

Press Release

Monday 26 February 2024

TOM BLOXHAM MBE STEPS DOWN AFTER ALMOST 20 YEARS AS FOUNDING CHAIR OF MIF AND FACTORY INTERNATIONAL

Award-winning developer Tom Bloxham MBE steps down as Chair of Factory International this week, the organisation behind the biennial Manchester International Festival (MIF), and Manchester's landmark new arts venue Aviva Studios. He will hand over the baton to Moira Sinclair MBE, who has been announced as the new Chair from 1 March.

Bloxham's near 20-year year tenure has seen the establishment of MIF – now one of the world's leading arts festivals, and the first to be entirely focused on the commissioning and producing of ambitious new work - and the conception and development of Aviva Studios, the landmark new home of Factory International which opened in October 2023.

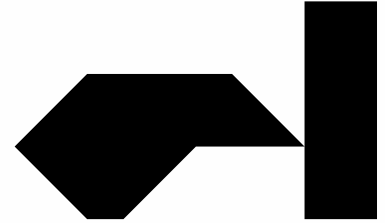
Tom Bloxham says: *"I've had an amazing 19 years, working initially with Sir Richard Leese and Sir Howard Bernstein and latterly Bev Craig, Joanne Roney and Luthfur Rahman at Manchester City Council to develop the concept of Manchester International Festival and Aviva Studios. It's been a delight to work first with Alex Poots, then John McGrath, on establishing from scratch one of the world's great art biennials, and then seizing the opportunity to harness considerable financial support from HM Government and Arts Council England to build our new home Aviva Studios – bringing new money to the arts and new money to Manchester. I am hugely proud of what we have created for the people of Manchester - showing what can be achieved with ambition and allowing great artists to create the works they have always dreamed of here in Manchester. Now that we have successfully opened Aviva Studios, I'm delighted to hand over the baton to Moira who I know will do a brilliant job overseeing the organisation as it continues to grow and flourish."*

Formed from an ambition to grow Manchester's reputation internationally as a creative city following the 2002 Commonwealth Games, MIF has been staged every two years in Manchester since 2007, commissioning, producing and presenting world premieres by world-renowned artists including **Marina Abramović, Damon Albarn, Laurie Anderson, Björk, Idris Elba and Kwame Kwei-Armah, Akram Khan, David Lynch, Wayne McGregor, Yoko Ono, Skepta and The xx**. The festival's success under the artistic direction of Alex Poots initially and now John McGrath, has attracted significant national and international audiences, widespread critical acclaim, and generated over **£300m** economic activity for the city since its inception. Working closely with cultural organisations globally, much of the work made at MIF has also gone on to travel the world, reaching an audience of **1.8 million people** in more than 30 countries to date.

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Aviva Studios, the new home of Factory International and the UK's newest cultural landmark, grew out of the festival's legacy – sharing its focus on commissioning new, large-scale work and building on MIF's record of working with communities, and bringing jobs, skills, training and creative opportunities. With its epic scale and ultra-flexible design, Aviva Studios is a unique and invaluable addition to the national and international arts landscape - a place where artists can create work of invention and ambition of a kind not made anywhere else in the world - and bolstering Manchester's credentials as an economic and creative powerhouse. Its development unlocked over **£100m** of new public funding into Manchester including **£99.05m from HM Government and £7m National Lottery** funding from Arts Council England - the largest investment in a national cultural project since the opening of Tate Modern in 2000. Over the next decade, Aviva Studios is projected to **generate £1.1 billion** to the city's economy and support **1,500 direct and indirect jobs**.

Aviva Studios provided a centrepiece to the 2023 Manchester International Festival in July, hosting a series of preview events including a spectacular exhibition by **Yayoi Kusama**, and gigs by the likes of **Angelique Kidjo** and **John Grant**. A [report](#) to Manchester City council's Economy and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee this month revealed that MIF23 attracted over **325,000 visitors** and **generated £39.2m of economic activity** to the city. In October, the venue officially launched to sold out audiences and critical acclaim with its opening production, the Matrix-inspired *Free Your Mind* created by a world-class creative team including **Danny Boyle, Es Devlin, Boy Blue** co-founders Kenrick 'H2O' Sandy and Michael 'Mikey J' Asante and **Sabrina Mahfouz** and featuring over 50 dancers from the Northwest and across the UK. It was followed by *The Welcome*, an invitation from local people to celebrate the new cultural space opening in the heart of their city, programmed by Greater Manchester residents; two nights with **Johnny Marr** and an orchestra of northern musicians; and a stage adaptation of Oliver Jeffers' award-winning book *Lost and Found* from BAFTA award-winning director **Will Brenton** with music from **Gruff Rhys** of Super Furry Animals.

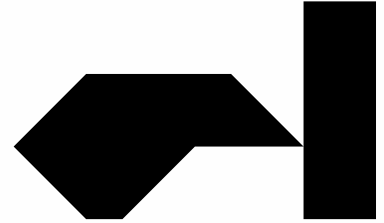
John McGrath, Artistic Director & Chief Executive, Factory International says: *"Tom has been a truly inspiring Chair at every stage of the journey for Manchester International Festival, and Factory International. From the very first plans to create a unique festival of new commissions for the 'Original Modern City', to the vast ambitions of our new venue, Aviva Studios, Tom has guided and supported the team here in such a generous and wise way. We simply wouldn't be here now without his leadership and spirit. Manchester as a city, alongside myself as an individual, and so many artists and audiences, all owe him a huge debt of gratitude."*

Sir Nick Serota, Chair, Arts Council England said: *"Tom has played a pivotal role in the establishment of Manchester International Festival's reputation for developing and delivering world class artistic activity. His vision and commitment to the cultural life of the city, its communities and visitors, as well as to artists and creatives, has generated two decades of innovation and acclaim. He leaves a huge legacy, notably the creation of Aviva Studios as Manchester's landmark new venue,*

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but also a team and an organisation with the potential to achieve even more."

Councillor Luthfur Rahman OBE, Deputy Leader Manchester City Council, said: *"The cultural landscape in Manchester now is very different from what it was nearly two decades ago, and Tom has played no small part in this - always big on ideas and ambition and helping us shape the changes and improvements we've seen during this time. Supporting us in our ambitions to make Manchester a place where culture and arts are valued, not just for the feelgood factor they bring but also the inward investment they drive and the opportunities they bring for local audiences and artists to get involved and grow their own skills. So it's a big thank you from the city to Tom - a standing ovation no less - for his energy, enthusiasm and continued support over the years and for everything he has helped us achieve."*

Ends.

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NOTES TO EDITORS:

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.

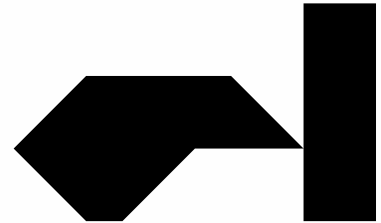
Factory International builds on the legacy of Manchester International Festival, one of the world's leading arts festivals, and the first to be entirely focused on the commissioning and producing of ambitious new work. Staged every two years in Manchester since 2007, world-renowned artists from different art forms and backgrounds create dynamic, innovative and forward-thinking new work reflecting the spectrum of performing arts, visual arts and popular culture, staged across Greater Manchester. Working closely with cultural organisations globally, whose financial and creative input helps to make many of these projects possible, much of the work also goes on to travel the world, reaching an audience of 1.8 million people in more than 30 countries to date.

A space for invention and discovery, the design of Factory International's new home, 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

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ambition, of a kind not seen anywhere else in the world, and providing a 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, while the venue's outside areas come alive with pop-up performances, events and markets, creating a thriving new riverside destination for all.

This new cultural landmark strengthens the city's status as a national and international centre for culture, creativity and innovation, as well as a major visitor destination. Its economic impact will be considerable, creating or supporting up to 1,500 direct and indirect jobs and adding £1.1 billion to the city's economy over a decade. 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 plays an important role in the lives of Greater Manchester residents, bringing jobs, skills, training and creative opportunities for local people and artists. Its pioneering creative engagement and artist development programmes creates year-round opportunities for local people to get involved, from participating in flagship commissions, co-designing programmes of activity, to shaping the organisation through involvement in its public forums. Through the Factory Academy, Factory International is training the creative workforce of the future, providing opportunities for careers in Manchester's ever-growing creative industries, while talent development programmes such as the Factory Fellowships see emerging artists placed alongside international creatives.

Factory International is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

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About Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 we will invest over £467 million of public money from Government and an estimated £250 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision.

www.artscouncil.org.uk

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