

# Fellowship in Residence

## Alternative communication via remote talking puppets

An opportunity to spend six months working with Black Laboratory, an award-winning animation and development studio.

This is a practical research Fellowship to investigate using remote puppetry to develop indirect conversation tools for people with alternative communication preferences.

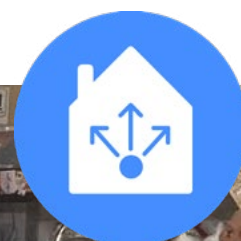
You will be exploring the potential of non-human puppet/animation characters as communication aids or facilitators, working with people who are diagnosed or self-identify as Autistic or with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and experience significant barriers with face to face communication.

We recognize that ASD is clinical language and does not resonate with everybody, see note on terminology on page 3.

You will be using **puppix**® puppets to trial ways in which they can overcome barriers to face to face communication, whether in person or online.

**THE BLACK LABORATORY**  
CREATING CHARACTERS - DIGITAL, PHYSICAL AND PUPPET

**puppix**



# Overview

Our MyWorld Fellowships are aimed at freelancers, practitioners, industry, and academics. We invite people to think about these Fellowships as a period of collaborative thinking and experimentation, applying practice, expertise or relevant experience. This Fellowship is hosted by one of the teams from the second MyWorld CR&D Call led by Digital Catapult.

The Fellow will be contracted and paid via the University of Bristol but supported by Watershed. Day-to-day the Fellow will become a valued member of the **puppix®** project team, supported primarily by the Producer Claire Teasdale and the Artistic Lead Ben Mars.

This document contains information about the opportunity and the application process. If you have any access requirements that mean this document does not work for you, please contact Vanessa Bellaar Spruijt on [myworld@watershed.co.uk](mailto:myworld@watershed.co.uk).

This Fellowship is part of the the MyWorld IDEAS programme, funded by UKRI.



Image: Pervasive Media Studio



# The Fellowship

The potential of alternative communication via remote talking puppets

We would like to work with a Fellow to investigate and trial the potential of new non-human puppet/animation characters (the **puppix®** system) as communication aids or facilitators. We believe this may be of particular value to people who are diagnosed or self-identify as Autistic or with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and experience significant barriers with face to face communication.

**puppix®** is a new system that The Black Laboratory are developing to allow digitally animated and controlled characters to be performed using the techniques of physical puppet performance. The system enables real-time transfer of in-the-moment live performance, to digital twins, for direct use, or further enhancement.

Following feedback about the liberating experience of communicating via their characters from several people who find face-to-face communication challenging, The Black Laboratory have decided to explore the potential of their **puppix®** system for this use.

The Fellow will trial a range of ways to harness the **puppix®** system's communication capabilities, and identify how it could be used to develop new audience experiences in both real and virtual spaces.

## *Notes on terminology:*

*We recognise and understand that there is no consensus among Autism communities about how people would like to be referred to. There are many people who prefer identity first, i.e. Autistic, and many people who prefer to state that they 'have Autism'. We also know that some people prefer to stick to the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria and refer to themselves as people with Autism Spectrum Disorder or people on the Autism Spectrum. Some people have been diagnosed before 2013 and might have been diagnosed as having Asperger Disorder or Syndrome. We also know that for some people 'Neurodivergent' is preferred.*

*For the sake of clarity, we are describing people as follows: 'people who are diagnosed or self-identify as Autistic or with Autism Spectrum Disorder and experience significant barriers to face to face communication.' This could mean (but is not exclusive to) Autistic verbal or non-verbal people who have a support worker to help with specific communication barriers.*





# The Fellowship (continued)

## The award: £12,000 for 6 months at 2.5 days/week

For a payment schedule breakdown please check the [FAQs](#)

### Key Responsibilities (outputs):

- Research into approaches that could harness the system's potential for the following identified groups: people who are diagnosed or self-identify as Autistic or with Autism Spectrum Disorder and experience significant barriers to face to face communication.
- Recruitment of and user testing with the above specified groups of people.
- Identification of ways that the system could be used to develop new audience experiences.
- Sensitive documentation (format TBC) of the process including recommendations and feedback (format TBC) from the people involved on the project.
- Sharing of learnings with The Black Laboratory team as well as with peers and the wider sector.

### Experience and Skill Set

- Lived experience of Autism, or experience of working with autistic people and/or carers.
- Demonstrable experience of designing and delivering events, workshops or user tests.
- Understanding of safeguarding vulnerable adults, including data processing regulations.
- Ability to self-manage and direct the project set up and the involvement of the participants and their access requirements.
- Open and collaborative, comfortable sharing early ideas and giving/receiving constructive feedback with care.
- Demonstrable knowledge of creative practice, or interest in the performance sector.
- Demonstrable knowledge of or interest in inclusive, user-centred design.

### Desirable skills & experience

- Experience of running events, workshops or user tests with Autistic participants.
- Speech & Language or other relevant qualification.



## What do you get?

- A grant of £12,000 for 6 months embedded exploration at 2.5 days/week (incl. expenses)
- You will be working alongside an interdisciplinary community of user researchers, designers and developers on a brand new puppetry and animation system at The Black Laboratory. They work primarily out of the Puppet Place studio in Bristol, though you are not expected to work on location for the full 2.5 days/week.
- Support from a Watershed producer (relationship management, contracts, networking, signposting to opportunities, etc.)
- Opportunity to participate in Digital Catapult led activities designed to support projects which the Fellowship is aligned with.
- For the duration of MyWorld's programme: 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.
- Access support where relevant and to be agreed.
- Sharing opportunities via Pervasive Media Studio Lunchtime Talks and/or blogs, Watershed First Friday programme, and other opportunities.

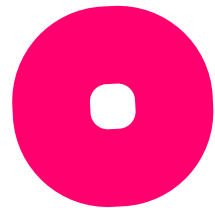


Image: Black Laboratory

## How to apply

You are invited to answer five questions in an online questionnaire focusing on how you meet the skills and experience for the Fellowship and how you can build care into the process.

Shortlisted applicants will then be invited to interview.

**Apply here for the MyWorld Fellowship in Residence:**

<https://wshd.to/blacklaboratoryapplication>

Please check the eligibility criteria in the [FAQs](#) before applying.

We understand that online forms do not work for everyone. If you would like to apply by alternative means please email Vanessa Bellaar Spruijt on [myworld@watershed.co.uk](mailto:myworld@watershed.co.uk). This could be an audio or video application, or another format that suits your needs

## Assessment Criteria

We will assess applications for the Fellowship with the following criteria:

- You will meet all the eligibility criteria outlined in the [FAQs](#)
- How you demonstrate the Experience and Skills set outlined on page 4
- How you demonstrate the Desirable Experience outlined on page 4



Image:Back Laboratory



# Timeline

- Closing date for applications:  
Monday 23 September 2024 10.00 a.m.
- Applicants will hear from us by end of:  
Tuesday 8 October 2024
- Interviews  
Tuesday 15 October 2024
- Contracting:  
October 2024
- Fellowship start date:  
w/c 18 November 2024
- Fellowship end date:  
w/c 5 May 2025



# Talk to Us

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

**Application form for Fellowship in residence:**  
<https://wshd.to/blacklaboratoryapplication>

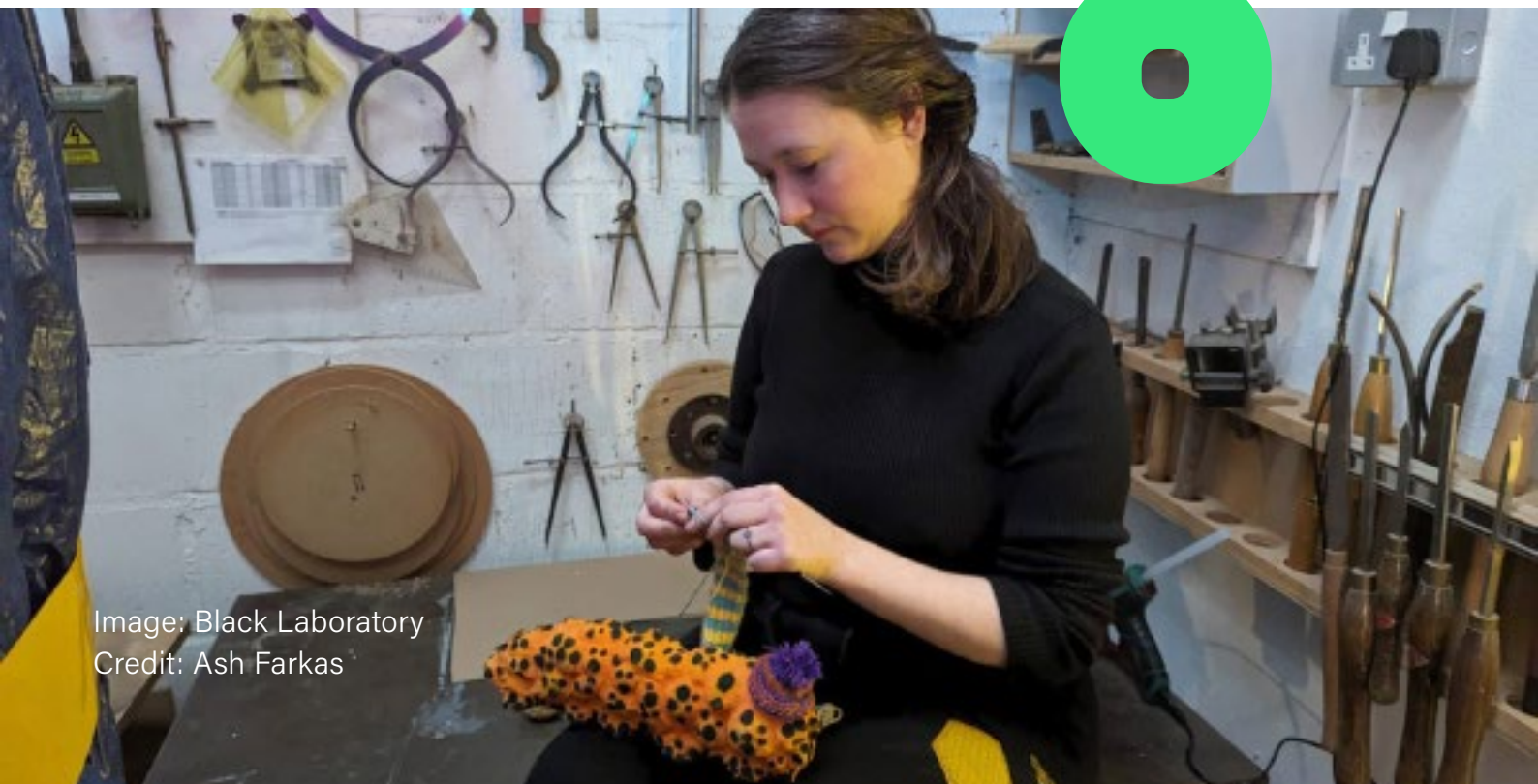


Image: Black Laboratory  
Credit: Ash Farkas

## About The Black Laboratory & puppix®

The Black Laboratory are an award-winning animation and development studio, with a focus on character-based narrative work and over fifteen years of animation/VFX experience, working in films, commercials, games, television and with skilled puppet operators (UK and some US) puppet performance companies.

The Black Laboratory are creating **puppix®**, our system to allow digitally animated and digitally controlled characters to be performed using the techniques of physical puppet performance. A realtime transfer of in-the-moment live performance, with true weight, physicality and movement to digital twins, for direct use, or further enhancement.

Our partners in the Puppix® project are Kristian Moen, Principal Academic Investigator at the Department for Film & Television at University of Bristol and Bristol based Puppeteers and other freelancers from our trusted network.

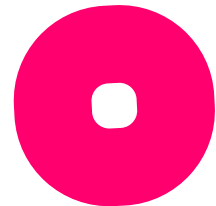


Image: Black Laboratory



## About Pervasive Media Studio and Watershed

[The Pervasive Media Studio](#) hosts a brilliant community of over over 200 residents exploring creativity and 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 Digital Catapult

[Digital Catapult](#) is the UK authority on advanced digital technologies. Through collaboration we accelerate industry adoption to drive growth and opportunity across the economy. Within MyWorld, Digital Catapult supports the next generation of B2B advanced digital technology within the Creative Industries to deliver innovation-led regional growth in the West of England.

This fellowship is hosted by one of five teams from the first MyWorld CR&D Call, funding industry-led projects working in collaboration with regional research organisations to de-risk innovative research and development.

## About MyWorld

Watershed, the Pervasive Media Studio and Digital Catapult 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, Watershed, Digital Catapult, Aardman Animations, Lux Aeterna, Esprit Film and Television, Bristol Old Vic and Opposable Games.

