

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

Press Release

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Press images: [here](#)

Local school children's creativity goes on display through huge art installation at the Southbank Centre

- Nearly 3,000 young people from London, Birmingham, and Manchester have taken part in the Southbank Centre's expanded schools programmes, to mark the 75th anniversary of the arts centre.
- Through the *Imagine the Future* project, led by poet Lemn Sissay, over 90 classes wrote a poetry line, brought together to form *Gift to the Future*. This collaborative poem has been transformed into a large-scale physical art installation, open to the public this summer.
- As part of the *Reframe: Inspire Schools* project, students have created multimedia digital zines, exploring their visions and dreams of the future. Their work is on display in an online showcase.



Gift to the Future installation at the Southbank Centre; Michael Rosen performing for the children involved at the 10 July celebration event
© Belinda Lawley

Nearly 3,000 young people from London, Birmingham, and Manchester have taken part in the Southbank Centre's expanded schools programmes to mark its 75th anniversary.

Supported by Apple, the *Imagine the Future* and *Reframe: Inspire Schools* projects empowered over 2,750 young people in London, Birmingham, and Manchester to get creative through zine and poetry making – boosting their digital literacy, creative writing and creative confidence. The projects were

delivered in partnership with Factory International in Manchester and Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) in Birmingham.

For the *Reframe: Inspire Schools* project, young people took part in digital zine workshops led by artist-educators. 21 schools were involved and 105 workshops were delivered, reaching 476 students. The project focuses on increasing essential digital skills through the creation of multimedia creative zines. Using the Apple iPad, students weaved together visual art, poetry, and digital layout design, mastering creative technology to create zines themed on celebrating their local areas, personal dreams, and life in 2026. *Reframe: Inspire Schools* is in its third year of delivery.

The *Imagine the Future* programme, led by renowned poet Lemn Sissay and a team of poet-educators, combines poetry and visual art. Between January and April 2026, the team worked with 2,319 schoolchildren in 93 classes from over 40 schools across the three cities to explore how history can help us understand the present and look forward to the future. The students were introduced to visual poetry which explores language as a visual medium designed to spark imagination and creativity, using creative formats such as blackout poetry and poetry comics. The Southbank Centre is home to the National Poetry Library, which holds the largest public collection of modern poetry in the world, including hundreds of visual poems to inspire creativity.

The result of their imagination is a 93-line collaborative poem called *Gift to the Future*, with each class contributing a single line curated by Sissay and the poet-educator team. This powerful piece has been transformed into a large-scale, site-wide physical public art installation, making the voices of this new generation visible to the Southbank Centre's over 11.6 million visitors. To further celebrate their work, the children's visual poems have been compiled and preserved in a special-edition 75th-anniversary newspaper anthology, representing their gifts to the future.

Lemn Sissay, poet ambassador for *Imagine the Future*, said: "*It is my conviction that we think in poetry and speak only in inadequate sentences. In an act of deliberate unification, a single line from each school has been woven into a collective poem, and each line is emblazoned somewhere upon the fabric of the Southbank Centre itself. This is a place of dreams, and there is nothing more concrete than that. This thrilling tension, this interplay of linguistic and material form, is Gift to the Future.*"

The Southbank Centre invites the public to pick up a *Gift to the Future* newspaper and use its map to explore the poetry installation across the site throughout the summer, as well as browse the online *Reframe: Inspire Schools* zine gallery, witnessing these young voices and their visions of the future.

As part of the Poetry International Festival, participating schools from both projects came together at the Southbank Centre for an epic celebration event on **Friday 10 July**, seeing nearly 3,000 schoolchildren take over the site. The students enjoyed witnessing their work on display, alongside special live performances from Lemn Sissay and former Children's Laureate Michael Rosen, as well as visiting the Anish Kapoor exhibition at the Hayward Gallery.

Beyond the student experience, the projects create a sustainable educational legacy by training and providing resources to the over 100 teachers involved. United by a shared commitment to upskilling educators, both programmes offer shared Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions and an expanding bank of video tutorials to equip teachers with digital design skills.

Mark Ball, Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre, said: *"The Southbank Centre was born out of the 1951 Festival of Britain, where art, design and technology gave the nation a real tonic after the trauma of WW2. 75 years later, we're doing exactly the same thing: using arts and culture to bring optimism and hope for the future. We've had nearly 3,000 brilliant school children from London, Birmingham and Manchester writing poetry and making digital zines for our big 75th anniversary. Seeing their hopes and dreams of the future taking shape in poetic form across the Southbank Centre is just incredible. It shows the next generation that their voices, dreams and creativity matter. This has been a massive, national team effort. A huge thank you to the students, teachers, artists and our fantastic partners at Factory International, MAC and Apple who rolled up their sleeves to make this happen."*

Lynsey Rutter, Head of Learning and Participation at Midlands Arts Centre (MAC), said *"As we complete the Reframe: Inspire Schools and Imagine the Future projects, we are immensely proud of our Birmingham students for their participation, creativity and enthusiasm. Working with local artists, students developed their digital and analogue creative skills to produce zines of high quality and local relevance, as well as exploring poetry as a form of collective expression. We have loved seeing their passions, ideas, local pride and hopes for the future echo through their work. We were also delighted to welcome students who visited MAC twice during the project, days we hope will encourage students to think of their local arts centre as a place for them, and their families, in the future."*

Amber Calland, Young People and Family Lead at Factory International, said *"Reframe: Inspire Schools and Imagine the Future are about creating opportunities for young people to realise that their ideas, voices and creativity matter. When students are given the space to experiment, make, create and tell their own stories, you see confidence grow and ambitions expand. Developing creative and digital skills isn't just about future careers; it's about helping young people imagine what's possible and feel empowered to shape it. Seeing Manchester students share their work and have their voices celebrated on a national scale is incredibly powerful, it sends a clear message that their perspectives belong at the centre of our cultural future."*

Press images can be downloaded [here](#)

#ENDS#

NOTES TO EDITORS

For further information, contact emily.palmer@southbankcentre.co.uk

About Schools at the Southbank Centre

- The two projects, **Imagine the Future** and **Reframe: Inspire Schools**, are part of the Southbank Centre's school programme and its wider 75th-anniversary celebrations.
- **Reframe: Inspire Schools** utilises Apple technology in digital zine workshops, allowing students to create zines that reflect what matters to them. In this cohort, the themes identified by the young people reflect a compelling mix of contemporary concerns, future aspirations, and local pride. This creative exploration explicitly aims to inspire and encourage more young people to pursue creative subjects at

GCSE level, with their collaborative portfolios now available in a [dedicated online showcase](#). Read more about the project [here](#).

- **Imagine the Future:** This project aims to ignite a love for poetry and encourages children to express their hopes and dreams for the future through visual poetry. Led by Lemn Sissay, this national project saw over 2,300 schoolchildren from over 40 schools take part in workshops in their school, with every class submitting a line of poetry forming a 93-line poem called '[Gift to the Future](#)', which has been transformed into a public outdoor art installation, open until 27 September. Read more about the project [here](#), and see the installation [here](#).
- Both projects focus on upskilling teachers, providing shared CPD and resources to embed digital design and creative writing skills in the classroom beyond the projects.

Artists credited

- **Imagine the Future** poet-educators: Grace Atkinson, Griot Gabriel, Arji Manuelpillai, Astra Papachristodoulou, Bradley Taylor, James Wilkes
- **Reframe: Inspire Schools** zine artists: Mike Emerson, Jasmine Issaka, Alima Rico, Rachel Rollins, Lu Williams
- Thanks also to SOUP Design Studio for their part in realising the Gift to the Future installation

About the Southbank Centre

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest multi-arts centre and engages the most diverse audiences of any performing arts organisation in the UK. Our biggest venue, the Royal Festival Hall (2,700 seats) is the lasting legacy of the 1951 Festival of Britain and the ambition and values of that project – that arts, ideas, innovation and culture can heal communities and should be available and accessible to everyone – are still our guiding principles today. The Southbank Centre is uniquely able to offer a wide-ranging, inclusive and world-class artistic programme spanning contemporary visual arts, music, dance, performance, literature, comedy and spoken word across the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, the Hayward Gallery and our free spaces. We are also home to the National Poetry Library, the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP), two resident organisations (Kinetika Bloco and Tomorrow's Warriors) and six resident orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Philharmonia Orchestra). The Southbank Centre's 75th Anniversary Season is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

www.southbankcentre.co.uk

About the Southbank Centre's National Poetry Library

The Southbank Centre's National Poetry Library is the largest public collection of modern poetry in the world and is housed at the Southbank Centre in London. Founded by the Arts Council in 1953 and opened by poets T.S. Eliot and Herbert Read, the library contains over 200,000 items spanning from 1912 to the present day, extensive resources for poets, academics, schools and families. Hosting exhibitions and events, as well as offering an extensive catalogue and ebook service accessible online, the library is free to use

www.nationalpoetrylibrary.org.uk

About Lemn Sissay

Lemn Sissay OBE FRSL is a renowned poet, playwright, memoirist, performer, and broadcaster. Awarded the 2024 Hay Festival Medal for Poetry, he is a three-time Sunday Times bestselling author. His autobiography, *My Name Is Why*, was a Number One bestseller, and his collection *Let The Light Pour In* also achieved bestseller status. Sissay was appointed an MBE and later an OBE in 2023 for services to literature and charity. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and holds seven honorary doctorates. Sissay served as Chancellor of the University of Manchester from 2015 to 2023, where he is now the Honorary Chair of Creative Writing. He is also a Fellow of Mansfield College, Oxford. In 2012, he became the first poet commissioned to write for the London Olympics, where his landmark poem *Spark Catchers* remains on display at Queen Elizabeth Park. His acclaimed television documentaries, including *Superkids*, have earned BAFTA, Grierson, and RTS nominations. He has performed globally, from the Library of Congress to the London Palladium. In 2024, he curated the first Ethiopia Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

<https://www.lemnssissay.com/>

About Factory International

Factory International is the organisation behind Manchester International Festival (MIF) and the city's landmark cultural space, Aviva Studios. Building on the legacy of MIF – a leading arts festival staged biennially since 2007 – Factory International produces a year-round programme of original creative work on-site, online, and internationally. Designed by architectural practice OMA, Aviva Studios was developed by Manchester City Council with backing from HM Government and Arts Council England. Its ultra-flexible design features large, adaptable spaces that enable artists to create ambitious, large-scale work of a kind not seen anywhere else in the world. Deeply rooted in the community, the organisation provides jobs, skills, and training via the Factory Academy. Its creative engagement and artist development programmes offer year-round opportunities for local people to participate in and shape the organisation. Factory International is an Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation.

<https://factoryinternational.org/>

About Midlands Arts Centre

Midlands Arts Centre (MAC) is a contemporary independent arts centre and charity set in the magnificent surroundings of Cannon Hill Park, Birmingham. Founded in 1962, MAC presents a dynamic programme of art exhibitions, independent cinema, brilliant shows and performances, hands-on creative courses and much more. At the heart of MAC is a focus on sustainability, accessibility, and inclusion. As the most visited free attraction in the West Midlands (Visit England 2023), MAC works extensively to support international and local artists, and develop programmes for and with our local communities. As a registered charity, MAC is supported by players of the Postcode Lottery through the Postcode Culture Trust and Arts Council England.

<https://macbirmingham.co.uk/>