

# SOUTHBANK CENTRE

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## Press Release

**Date:** Wednesday 2 September 2020

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**Images:** Installation images [here](#); Images of works [here](#)

## THE FIRST EXHIBITION IN EUROPE CELEBRATING THE KEY WORKERS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC OPENS AT SOUTHBANK CENTRE



(Image caption L - R: Lydia Blakeley, *Jacqui*, 2020; Mahtab Hussain, *The Surgeon*, 2020; Ryan Mosley, *My Brother Paul*, 2020  
All images: Copyright the artists, 2020)

## ***Everyday Heroes***

**Until 1 November 2020**

Around the Southbank Centre Site

***Everyday Heroes*** is a free outdoor art and poetry exhibition that celebrates the contributions of key workers and frontline staff during the pandemic. *Everyday Heroes* features more than 40 newly commissioned portraits of some of the entirely ordinary but utterly remarkable people – among them health workers, bus drivers, faith workers and shop assistants – who helped to keep this country going during the crisis. The portraits are rendered in a variety of materials including paint, charcoal, photography, collage and language and they are presented across the Southbank Centre's outdoor areas as large posters and banners transforming the site into an outdoor gallery that is accessible to all for free.

From 4 September the exhibition will also extend off-site with portraits presented across several billboards on selected streets all over London and other cities throughout the UK including Birmingham, Brighton, Cardiff, Glasgow, Manchester and Sheffield. The off-site project is made possible through a partnership with creative street advertising agency **Jack Arts** who have provided advertising space across the country, for free.

For this exhibition, the Southbank Centre commissioned portraits from some of the UK's leading contemporary artists, including Turner-Prize winner **Jeremy Deller** and ground-breaking painters such as **Barbara Walker**, **Michael Armitage** and **Ryan Mosley**. Alongside their artworks, newly commissioned poems also celebrate and illuminate the often unsung lives of key workers, with contributions from Poet Laureate **Simon Armitage**, 2019; Scottish Makar **Jackie Kay** (Scotland's poet laureate); Ted Hughes award-winning poet **Raymond Antrobus**; 2020 T.S. Eliot Prize winner **Roger Robinson** and rising stars including poet and nurse **Romalyn Ante** and Bristol's City Poet **Vanessa Kisuule**.

Many of the contributing artists and writers have chosen to portray family members, friends, or people in their local communities. Several of the artists and poets have paid homage to the National Health Service and other essential frontline workers. **Michael Armitage's** painting, for example, features a pair of paramedics maneuvering a stretcher into an ambulance, as well as a team of refuse collectors pictured at work. **Mahtab Hussain** presents two portraits, one of a surgeon with the tools of his trade, and the other featuring his friend, the dermatologist Dr A Shahid, who worked throughout the pandemic whilst heavily pregnant.

**Lydia Blakeley** presents three works in the exhibition including a painting of her aunt Jacqui, a nurse at a community hospital in Oxfordshire. Even though this period has been extremely stressful and difficult for key workers, the artist wanted to portray individuals during a moment of calm. **Barbara Walker's** contributions to the exhibition depict NHS workers to whom the artist has a personal connection, including a painting of her daughter who is a frontline NHS worker, and who not only survived coronavirus, but immediately upon recovery, returned to her duties.

**Matthew Krishanu** has produced a group of portraits focussing on four female religious workers from Birmingham who continued to find ways to serve their community throughout the crisis. **Ryan Mosley's** painting depicts his brother Paul, a train driver who has continued to work throughout the pandemic, while renowned fashion photographer and artist **Juergen Teller** portrays two London bus drivers who he photographed at London Waterloo bus station, a short distance from the Southbank Centre.

Other artists consider recent events and the ways in which our lives have changed since the pandemic. **Jeremy Deller** reflects on recent events in the UK with a graphic artwork that reads 'An immigrant saving a racist's life x 500,000', which the artist describes as a word portrait of the UK in 2020. **Silvia Rosi** presents a series of photographs documenting her family's daily life during lockdown, and their new routines which, as for many others, included having to adapt to home-schooling.

The poetry portraits are equally arresting, personal and reflective of current times. In 'Heatwave', for example, **Romalyn Ante** offers a visceral and affecting poem about her mother, who, like her, works as a nurse. Poet and teacher **Raymond Antrobus** contributes 'On touch', an 'homage to the NHS', written after interviewing NHS nurse Joan Pons Laplana. Poet Laureate **Simon Armitage** wrote 'The Omnipresent' for *Everyday Heroes*, which opens with a powerful description of graffiti on a motorway bridge stating 'God is an ambulance'. **Jackie Kay** presents her new poem 'Home' which captures the unique position key workers have found themselves in during the pandemic. Speaking of the

importance of frontline workers, **Roger Robinson** notes: *'It wasn't the bankers, millionaires or computer magnates that we turned to in the crisis – it was the nurses, garbage cleaners, supermarket workers; I hope these people will be valued more.'*

Multi-Slam winning poet **Vanessa Kirsuule** has written her new commission fresh from her poem on the toppling of Edward Colston's statue going viral. Her new poem 'Scrunchie' depicts an everyday woman rejecting the notion of heroism. **About her commission Kirsuule has said:** *'Everyday Heroes gave me the opportunity to reflect on the micro effects of this global pandemic. Amid all the media flurry, it's grounding to consider the combination of mundane and exceptional things that any given person carries out on a daily basis.'*

**Ralph Rugoff, Director of the Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre, said:**

*"This extraordinary period in our history demands that arts organisations find new ways of responding to the moment and bringing art to the public. Everyday Heroes aims to celebrate those people who have helped to hold society together in one way or another over the course of this year. At the same time it also highlights a range of ingenious and inspired approaches to image-making and poetry whilst bringing the unparalleled site of the Southbank Centre to life in an entirely new way. At this particular moment, perhaps more than ever, this kind of outdoor exhibition can play a crucial role in furnishing the inspiration which visual art and poetry provide to our collective imagination and civic life."*

**Cedar Lewisohn, Site Curator, Southbank Centre said:**

*"Art and literature helped so many people get through the recent lockdown months. The artists and poets in this project feel as if they have produced a group of works with true meaning. We feel so privileged and honored to be able to put these works into the public sphere for everyone to enjoy and we're thrilled to be enlivening our site again with art outdoors."*

*Everyday Heroes* also features two poems by members of the public who have taken part in the Southbank Centre's **Art by Post** scheme. The poems were written by **Art by Post** participants **Luke Squire** and **Barbara Rigg**, and were selected by the Southbank Centre's Head of Literature and Spoken Word, Ted Hodgkinson. Luke Squire has been writing for 17 years; taking part in the scheme has been the first time he has shared his poetry in public. Barbara Rigg, 86, lives in the Lake District and has taken part in the Art by Post activities alongside her next door neighbour and friend, Kathryn.

This project animates the Southbank Centre's outdoor areas post-pandemic, providing an opportunity for visitors to the site to encounter art and poetry as they visit the newly reopened Southbank Centre Market, autumn pop-ups and the majority of restaurants, shops and cafes across the Southbank Centre site which have now reopened.

Key works are also presented on the Southbank Centre website, where they are accompanied by short texts, and statements from the sitters. The Southbank Centre will also be releasing video interviews with some of the participating artists on social media channels over the coming weeks.

*Everyday Heroes* is curated by **Cedar Lewisohn**, Site Curator, Southbank Centre and **Ralph Rugoff**, Director of the Hayward Gallery. The poetry commissions were selected by the Southbank Centre's Head of Literature and Spoken Word, **Ted Hodgkinson**.

**Ends**

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

The Southbank Centre is closed. Should you need to reach the press team, please contact: [press@southbankcentre.co.uk](mailto:press@southbankcentre.co.uk).

For more information, visit the Southbank Centre [here](#) and the *Everyday Heroes* website page [here](#).

### Join the Conversation:

@southbankcentre

@hayward.gallery

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### About Art By Post

Created under lockdown, *Art by Post* is a Southbank Centre initiative which sends out free creative activity booklets to people across the UK who are living with dementia and other chronic health conditions, and who have been most isolated by social shielding measures. The poetry, visual arts and craft activity booklets are created by artists and inspired by Southbank Centre collections, with participants invited to share their artwork with the Southbank Centre using the freepost envelopes provided.

### About the Southbank Centre

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre and one of the UK's top five visitor attractions, occupying a prominent riverside location that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. We exist to present great cultural experiences that bring people together and we achieve this by providing the space for artists to create and present their best work and by creating a place where as many people as possible can come together to experience bold, unusual and eye-opening work. We want to take people out of the everyday, every day.

The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 Festival of Britain. The Southbank Centre is made up of the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and Hayward Gallery as well as being home to the National Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. It is also home to four Resident Orchestras (London Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, London Sinfonietta and Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment) and four Associate Orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra and National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain).

### About Jack Arts

Jack Arts is a creative street advertising agency, specialising in the arts and culture space. For more than 25 years we have been crafting bold and unconventional campaigns to create dialogue on the street in an artful way. An agency with a difference, we run poster schemes in 10 cities across the UK. We also produce one of a kind special builds, murals, installations, ambient and experiential marketing campaigns to cause a welcome disruption on the street. Our experienced team, combined with our creative approach, has helped us build a reputation as the leading street advertising agency for the arts.