

# SOMERSET HOUSE PRESS RELEASE

**John Gerrard: Western Flag (Spindletop, Texas) 2017  
21 – 27 April 2017**

**Free**

**The Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court, Somerset House, London**



© Richard Ansett

***A large-scale art installation by artist John Gerrard in Somerset House's The Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court on the occasion of World Earth Day***

This April, a computer generated flag, made from streams of black smoke and located on the site of the world's first major oil discovery, will be installed for the first time in Somerset House's neoclassical courtyard.

Commissioned by Channel 4 for Somerset House, artist John Gerrard has created a new life-like simulation of a flag, which is formed by endlessly emitting trails of thick black smoke. Flying silently, the flag is placed on a pole in a perfect, real-time replica of a salt dome field in Spindletop, Texas. The site is considered to be the birthplace of the modern oil industry, following the 1901 'Lucas Gusher', a strike which produced more oil in one day than the rest of the world's oilfields combined at the time. The site is simulated as it stands today, barren and depopulated, the original deposits long exhausted. It will precisely parallel the sunrises, sunsets and shadows of the real-life Spindletop, so visitors can view the changing Texan landscape in real-time.

Presented on a massive LED screen, it is the first solo large-scale installation in Somerset House's The Edmond J. Safra Fountain Court since 2015 and the first public showing of Gerrard's original artwork. Marking World Earth Day, the world's largest environmental movement on 22 April, *John Gerrard: Western Flag (Spindletop, Texas) 2017* will stand as a symbol of climate change and modern society's dependence on oil.

Looking deceptively like film or video, Gerrard's virtual worlds are made using real-time computer graphics, a technology developed by the military and now used extensively in the gaming industry. They are often painstakingly accurate, moving-image portraits of locations that speak to the way the modern world is changing, with previous productions featuring a Google 'data farm' and a 'Grow Finish' unit that fattens pigs for slaughter without the need for human supervision. His work has been exhibited around the world, including the recent Solar Reserve in the plaza of New York's Lincoln Center, which was subsequently bought by Leonardo DiCaprio and donated to Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The live presentation of *John Gerrard: Western Flag (Spindletop, Texas) 2017* will coincide with Channel 4's Man Made Planet season, which explores the impact humanity is having on Earth. Channel 4 will broadcast the artwork in short bursts that will abruptly interrupt the normal flow of transmission over the course of entire day and night on 22 April (World Earth Day).

The installation is supported by the Climate Change Collaboration.

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## **LISTINGS INFORMATION**

**Dates:** 21 April – 27 April 2017

**Times:** Daily, 07.00 – 23.00. Special late night opening on World Earth Day, please check website for further details.

**Tickets:** Free admission

**Address:** East Wing Galleries, Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 1LA

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

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

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

**Somerset House Twitter:** @SomersetHouse

**Somerset House Instagram:** @SomersetHouse

**Hashtag:** #WesternFlag

## **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.somersethouse.org.uk](http://www.somersethouse.org.uk)

## **About Climate Change Collaboration**

Climate Change Collaboration is a group of three of the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts. The Trusts are: Ashden Trust, JJ Charitable Trust and the Mark Leonard Trust. This group came together in 2011 to support pilot and research projects to find ways of reducing CO2 emissions quickly.