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UTOPIA 2016: A Year of Imagination and Possibility

Four seasons of events, exhibitions and new commissions celebrating the idea of utopia to mark the 500th anniversary of Thomas More's influential text

Launches on 25 January 2016

Somerset House, London

www.utopia2016.com

#utopia2016

UTOPIA 2016: A Year of Imagination and Possibility at Somerset House, launching on 25th January 2016, celebrates the 500th anniversary of the publication of Thomas More's inspirational text, *Utopia* – the largest ever celebration of this radical work anywhere in the world.

The year will span the realms of art, literature, society, fashion, design, architecture, theatre, film and beyond, featuring a varied and vibrant programme of special events, exhibitions, new commissions and activities across the entire site. For the first time, Somerset House will collaborate with its neighbours King's College London and the Courtauld Institute and Gallery, as well as other partners across the UK and mainland Europe.

Thomas More was the first to give a name and form to an idea that has captured human imagination throughout history: that by imagining a better world is possible, we are empowered to create it. His playful vision, published in 1516, presents an ideal society living on a fictitious island, described in a traveller's tale. More's *Utopia* is deliberately ambiguous, with the Greek words on which the name is based meaning both 'no place' and 'good place'. It is not a blueprint for the future, instead he places importance on the process of dreaming in the now. His work continues to inspire communities and provide a framework for true innovation in our time.

To celebrate More's vision, UTOPIA 2016, initiated by artistic advisors Ruth Potts and Gareth Evans, will explore challenges facing contemporary culture and society, from community and sustainability to the pivotal role of the arts and culture in creating the space where dreams can take root. Housing the largest community of creative organisations in London, Somerset House is uniquely placed to create the space for people to come together, imagine utopia for the 21st Century and explore its relevance today.

Jonathan Reekie from Somerset House Trust, Deborah Bull from King's College London and Deborah Swallow from The Courtauld Institute of Art said: "*Over the course of 2016 Somerset House, King's College London and The Courtauld Institute of Art will be transformed into a space of possibility, participation and imagination around the themes of utopia, where people from all walks of life will be invited to experiment with new ways we might live, make, work and play. We will create physical and virtual spaces where positive visions are nurtured, supported and celebrated, and where anything is possible*".

Launching UTOPIA 2016:

25 January 2016: Jeremy Deller and Fraser Muggeridge: Raising the Utopian Flag

The launch of UTOPIA 2016 will be marked by the raising of a specially commissioned Utopian flag by the celebrated artist Jeremy Deller and Fraser Muggeridge studio who have also developed the visual identity for the year. The flag will be raised on Monday 25th January as

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residents of Somerset House, and invited guests, gather in the courtyard. The pair have also produced limited edition copies of the book, *Utopia*, transliterated into Thomas More's imagined Utopian language and exclusively available from Somerset House and The Courtauld Gallery. Commenting on how they approached the brief of designing a visual identity for UTOPIA 2016, Jeremy Deller and Fraser Muggeridge said "*It's a great image that a caveman would understand, associated with all kind of utopias: consumer, religious and youth cultural.*"

In addition, the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, also a resident of Somerset House, have been commissioned to create a utopian fanfare especially for the launch.

January 2016 – December 2016: A Utopia Treasury (Great Arch Hall)

A Utopia Treasury, located at Somerset House's Embankment entrance and open throughout the year, will host a rolling programme of talks, debates, workshops, film screenings and salons, as well as a library full of 'utopia'- themed literature.

9 January – 22 March 2016: Utopia: Constructed, The Courtauld Institute of Art (Research Forum Lecture Series)

In The Courtauld's spring term, *Utopia: Constructed* explores the transformative power of architecture in the past, present and future and the interplay between the visual arts, social contexts, and intellectual communities. Speakers including Professor Reinhold Martin, Professor Ethan Matt Kavaler and artist Alex Hartley will investigate the multivalent modes of architectural research and artistic practice, and how the legacy of *Utopia* has been negotiated through space and ideas. The series is open to all and free, although advanced booking is required.

Spring highlights:

February - May 2016: Out There: Our Post-War Public Art and Venturing Beyond: Graffiti and the Everyday Utopias of the Street

Running side-by-side **Out There: Our Public Art** and **Venturing Beyond** will explore the Utopian nature of public art: official and unsanctioned.

Out There: Our Post-War Public Art (3 February – 10 April), produced by Historic England, will tell the story of public art created in England between 1945 and 1985. Many artworks have been lost, damaged, moved or destroyed, others have been saved and are widely loved, yet all were sited with care and conviction for the post-war public. Part of a broader public sector arts programme, the artworks were utopian in vision: designed to create a sense of shared experience and possibility, inspiring hope for the future. By uncovering the stories of a range of sculptures and reliefs by artists including Henry Moore, Elisabeth Frink and Paul Mount, the exhibition will raise questions about the role of public art then, now and in the future.

Venturing Beyond (3 March – 2 May) presented by A(by)P, will explore unsanctioned public art – graffiti – as an intrinsically utopian practice. In a literal sense, graffiti compels its practitioners to 'venture beyond' through encountering new places and straying beyond architectural boundaries, but also metaphorically provokes them to go beyond conceptual frontiers, to form new ways of thinking, acting and being in the world. Featuring leading artists from around the globe including Horfée, Revok, Filippo Minelli, Shepard Fairey and Swoon, this exhibition showcases specially commissioned work from these artists on the theme of 'Venturing Beyond'. It presents graffiti as an everyday utopian presence in the city and examines the aesthetic and social foundations of this art-form.

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19 - 23 February: Fashion Utopias - International Fashion Showcase

The British Council and the British Fashion Council will present work by emerging fashion designers from 25 countries in an exhibition entitled *Fashion Utopias*. Now in its fifth year, the International Fashion Showcase forms a key part of London Fashion Week's public programme and celebrates the universal relevance of fashion in contemporary culture. The exhibition will be arranged over 15 galleries, 13 of which will represent a country ranging from Austria and Ukraine to Lebanon and Indonesia. There will be one group installation, 'Next in Line' which will feature designers from 11 further nations including Argentina, Bahrain, Kazakhstan and South Africa. At the heart of More's *Utopia* is the understanding that we can learn from different places, peoples and cultures. The West Wing will be transformed into an imaginary terrain where an emerging generation of international designers and curators invite visitors to share their vision of the future.

13 March: TEDxCourtauldInstitute: Breaking the Rules

The Courtauld Institute of Art presents TEDxCourtauldInstitute: *Breaking the Rules* – a one-day conference of live speakers, performances and pre-recorded TED talks. Inspired by *Utopia*, the theme of the programme, *Breaking the Rules*, asks speakers and attendees to reflect what it means to dare to do things differently, break the rules and dream of change, be it for better or for worse. Life-changing innovations, actions and ideas will prompt us to question: if we break the rules of our present moment, what could the future hold? The Courtauld Institute of Art is the first public museum in the UK to host a TEDx event.

1 – 3 April: Now Play This 2016. Utopia at 'London Games Festival'

Taking the spirit of playfulness in *Utopia*, Somerset House will be home to everything games-related with Now Play This, as part of a new annual city-wide games initiative, 'London Games Festival', to showcase and celebrate the industry's huge cultural and economic impact. The weekend-long festival will showcase dozens of different games that visitors can take part in, from lo-fi physical games to newly released digital adventures.

21 April – 2 May: Pick Me Up 2016

The UK's first ever graphic arts festival, *Pick Me Up*, will return to its annual home at Somerset House, adopting the utopian theme of community for its seventh iteration. This year's festival will encourage interaction on all levels, from regular talks, demos and hands-on workshops to encouraging new collaborations especially for *Pick Me Up*. Visitors can see the best new work from a range of graphic arts disciplines presented and produced onsite whilst engaging directly with top emerging artists as well as established industry names.

As part of this year's focus on community, the graphic identity for *Pick Me Up* 2016 will be designed with unprecedented input from the public. Somerset House is working with London-based printing and publishing house Hato Press to create an online tool where members of the international graphic arts community as well the public can have their say about the typographic design of this year's logo.

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27 April – 22 May: Mirrorball by Katie Paterson - 70th Anniversary for the Arts Council Commission

The Arts Council Collection, the UK's most widely seen collection of Modern and Contemporary Art will mark its 70th anniversary during 2016 with celebrations including 8 new commissions that will go on display across the UK.

Katie Paterson's commission on display at Somerset House as part of UTOPIA 2016 will be a mirrorball comprising images of nearly every solar eclipse that has been documented by humankind; from the oldest drawings of a solar eclipse from hundreds of years ago and the earliest 19th century photographs, to images from the most technologically advanced telescopes today. A visually striking object that captures a sense of vastness and intimacy, reflecting upon the relation of the human being and cosmos, the piece provides perspective on shared history of an experience common to us all and the chance to recalibrate our notions of what the future could hold.

Summer highlights:

24 – 26 June: The Utopia Fair

Representations of contemporary utopian movements will fill the Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court, celebrating projects already flourishing in the margins and liminal spaces, and the importance of the spaces that artists create for dreaming. In partnership with the AHRC and the Connected Communities Programme, the fair will showcase the creative outcomes from 25 projects bringing together communities, researchers and artists around the UK to explore what utopia means to them. The Fair will enable visitors to join in and taste utopia now, inspiring them to take a piece of utopia home with them and into their lives.

6 July – 29 August 2016, Site-wide, Somerset House: Utopian Voices Here & Now

A new series of displays, installations and performances throughout Somerset House will showcase the utopian visions of contemporary UK-based artists and give voice to the issues most affecting them today, including the body, gender, sexuality and race. As part of UTOPIA 2016, this complex and challenging concept has resulted in a dynamic range of work, including IB Kamara's exploration of male sexuality through fashion and Matthew Stone's dynamic digital paintings.

1 July – 30 September: Paths to Utopia at King's College London

Paths to Utopia is a collection of new art works that is a summation of collaborations between artists, architects, technologists and King's academics. Utopian audiences will have the chance to meet whales, ascend to a community on the clouds, witness the ubiquitous, transcendent pursuit of creativity, take part in a unique educational experiment on a distant planet and much more. This wide-ranging exhibition features new works from Le Gun Collective, author Philip Hoare and artist Caitlin Shepherd and includes film, immersive installations, durational performance, a national scratch choir, talks and research, enabling audiences to gather a figurative map of what Utopia means today. Highlights include:

1 July – 30 September, Inigo Rooms, Somerset House: In Our Hands

Ernst Bloch declared in *The Spirit of Utopia*, 'Life has been put into our hands.' Picking up this direction, *In Our Hands* will give audiences the chance to experience a collection of intercultural Utopian art works drawn from Navajo designs, Roger Fry, Slavoj Žižek,

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and our stories of creation. Le Gun Collective and Richard Howells demonstrate how humankind is striving to fashion a better world from the raw materials we inherit.

1 July – 30 September, Inigo Rooms, Somerset House: We Account the Whale Immortal

The whale forever exists, like utopia, as a parable, a myth, and a nightmare - caught between the wide open ocean and our two-dimensional confinement, between reality and imagination. *We Account the Whale Immortal* by Philip Hoare and Jessica Sarah Rinland, is an ever-changing film and a one-off performance that explores the arrival of three mythic whales in the Thames, from the 17th to the 21st century, as evocative emblems of utopian intent. With Edward Sugden, American Literature at King's.

27 August, Kings College London: We're Here: Singing Our Way to Utopia

We're Here: Singing Our Way to Utopia is a bold experiment, a national scratch choir selected to roughly represent the UK's demographic make-up. Each singer will learn their part alone, and in a fragile utopian moment, come together for the very first time to perform the piece live at Somerset House. Artists Boff Whalley, Sarah Punshon and Daniel Bye work alongside Geography Professor David Green to bring this ambitious choir to life.

Autumn highlights:

7– 27 September: The London Design Biennale: Utopia by Design

From 7 – 27th September some of the world's most exciting and ambitious designers, innovators, and cultural bodies will come together at the inaugural London Design Biennale. This global exhibition, exploring the role of design in our collective futures, will occupy the entirety of Somerset House's exhibition spaces. Responding to the theme '*Utopia by Design*', creative teams from up to 40 countries and six continents will present installations which interrogate the history of the utopian idea, and address and explore the role of design in solving some of humanity's most pressing issues. The full list of nations, commissioners and design teams will be unveiled at an international press conference to be held at Somerset House on the 22 March. www.londondesignbiennale.com

8 October 2016 – 8 January 2017: A Civic Utopia: France, 1760 – 1840, The Courtauld Gallery (The Gilbert and Ildiko Butler Drawings Gallery)

This display considers the place of architecture in establishing the notion of public life, bringing together an outstanding selection of architectural drawings of public buildings and spaces. From the late Ancient Regime to the Napoleonic period and the early years of King Louis-Philippe in France, the display explores the idea of a 'scientific' city, in which rational, hygienic and symbolic expressions of civic life established a pattern for the improvement of society. If utopia is defined as the imagining of a comprehensive ideal system or pattern of civil organisation, then we can see this French vision as utopian, in which public places and buildings function to encourage the moral character of society.

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Elsewhere in London:

22- 27 February: LSE Space for Thought Literary Festival 2016

The London School of Economics and Political Science's 8th Space for Thought Literary Festival 'Utopias' will explore the power of dreams and the imagination and the importance of idealism, dissidence, escapism and nostalgia, as well as the benefits of looking at the world in different ways. Speakers include David Aaronovitch, AC Grayling, Robert Harris, Tom Holland, Margaret Macmillan, Anna Pavord and Zoe Williams.

24 May- 2 October: Utopia at the British Library

A free display in the Sir John Ritblat Treasures of the British Library Gallery will explore the history of *Utopia*, featuring an original first edition of the text and handwritten letters by Thomas More. The Library will also present talks and discussions exploring the genesis of Thomas More's *Utopia*, and the subsequent development of utopian thinking over 500 years, to the present and beyond.

Elsewhere in Europe:

20 October 2016 – 17 January 2017: 'In Search of Utopia' exhibition at M-Museum, Leuven, Belgium

Thomas More's *Utopia* was published in 1516 in the university city of Leuven, Belgium. To celebrate the 5th centenary of this milestone in Europe's intellectual and cultural history, the M-Museum in Leuven is hosting a major exhibition: *In Search of Utopia*. Opening with More's book, the exhibition spreads its wings, bringing together masterpieces by Quinten Metsijs, Jan Gossaert, Hans Holbein, Albrecht Dürer and others to explore representations of the boundless imagination of an ideal world in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The search for this world will be the focal point of a citywide programme of cultural, scientific and tourist activities entitled "500 Years of Utopia". Contemporary art, architecture, dance, film, music, art in public spaces, city trails, lectures and discussion forums will take centre stage during this period.

Further information on the programme for UTOPIA 2016 will be announced over the course of the year.

For press enquiries and images, please contact Josephine Rodrigues at the Somerset House Press Office on josephine.rodrigues@somersethouse.org.uk or press@somersethouse.org.uk / 020 7845 4624.

Notes to Editors

LISTINGS INFORMATION

Dates: Launching 25 Jan 2016

Opening Hours: Varied, please consult the website www.utopia2016.com

Admission: Please consult the website for specific events, locations and admission prices

Address: Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 1LA

Transport: ☉ Temple, Embankment ➡ Charing Cross, Waterloo

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About UTOPIA 2016

UTOPIA 2016 is four seasons of activity celebrating the 500th anniversary of the publication of Thomas More's Utopia. Published in Leuven in December 1516, More's Utopia presented an imaginative and playful vision of the world as it could be at a time of great change. More's Utopia is deliberately ambiguous: both "no place" and "good place", he is clear that many other visions for society are possible. Through a series of exhibitions, events, new commissions, talks and workshops, UTOPIA 2016 will explore the broad cultural history of the idea of utopia and its relevance to 21st-Century cultural, ecological, and social challenges and opportunities. The year celebrates the pivotal role of the arts and culture in creating spaces where utopian dreams are possible. Throughout UTOPIA 2016 people from all walks of life will be invited to experiment with new ways we might live, make, work, play and dream.

UTOPIA 2016 is a collaboration between three neighbours: Somerset House, King's College London and the Courtauld Institute and Gallery, in partnership with the British Library, the AHRC, the British Council, London School of Economics and Politics, M-Museum in Leuven, Guardian Live and Verso and will also engage many of the 300 plus creative organisations, artists and makers resident at Somerset House.

About Somerset House

Somerset House is a unique part of the London cultural scene, a historic building within which surprising and original work comes to life. From its 18th century origins, it has been a centre for debate and discussion – an intellectual powerhouse for the nation. Today, Somerset House is 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 to all 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 including photography, fashion, architecture and design, with an extensive integrated learning programme. We currently attract over 2.5 million visitors every year. It is one of the biggest communities of creative organisations in London including The Courtauld Gallery and Institute of Art, King's College London and over 100 other creative businesses. www.somersethouse.org.uk

About King's College London

King's College London is one of the top 20 universities in the world (2015/16 QS World University Rankings) and among the oldest in England. King's has more than 26,500 students (of whom nearly 10,400 are graduate students) from some 150 countries worldwide, and nearly 6,900 staff. Across King's, arts and culture offer distinctive opportunities to students and academics, helping to deliver world-class education and research that drives innovation, creates impact and engages beyond the university's walls. Our partnerships with artists and cultural organisations enhance the King's experience and, at the same time, add value and deliver benefits across the cultural sector. Culture at the university is under the leadership of Deborah Bull, Assistant Principal (Culture & Engagement), King's College London.

About The Courtauld Gallery and The Courtauld Institute of Art

The Courtauld Institute of Art is the world's leading centre for the study of the history and conservation of art and architecture. Through its unique integration of activities, facilities and resources, The Courtauld provides an exceptional environment for research, learning and professional development. Facilities for students are exceptional, including outstanding libraries, the Research Forum which offers access to visiting speakers from around the world and The Courtauld Gallery's outstanding collection. Open to the public daily, The Gallery is famous for its iconic Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces, as well as numerous other important paintings and works of art from the Renaissance through to the 20th century. The Courtauld Gallery regularly presents major exhibitions and special displays which are consistently acclaimed for their outstanding quality and originality.

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About the Arts and Humanities Research Council

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funds world-class, independent researchers in a wide range of subjects: ancient history, modern dance, archaeology, digital content, philosophy, English literature, design, the creative and performing arts, and much more. This financial year the AHRC will spend approximately £98m to fund research and postgraduate training in collaboration with a number of partners. The quality and range of research supported by this investment of public funds not only provides social and cultural benefits but also contributes to the economic success of the UK. www.ahrc.ac.uk

Connected Communities is a research programme that involves five of the Research Councils led by the AHRC. It seeks to build powerful and lasting relationships between researchers and communities, put communities at the centre of research that concerns them and to support research across disciplinary and organisational boundaries. Through such collaborative research it aims to help us understand the changing nature, and historical and cultural contexts, of communities and to understand how they can affect our current and future quality of life. www.connected-communities.org

About the artistic advisors

Ruth Potts is a co-founder, with Molly Conisbee, of bread, print and roses: a collective engaged in seditious pamphleteering, radical walking and anarchist baking. With Gareth Evans, Ruth initiated, and is an artistic advisor to, UTOPIA 2016. She is co-author of the *New Materialism* and was previously Head of Campaigns and Communications at the New Economics Foundation.

Gareth Evans is an independent curator, presenter, producer, and writer. With Ruth Potts he initiated, and is an artistic advisor to, UTOPIA 2016. Gareth is also a co-curator of the Estuary Festival, Swedenborg Film Festival, and the Whitstable Biennale. He is the London Review Bookshop Screen Co-Ordinator and curates film for the Whitechapel Gallery.

About Sipsmith

Sipsmith are proud to be supporting Somerset House and the UTOPIA 2016 project throughout the year. As the first copper distillery to launch in London for nearly 200 years, they bring with them their mission to return the art of uncompromising, small batch gin distillation to the capital where it all began. As true celebrators of craft and culture, the Sipsmith distillery team will work with UTOPIA 2016 curators to create bespoke cocktails and gins for the forthcoming events programme. www.sipsmith.com