

# SOMERSET HOUSE PRESS RELEASE

**MAT COLLISHAW: THRESHOLDS**

**18 May – 11 June 2017**

**River Rooms, Somerset House**

**Tickets from £3.50**

**On sale 20 February: [www.somerset-house.org.uk](http://www.somerset-house.org.uk)**



## ***Acclaimed artist Mat Collishaw turns to virtual reality for the first time to take audiences back to the dawn of photography***

- **New exhibition celebrates the pioneers of early photographic technologies**
- **Cutting edge VR technology recreates one of the world's first major exhibitions of photography**
- **Fully immersive experience includes sight, sound and touch**

This spring, Somerset House and Photo London, in collaboration with Blain|Southern gallery, is proud to present *Thresholds*, a new virtual reality artwork by internationally acclaimed artist Mat Collishaw.

Using the latest in VR technology, Collishaw is set to restage one of the world's first major exhibitions of photography for contemporary audiences. Visitors will travel back in time to 1839, when British scientist William Henry Fox Talbot first presented his photographic prints to the public at King Edward's School in Birmingham.

The experience will be a fully immersive portal to the past; visitors can walk freely throughout a digitally reconstructed room, and will be able to touch the bespoke vitrines, fixtures and mouldings; even the heat from a coal fire will be recreated. Infrared sensors will track visitors' movements, creating ghostly avatars that indicate their position and enhance the feeling of travelling through time. Collishaw has also created a soundscape to accompany the exhibition: the demonstrations of the Chartist protesters who rioted in 1839 on the streets of Birmingham, and who can be glimpsed through the digital windows.

The original 19<sup>th</sup>-century exhibition, staged by the British Association for the Advancement of Science, celebrated cutting edge technological innovation. Many new inventions were premiered there, a number of which have been faithfully researched and digitally reconstructed for today's audiences. Unfortunately, Fox Talbot's original images have faded almost beyond recognition with several of the surviving photographs existing only in light-proof vaults. *Thresholds* not only restages an important historical exhibition but provides a way to view images that have since been lost to the public.

Mat Collishaw said: *"I have been looking to work with virtual reality for a number of years and I'm delighted that it has now become a feasible medium for me to use in an artwork. VR's ability to enable visitors to revisit the birth of photography – a medium that has come to saturate our lives – is uncanny and compelling. It's also quite appropriate as VR is the total 360 degree immersion of the viewer within an image, and is itself one of the many innovations spawned by the invention of photography."*

*Thresholds* will launch as part of Photo London, the annual photography fair at Somerset House and will continue as a standalone show at Somerset House until 11 June. The exhibition will then tour to Birmingham, the city where the original exhibition took place. From the Waterhall at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, it then travels to National Trust property Lacock Abbey, Wiltshire, Fox Talbot's former home and The National Media Museum, Bradford, which holds original photographs and objects from Fox Talbot's career.

In creating *Thresholds*, Collishaw has worked with photographic historian Pete James; Paul Tennent from Nottingham University's Mixed Reality Laboratory; respected authority on Fox Talbot, Larry Schaaf; Architectural Historian David Blisset; the team at VMI studios and The Whitewall Company, London.

Mat Collishaw: *Thresholds* is supported by: Colmore Business District, Birmingham City University, King Edward's School, The Schools of King Edward's Birmingham, BOM, an Art Fund Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial Grant and the exhibition's touring partners.

Ends

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#### **LISTINGS INFORMATION**

**Dates:** 18 May – 11 June 2017

**Times:**

During Photo London: 12-8.30pm: 18 May, 12-7.30pm: 19 May, 12-7:30pm: 20 May, 12-6.30pm: 21 May

Then: (22 May -11 June) 10am-6pm: Saturday – Tuesday & 11am-8pm Wednesday – Friday.

**Tickets:** from £3.50 concessions (available at [www.somerset.org.uk](http://www.somerset.org.uk))

**Address:** River Rooms, Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 1LA

**Transport:** Underground: Temple, Embankment / Rail: Charing Cross, Waterloo, Blackfriars

**Website:** [www.somerset.org.uk](http://www.somerset.org.uk)

**Somerset House Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/SomersetHouse](http://www.facebook.com/SomersetHouse)

**Somerset House Twitter:** @SomersetHouse

**Somerset House Instagram:** @SomersetHouse

**Hashtag:** #Thresholds

#### **About Somerset House**

A unique part of the London cultural scene, Somerset House is an historic building where surprising and original work comes to life. From its 18<sup>th</sup>-century origins, Somerset House has been a centre for debate and discussion – an intellectual powerhouse for the nation. Somerset House is today a key cultural destination in London in which to experience a broad range of artistic activity, engage with artists, designers and makers and be a part of a major creative forum – an environment that is relaxed, welcoming, and inspirational to visit while providing a stimulating workplace for the cultural and creative industries.

Since its opening in 2000, Somerset House has built up a distinctive outdoor public programme including Skate, concerts, an open-air film season and a diverse range of temporary exhibitions throughout the site focusing on contemporary culture, with an extensive learning programme attached. In October 2016, Somerset House launched Somerset House Studios, a new experimental workspace connecting artists, makers and thinkers with audiences. The Studios provide a platform for new creative projects and collaboration, promoting work that pushes bold ideas, engages with urgent issues and pioneers new technologies. Somerset House is also one of the biggest community of creative organisations in London including The Courtauld Gallery and Institute of Art, King's College London Cultural Institute and over 100 other creative businesses. It currently attracts approximately 3.4 million visitors every year.

[www.somerset.org.uk](http://www.somerset.org.uk)

#### **Mat Collishaw**

Mat Collishaw (b. 1966) is a key figure in an important generation of contemporary British artists. He began his career exhibiting the acclaimed work *Bullet Hole* at the legendary show *Freeze* in 1988. His broad practice includes sculpture, photography, film and installation, and his work has been exhibited in numerous solo shows around the world, including: *The Centrifugal Soul*, Blain|Southern London (2017), *folly! Fountains Relief*, Fountains Abbey & Studley Royal, Yorkshire (2016); *Mat Collishaw*, New Art Gallery Walsall (2015); *Black Mirror*, Galleria Borghese, Rome (2014). Collishaw's work is in numerous public and private collections including; Tate, London, UK; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Arter Foundation, Istanbul; British Council Collection, UK; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Museum of Old and New Art, New South Wales and Olbricht Collection, Berlin. Represented by Blain|Southern, the artist lives and works in London. <http://matcollishaw.com>

#### **About Photo London**

Photo London was created to give London an international photography event befitting the city's status as a global cultural capital. Founded in 2015, it has already established itself as a world-class photography Fair and as a catalyst for London's dynamic photography community. From the capital's major museums to its auction houses, galleries large and small, right into the burgeoning creative community in the East End and South London, Photo London harnesses the city's outstanding creative talent and brings the world's leading photographers, curators, exhibitors and dealers together with the public to celebrate photography, the medium of our time. [www.photolondon.org](http://www.photolondon.org)

#### **About Blain|Southern**

Blain|Southern is a contemporary art gallery based in London and Berlin. The gallery represents an international roster of contemporary artists and is the world-wide representative of The Estate of Lynn Chadwick. The gallery's recent exhibitions include Tim Noble & Sue Webster, Nasan Tur, Chiharu Shiota, Ed Moses, Bruce Nauman, Abdoulaye Konaté and the critically acclaimed group show, *Revolt of the Sage*. [www.blainsouthern.com](http://www.blainsouthern.com)