

**BIG BEN MADE FROM 20,000 POLITICAL BOOKS TO BE BUILT IN MANCHESTER**

Argentinian art pioneer Marta Minujín will unveil a monumental new participatory artwork *Big Ben Lying Down with Political Books* on 1 July at this year’s Manchester International Festival. The 42-metre structure of London’s iconic Big Ben tower will be covered in 20,000 books that will be given away for free at the end of the festival. Through the Festival the immense construction will occupy Piccadilly Gardens in Manchester and audiences will be invited to walk through the structure. It is Minujín’s first major UK commission.

The artist invited a coalition of Manchester-based organisations to compile a list of 160 inspiring book titles that have shaped British politics including forgotten histories, neglected voices and books that will influence the next generation of activists and politicians. The oldest book included is *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine, published in 1776, and the most recent is Marcus Rashford’s *You Are A Champion: Unlock Your Potential, Find Your Voice and Be the Best You Can Be,* published this year. The diverse list of writers ranges from Mary Wollstonecraft to Bernardine Evaristo, Sylvia Pankhurst to Joeli Brierly, Angela Davis to Akwugo Emejulu and Francesca Sobande, George Orwell to Irvine Welsh, Walter Rodney to David Olusoga, Karl Marx to Rutger Bregman.

The organisations who devised the book list are:

* People’s History Museum in Manchester
* Working Class Movement Library
* Pankhurst Centre
* Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre
* University of Manchester
* John Rylands Research Institute and Library
* Manchester Central Library
* Wai Yin Society
* Manchester Jewish Museum
* Anthony Burgess Foundation
* MIF's People’s Forum
* MIF's Young People’s Forum

Inside the structure there will be a new short film directed by Marta Minujín showing Big Ben landing in Manchester. A new sound composition will play inside and outside the structure composed from speeches from history and Ben Ben’s iconic chimes.

The 20,000 books have been donated by publishers including Penguin Random House, Pan MacMillan, Canongate, One World, Faber, Stanford University Press, Profile Books, Oxford University Press and Manchester University Press. The event will culminate in a three-day giveaway from 16-18 July when audiences are invited to take away a book for free.

A new interactive digital artwork by Marta Minujín will enable audiences to visit *Big Ben Lying Down* virtually and a new online exhibition will feature archive material from Minujín’s legendary large-scale public art series *The Fall of Universal Myths,* published for the first time.

Marta Minujín said:

*“People need this! We need new ideas and new places where people meet. Things need to change, global symbols like Big Ben stand up straight and never change but the world is always changing – the UK is now living through covid and Brexit - things are never ‘straight’, we need to be able to adapt and be flexible with our ideas. This will be a new national symbol, one that the people of Manchester will create.*

*Creating a new Big Ben in the North. It’s a way of being liberated from the concept of one thing or place being better than the other. We get hold of Big Ben and take it to Manchester, it starts to be a lighter weight, as if it were a seesaw. To balance out the situation.”*

Curator Phoebe Greenwood said:

*“This is a critical time for the UK and the world as all the old systems are overwhelmed and the new systems are still being born. We wanted to commission a large-scale public work that could speak to this precarious moment. Marta immediately proposed giving the world’s most famous clock and the UK’s most recognisable political symbol, Big Ben, a temporary new home in Manchester. She is inviting people to come together to create a living monument which culminates in the magical moment the historic icon is taken apart, the books are given away, and new ideas are shared. Marta is a wonderful, generous, force of nature. She wants the audience to experience something that should be impossible, and she has brought together an incredible coalition of Manchester organisations and communities to make it happen. She has gifted them the opportunity to tell their version of this country’s history and future. We cannot wait for Marta and Big Ben to arrive in Manchester.”*

Commissioned by Manchester International Festival and premiering at MIF21, which runs from 1–18 July 2021.

For more details about this year’s programme, please visit [mif.co.uk](https://mif.co.uk)

MIF is working in partnership with Blackwell’s on this project and would like to thank the team at Blackwell’s on University Green in Manchester for their support in collating the books.

**Listings information:**

***Big Ben Lying Down with Political Books***

Date: 1-18 July 2021

Piccadilly Gardens

Manchester

Free but ticketed

**ENDS**

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Download high resolution images [here](https://press.mif.co.uk/)

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

**About Marta Minujín**

Argentinian artist Marta Minujin’s is a pioneer and legendary art icon. She is celebrated for her monumental sculptures, participatory artworks and performances. These include “La caída de los mitos universals” or “The Fall of Universal Myths her series of large-scale ‘tilting’ and ‘fallen’ recreations of popular monuments or cultural myths. In 2017 her seminal *Parthenon of Books* (first constructed in 1983 in Buenos Aires) was recreated at documenta 14 with over 100,000 banned books on a Nazi book-burning site. A Guggenheim Fellow, Minujín has exhibited at major institutions like MoMA in New York, the Centro de Arte y Communicación in Buenos Aires, Tate Modern in London, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Centre Pompidou in Paris. A major retrospective of the artist’s work was presented at the Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires in 2010.

Marta Minujín was born in 1943 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where she lives and works. She studied at the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes Manuel Belgrano and the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Prilidiano Pueyrredón Buenos Aires. In 1961, she received a scholarship to study in Paris, where she carried out her first performance, *La destrucción* (The Destruction), in 1963. Returning to Buenos Aires in 1964, she was awarded the Premio Nacional Instituto Torcuato Di Tella for the work *¡Revuélquese y viva!* (Wallow around and live!, 1964), her first interactive installation. In 1965, at the Center of Visual Arts of the Instituto Torcuato di Tella in Buenos Aires, Minujín and Rubén Santantonín devised the now-legendary environment *La Menesunda*. The work led visitors on a circuitous journey through eleven distinct spaces inspired by everyday life in Buenos Aires, including a tunnel of luminous neon signs, a bedroom complete with a married couple, a hallway lined with illuminated TVs, and a salon with makeup artists and masseuses offering their services. The intricate, interactive labyrinth was visited by thousands of people. *La Menesunda* will be staged at Tate Liverpool dates TBC (rescheduled due to covid).

**About Manchester International Festival**

Manchester International Festival (MIF) is an artist-led festival of original, new work and special events reflecting the spectrum of performing arts, visual arts and popular culture. MIF21 takes place from 1 - 18 July 2021.

Staged every two years in Manchester, MIF has commissioned, produced and presented world premieres by artists including Marina Abramović, Damon Albarn, Laurie Anderson, Björk, Boris Charmatz, Jeremy Deller, Idris Elba and Kwame Kwei-Armah, Elbow, Philip Glass and Phelim McDermott, David Lynch, Wayne McGregor, Steve McQueen, Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, Yoko Ono, Thomas Ostermeier, Maxine Peake, Punchdrunk, Skepta, The xx, Robert Wilson and Zaha Hadid Architects.

These and other world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work, staged in venues across Greater Manchester – from theatres, galleries and concert halls to railway depots, churches and car parks. MIF works closely with venues, festivals and other cultural organisations globally, whose financial and creative input helps to make many of these projects possible and ensures that work made at MIF goes on to be seen around the world.

MIF supports a year-round Creative Engagement programme, bringing opportunities for people from all backgrounds, ages and from all corners of the city to get involved during the Festival and year-round, as volunteers, as participants in shows, through skills development and a host of creative activities, such as Festival in My House.

MIF will also run The Factory, the new landmark cultural space currently being built in the heart of Manchester and designed by the internationally-renowned architect Ellen van Loon of Rem Koolhaas’ OMA. The Factory will commission, present and produce one of Europe’s most ambitious and adventurous year-round creative programmes, featuring bold new work from the world’s greatest artists and offering a space to create, invent and play.

Attracting up to 850,000 visitors annually, The Factory will add up to £1.1 billion to the economy over a decade and create up to 1,500 direct and indirect jobs. Its pioneering programme of skills, training and engagement will benefit local people and the next generation of creative talent from across the city, whilst apprenticeships and trainee schemes are already underway during the construction phase.

MIF’s Artistic Director and Chief Executive is John McGrath.

[mif.co.uk](https://mif.co.uk)