

PRESS RELEASE / COMMUNIQUE

One Voice, Greater Impact: visual arts leaders make the case for stronger pan-sector representation

London, 10 September 2026 — The UK visual arts sector has an opportunity to strengthen its collective voice and demonstrate more clearly the contribution it makes to the UK's economy, society and international influence, speakers at The Art Business Conference in London heard this week.

The panel, **“One Voice, Greater Impact: Why UK Visual Arts Needs a Trade Body Now”**, brought together Paula Orrell (Contemporary Visual Arts Network England), Paul Hewitt (Society of London Art Dealers), Tom Kiehl (UK Music Ltd) and Alison Cole (The Cultural Policy Unit), chaired by Financial Times journalist Melanie Gerlis.

The discussion focused on a central challenge: while the UK visual arts ecosystem is internationally significant, its ability to influence regulation and public policy can be diluted by the number of organisations representing different parts of a highly diverse sector.

The panel emphasised that the visual arts are not a collection of disconnected activities but an interconnected ecosystem. A strong talent pipeline — beginning with the teaching of art across education — can lead to artists developing their practice, being supported by galleries and other organisations, and ultimately entering regional or national museum collections. Each part of that journey contributes to the strength and sustainability of the whole.

A training in the visual arts is also foundational to so many other industry careers, from architecture and design, to illustration, photography and visual media, to animation and gaming. Visual literacy is also increasingly essential to our children's education in an age of AI and visual communications.

Speakers also highlighted the sector's potential to contribute further to **economic growth, employment, reducing inequality and the UK's international influence through soft power**. More coordinated representation could help the sector articulate and quantify these contributions, build a stronger evidence base, and make a clearer case for what the visual arts could contribute in future.

The discussion also drew lessons from the experience of **UK Music**, whose development as a coordinated representative body provides a useful example of how greater alignment can support advocacy and engagement with policymakers. The visual arts sector has an opportunity to learn from that experience while developing an approach suited to its own distinctive structure and needs.

Importantly, the proposal is **not about disintermediating or replacing existing representative organisations** — whether commercial, professional or publicly funded.

Rather, it is about finding ways for the many voices already working across the sector to achieve greater impact when speaking collectively: different parts of the sector in harmony, without losing their individual identities.

The proposed pan-sector body would seek to complement existing organisations by providing a stronger collective voice, helping raise the profile of the visual arts and building a clearer picture of the sector's current and potential contribution to the UK.

To register your interest in or find out more about the proposed representative body , email: info@cvan.art