our daily lives, including much hype and a lot of valid concern. In the creative and cultural sectors AI as a tool for making and consuming is having an impact across everything from writing, visual arts and music to film-making, games and performance.

Right now, opinion around AI is often polarised. As [striking actors in Hollywood make the headlines](#) with concerns about the impact on their jobs, and high profile examples of [machine generated 'fake news'](#) cause real harm – the long-imagined fears and anxieties of robots overthrowing or supplanting humanity are easily invoked. Elsewhere commercially successful artists like [Grimes](#) and [Spencer Jones](#) are experimenting with using deep fakes, and software companies are promoting the potential of [generative tools](#) to overcome barriers to engagement. We think that there are opportunities for new forms of expression and accessibility to be found in AI; but only if makers and thinkers come together to grapple with the complexities of what intelligence is and how we use it.



Image: Luke O'Donovan

And whilst developments in AI have accelerated, we are also increasingly confronted by our own existence as part of an interdependent natural world. A world full of networks of intelligence that we still don't fully understand but could learn from. Artists and technologists, often drawing on non-western, indigenous and animistic understandings of human-nature relationships, are making work that expands our thinking to include the more-than human (where multiple species and processes come together to produce a result).

"What if, instead of being the thing that separates us from the world, and ultimately supplants us, artificial intelligence is another flowering, wholly its own invention, but one which, shepherded by us, leads us to a greater accommodation with the world? Rather than being a tool to further exploit the planet and one another, artificial intelligence is an opening to other minds, a chance to fully recognise a truth that has been hidden from us for so long. Everything is intelligent, and therefore – along with many other reasons – is worthy of our care and conscious attention."

James Bridle, Ways of Being.

This is the kind of research and development culture that Watershed are working towards, one where diverse systems of knowing, being and doing work in partnership. We are looking for teams who want to work in that way too - developing new AI products, services and experiences by collaborating with the world around them, towards our collective futures.



What is a Sandbox?

The methodology we will use to support the development of your idea is called Sandbox. Watershed developed this tried-and-tested methodology to bring together teams of brilliant people to test new ideas with generosity and rigour. We will support you to take an experimental idea to a working prototype over three months of rapid research and development.

Sandbox helps to develop ideas with commercial potential; it is not for finished products or services, or one-off projects. We will bring the six teams together for a series of workshops offering peer learning and access to creative and business expertise.



Responsible Innovation

Watershed believes in responsible innovation. That means designing new projects with an understanding of, and responsibility for, their social, cultural and environmental impact. You can use our 'More than AI' design questions to help you think this through:

- How can diverse intelligences work together in more equal and collaborative ways? What does that mean for you in practice?
- What impact will your prototype have on its environment, and how will it respond and adapt to it?
- If gathering and using data, how will you ensure that the process is transparent, non-extractive and mutually beneficial?
- How is labour valued? Is your project replacing human labour and is that okay in the longer term?
- Whose knowledge and experiences are centred in the design and development of your prototype? Does your idea consider social and environmental justice?

Creative Technology

You may be using a range of technologies but we do expect you to be experimenting with AI and/or machine learning in some way. We are looking to fund creative and critically engaged ways of working with AI, rather than using it to increase efficiency of existing methods/tools.

We are excited by the ways that technology can help us to connect to things at previously impossible scales (very small and very big); to sense our environment in new ways (seeing and hearing beyond our usual range); to recognise patterns that we don't notice (by processing large amounts of data); to form relationships with living things that are beyond our reach (because of conditions that don't suit our bodies); and to reflect the things that we do back at us from a different perspective.

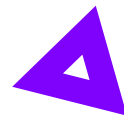
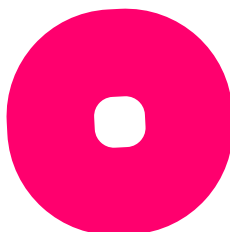


Image: Luke O'Donovan



Projects that we are inspired by

In the development of this call Watershed has been inspired by several works which engage with non-human intelligences in a creative and critical way. These projects are:

- Holly Herndon, [Holly+](#)
- Stephanie Dinkins, [Secret Garden](#)
- Birgitte Aga and Coral Manton, [Women Reclaiming AI](#)
- Atsushi Tero, [Mapping Tokyo's subway system in slime mould](#)
- Tomás Saraceno, [In Collaboration: Web\(s\) of Life](#)
- Tomo Kihara and Playfool, [How \(not\) to get hit by a self-driving car](#)
- Annali Grimes with KWMC and Paul Granjon, [Garden Lab Whispers Grow](#)

The wider list of inspirational projects can be found in the [FAQs](#).

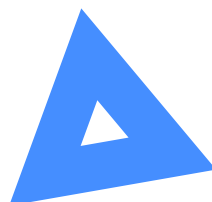


What do we expect from you?

- Attendance at all three Sandbox workshops and one-to-one meetings with the Sandbox Producer.
- Attendance at one-to-one meetings with advisors and mentors.
- A generous and open attitude.
- Some time spent in residence at Watershed's [Pervasive Media Studio](#) in Bristol.
- A willingness to participate in events/discussions with audiences, peers and partners as part of Pervasive Media Studio while your work is in development.
- Contribution to press and media campaigns and editorial (blogs).
- Consideration of inclusion, equity and accessibility in your idea. We will support you to play-test your prototype with this in mind.

What do you get?

- A grant of up to £45,000 to fund the development of your idea into a prototype. This can be spent on company time, materials and specialist skills.
- Three Sandbox workshops with all of the six teams to inspire, challenge and upskill you around the theme of More than AI.
- Advice from a Watershed Producer, Industry Experts/Advisors, Business Mentor and Creative Technologist as you develop your prototype.
- Desk space and access to facilities in the [Pervasive Media Studio](#) at Watershed in Bristol, connecting you to a vibrant community of artists and creative technologists.
- Support with developing your inclusive practices.
- PR support, showcasing opportunities and feedback events offering the opportunity for discussion and collaboration with both peers and public.
- Access support where relevant.
- A short promo film documenting your prototype.



How to apply

Online applications will open Wednesday 11 October and applying teams will be asked to provide:

- Confirmation of eligibility.
- An overview of the team.
- A project proposal.
- An outline budget.

Shortlisted teams will then be invited to interview with members of the MyWorld partnership and external industry experts. We expect to commission six teams with a budget of up to £45,000 per team.

Apply to More Than AI Sandbox:

<https://wshd.to/morethanaiaapplication>

Applications close Monday 18 December 10:00 GMT

Please check eligibility criteria and read the application questions in the [FAQs](#) before applying.



Image: Luke O'Donovan

Assessment Criteria

We will be looking to curate a mix of ideas, perspectives and approaches to the More Than AI theme. Proposals will be assessed by the extent to which:

- The idea responds to the theme with originality, using creative technology in an interesting way.
- The proposed prototype has exciting potential for development beyond our funding (further R&D, identified audiences, market reach, other income streams etc.).
- There is clear evidence that the More than AI design questions have been thoughtfully considered within the idea and development plans.
- There is a strong team in place with the expertise and ability to deliver your prototype.
- There is a credible plan for positive economic, social and cultural impact in the West of England.
- You demonstrate a desire to sustainably grow your business and practice (this criterion will be explored at interview rather than at application stage).

For more information about eligibility and the possible make up of teams, please see the [FAQs](#).

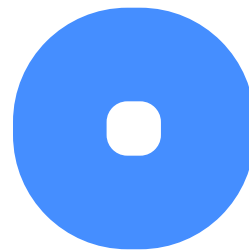


Image: Shamphat Photography



Timeline

- More Than AI Application Open
Wednesday 11 October 2023 at 12:00 BST
- Bookable one-to-one surgeries:
Monday 30 October - Monday 4 December 2023
- Sandbox briefing session:
Monday 6 November 2023
- More Than AI Application Deadline
Monday 18 December 2023 at 10:00 GMT
- Shortlisted applicants will hear from us by
Friday 26 January 2024
- Interviews
13, 14, 15 February 2024
- Projects Announced
April 2024
- Sandbox Production Period (including workshops)
May - July 2024
- Showcase
September 2024





Talk to Us

We have shared some [FAQs](#) here. If your question has not been answered please contact Emma Boulton on myworld@watershed.co.uk

If you would like to speak to a member of the team or find more information before submitting a proposal you can:

- Book and attend a [one-to-one surgery](#) with the team to talk through your idea before submitting your proposal.
- Attend an informal briefing event Monday 6 November 13:30 – 14:30 in the Pervasive Media Studio. [Booking available here.](#)

Tweet Us!

[@pmstudio](#)

[@wshed](#)

MyWorld IDEAS Programme

More Than AI Sandbox is part of the [MyWorld](#) IDEAS programme, led by Watershed.

The IDEAS programme provides small-medium enterprise businesses, freelancers and the public the opportunity to experiment with new technologies, creating meaningful experiences for audiences. It also offers the opportunity to test and question how these technologies are or could be applied, thereby placing people, arts and culture at the heart of new, innovative technologies. The IDEAS programme encourages responsible forms of innovation and actively explores points of crossover and connection.



"Sandbox has been one of the best funded projects I've ever been involved with [...] it combines meaningful financing, sensitive support and input, and a laser focus on good commercial product design."

Alex Fleetwood, previous Sandbox participant

About Pervasive Media Studio and Watershed

[The Pervasive Media Studio](#) hosts a brilliant community of over 190 artists, creative companies, technologists and academics exploring experience design and creative technology.

The Pervasive Media Studio is based within [Watershed](#) in Bristol, a cultural organisation championing engagement, imagination and ingenuity. We have an open plan studio with a culture of generosity, curiosity and interruptability. We believe that by clustering together people from a broad range of backgrounds, with differing skills, experiences and opinions, all of our ideas get better.

It is a collaboration between Watershed, University of Bristol and UWE Bristol.

About MyWorld

Watershed and the Pervasive Media Studio are part of a programme called [MyWorld](#) which will showcase the latest advances in digital production and research.

Led by the University of Bristol, the aim of MyWorld is to position the West of England as an international trailblazer in screen-based media, forge dynamic collaborations to progress technological innovation, deliver creative excellence, establish and operate state of the art facilities, offer skills training and drive inward investment, raising the region's profile on the global stage.

MyWorld is funded through UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) 'Strength in Places fund'.

Main Delivery partners: University of Bristol, University of the West of England, University of Bath, Bath Spa University, Digital Catapult, Watershed, Aardman Animations, Lux Aeterna, Esprit Film and Television, Bristol Old Vic and Opposable Games.