PRESS RELEASE: For immediate release

**MANCHESTER INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OPENS**

**WITH COMMISSIONS BY LEADING UK & INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS**

* Manchester International Festival (MIF), returns with a vibrant programme of original new work from across the spectrum of visual and performing arts and music by artists from over 20 countries, running from 1 to 18 July 2021.
* Artists include **Akram Khan, Arlo Parks, Aaron and Bryce Dessner, Cerys Matthews, Christine Sun Kim, Cillian Murphy, Damon Albarn, Deborah Warner, Forensic Architecture, Ibrahim Mahama, Laure Prouvost, Marta Minujín** and **Lemn Sissay.**
* Events will take place safely in indoor and outdoor locations across Greater Manchester, including the first ever work on the construction site of The Factory, the landmark cultural space that will be MIF’s future home.
* A rich online offer provides a window into the Festival wherever audiences are, including livestreams and work created especially for the digital realm.
* With almost all the work created in the past year, MIF21 provides a unique snapshot of these unprecedented times. Artists have reflected on ideas such as love and human connections, the way we play, division and togetherness, equality and social change, and the relationship between the urban and the rural.
* For the first time, the curation of the Festival’s talks and discussions programme has been handed over to local people, building on MIF’s work involving the community as artistic collaborators and participants in work shaped by them.
* Festival Square returns in new location Cathedral Gardens with a packed programme of food, drink and free live music, DJs and more.
* As one of the first major public events in the city, MIF21 will play a key role in the safe reopening of the city’s economy and provide employment for hundreds of freelancers and artists.
* Much of the programme is free to attend, with more work than ever in public spaces around the city.
* Created with safety and well-being at its heart, all protocols are being followed to make this a safe festival for all.

Manchester International Festival Artistic Director & Chief Executive, **John McGrath** says*: “MIF has always been a Festival like no other – with almost all the work being created especially for us in the months and years leading up to each Festival edition. But who would have guessed two years ago what a changed world the artists making work for our 2021 Festival would be working in?*

*From legendary Argentinian artist Marta Minujin’s decision to give the world’s most famous clock, Big Ben, a temporary new home in Manchester to Cephas Williams’ celebratory activist artwork Portrait of Black Britain, the ways in which artists have used the opportunity of the Festival to reflect on life now has been inspiring. Our programme is very different to the one we had almost-fully planned at the start of last year, but I hope it feels urgent and right.*

*We hope MIF21 will provide a time and place to reflect on our world now, to celebrate the differing ways we can be together, and to emphasise, despite all that has happened, the importance of our creative connections – locally and globally.”*

**Sir Richard Leese**, Leader of Manchester City Council, says: “*After the year we've all had that has been such a massive challenge for our cultural sector - which was the first to lockdown a year ago and will be the last to reopen - Manchester needs MIF this year more than ever.*

*Manchester has always been a city that values and champions culture and is rightly recognised across the globe for its strengths and innovation in this. As we now begin to move out of the pandemic, we're very clear that the cultural sector has an enduring and important part to play in our recovery.*

*Thanks to the determination and creativity of the MIF team and all the artists and others who are part of this year's festival, I have no doubt that MIF21 will put Manchester back in the spotlight once more, firmly centre-stage again, leading the way as ever and showing the rest of the world what Manchester does best."*

MIF21 programme:

A series of works in public spaces around the city includes, on the Festival’s opening night, a daring new outdoor dance work by French choreographer **Boris Charmatz** (10000 Gestures MIF19). *Sea Change* will fill Deansgate with a chain of professional and non-professional dancers – including around 150 local residents – each performing and repeating a dance movement on the spot while the audience walks past the dancers to animate the action into a kind of living flipbook.

Argentinian art pioneer **Marta** **Minujín** presents*Big Ben Lying Down with Political Books,* a monumental 42m sculpture of the iconic London landmark in Piccadilly Gardens. Assembled from 20,000 copies of books that have shaped British politics, it is a joyful provocation to reimagine our national symbols and unite around democracy and equality.

Also responding to the events of the past year, artist and activist **Cephas Williams** presents a series of portraits of Black British people, including many from Manchester, displayed throughout Manchester Arndale, making visible and highlighting the contribution of Black people living in the UK.

**Christine Sun Kim** has created a series of installations that caption the world that surrounds us - from descriptions installed on buildings, to a plane with a banner caption flying over the city. Playful, powerful and political, *Captioning the City* invites us to consider what makes up the essence of a city – and to experience our world in a whole new dimension.

Opera and Theatre director **Deborah Warner** will unveil a new sound and light installation, *Arcadia,* created specifically for the site of The Factory. Due to be completed later next year, the new landmark cultural space, designed by internationally-renowned architects OMA, will be the permanent home of MIF. For one night only, audiences will be invited to wander through a field of luminous tents housing a murmuring soundscape of poetry inspired by the natural world: from **Sappho** to **Simon Armitage** and from **William Blake** to **Sabrina Mahfouz**, featuring recorded contributions from leading actors and musicians including **Simon Russell Beale, RoxXxan, Jane Horrocks, Brian Cox, Lionness, David Thewlis**, and many others.

Poetry is also the subject of a collaboration by curator **Hans Ulrich Obrist** and poet **Lemn Sissay** at HOME’s gallery and across the city. *Poet Slash Artist* brings together poets who work with visual art, and visual artists who work with poetry from **Tracey Emin** to **Inua Ellams**, **Imtiaz Dharker** to **Jota Mombaça**, **Precious Okoyomon** to **Adonis**. Alongside, Cerys Matthews will curate *CATCH A FIRE: a celebration of music, stories, lyrics and poetry* inspired by the *Poet Slash Artist* exhibition, which takes place at Homeground, HOME’s open-air stage.

One of the most compelling pieces of writing to be published in 2020 was **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s** essay for the New Yorker, *Notes on Grief*, a tribute to the father she loved ‘so much, so fiercely, so tenderly’ and a poignant meditation on the meaning, impact and nature of grief. Director **Rae McKen** takes the acclaimed author of *Half a Yellow Sun*’s words and transfers them to the stage in this powerful and timely MIF21 world premiere.

The need to care for those alongside us and the earth that sustains us is the theme of *All of This Unreal Time,* a new film starring **Cillian Murphy**, written by **Max Porter** and directed by **Aoife McArdle** with music by **Aaron Dessner**, **Bryce Dessner** and **Jon Hopkins**, which candidly examines one man’s failings. It will be presented for its MIF21 world premiere as an immersive installation in surround sound.

The way we play has taken on a new resonance over the months of lockdown. Marking 25 years of **Theatre-Rites** (The Welcoming Party, MIF17), *The Global Playground* is an uplifting new show mixing dance, music, theatre and puppetry for children and family audiences, choreographed by **Gregory Maqoma** (*Tree* MIF19) and scored by **Ayanna Witter-Johnson,** whichconsiders how we connect and sometimes disconnect and how we make the most of the time we spend together.

At the Whitworth, a major exhibition that coincides with the tenth anniversary of **Forensic Architecture,** *Cloud Studies,*exposes how state power mobilises the air we breathe to suppress and dominate. The exhibition includes the first phase of a significant new investigation on environmental racism in Louisiana’s Cancer Alley, a region where majority-Black communities are exposed to the most toxic air in the US.

A new commission by Turner Prize winner **Laure Prouvost**, *The long waited, weighted, gathering,* will mark the opening of the redeveloped and extended Manchester Jewish Museum. The immersive installation will include a new film, shot inside the museum and in the surrounding Cheetham Hill area, inspired by the museum’s history as a former Spanish and Portuguese synagogue.

Leading Pakistani artist **Rashid Rana** presents a project conceived entirely around his concept of *EART.* It includes an anti-consumerist grocery store that will open as a fully functioning Manchester shop, selling generic and unbranded produce, seeking to reframe the act of buying as a social, personal and global cause.

*I Love You Too* is the largest UK exhibition to date by South African artist **Kemang Wa Lehulere** which takes over the grand Reading Room of Manchester Central Library.It includesthe publication of a book of love letters told by over 100 residents from across Greater Manchester to a team of poets and writers.

*Postcards From Now* is a set of new film projects by leading artists from across the globe which ask how Covid-19 compels us to question how we will all live in the future. Choreographer **Akram Khan** and animator and film director **Naaman Azhari** explore how tragedy can bring us together; visual artist **Ibrahim Mahama** gives an insight to creative education for young people in rural Ghana; a collaboration between choreographer **Lucinda Childs** and the artist collective **(LA)HORDE** shows the artistic process of creation in lockdown across borders; and director **Lola Arias** exposes and explores ageism in a pandemic society. The films will be available on BBC iPlayer as well as at mif.co.uk.

An eclectic music programme spans internationally-acclaimed artists and homegrown talent including two special performances from the singer-songwriter **Arlo Parks** with musicians from Manchester’s Royal Northern College of Music; **Damon Albarn** performing new songs from his latest project*The Nearer the Fountain, More Pure the Stream Flows;* and the UK premiere of **Laurent Garnier: Off the Record,** a film about club culture and the part the techno pioneer has played in its relentless rise*.* A partnership with **Homecoming**, the Lagos-based festival of African creativity, music, fashion, sport, politics and art – will see the first event in a long-term relationship as MIF prepares for The Factory – featuring British-Nigerian/Ghanaian rap collective **NSG**, hotly tipped Afrobeat act **Midas the Jagaban** plus special guests.

*Rooted in Rhyme* will take audiences on a journey deep into Manchester’s Hip Hop underground with a packed line-up taking in everything from urban pioneers to emerging grassroots talent in collaboration with **Unity Radio** and **Manchester Hip Hop Archive**; emerging Islamic culture festival **Salaam** will showcase the music talent of singer **Abi Sampa,** kora virtuoso **Sona Jobarteh** and poet **Muneera Pilgrim**; and **Manchester Camerata** will perform a site-specific concert called *The Patience of Trees,* featuring a newly commissioned concerto for solo violin, strings and percussion by **Dobrinka Tabakova** and performed by **Hugo Ticciati**, inspired by the healing potential and power of the natural world.

**Festival Square** returns in the new location of Cathedral Gardens designed by the architects Hawkins\Brown. The hub of the Festival in the centre of the city, audiences can expect fun-filled days of food, drink and free entertainment. Expect curated nights from **Jamz Supernova**, **Homoelectric, Mr Scruff** and **DJ Paulette** along with many more artists and performers from across the UK.

As part of their 200th anniversary celebrations, **The Guardian** will co-host a keynote lecture on the opening night of MIF. **Marta Minujín** will explore the urgent themes of our time through the lens of ‘work in progress’, followed by a Q&A.

MIF’s online channel **MIF LIVE** returns for the Festival following the success of the free programme for audiences at home during lockdown. A rich online offer includes a mix of performance, live music, exclusive interviews, and a range of commentary and talks, providing a window into the Festival and giving audiences the opportunity to interact and engage with MIF wherever they are in the world.

Online audiences are also able to visit the *Virtual Factory* - a major series of online artworks inspired by the architecture and the ambition of the building – which include a playable interpretation of The Factory in Fortnite Creative. Premiering during MIF21, artist, writer and game designer **Robert Yang** and illustrator **Eleanor Davis** have created a queer video game which explores gender, sexuality, gardening and society.

*The Walk,* is a major production from **Good Chance**, in association with **Handspring Puppet Company**, which will enact the journey of a nine-year-old refugee girl in the form of a giant living artwork. Originally due to conclude during MIF21, MIF will be marking the start of Little Amal’s journey from the Turkish-Syrian border in a special ceremony in July 2021, before welcoming her to the city for the finale event later in the year.

For the first time, Manchester residents will take over the curation of the Festival’s talks and discussions series, building on MIF’s pioneering work with the community as artistic collaborators, such as *Festival in My House* where Greater Manchester residents programmed their own international micro-festivals. Featuring a range of speakers, including artists, activists, key workers, campaigners and members of the Greater Manchester community, Looking *Forward to Tomorrow* will explore some of the big issues of the day including the climate emergency and anti-Black racism.

Local people are at the heart of many commissions, including *Sea Change, I Love You Too* and *Portrait of Black Britain.* Greater Manchester residents are also involved in this year’s Festival volunteer programme involving hundreds people from the region, a new Neighbourhood Organiser initiative connecting the Festival to communities around Greater Manchester and a wide-range of opportunities to perform on Festival Square.

With the creative community seriously affected by the COVID-19 crisis, MIF has been supporting local artists and creatives in a number of ways including selecting five Greater Manchester artists for Creative Fellowships which provide mentor support, a £3,000 bursary, and opportunities to shadow the creation of major Festival productions. MIF has also been supporting those involved in Manchester’s music scene through **MIF Sounds**, providing funding and professional guidance, and is a major partner in **Manchester Independents** - supporting independent artists and companies in Greater Manchester to develop and share their work across the summer, including during the festival.

***ENDS***

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**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

**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.