

**THE PHOTOGRAPHERS' GALLERY OPENS
SOHO PHOTOGRAPHY QUARTER:
A NEW OPEN AIR CULTURAL SPACE PRESENTING WORLD-CLASS PHOTOGRAPHY FOR FREE**

This summer, The Photographers' Gallery will launch Soho Photography Quarter, a permanent new outdoor cultural space, presenting the very best of contemporary photography, for free.

Offering dynamic new ways to discover the photographic medium, Soho Photography Quarter opens on 9 June 2022, following the refurbishment of Ramillies Place, which has transformed a previously overlooked alley into a beautifully designed, pedestrianised space and offers an inspiring gateway to Soho. The launch of the space extends The Photographers' Gallery's acclaimed exhibitions programme beyond the walls of the building and completes the development of its site in Soho as a centre of Photography.

A tranquil and accessible cultural space only seconds from Oxford Street, Soho Photography Quarter will present a rotating, open-air programme of site-specific and interactive artworks, which will change twice a year. The presentations will feature a significant art frieze in the main square, large-scale over street banners, plus moving image projections, soundscapes and other interactive works depending on the project.

Alongside the changing artworks, the Gallery will present a rich and engaging programme of activities and resources. From live events, artist talks and presentations, to short films, sound installations and specially commissioned AR projects, accessibility to the ideas and inspirations behind the projects will be a key part of SPQ's offer.

**LAUNCH EXHIBITION:
CHRISTIAN THOMPSON: BEING HUMAN HUMAN BEING
OPENS 9 JUNE 2022 - DECEMBER 2022**

The opening presentation for Soho Photography Quarter, *Being Human Human Being*, comprises a large-scale, site-specific installation of works - including a large-scale art frieze, cross street banners, soundscapes and projections - by the acclaimed Indigenous Australian contemporary artist, Dr. Christian Thompson AO, presented in partnership with Photo Australia / PHOTO 2022 International Festival of Photography, Melbourne.

The *Being Human Human Being* installation is also one of the highlights of UK/Australia Season 2021-22, the largest ever cultural exchange between the two nations presented jointly by the Australian Government and the British Council.

Formally trained as a sculptor, Thompson's multidisciplinary practice engages mediums such as photography, video, sculpture, performance and sound. Thompson's works

explore notions of identity, sexuality, gender, cultural hybridity, memory and history, often referring to the relationships between these concepts and the environment. Through performances and what he calls 'anti-portraits', he inhabits a range of personae achieved through incorporating handcrafted costumes and carefully orchestrated poses and backdrops.

The open-air exhibition will present selected works from the series' King Billy (2010), Polari (2014), Equinox (2018) and Flower Walls (2018-ongoing), all of which reflect on indigenous and diverse representation. Thompson fuses both specific references and universal symbols to create a distinct, often unconventional visual language.

King Billy (2010) draws on traditional portraiture, fashion photography, advertising, music promos and mugshots. The images show an anonymised figure, wearing a brightly coloured hoodie made from a textile customised with indigenous motifs and further adorned with symbols of power and authority (crown, pearls, medals etc). Positioned against a black backdrop, the subject commands a striking formidable presence, yet eschews any specific identity.

In *Flower Walls* (2018-Ongoing) the artist is immersed in a composition of dense and overlapping depictions of Australian native flora: an abundance of plants and flowers arranged in bursting colours. Amongst the foliage, parts of Thompson's face and hands are showing, seemingly appearing or submerged in the arrangement. It will feature the latest work in the series, also titled *Being Human Human Being* (2022), commissioned by Photo Australia and premiering internationally at the Soho Photography Quarter.

Indigenous flora and allegory also play an important role in further works presented as part of *Being Human Human Being* and reproduced in the space on large-scale 4 x 6m banners.

Primeval Sea (from the series *Equinox* 2018) shows Thompson's face encased by a floral wreath including Daisies and Proteas, a plant native to the prehistoric continent Gondwana. As in other works, which see him painting his skin or adorning himself with flowers and feathers, Thompson evokes a strong sense of ceremony or ritual that weaves together lived experience, cultural and art historical iconographies and ancient mythological narrative as a way of proposing or exploring fluid identity and cultural hybridity.

In *Ellipse* (from *Polari*, 2014) Thompson, wearing a platinum-white wig topped with a flower garland, poses like a Greek god against a sky-blue backdrop. Polari is a secret language used by vagabonds, traveling performers, sailors, criminals and revellers in the 1700s and 1800s. It was later adopted by the LGBTQ+ community in the UK as a protective code but also as a form of shared private language. Thompson's celebration of evolving, non-binary identities through costume and performance can be seen as an echo of the use of Polari language as a form of disguise for the many subcultures and communities that used/use it.

The presentation also includes audio visual work that investigates the loss of Indigenous languages. In a hauntingly beautiful new soundscape *Phantom*, (2022) Thompson sings in his father's native language, Bidjara, now classified as extinct, against a melodic backdrop of instrument, breath and speech. The significance of vernacular is also explored in the video work, *Dead tongue* (2015), where Thompson also interrogates the implications of England's empirical quest on the former colonies of the British Empire. In a second video projection, *Amsterdam RMX* (2020), Thompson presents a more direct and subjective experience of what the Bidjara language feels and sounds like. Here Thompson stands in front of a black backdrop cloaked in a hooded coat, singing to us with specs of snow rapidly falling in front of him.

Artist Christian Thompson says: *"I am delighted that my work will launch the Soho Photography Quarter. The first Indigenous Australian artist to be accepted into Oxford University in its 900-year history, I have lived and worked across Australia and London for over a decade. By inserting my own imagery and sound (singing in my traditional Bidjara language) into these spaces, I seek to highlight both the legacies of colonialism and the complexity of human identities, while simultaneously alluding to the multifaceted and layered histories of the precinct."*

Brett Rogers, Director, The Photographers' Gallery, says: *"Soho Photography Quarter (SPQ) represents the realisation of a long-awaited vision to transform the public area outside The Photographers' Gallery into a welcoming, prominent cultural and social destination for people to encounter extraordinary images for free. Photography is one of our foremost and most accessible cultural forms, so being able to showcase the very best of what's being created in this field for everyone to enjoy feels like a really valuable addition to the cultural offer in the West End. SPQ will present a wide range of work from world-class photographers, extending the Gallery's passion and commitment to the medium beyond the Gallery walls and engaging new audiences, who might not otherwise experience it. We will also offer free events, talks and other activities in the space to enhance visitor experience and bring the works to life."*

Michael Napthali, UK/Australia Season Director, says: *"The UK/Australia Season 2021-22 theme of 'Who Are We Now?' reflects on our history, explores our current relationship, and imagines our future together. We are thrilled the acclaimed Indigenous Australian contemporary artist, Dr. Christian Thompson AO's 'Being Human Human Being' installation will be the opening presentation for Soho Photography Quarter, bringing his striking and moving work to thousands of people in the UK this year. Christian's work is a true articulation of our Season theme, and we encourage you to see this extraordinary installation and make your own reflection on 'Who Are We Now?'."*

Elias Redstone, Artistic Director, Photo Australia / PHOTO 2022 International Festival of Photography, says: *"Photo Australia is thrilled to be partnering with The Photographers' Gallery to launch the Soho Photography Quarter as part of PHOTO 2022's international program, providing opportunities for Australian artists to be exhibited overseas. Through this collaboration we are proudly centring an important First Nations artist not just within our biennale in Melbourne, but on the global stage."*

Christian Thompson: Being Human Human Being is organised by The Photographers' Gallery and Photo Australia / PHOTO 2022 International Festival of Photography, and is supported by the Australian Government as part of the UK/Australia Season 2021-22.

Christian Thompson is represented by Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne.

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For more details visit: www.tpg.org.uk
Social media hashtag: #MySPQ

Press Contacts:

For further press information and image requests for Soho Photography Quarter and 'Christian Thompson: Being Human, Human Being' please contact:

Grace Gabriele-Tighe or Emma Pettit at Margaret PR grace@margaretlondon.com / emma@margaretlondon.com

For General information and enquires about The Photographers' Gallery, including their archive, Print Sales Gallery or Bookshop contact: press@tpg.org.uk

Featured artworks:

Art Frieze:
King Billy, 2010
 Flower Walls, 2018 – Ongoing

Banners:
Polari, 2014
Primeval Sea, 2018

Projection:
Dead Tongue, 2015
Amsterdam, RMX, 2021

Sound:
Burdi Burdi (Fire Fire) QUOD Mix, 2022
Phantom, 2022

About Soho Photography Quarter:

Designed by Andreas Lechthaler Architecture, Soho Photography Quarter is part of Westminster City Council's ambitious £150m plans to invigorate Oxford Street and the surrounding areas and will include new seating areas, trees and planters, enhanced access for pedestrians and cyclists, improved safety and air quality and an enriched cultural offer for the district.

About Christian Thompson:

DR CHRISTIAN THOMPSON AO was born in 1978, Gawler, South Australia (Bidjara People). In 2010, Thompson made history when he became the first Aboriginal Australian to be admitted into the University of Oxford in its 900-year history. He holds a Doctorate of Philosophy (Fine Art), Trinity College, University of Oxford, UK; a Master of Theatre, Amsterdam School of Arts, Das Arts, The Netherlands; a Masters of Fine Art (Sculpture) and Honours (Sculpture), both RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia; and a Bachelor of Fine Art from the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. In 2015, he was mentored by performance artist Marina Abramovic.

Thompson has exhibited widely both nationally and internationally, having been included in exhibitions such as 'Australia' at the Royal Academy for the Arts, London; 'We Bury Our Own', The Pitt Rivers Museum, SOLOS, Modern Art Oxford, Oxford, Valencia Institute of Modern Art, Valencia, Spain; 'The Other and Me', The Sharjah Museum, United Arab Emirates, 'Hijacked III'; QUOD Gallery, Derby, United Kingdom; 'Shadow life' Bangkok Art and Cultural centre, Bangkok, Thailand; and 'The Beauty of Distance/ Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age', 17th Biennale of Sydney. His works are held in major Australian and international collections. In 2018 he was awarded an Officer of the Order of Australia for distinguished service to the visual arts as a sculptor, photographer, video and performance artist, and as a role model for young Indigenous artists.

Thompson's work is held in major public and private collections including: Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; Aboriginal Art Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands; The Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford; University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane. A major survey exhibition of his work, Christian Thompson: Ritual Intimacy toured throughout Australia from 2017–19. Thompson will present newly commissioned work as part of Photo 2022 International Festival of Photography in April 2022.

About The Photographers' Gallery:

The Photographers' Gallery opened in 1971 in Covent Garden, London, as the UK's first independent and publicly funded gallery devoted to photography. It was the first UK gallery to exhibit many key names in international photography, including Juergen Teller, Robert Capa, Sebastiano Salgado and Andreas Gursky. The Gallery has also been instrumental in establishing contemporary British photographers, including Martin Parr and Corinne Day. In 2009 the Gallery relocated to a new multi-storey building in Ramillies Street, Soho and opened its doors to the public in 2012 after an ambitious redevelopment plan which provided the Gallery with three floors of state-of-the-art exhibition space as well as an education/events studio, a gallery for commercial sales, bookshop and cafe. The success of The Photographers' Gallery over the past four decades has helped to secure the medium's position as a vital and highly regarded art form, introducing new audiences to photography and championing its place at the heart of visual culture.

www.thephotographersgallery.org.uk

About UK/Australia Season 2021-22:

The UK/Australia Season is a joint initiative by the British Council and the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The Season highlights the breadth of partnership between Australia and the UK and aims to deepen and extend cultural connections. The Season started in September 2021 and concluded in March 2022 in Australia and will conclude in December 2022 in

the UK. The theme 'Who Are We Now?' reflects on our history, explores our current relationship, and imagines our future together. The Season features programming for all ages and celebrates the diversity of cultures and languages in both countries. It emphasises Australia's First Nations voices, enables cultural exchange with Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland, and the diverse societies that have emerged in both Australia and the UK through migration.

ukaustaliaseason.com

About PHOTO AUSTRALIA:

Photo Australia delivers Australia's largest and most prestigious photography biennale. The most recent edition, PHOTO 2022 International Festival of Photography, took place in Melbourne from 29 April to 22 May 2022. Responding to the theme Being Human, 123 artists including Cindy Sherman, Gillian Wearing, Mohamed Bourouissa, Paul Mpagi Sepuya, Vasantha Yoganathan, Hoda Afshar and Poulomi Basu explored the contemporary human condition in 90 exhibitions, alongside a program of talks, tours, workshops and film screenings.

photo.org.au



Visitor Information:

(please check website for latest opening information)

Opening times:

Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday: 10.00 – 18.00
 Thursday & Friday (Late opening): 10.00 – 20.00
 Saturday: 10.00 – 18.00
 Sunday: 11.00 – 18.00

Soho Photography Quarter: FREE

General Gallery Admission: £5 / £2.50 Concessions. Fridays 18.00 - 20.00 Free for everyone

Address: 16-18 Ramillies Street, London, W1F 7LW

Nearest London Underground Station: Oxford Circus

T: + 44 (0)20 7087 9300

E: info@tpg.org.uk

W: thephotographersgallery.org.uk

Social media:

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The Gallery has Covid-19 Protective Measures in place



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