

SOUTHBANK CENTRE

PRESS RELEASE

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Ralph Rugoff to step down as Hayward Gallery Director in Spring 2026



Ralph Rugoff OBE, Director, Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre © 2017 Cesare De Giglio

The Southbank Centre has announced today that Ralph Rugoff OBE, Director of the Southbank Centre's Hayward Gallery, will step down in Spring 2026 after 20 years in post.

Ralph Rugoff, Director, Hayward Gallery says: *"I have a great love for the Hayward Gallery – for the artists we've shown and the audiences who've engaged with our exhibitions; for so many superb colleagues and the different communities we've worked with; and also for the building itself, which was ingeniously designed as a democratic forum that*

concentrates aesthetic experience. That architecture is a spur for all of us to try to make exhibitions in adventurous and unexpected ways that might not be possible elsewhere.

“Over the past two decades it’s been deeply rewarding to exhibit, commission and publish some of the world’s most compelling artists; to have the support of truly inspiring art patrons, philanthropists and collectors; and to partner with great museums and art organisations around the world. I believe the Hayward’s programme has made a positive contribution to what has been an era of remarkable change in the contemporary art landscape. I very much look forward to watching its next chapter unfold.”

Ralph was appointed Director of the Hayward Gallery in May 2006. Throughout his tenure, he has driven a rich and inspiring programme featuring diverse artists from across the global diaspora, working in and around complex themes in captivating and engaging ways and making them accessible to a wider public.

Group shows such as *Kiss My Genders*, *Dear Earth*, and *In the Black Fantastic* engagingly explored key concerns of contemporary life with ‘alternative blockbusters’ such as *Walking In My Mind* and *Light Show* drawing broad audiences with experiential installations. Ralph has also championed some of the greatest living British artists – from Bridget Riley and Antony Gormley to Jeremy Deller, Tracey Emin and Mike Nelson – and opened up the Hayward Gallery and wider Southbank Centre site with programmes of free exhibitions and playful public art.

In parallel to putting together an admired and respected programme, Ralph also developed the international touring of Hayward Gallery exhibitions, which in the past two decades have travelled to cities around the world, including Berlin, Beijing, Sydney, Sharjah, New York and Stockholm.

Ralph personally curated 23 major exhibitions for the Hayward Gallery over the past 20 years, including medium-specific group shows such as *The Painting of Modern Life* (2007), *Psycho Buildings: Artists Take On Architecture* (2008), *Invisible: Art About the Unseen, 1957–2012*, *Mixing It Up* (2016) and *When Forms Come Alive* (2023) and major survey solo artist exhibitions of artists such as Ed Ruscha, Jeremy Deller, Tracey Emin, George Condo, Carsten Holler, Andreas Gursky, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Kader Attia and Tavares Strachan.

In 2008, Ralph initiated a new programme of free exhibitions in what is now the Hayward Gallery’s HENI Project Space. Focusing on early career artists with little institutional exposure in the UK, the HENI Project Space has since showcased artists from over 40 different countries including Dineo Seshee Bopape, Cyprien Gaillard, Victor Man, Kate Cooper, Hicham Berrada, Nevin Aladag and Amol K. Patil.

Beginning in 2006 with the installation of Jeppe Hein’s ever-popular *Appearing Rooms* fountain sculpture in front of the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Ralph created an ongoing programme of accessible, free public artworks across the Southbank Centre site. Artists have included Phyllida Barlow, Tracey Emin, Yinka Shonibare, Klaus Weber, Bharti Kher, John Gerrard, Anthea Hamilton, Slavs and Tatars, Asim Waqif and Jyll Bradley.

Over the past 20 years, Ralph has also overseen the work of Hayward Gallery Touring, which supports museums and galleries across the UK with ambitious and imaginative exhibitions - reaching over 45 cities and towns nationwide, and over half a million audience members every year. Hayward Gallery Touring produces the *British Art Show*, the largest and most significant survey of contemporary art produced in the UK.

Ralph has also supervised the work of the Arts Council Collection which has been hosted at the Southbank Centre under his leadership throughout his time at the Hayward.

In addition to his work at the Hayward Gallery, Ralph curated the 2015 Lyon Biennale and in 2019 served as Artistic Director of the 58th Venice Biennale, *May You Live In Interesting Times*. In 2018, he led the Hayward curatorial team that programmed *Artnight 2018*, commissioning 11 artists including Halil Altindere, Lara Favaretto, Tamara Henderson and Prem Sahib to make new work in public spaces across Lambeth. He has been an advisor on a number of other international biennials, and served on the jury for the 2013 Turner Prize and the 2010 British Council selection committee for the Venice Biennale. In 2019, Ralph was awarded an OBE for services to the arts. He served as chair of the London Visual Arts Group from 2008 through 2022.

Prior to leading the Hayward Gallery, Ralph was director of the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art in San Francisco, where in 2005 he was awarded the Ordway Prize for Criticism and Curating. Before joining the Wattis, he was a highly sought-after voice in art and cultural criticism, being published widely in art periodicals including *Artforum*, *FlashArt*, *Frieze*, *The Financial Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The LA Weekly*, and *Parkett*.

Rugoff will continue to work as an independent curator and writer.

Elaine Bedell, CEO of the Southbank Centre, says: *“Ralph’s extraordinary passion and visionary leadership has seen the Hayward Gallery carve out an important space in the global contemporary art scene - showcasing diverse voices, platforming the greatest living international and British artists and making the space a welcoming and entertaining place for audiences across London and beyond.*

“Working alongside Ralph since 2017 has been a pleasure and a huge privilege. I can’t thank him enough for everything he has done for the Hayward and the Southbank Centre over the past two decades.”

Mark Ball, Artistic Director of the Southbank Centre, says: *“Over the past 20 years, Ralph’s curatorial insight and skill has greatly contributed to London’s reputation as a global capital of contemporary art. Under his leadership, the Hayward Gallery has welcomed millions of people, showing them how art can be playful, interactive and genuinely entertaining, while grappling with some of the biggest issues of our time.*

“I, along with my curatorial colleagues, are hugely grateful for his contribution to the Hayward Gallery and the wider Southbank Centre over the last two decades. It’s been a joy to work with Ralph, and I wish him the very best for the future.”

Misan Harriman, Chair of the Southbank Centre, says: *“Ralph’s extraordinary contribution to the Hayward Gallery and Southbank Centre, and the wider cultural clout of London and*

the UK cannot be overstated. I, together with the Southbank Centre Board, am hugely grateful to Ralph for his energy and passion and wish him every success."

Before Ralph's departure, the Hayward Gallery will open three major exhibitions: Gilbert and George: 21ST CENTURY PICTURES (opening October 2025); Chiharu Shiota: *Threads of Life* & Yin Xiuzhen: *Heart to Heart* (opening February 2026). Beyond the end of his Director role, Ralph will provide curatorial oversight for a major new solo exhibition opening June 2026 as part of the Southbank Centre's 75th Anniversary celebrations (to be announced this Autumn).

An international search for Ralph Rugoff's successor will begin in Autumn 2025.

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Press images can be downloaded [here](#).

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Southbank Centre

The Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre 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 six Resident Orchestras (Aurora Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and Philharmonia Orchestra). www.southbankcentre.co.uk/



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