

Press Release

**Whitechapel Gallery Art Icon 2020 in partnership with Swarovski:  
Francis Alÿs to be honoured on 21 January 2020**

The Whitechapel Gallery is pleased to announce that **Francis Alÿs** (b. 1959, Belgium) is the seventh artist to receive the prestigious annual Art Icon award in partnership with Swarovski. Art Icon 2020 will be presented at Whitechapel Gallery on Tuesday 21 January 2020, during a gala dinner hosted by **Iwona Blazwick OBE** (Director, Whitechapel Gallery) and Swarovski.

**Iwona Blazwick** said: "This award celebrates an artist whose work elevates the simple activities of walking, playing and observing everyday life, in locations ranging from Mexico City to Mosul, into an art form that is at once playful and profound. The lyrical vision of Alÿs' actions, films and paintings transcends social and national boundaries to reveal a common humanity".

**Nadja Swarovski** commented: "We are delighted to continue our partnership with Whitechapel Gallery and the Art Icon award, which celebrates an outstanding artist and their contribution to our cultural life. Francis Alÿs combines a global vision with an eye for the local, and sees compelling human stories at the smallest level. His richly suggestive multimedia works capture ephemeral moments that encourage the viewer to question the nature of art and its relationship to the world".

The Whitechapel Gallery's annual Art Icon event is organised with generous support from Swarovski, which has a longstanding commitment to the Gallery and its programme. The Art Icon Committee includes Erin Bell, Luigi Maramotti, Sarah Miller, Farshid Moussavi, Francis Outred, Irene Panagopoulos, Jasmin Pelham, Catherine Petitgas, Alice Rawsthorn, Darius Sanai, Patrizia Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Bina von Stauffenberg, Nadja Swarovski, Cheyenne Westphal, and David Zwirner.

An auction, led by Phillips Auction House, of works donated by leading artists including **Alvaro Barrington, Gareth Cadwallader, Cathy de Monchaux, Alexis Teplin and Richard Wentworth** will also take place. A silent auction of exclusive events and tours is also on offer. All funds raised support the Whitechapel Gallery's programme, in particular its work with thousands of children and young people each year.

Born in Antwerp in 1959, Alÿs originally trained as an architect and moved to Mexico City in 1986, where he continues to live and work. It was the confrontation with issues of urbanisation and social unrest in his country of adoption that inspired his decision to become an artist. Throughout his practice, Alÿs directs his distinct poetic and imaginative sensibility toward anthropological and geopolitical concerns centred around observations of, and engagements with, everyday life. His projects including public actions, installations, video, paintings and drawings have involved travelling the longest possible route between Mexico and the United States; pushing a melting block of ice through city streets; filming his efforts to enter the centre of a tornado; and accompanying a Kurdish battalion during the Liberation of Mosul to create a series of tiny yet powerful paintings. His famed collection of found 'Fabiola' paintings, premiered at the Whitechapel Gallery, is on permanent display at the De Menil Foundation in Houston. Francis Alÿs

has also been the subject of numerous solo exhibitions including a major survey at Tate Modern in 2010.

## Notes for Editors

- **Whitechapel Gallery** - For over a century the Whitechapel Gallery has premiered world-class artists from modern masters such as Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Frida Kahlo to contemporaries such as Sophie Calle, Lucian Freud, Gilbert & George and Mark Wallinger. With beautiful galleries, exhibitions, artist commissions, collection displays, historic archives, education resources, inspiring art courses, café/bar and bookshop, the Gallery is open all year round, so there is always something free to see. The Gallery is a touchstone for contemporary art internationally, plays a central role in London's cultural landscape and is pivotal to the continued growth of the world's most vibrant contemporary art quarter. The Gallery believes that art has the power to transform the lives of children and young people, and pioneered gallery education and community outreach. Working with thousands of children and young people annually, leading artists collaborate with those who have the greatest need for opportunity, and their art is celebrated through exhibitions in galleries 5&6, which are dedicated to education projects. [www.whitechapelgallery.org/learn](http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/learn)

- Past winners of the Whitechapel Gallery Art Icon are: **Sir Howard Hodgkin** (2014), **Richard Long** (2015) **Joan Jonas** (2016), **Peter Doig** (2017), **Mona Hatoum** (2018) and **Rachel Whiteread** (2019).

- Swarovski delivers a diverse portfolio of unmatched quality, craftsmanship, and creativity. Founded in 1895 in Austria, the company designs, manufactures and markets high-quality crystals, genuine gemstones and created stones as well as finished products such as jewellery, accessories and lighting. The Swarovski Crystal Business is run by the fifth generation of family members and has a global reach with approximately 2,800 stores in around 170 countries, more than 27,000 employees, and revenue of about 2.6 billion euros in 2016. Together with its sister companies Swarovski Optik (optical devices) and Tyrolit (abrasives), Swarovski Crystal Business forms the Swarovski Group. In 2016, the Group generated revenue of about 3.37 billion euros and employed more than 32,000 people. A responsible relationship with people and the planet is an integral part of Swarovski's heritage. The global Swarovski Waterschool education program has reached 461,000 children on the world's greatest rivers, and the Swarovski Foundation, set up in 2013, works to support culture and creativity, promote wellbeing, and conserve natural resources to achieve positive social impact. [www.swarovskigroup.com](http://www.swarovskigroup.com)

- **The Swarovski Foundation** generously supports the Swarovski Foundation Curator: Youth & Community Programmes post at the Whitechapel Gallery. Open to people aged 15 – 21 the youth programme gives young adults the chance to explore contemporary art, meet creative professionals, and open up career paths into the sector. The programme is formed around collaborative artist-led projects, events and a dedicated peer-led youth forum. [www.swarovskifoundation.org](http://www.swarovskifoundation.org)

## Tickets

From £395 per person or £3,950 for a table for 10

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<https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/support/art-icon-swarovski/art-icon-2020-francis-aly/>

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