

SOMERSET HOUSE PRESS RELEASE



Earth Day 2018 at Somerset House Sunday 22 April Free across Somerset House

On 22 April, Somerset House celebrates Earth Day - the world's largest environmental event - with a variety of extraordinary visceral experiences by leading artists. With a first-hand look at how we are polluting the air around us, the artworks are designed to deliver a powerful rallying cry to do more to protect the environment.

- A series of geodesic domes by British artist Michael Pinsky **recreate the air of locations across three continents** – London, Beijing, São Paulo, Tautra and New Delhi. Travelling through the *Pollution Pods*, visitors can sense the difference in these atmospheres and find the cleanest air anywhere in London.
- A **new flag**, flying at the top of Somerset House, will **change colour as it reacts in real-time to London's air quality**. The iconic colours of the Union Jack will transform, from red, white and blue to smoggy greys and sooty blacks, according to changes in the city, making the invisible visible.
- A host of hands-on workshops and talks from artist-activists on sustainable living, including a **tour to the secret coalholes beneath Somerset House's courtyard** where mushrooms are being grown as part of a new Edible Utopia project and an easy step-by-step workshop on **how to become a proud plant parent**.

Michael Pinsky: Pollution Pods
18 – 25 April, with a free talk from creator Michael Pinsky at 1.30pm on Sunday 22 April
Free, Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court

For a strictly limited time, Somerset House presents *Pollution Pods*, an innovative sensory installation in its courtyard by British artist Michael Pinsky. A series of five connecting domes will recreate the pollution from London, Beijing, São Paulo, New Delhi and Tautra in Norway.



Forming a ring in the centre of Somerset House's spectacular courtyard, visitors will pass through the climatically controlled pods to compare the quality of polluted global environments. All five *Pollution Pods* are linked, so that one has to pass through all of them in order to exit the installation. This visceral experience encapsulates the sense that the world – and our own impact on it – is interconnected.

The entry pod, emulating a peninsula in Norway called Tautra, will contain the cleanest air. Using Airlabs technology, all harmful gases will be fully removed, making it totally pure and reinstalling the sense of what it is like to breathe truly clean air. A smorgasbord of metropolises

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follow, each with their own specific and nuanced polluted environments, approximating accurately, yet safely, London's invisible but deadly output of Nitrogen Dioxide to New Delhi's suffocating haze of airborne particles.

It is estimated that the average Londoner, exposed to the current levels of pollution recreated in the installation, would lose up to 16 months of their life, with a resident of New Delhi cutting their life short by 4 years. In this work, Pinsky considers how the excessive consumerism of the West has far-reaching consequences on the environment of the East.

The artist said: "I wanted to test whether art can really change people's perceptions of, and actions around, climate change. In the *Pollution Pods*, I have tried to distil the whole bodily sense of being in each place. For instance, being in São Paulo seems like a sanctuary compared to New Delhi, until your eyes start to water from the sensation of ethanol, whilst Tautra is unlike any air you'll have ever breathed before, it is so pure."

"I have worked with a range of specialists – such as Lizzie Ostrom of Odette Toilette who co-curated Somerset House's Perfume exhibition last year – to do this, and you can feel such a startlingly difference in each pod. I hope such a strong visceral installation will leave a lasting impression and inspire people to think twice about their actions."

Pinsky's original commission was from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim for Climart and it is the first time that the *Pollution Pods* will be presented in the UK.

Michael Pinsky will discuss the process of developing Pollution Pods at 1.30pm on Earth Day.



T H E U N S E E N: Choropleth

The flag will be raised at midday on Sunday 22 April, with a free talk from creator Lauren Bowker at 1pm on Sunday 22 April Free, Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court

Launching on Earth Day 2018, Somerset House will raise a flag which reflects the impact of pollution on the environment around Somerset House.

Created by T H E U N S E E N, a material craft and innovation studio which started life at Somerset House, the *Choropleth* flag uses a chromic colour change compound developed by T H E U N S E E N, which reacts in real-time to ultraviolet (UV) radiation. The depletion of the ozone layer over London, due in large part to the capital's congested roads and continual construction, leads to astronomical amounts of greenhouse gases being emitted into the environment. This allows excessive amounts of UV radiation to unwittingly reach people on the city's streets.

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Taking the form of the Union Jack, the flag's iconic colours will transform in real time according to radiation exposure levels in central London, turning the invisible visible. When the red, white and blue of the Union Jack is more vivid, UV radiation exposure - caused by harmful human-made emissions - is low in the area surrounding Somerset House. However when the Union Jack becomes monochrome, the levels of exposure are higher.

Up close, the *Choropleth* flag also reveals a street map of London superimposed onto the Union Jack, highlighting the issue from its very source.

Founder of T H E U N S E E N, Lauren Bowker, was inspired to create the *Choropleth* flag whilst watching former US Vice President Al Gore introduce the premiere of *An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power* on *Film4 Summer Screen at Somerset House's* opening night last year, where he asked the audience to play their part in protecting the environment.

Lauren Bowker will discuss the artwork she developed in close detail at 1pm on Earth Day.

In 2016, Somerset House initiated a series of commissions with artists to design the flag, flying over its famous courtyard. Former flag artists include Jeremy Deller and Somerset House Studios artist Larry Achiampong. This significant commission provides access to free public art for audiences from multiple vantage points across London.

Edible Utopia

**Earth Day tour and workshop on Sunday 22 April
Free, South Wing, 12.00 – 15.00**

Edible Utopia at Somerset House is an educational food-growing project, taking root in hidden and overlooked locations around the building over the next three years. It is being spearheaded by a collective and co-op, Edible Utopia Ltd., comprising of artists and horticulturists, including Clare Patey, Jane Levi, Sophie Mason, Tim Mitchell and resident mycologist Darren Springer.

On Earth Day 2018, Edible Utopia Ltd will lead a free workshop on the science of happy houseplants and blooming buds, with the opportunity to create your own potent compost mix, taking this gardener's 'black gold' home and making your green spaces thrive. Visitors can also have the rare chance to see the secret coalholes beneath Somerset House's courtyard where mushrooms have started to grow, to be served up on plates later in the year.

Edible Utopia is one of the legacies of UTOPIA 2016, a year-long celebration of imagination and possibility at Somerset House, on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of Sir Thomas More's seminal text in 2016, and showcases Somerset House's longstanding commitment to sustainability.



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The food grown at Somerset House will ultimately be served back at Somerset House, through its on-site cafés and restaurants, reducing Somerset House's overall carbon footprint by creating a closed loop eco cycle on site.

Other Earth Day 2018 highlights

As well as *Pollution Pods*, the *Choropleth* flag and *Edible Utopia*, there will be a host of hands-on workshops and talks from artists who are contributing to our critical understanding of the natural world around us in new ways. All activities are free and drop-in across the site from 12 – 3pm on Sunday 22 April. Highlights include:

- Originally commissioned for Hull City of Culture 2017, artist Kasia Molga talks about her project *Coral Love Story*, which considers how wearable technology could make us feel more connected to changes in coral reefs, caused by climate change.
- Inspired by their film *Indigo Zoom* – depicting a dystopian future where no oxygen is left to breathe and corporations are selling air to the masses – artist Ayesha Tan-Jones stages an air purifying workshop, using everyday plants and herbs from the UK, and collaboratively creates a room spray to take home.
- Short film *Antarctica: The First Dance* receives its world premiere screening at Somerset House on Earth Day. Commissioned by Random Acts for Channel 4 and digital development organisation The Space, award-winning choreographer Corey Baker creates the first ever dance on the world's last great wilderness, Antarctica. Featuring star of Royal New Zealand Ballet Madeleine Graham, they were the only artists to be granted access to Antarctica in 2018 to foreground the fragile landscape, changing at astonishing speed as a consequence of global warming.
- Somerset House Studios artist Eloise Hawser takes visitors on a special tour of her exhibition *By the deep, by the mark*, which draws connections between the passage of water in the Thames and the flow of fluid in our bodies. For this Earth Day tour, Hawser will be joined by Stuart Williams, Lead Engineer of Tideway's 'Super Sewer'. Through her extensive research for the exhibition and Williams' industry expertise, they reveal innovative solutions to fight pollution in the River Thames.
- Makerversity, Europe's most exciting community of emergent makers based in Somerset House Studios, demonstrates a new climate data capture device, which it has designed with Climate Edge for farmers in developing countries.

How Somerset House is cleaning up its own act

Somerset House not only encourages the public to be more eco-conscious through presenting extraordinary artworks on the subject of sustainability, but also by leading by example.

In 2018, Somerset House installed public drinking water fountains, to help limit the need for single-use plastic bottles, and became a plastic straw-free site. One of its on-site restaurants, Spring, committed to going completely plastic-free by 2019, following the successful launch of its Scratch Menu last year, which creates meals with waste and surplus food to the kitchen.

Somerset House Studios – Somerset House's experimental workspace – also provides a platform for the development of projects that push urgent issues, such as the protection of the environment, with a number of innovative solutions being created inside the building. Such

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solutions include Superflux's 'Buggy Air', a mobile sensing kit to help parents understand their children's exposure to pollution, and Makerversity member Something & Son's line of jewellery created from coal to lock carbon into fashion and save it from being burnt, which can be purchased from Somerset House's on site and online shop.

There are also a number of resident organisations, including Julie's Bicycle, Hubbub, Annas Anam, Blue Marine Foundation, British Fashion Council to name but a few, who are also addressing these issues inside Somerset House.

Ends

For press enquiries, please contact:

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LISTINGS INFORMATION

Dates: Earth Day takes place on 22 April 2018. Some events listed may open before or continue after Earth Day. This is listed beside each entry if applicable.

Times: 12.00 – 15.00, see full schedule below

Tickets: Free

Address: Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court, Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 1LA

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

Website: www.somersethouse.org.uk

Somerset House Facebook: www.facebook.com/SomerSetHouse

Somerset House Twitter: @SomersetHouse

Somerset House Instagram: @SomersetHouse

Schedule

12.00 Launch of T H E U N S E E N: Choropleth

Talks:

13.00 Lauren Bowker, T H E U N S E E N: Choropleth

13.30 Michael Pinsky: Pollution Pods

14.00 Kasia Molga: *Coral Love Story*

14.30 Angela Chan, WORM: Ecology and Art

Tours:

13.30 Eloise Hawser and Stuart Williams

All workshops, Edible Utopia tours and *Antarctica: The First Dance* screening from 12.00-15.00

About Somerset House

Inspiring contemporary culture

A unique part of the London cultural scene, Somerset House is an historic building where surprising and original work comes to life. From its 18th-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

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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.somersethouse.org.uk

About Pollution Pods partners

Pollution Pods has been generously supported by the following organisations:

Norwegian Research Council, who have provided the project funding,

Build With Hubs, who have provided the technical expertise to construct the geodesic domes.

The Norwegian Institute of Air Research (NILU), who have provided the technical expertise to create the pollution environments.

Airlabs, who have provided an air-purifying unit for the entrance dome to create a clean air, unpolluted environment.

University of East London, who support Michael Pinsky's role as researcher.

NTNU Sustainability

About Edible Utopia partners

Edible Utopia is generously supported by the following organisations:

SYSTEMIQ

SYSTEMIQ aims to catalyse good disruptions in economic systems that will speed achievement of the UN Global Goals. With initiatives across the circular economy, land use and energy sectors, SYSTEMIQ builds coalitions to shape policies and business strategies, co-creates market-based solutions in partnership with the private and public sectors, and invests its own capital in early stage ventures with the biggest potential to rapidly transform economic activity. To learn more, www.systemiq.earth.

City Bridge Trust

City Bridge Trust is London's biggest independent grant giver, making grants of £20 million a year to tackle disadvantage and inequality across the capital. The Trust has awarded around 7,700 grants totalling over £370 million since it first began in 1995. It helps achieve the City Corporation's aim of changing the lives of hundreds of thousands of Londoners. www.citybridgetrust.org.uk