

PRESS RELEASE – **EMBARGOED UNTIL 10AM WEDNESDAY 31 JANUARY 2024**

INAUGURAL WOW FESTIVAL IN MANCHESTER ANNOUNCED INCLUDING AN EVENING WITH MEL B

- **WOW - WOMEN OF THE WORLD TO TAKE OVER AVIVA STUDIOS FROM 24 - 26 MAY 2024 FOR FIRST EVER MANCHESTER FESTIVAL IN PARTNERSHIP WITH FACTORY INTERNATIONAL.**
- **WORLD-CLASS ACTIVISTS, THINKERS, SPEAKERS AND PERFORMERS WILL PRESENT TWO DAYS AND THREE EVENINGS OF LAUGHTER, JOY AND URGENT CONVERSATIONS COVERING THE MOST TALKED ABOUT ISSUES FACING WOMEN, GIRLS AND NON-BINARY PEOPLE TODAY.**
- **HIGHLIGHTS WILL INCLUDE BRUTALLY HONEST: AN EVENING WITH MEL B, DISCUSSING HER JOURNEY FROM SPICE GIRL TO GLOBAL ICON, TO WOMEN'S AID PATRON AND CHAMPION FOR SURVIVORS OF ABUSE.**
- **WOW MANCHESTER TICKETS WILL GO ON GENERAL SALE FROM 2 FEBRUARY 2024 WITH FURTHER HEADLINE EVENTS TO BE ANNOUNCED IN THE COMING WEEKS.**

Factory International and WOW - Women of the World are today announcing the first ever WOW Manchester, which will take place at Manchester's landmark new cultural space, Aviva Studios from Friday 24 - Sunday 26 May in partnership with Factory International.

Over two days and three evenings in May the world's biggest, most comprehensive festival celebrating women, girls and non-binary people, will see WOW take over Aviva Studios' different spaces to bring people together to find solutions to the pressing issues of gender inequality and celebrate the achievements of women, girls and non-binary people both in the Northwest and globally.

On Friday 24 May, WOW Manchester presents an evening with artist and author, Melanie Brown. Celebrating the launch of her critically acclaimed memoir, *Brutally Honest*, Mel and journalist and co-author Louise Gannon will share an unfiltered discussion on Mel's journey from being a Spice Girl and global icon, to Women's Aid patron and champion for survivors of abuse – and everything in between. This will be one of WOW Manchester's headline evening ticketed events, with others to be announced. The event will go on general sale on Friday 16 February.

WOW Manchester will also feature WOW's popular Day ticket model with a twist, providing audiences with the opportunity to choose from a wide variety of events and discussions housed within a huge marketplace at the centre of the event – and taking place throughout Aviva Studios' many different spaces with a different line-up each day. Day tickets for both the Saturday and Sunday will go on general sale on Friday 2 February, as well as a weekend ticket.

Opening the festival with a powerful Moment of Unity, WOW's founder Jude Kelly will bring everyone together to look at the highs and lows of the last five years of progress. Repeated at intervals throughout the festival, these moments will also feature performances, interviews with special guest speakers and more.

Throughout the weekend, household names, local activists and artists will present their big ideas to change the world, whilst inspiring thinkers, activists and world-class speakers will hold frank and lively sessions on everything from the climate, masculinity, menopause myths, reproductive justice, gentrification, divorce, the murky history of the fashion industry, sandwich caring, and orgasms, to urgent conversations around women and conflict with accounts from first hand survivors. Sessions will also celebrate women and non-binary people in Manchester's music scene, explore how iconic buildings can shape our cultural landscapes, and discuss football's ability to transcend boundaries.

Festival-goers will be able to visit the bustling Marketplace – a hub of urgency, generosity and conversation with over 70 spaces to explore. They will witness pop-up performances from indigenous oud players, poets, choirs and dance troupes; participate in workshops led by Greater Manchester's rich and diverse talent and explore the city with Walking Tours that celebrate the women usually confined to the footnotes of history from marriage and maternity through to protest and crime. There will also be the opportunity to meet artists from across the globe in a specially curated South Asian art exhibition.

Jude Kelly said, *"We are so excited to be bringing WOW to Manchester and the Northwest for the first time. As a Liverpool girl myself, it is a joy to be able to celebrate the rich diversity of stories across the region and to build a Festival with the people of the Northwest at its heart. Factory International is the perfect partner for WOW as we continue to grow and it is a privilege to be able to take over the iconic Aviva Studios with the unique WOW blend of celebration, determination and frank conversation."*

John McGrath, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of Factory International says, *"As a long-term admirer of the wonderful WOW festival, I'm delighted that in our very first year Aviva Studios will be taken over by the energy, ambition and imagination of this extraordinary event. We're delighted to collaborate on the first ever WOW Manchester and look forward to many moments of inspiration as some of the most dynamic women from the region and across the globe, share their wisdom, experience and vision."*

In the lead-up to WOW Manchester, The WOW Foundation's custom-built WOW Girls Festival Bus will park up at Aviva Studios on 1 March as part of the last leg of its UK-wide tour. Designed by artist/designer Emma Hardaker working with inspiration from Getaway Girls in Leeds, the WOW Girls Festival Bus is an interactive space created with and for

young people. The Manchester stop will include WOW Speed Mentoring for up to 120 young people from the Greater Manchester area and mentors from across the UK, and school visits led by Factory International's Creative Learning team.

The WOW Foundation is a UK Charity, set up in 2018 by Jude Kelly CBE, following 8 years of WOW as part of her tenure as Artistic Director at Southbank Centre. It operates across a global network of partners that work with the idea that Festivals and the arts can build the belief across new audiences that a gender equal world is urgently needed, possible and desirable - whilst also building the determination and optimism to further this aim. WOW is the largest network of its kind. To date, WOW Festivals and events have taken place in over 45 places, across 6 continents, reaching over 5 million attendees. A growing programme of education and leadership for all ages has, for 2023-2024 had a particular focus on girls and non-binary young people. Alongside WOW Manchester, Festivals for 2024 include WOW Girls Festival, WOW Pakistan, WOW Istanbul, WOW Athens and WOW Rotherham.

The WOW Foundation is proudly supported by its Global Founding Partner Bloomberg.

LISTINGS

WOW Manchester 2024

24 – 26 May 2024

Aviva Studios, Water Street, Manchester, M3 4JQ

<https://factoryinternational.org/whats-on/wow-manchester>

WOW Manchester commissioned and produced by Factory International and The WOW Foundation.

WOW Festival was originally produced and presented by Southbank Centre.

About The WOW Foundation

The WOW Foundation was created by Jude Kelly CBE in 2018 to run the global movement that is WOW - Women of the World Festivals. The Festivals began in the UK in 2010, launched by Kelly at the Southbank Centre London, where she was Artistic Director, to celebrate women and girls, taking a frank look at what prevents them from achieving their potential, raising awareness globally of the issues they face, and discussing solutions together.

To date, WOW has reached five million people in 45 locations on six continents, in locations including Australia, Brazil, China, Egypt, Finland, Greece, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Somaliland, the UK and the USA.

Over the last 13 years the Festivals have developed a reputation as a space for world renowned artists, activists, thinkers and performers including Angela Davis, Malala Yousafzai, Annie Lennox, Patrick Stewart, Baroness Doreen Lawrence and Salma Hayek, to come and participate, alongside thousands of women and girls who don't have public profiles but are doing amazing things. WOW provides platforms for people of all kinds, changes attitudes, brings communities together and provides a unique space for people to work together towards gender equity in their own communities. One example of the Festival's impact came in 2015, with the founding of the Women's Equality Party by Sandi Toksvig and Catherine Mayer.

In 2018 Kelly left the Southbank Centre to run The WOW Foundation full time as a charity working to build, convene and sustain a global movement that believes a gender equal world is possible and desirable through festivals and empowering women and girls. The unique festival model creates numerous pathways for participants to take part in WOW projects, amplify their own causes, or start

new initiatives which have a wide impact on communities. It is the biggest, most comprehensive and most significant festival dedicated to presenting work by women and promoting equity for women and girls.

WOW Festival was originally produced and presented by Southbank Centre.

The President of WOW - Women of the World is Her Majesty The Queen.

WOW Festivals will be taking place around the world in the next 12 months:

- WOW Pakistan (Lahore): 1-3 March 2024
- WOW Istanbul: 1-3 March 2024
- WOW Athens: 6-8 April 2024
- WOW Rotherham 11 May 2024
- WOW Kathmandu: 2024 tbc
- WOW Baltimore: April 2025 tbc

About Factory International

Factory International commissions, produces and presents a year-round programme of original creative work and special events at Aviva Studios, its landmark new home in Manchester, online, and internationally through its network of co-commissioners and partners. It also stages the city-wide Manchester International Festival every other year.

The design of Aviva Studios is led by Ellen van Loon of the world-leading practice Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA). Built with flexibility in mind, the building is based around large, open, adaptable spaces that can be constantly reconfigured, enabling artists to develop and create large-scale work of invention and ambition of a kind not seen anywhere else in the world.

A unique canvas to make, explore and experiment, audiences can enjoy the broadest range of art forms from major exhibitions and concerts to intimate performances and immersive experiences. The venue's development is led by Manchester City Council, with backing of £99.05m from HM Government and £7m National Lottery funding from Arts Council England.

Factory International builds on the legacy of Manchester International Festival, one of the world's leading arts festivals, and the first to be entirely focused on the commissioning and producing of ambitious new work. Staged every two years in Manchester since 2007, world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work in venues and spaces across Greater Manchester.

Factory International plays an important role in the lives of Greater Manchester residents, bringing jobs, skills, training and creative opportunities. Through the Factory Academy, Factory International is training the creative workforce of the future, while its pioneering creative engagement and artist development programmes create year-round opportunities for local people to get involved, from participating in flagship commissions to shaping the organisation through involvement in its public forums.

Factory International is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.