

Iwona Blazwick OBE to step down as Director of Whitechapel Gallery

5 January 2022 – Iwona Blazwick has announced that after twenty years at the helm she will be stepping down in April 2022. Blazwick will continue to work as an independent curator both with the Gallery into 2023, and on a wide range of international projects.

Iwona Blazwick said: *“This has been an emotional decision because of the great love I have for Whitechapel Gallery, our exhibitors, audiences, colleagues and communities. Over the last two decades I have had the opportunity to exhibit, commission and publish some of the world’s greatest artists; to lead the expansion of the Gallery; to forge relationships with international institutions and a huge range of cultural practitioners, important collectors, and philanthropists; and to work with inspiring colleagues. As the Gallery emerges from the pandemic in a strong financial position and with programmes admired and respected around the world, now seems a good time to hand over the reins!”*

Whitechapel Gallery’s Board of Trustees will immediately begin the process of recruiting a new director, led by a specially appointed committee.

Whitechapel Gallery’s Chairman (2015–2021), Alex Sainsbury said: *“Iwona’s illustrious direction of the Whitechapel Gallery will resonate locally and internationally as a landmark of such institutional leadership. All who have worked with her and alongside her brilliant team have felt the tremendous energy generated here. Over twenty years Iwona has expertly cultivated and expanded the Gallery’s scope, creating a formidable programme. It is immensely sad to see her leave, but her vision will continue to inspire, at the Whitechapel Gallery and beyond.”*

Iwona Blazwick joined Whitechapel Gallery in 2001 with a vision to grow its world-class exhibition, education, commissioning, and publishing programmes. Under her 20-year leadership, the Gallery’s reputation as ‘the artist’s gallery for everyone’ has grown exponentially; in 2009 she doubled the Gallery’s physical footprint, transforming the adjacent former Whitechapel Library into new galleries and creative studio spaces. The programme, which includes seasonal exhibitions, commissions, collection and archive displays, events, and workshops, engages ever more artists, thinkers and makers annually, while local, national and international audiences have risen by 300%, with over 25% of visitors identifying as BAME.

Blazwick notably strengthened Whitechapel Gallery’s commitment to showing pioneering women artists; the programme has featured major solo exhibitions of **Nan Goldin** (2002), **Cristina Iglesias** (2003), **Isa Genzken** (2009), **Elizabeth Peyton** (2009), **Sophie Calle** (2010), **Alice Neel** (2010), **Gillian Wearing** (2012), **Zarina Bhimji** (2012), **Sarah Lucas** (2013), **Hannah Höch** (2014), **Emily Jacir** (2015), **Mary Heilmann** (2016), **Anna Maria Maiolino** (2019) and **Eileen Agar** (2021). Under her tenure the Gallery continued its famous history of ‘firsts’, with immersive exhibitions by **Mark Wallinger** (2002), **Franz West** (2003), **Paul McCarthy** (2005), **Albert Oehlen** (2006), **William Kentridge** (2016), **Mark Dion** (2018), **Elmgreen & Dragset** (2019) and **Kai Althoff** (2020). Alongside significant surveys and solo

Press Release

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exhibitions, Blazwick commissioned or curated ambitious historical surveys, including *A Short History of Performance* (2002-2005), *Back to Black: Art, Cinema, and the Racial Imaginary* (2005), *Faces in the Crowd* (2005), *Adventures of the Black Square* (2015), *Electronic Superhighway* (2016), *Eduardo Paolozzi* (2017) and *A Century of the Artist's Studio* (2022).

Ten years ago, an annual programme of new artist commissions was born in the ground floor gallery. Today, Whitechapel Gallery is a leading commissioner, having collaborated with more than 100 artists to create exhibitions, performances, events and publications. Extending across the globe and beyond cultural boundaries, the programme includes **Goshka Macuga** (2009), **Claire Barclay** (2010), **Josiah McElheny** (2011), **Giuseppe Penone** (2012), **Kader Attia** (2013), **Alicja Kwade** (2016), **Leonor Antunes** (2017), **Ulla von Brandenburg** (2018), **Carlos Bunga** (2019), **Nalini Malani** (2020) and **Simone Fattal** (2021).

Blazwick conceived and nurtured the growth of many prizes for artists, including the Max Mara Art Prize for Women which was founded in 2005. This unique biannual prize brings together a jury of gatekeepers to the artworld, awarding a UK-based woman artist a six-month residency in Italy. New work created during the residency is premiered at the Gallery and acquired by the Collezione Maramotti in Reggio Emilia, Italy. Winners include **Margaret Salmon** (2005-2007), **Hannah Rickards** (2007-2009), **Andrea Büttner** (2009-2011), **Laure Prouvost** (2011-2013), **Corin Sworn** (2013-2015), **Emma Hart** (2015-2017), **Helen Cammock** (2017-2019) and **Emma Talbot** (2020-2022). Further awards include Art Icon with the Swarovski Foundation and the NEON Curatorial Award.

As Whitechapel Gallery is a museum without a collection, Blazwick pioneered a new strand of programming showing rarely seen public and private collections from around the world. Collections include **British Council Collection** (2009), **The D.Daskalopoulos Collection** (2010), **Government Art Collection** (2011), **Collection Sandretto Re Rebaudengo** (2012), **Contemporary Art Society** (2013), **V-A-C Collection** (2014), **Barjeel Art Foundation Collection** (2015), **The National Museum of Women in the Arts** (2017), **ISelf Collection** (2017), **Loudon Collection** (2018), **"la Caixa" Collection of Contemporary Art** (2019), **The Hiscox Collection** (2020) and the **Christen Sveaas Art Foundation** (2021).

She also established an archive gallery dedicated to the history of exhibitions, with displays from the Whitechapel Gallery's 120-year archive and guest archives from around the world. Displays have ranged from revisiting Jackson Pollock's debut at the Gallery in 1958 to the archives of the 1969-1978 Shiraz-Persepolis cultural festival from Iran.

In 2007 Blazwick founded the global consortium, **Artists' Film International**. Arts organisations from 22 countries ranging from Poland to the United States, India to Serbia, China to Italy each nominate an outstanding moving image artist from their region whose work is screened by the entire consortium for their local audiences.

Public Programmes and Education

Bringing the Gallery's pioneering work in community and learning programmes onto the public stage, Blazwick established two project spaces for artists involved in participatory projects. The programme has premiered new commissions by **Melanie Manchot** (2009), **Eva Rothschild** (2010), **Francis Upritchard** (2014), **Samson Kambalu** (2016) and **Mikhail Karikis** (2018) among many projects by artists, designers and architects.

Publications, MA Programme, Annual Book Fair

Iwona Blazwick has written on the work of a global roster of contemporary artists, on the big themes in contemporary art and on arts institutions, for Whitechapel Gallery and a range of other publishing houses. Founding editor of the Documents of Contemporary Art anthologies co-

published with MIT Press, Blazwick has overseen a series that now comprises 24 titles, selling over a quarter of a million copies since launching in 2007. She also established the London Art Book Fair and a Masters graduate programme in Contemporary Curating.

Notes to Editors

- Iwona Blazwick has been Director of the Whitechapel Gallery, London since 2001 and is a curator, critic and lecturer. She was formerly at Tate Modern and London's ICA, as well as working as an independent curator in Europe, Japan and the USA.
- Blazwick has been awarded honorary doctorates from Goldsmiths, University of London, The London Metropolitan, Plymouth and Middlesex Universities, is a fellow of the Royal College of Art and was honoured with an OBE in 2007. Harpers Bazaar named her as one of their women of the year in 2010. She was made an Officier de L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of the French Republic in 2013; and recognised for Services to Art by the Royal Academy on the occasion of the Queen's 90th year in 2016.
- Blazwick is a Trustee of Harewood House Trust in Yorkshire; and serves on the advisory boards of the Fourth Plinth Committee, Mayor's Office, GLA; the Istanbul Biennale; the Jarman Award, Film London; *Sculpture in the City*, London; and the MAXXI in Rome.
- The Search Committee for the next Director of the Whitechapel Gallery includes Trustees **Alex Sainsbury**, **David Dibosa**, **Ann Gallagher**, and **Melanie Manchot**, with the full support of the wider Board of Trustees.
- From April 2022 – April 2023, Iwona Blazwick will be an Emeritus Curator for the Whitechapel Gallery
- Whitechapel Gallery's Board of Trustees comprises Erin Bell, Kevin Brady, Peter Carew, David Dibosa, Ann Gallagher, Anupam Ganguli, Jonny Kanagasooriam, Samantha Leonor Renovaes Hill, Nicola Kerr, Melanie Manchot, Sarah Miller, and Alex Sainsbury.
- Whitechapel Gallery's Ventures Board includes Melanie Arnold, James Attlee, Tony Chambers, Lizzy Moriarty, Gill Perry, Bhavish Shah, Tony Stevenson, Cheyenne Westphal, Gilda Williams.

About 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, Frida Kahlo and Hannah Höch to contemporaries such as Zarina Bhimji, Sophie Calle, William Kentridge, Eduardo Paolozzi and Michael Rakowitz. Its historic campus houses exhibitions, artist commissions, collection displays, historic archives, education resources, inspiring art courses, talks and film screenings, the Townsend dining room and the Koenig Bookshop. It 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.

Visitor Information

Opening times: Tuesday – Sunday, 11am – 6pm; Thursdays, 11am – 9pm
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