



Acme Co-Founder and Chair of the Board David Panton in front of Acme Propeller Factory, January 2026 © Hydar Dewachi, courtesy of The Acme Archive.

Acme secures Acme Propeller Factory as Co-Founder David Panton OBE marks five decades of leadership

LONDON, 15 JANUARY 2026 – In a landmark moment, London-based charity Acme has successfully purchased Acme Propeller Factory (APF) in Deptford, securing in perpetuity the largest affordable artist studio building of its kind in London.

The achievement marks a major milestone for artists' workspace provision in the capital and coincides with the announcement that David Panton OBE, Acme's Co-Founder and Co-Director, steps away from his executive role to focus solely on Chair of the Board duties.

The [Acme Propeller Factory](#) (APF) building is a former 1920s ship propeller foundry. Spanning 70,492 sq ft, it currently accommodates 180 working artists, offering long-term security in a city where such space is increasingly scarce. Over the past 35 years, more than 650 artists have worked in the building, making it a cornerstone of Lewisham's cultural life and a vital part of London's creative infrastructure.

The building also houses The Acme Archive, a significant community resource documenting Acme's commitment to supporting artists since 1972, and an engagement hub facilitating workshops, exhibitions, and events.

Acme's 2024 artist survey found that 58.5% of 180 artists at APF would not have been able to continue their practice if the building had closed. This landmark acquisition concludes a two-year public campaign to safeguard one of London's most important sites for creative production at a time when artists face unprecedented pressure from rising rents, redevelopment, and the loss of affordable workspace.

The purchase was made possible through generous funding from The Julia Rausing Trust, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the Sylvia Waddilove Foundation UK, and the Mayor of London, whose support reflects the building's location within the Mayor's Lewisham Creative Enterprise Zone, alongside bank borrowing and invaluable contributions from artists, friends, and local communities.

Having secured the building, Acme will now focus on conserving its heritage, improving accessibility, and reducing its environmental impact. With more than 1,300 artists currently on Acme's waiting list, including 110 Lewisham residents, the acquisition significantly strengthens Acme's ability to continue providing permanent, genuinely affordable studio space for artists in London, shaping the city's cultural landscape for generations to come.

Dame Rachel Whiteread, former Acme artist tenant, reflects:

"Acme has been a lifeline to creatives in London, helping to enrich the cultural life of the UK. Artists headline London's global cultural experience and Acme has provided affordable and accessible studios to artists for five decades. I was lucky enough to have a studio at Carpenters Road in East London for several years. It was very important for my development as an artist, and I became part of an artistic community. Acme Propeller Factory is a cultural hub for 180 artists with plans for development. It will be the UK's biggest building dedicated solely to artists' studios and should be a shining star in Lewisham."

Dame Rachel Whiteread
Former Acme artist tenant

For 53 years, David Panton OBE has led and shaped Acme's mission to support artists with affordable studio space. Together with the late Jonathan Harvey OBE (1949-2023), he founded Acme in 1972, transforming derelict buildings in East London into much-needed spaces for artists.

Throughout this time, David has guided Acme's evolution from a grassroots housing association into a cornerstone of London's cultural infrastructure. He spearheaded the establishment of work/live spaces in the 1970s, providing hundreds of artists in East and Southeast London with affordable places to work and live, and co-founded the Acme Gallery in Covent Garden from 1976 to 1981, which made a seminal contribution to the development of performance and installation work principally by artists whose reputations had not yet been established.

He also instigated Acme's international residency programme in the 1980s which has grown to support over 40 artists per year from all corners of the globe.

A key part of David's legacy has been pioneering the use of Section 106 planning agreements (via the Town & Country Planning Acts of 1971 and 1990) to secure affordable artist studios as part of regeneration projects – setting a new precedent for how arts and culture could be integrated into urban development in the UK. This was the first time an artist studio provider worked in partnership with local planning authorities and developers. Together, they embedded permanent affordable studio provision into planning frameworks, recognising and endorsing the cultural, economic, and social value that artists bring to local communities.

David's leadership was central to the successful acquisition of Acme Propeller Factory, including securing a landmark £2.5 million grant from The Julia Rausing Trust, alongside further funding support. Acme Propeller Factory now stands both as a vital resource for artists and as a lasting symbol of Acme's commitment to creating the conditions in which artists can live, work, and contribute to the cultural and social fabric of the city.

David will continue to serve as Chair of Acme's Board of Trustees, ensuring that its founding vision and commitment to artists remain at the heart of its work for years to come.

Looking ahead, David comments:

"One of the wondrous things about Acme is that it was an idea that just grew, "self-propelled" if you wish. It is the compelling initiative of artists that drives everything forward. We provide the back-up, but everyone has a role to play. Our artist community is at the heart of everything we do, and we look forward to entering this next chapter and face new challenges together."

David Panton OBE
Co-Founder & Chair of the Board, Acme

Notes for editors

About Acme

London-based charity Acme has been supporting artists in need since 1972. Over this time, we have provided thousands of artists at all stages of career with affordable studios, work/live space and a programme of artist support through residencies and awards. We support the development and production of art by reducing the practical challenges that artists face, increasing their ability to take creative risks.

Acme is the single largest provider of **permanent** affordable artist studios in England, supporting over 800 individual artists across 15 buildings in Greater London each year.

acme.org.uk
@acme.art



About The Julia Rausing Trust

The Julia Rausing Trust has been established in memory of the late British philanthropist Julia Rausing (née Delves-Broughton), who died in 2024.

The Julia Rausing Trust will see £100million donated to charities and organisations in its first year and annually thereafter, making it one of the largest charitable funds in the UK.

Julia Rausing co-founded The Julia and Hans Rausing Trust in 2014. She was widely known for her unwavering commitment to philanthropy and her impactful contributions to a wide range of UK charitable causes. She was instrumental in building The Julia and Hans Rausing Trust into one of the largest philanthropic funds in the country, donating £400 million to causes across Health, Welfare, and the Arts, primarily within the UK.

juliarausingtrust.org



About the Garfield Weston Foundation

The Garfield Weston Foundation is a family founded grant-maker that gives money to support charities across the UK. The Foundation supports charities operating in a wide variety of sectors that make a positive difference within their communities. The Foundation was established by W. Garfield Weston in 1958, through an endowment of shares in Witton Investments – which holds a majority stake in Associated British Foods. This successful business model exists to this day. Each year the sum the Foundation has given away has grown: in the most recent financial year 2024-2025 the Foundation gave away almost £130 million to 2,967 charities. Since its establishment, the Foundation has generated funds of nearly £1.7 billion, which have been donated to UK charities.

garfieldweston.org
@westonfdn



About the Mayor of London's Creative Enterprise Zone

Creative Enterprise Zones are a flagship cultural initiative from the Mayor of London supporting artists and creatives to put down roots in the capital and grow – with access to affordable creative workspace.

A bold initiative and a UK first, Creative Enterprise Zones launched in 2017 to increase permanent affordable space to work, provide business support, and improve access for Londoners to learn creative sector skills and find new jobs in the industry.

There are 12 Creative Enterprise Zones in the London boroughs of Brent, Croydon, Haringey, Hounslow, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Hackney with Tower Hamlets, Hammersmith & Fulham, Ealing, Waltham Forest and Westminster.

london.gov.uk/cez

CREATIVE ENTERPRISE ZONE

MAYOR OF LONDON

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