A new commission for a publicly sited artwork on Newcastle Quayside in collaboration with the Baltic Center for Contemporary Art as part of GEON (Great Exhibition of the North). We are particularly interested in what happens when the geography of a location takes on a porous identity, or becomes a place outside its own border. It is this idea of "the suspended island" that we are trying to impress upon the viewer the presence of absence, revealing on one hand a lost urban geography that most people won’t see and on the other exploring through moving image the kinetic relationship between the architecture of two distinct sites one still historically visible in the form of Trinity House and the other obsolete in the form of the now abandoned coastal fortifications that once functioned on Governors Island, situated off the coast of Manhattan.

Incorporating a voice over narrative for the film based upon a series of interviews with refugees from Bosnia, Kurdistan, Ukraine and Democratic Republic of the Congo that we recorded at a refugee drop in centre in Derby.

We propose to show this moving image work on an outdoor LED screen. The film will include both new and existing footage as well as a new animation.

Jane and Louise Wilson (b. Newcastle upon Tyne) began working together in 1989. They use film, photography and sculpture to create arresting and atmospheric installations that grapple with often challenging subject matter. Suspended Island is their first outdoor commission. The location of this work at Low Yard, part of Trinity House, is significant. A Royal Charter was granted by Henry VIII to the Corporation of Trinity House in 1514 and it has been concerned with the safety of shipping and the well-being of seafarers ever since. Ships and seafarers from all over the world depend upon Trinity House’s reliable aids to navigation for their safe passage into the UK’s ports and harbours.

Using filmed footage shot in 2004 documenting the now abandoned coastal fortifications on Governors Island off the coast of Manhattan, New York, the island was formerly home to the United States Coast Guard, before being decommissioned in 1996. Suspended Island weaves together footage from Governors Island and the Palace of Westminster, Parliament alongside animation featuring the artefacts found inside Trinity House and a newly commissioned text by the author Vesna Maric who came to the U.K. as a refugee from Bosnia – Herzegovina in 1992.

The soundtrack on Suspended Island riffs with the Calvinist hymn “We’ve Sighted the Golden Gate” taken from a 1948 recording sung by the artist’s grandmother and her siblings.

The work uncovers a relationship between its site on the Newcastle upon Tyne Quayside, Governors Island and Parliament.

“We are particularly interested in what happens when the geography of a location takes on a porous identity, or becomes a place outside its own border and in particular this idea of “a suspended island”.

The image of an island – as something that is at once cut off and yet connected – is particularly resonant, raising questions of what it means to British and what it means to be northern.