

London Design Biennale opens with over 30 pavilions from across the world

5-29 June, Somerset House

Installation images available [here](#) (uploaded through the morning 5 June)



L-R: Rachel Botsman, 'Roots of Trust' © Japan, 'Paper Clouds Materiality in Empty Space' © Oman 'Memory Grid'

- The fifth edition of London Design Biennale at Somerset House displays more than 30 pavilions by country and institution design teams and curators from across the world, showcasing world-leading design, confronting global challenges and inspiring audiences.
- The Biennale presents an immersive journey for visitors from soundscapes and visuospatial experiences, to hypnotic cubes and ancestral crafts.
- This year's Artistic Director, Dr Samuel Ross MBE, founder of A-COLD-WALL*, SR_A SR_A, and the Black British Artist Grants Programme, opened the Biennale with an introduction to his theme "Surface Reflections".
- Returning to the London Design Biennale, the Eureka pavilions span Somerset House's East and West Wings and Embankment Galleries, showcasing cutting-edge interdisciplinary projects from leading research departments that highlight design's role in shaping better futures.
- From 10-12 June, the Global Design Forum hosts a three-day series of bold talks and performances exploring the unseen forces shaping our world, featuring: Kengo Kuma, Mariana Mazzucato, Samuel Ross, Rachel Botsman and more.

Thursday 5 June: London Design Biennale opens today at Somerset House with over 30 pavilions from around the world responding to this year's theme, "Surface Reflections". Set by Artistic Director Dr Samuel Ross MBE, the 2025 Biennale explores the dynamic interplay between internal experience and external influence - inviting designers and audiences alike to consider what lies beneath the surface of the objects, systems, and spaces that shape our lives. In a time of global complexity and transformation, the Biennale boldly engages with themes of identity, memory, innovation, technology and craftsmanship through immersive installations, musical performances, soundscapes and hypnotic sculptural works.

London Design Biennale participants are:

Abu Dhabi, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Black British Artist Grants programme by SR_A, Chile, China, European Union, Design Council, Eco-Vision Plan, Hong Kong, India, Institute for Global

Prosperity at UCL, Japan, King's College London, Life Calling, Malta, Melek Zeynep Bulut, Netherlands, Nigeria, Northumbria University and University College London, Oman, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Rachel Botsman, Romania, Saudi Arabia, The Global South, The Silk Road Pop-Up by Teplo Store, Tijuana-San Diego, Turkey, UK Civil Service, Uzbek Design, VCUarts Qatar and World Monuments Fund and English Heritage.

In the East Wing, a series of pavilions explore themes of heritage, innovation and change. Poland's "Records of Waiting" fills the space with detailed wood carvings and drawings inspired by Polish Highland traditions, reflecting on time, patience and the politics of waiting. The Global South's "Wura" continues this thoughtful tone with a sculpture made from gold chain and cowrie shells, exploring the idea of value and the histories of trade, colonisation and cultural renewal. Abu Dhabi's House of Artisans showcases "Tides and Traditions", a sensory experience of the UAE's maritime crafts. Visitors will navigate Nigeria's "Hopes and Impediments", which uses imaginative storytelling to reimagine the Lejja community and questions fixed ideas of identity, heritage and change. In Peru's "Hæirloom", Andean women weave wigs from human hair using traditional methods - an act that preserves culture while supporting local communities and creating new opportunities for women. Malta's "URNA" envisions a new ritual for memorialising human remains in response to the legislation of cremation in Malta in 2019. It reflects on the importance of the traditional rituals and reimagines these meaningful ceremonies for the coming era.

In the West Wing, the focus shifts to the future of design. The Design Council's "Skills for Planet Blueprint" outlines the key skills designers need to create sustainable work, placing design at the centre of social, environmental and economic change. Northumbria University and UCL expand on this with "Living Assembly", an installation where architecture is grown, not built - using materials like mycelium and bacterial leather to form living, responsive structures. Melek Zeynep Bulut's "The Recursion Project: Levh-i Mahfûz" offers a reflective and philosophical experience. Its series of nested cubes encourages visitors to question what they see and think about design as both a mirror and a discovery. Oman's "Memory Grid" continues this reflective approach by channelling traditional pottery as a metaphor for what we value most. It connects ancient craft with digital ideas, prompting visitors to consider themes of survival, value and legacy. Finally, the Uzbek Design pavilion presents "The Once and Future Garden", inspired by the historic gardens of Samarkand. Four design studios showcase objects that reflect centuries of skill and tradition, while also pointing to a future - acknowledging its heritage whilst being shaped by ongoing cultural evolution.

Adorning the iconic Nelson Stairs, the Japan pavilion pays homage to traditional Japanese Washi paper. "Paper Clouds: Materiality in Empty Space" presents a Japanese poem to surface textures, and the strength and fragility of washi paper. Suspended in the air, these delicate forms - created by SEKISUI HOUSE – KUMA LAB with music by violinist-composer Midori Komachi - merge design, music and performance in a study of lightness, translucency and resilience.

Within Somerset House's Embankment Galleries, Rachel Botsman's "Roots of Trust" brings to life the world's first known organisational chart from 1855. Etched onto a floating glass panel and gently lit, the piece casts shadows that represent the movement of trust and power in

today's workplaces. It encourages visitors to think about how we organise information, authority and relationships. Nearby, VCUarts Qatar's "Matter Diplopia" explores how local and global influences shape society. Through joint projects by faculty, students and alumni, the pavilion looks at how Qatar's design identity balances tradition and innovation. China's "China Genome" also explores this balance, using porcelain as a canvas for cultural DNA. AI-generated glazes, 3D-printed shapes and hand-crafted pottery come together in a display that honours the past while imagining new futures. The Black British Artist Grants Programme by Dr Samuel Ross MBE offers a powerful response - an initiative focused on long-term support for underrepresented creatives. Here, design becomes a way to build equity, trust and community - bringing the journey full circle back to the theme of trust.

A full description of all participants is linked [here](#), in the London Design Biennale press pack.

Alongside the pavilions, the London Design Biennale 2025 presents a rich and thought-provoking programme of talks and performances, anchored by the Global Design Forum. Taking place from 10-12 June at King's College London, this three-day series of dynamic talks will explore the theme "Design and the Invisible." Leading voices from across design, architecture, economics, activism and technology will come together to challenge assumptions, amplify overlooked ideas and reimagine the role of design in society. Highlights include: architect Kengo Kuma in conversation with V&A Dundee Director Leonie Bell and Will Gompertz on the alchemy of materials and memory; economist Mariana Mazzucato debating the value of creativity with Gus Casely-Hayford, Director of V&A East; Artistic Director Samuel Ross and Director of London Design Biennale Victoria Broackes discussing the theme "Surface Reflections" with Charlene Prempeh; and designer and author Rachel Botsman exploring how trust can be designed into systems and spaces. The programme also features a live performance by violinist Midori Komachi, who will present "Paper Clouds: Materiality in Empty Space". Global Design Forum talks are free, but booking is required. This edition is supported by Digital Media Partner STIR and Session Partners Goldsmiths' Fair and the law firm Marks & Clerk.

Running alongside the main exhibition, the London Design Biennale's pavilions will host "Sessions" - a vibrant programme of workshops, film screenings, performances, and talks throughout June at Somerset House. These events offer visitors a deeper, more participatory exploration of the themes underpinning each pavilion. Highlights include a presentation of the Black British Artist Grants Programme by Artistic Director Dr. Samuel Ross MBE, and immersive exhibitions and screenings in the Film Studios, supported by AV Partner Blue Elephant, from pavilions such as the Netherlands, Tijuana-San Diego, and the UK Civil Service. The programme also features powerful documentary screenings, including 'Ajuju' by Nigerian designer Myles Igwebuike and 'Some Hairs Never Fall', linked to the Peruvian pavilion, both followed by Q&As with their creators. Visitors can engage with a dynamic Pecha Kucha presentation from VCUArts Qatar, experience an interactive policy game titled 'A Serious Game' from the UK Civil Service, and reflect on the digital age at the Life Calling pavilion's 'Note to Humanity'. The programme also includes an in-conversation event on coastal heritage, featuring Magnus von Wistinghausen of the World Monuments Fund and Rob Woodside of English Heritage. Session tickets are free with a biennale admission ticket, or £5 if bought separately.

In addition, as part of Somerset House's special 25th birthday programme, London Design Biennale and Somerset House are proud to be partnering with THE HERDS, a groundbreaking

public art and climate action initiative on a vast scale. The HERDS, a group of life-size puppet animals, created by The Walk Productions, will arrive in London via Tower Bridge on 27th June and make their way to London Design Biennale at Somerset House, on their first of three days stampede across the city. Their arrival marks the start of the London Design Biennale Late opening until 9pm. The evening will see the award of the Public Medal to the pavilion most voted for by the public, alongside performances in the iconic Edmund J. Safra Courtyard, including the Hampton University Choir.

Victoria Broackes, Director, London Design Biennale, says: *“The fifth edition of London Design Biennale invites the world to pause, reflect and look beneath the surface. At a time of global uncertainty, our designers and artists are not only responding to the challenges we face, they are imagining bold, hopeful alternatives. This year’s theme, “Surface Reflections”, captures a collective desire to reimagine the role of design in shaping a more thoughtful, equitable and connected world. From radical material innovation to deeply personal narratives, the 2025 Biennale is a proud celebration of design’s power to bring us together and help us imagine the future we want to build.”*

Dr Samuel Ross MBE, founder of A-COLD-WALL*, SR_A SR_A, and the Black British Artist Grants Programme, says: *‘As we open London Design Biennale, our theme of “Surface Reflections”, is at the fore of our minds and actions. We must consider the deep need of creative objective and thinkers amongst the current times. Collectively, they form a bridge, reflecting upon world affairs through surveying plausible solutions, rich in cultural and historic relevance. It is through the canon of design that empathy can fuse with objectivity and practical use. Topics such as ecology, death, belonging, raw material, water, ritual, digital architecture, emergency housing, sheep herding and sentient fungi have been unveiled. All topics cited, offering uplift and connections for humanity through the desire to better the world.’*

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

Press images and credit sheet: download [here](#)

Previous announcements: [here](#)

London Design Biennale 2025 Dates & Opening Hours

Preview: 05 June 2025, 12pm-4pm

06 – 29 June 2025, 11am-6pm (except Friday 27 June, 11am-9pm)

Website: <https://www.londondesignbiennale.com/>

Instagram: [@londondesignbiennale](#)

Facebook: [@londondesignbiennale](#)

Newsletter: [LDB bulletin](#)

Further information

London Design Biennale Medals

The following medals, designed by Shimell and Madden and produced by Fox Silver Ltd, will be awarded on the evening of 5 June:

- London Design Biennale Medal, awarded to the most outstanding overall contribution.
- London Design Biennale Theme Medal, awarded for the most inspiring interpretation of the theme “Surface Reflections”.
- London Design Biennale Best Design Medal, awarded to the contribution with the most exceptional design.
- London Design Biennale Public Medal, voted for by visitors.

The first three medal winners will be selected by the International Advisory Committee & Jury composed of leading creative experts with a strong commitment to and appreciation of design on 5 June. The Public Medal, voted for by visitors, will be presented on 27 June at 7pm in Somerset House’s Courtyard.

ENDS

Press pack, images and credits can be found here: <https://londondesignbiennale.com/press>

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Newsletter: LDB bulletin

Press accreditation is open. Please register [here](#).

Ticket information: This year, the Biennale is excited to introduce £10 Youth tickets for visitors aged 16-25 on weekdays, facilitating greater accessibility for young design enthusiasts. Advance tickets (£5 off full-price tickets) are on sale until midnight on 5 June.

London Design Biennale Sessions

Session tickets are free if purchased in conjunction with a Biennale admission ticket, or £5 without an admission ticket.

[Book here](#)

Global Design Forum

10-12 June 2025

The Great Hall, King's College London

[Free registration, book here](#)

Contact

For further information please contact:

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Full list of pavilions:

Abu Dhabi, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Black British Artist Grants programme by SR_A, Chile, China, European Union, Design Council, Eco-Vision Plan, Hong Kong, India, Institute for Global Prosperity at UCL, Japan, King's College London, Life Calling, Malta, Melek Zeynep Bulut, Netherlands, Nigeria, Northumbria University and University College London, Oman, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Rachel Botsman, Romania, Saudi Arabia, The Global South, The Silk Road Pop-Up by Teplo Store, Tijuana-San Diego, Turkey, UK Civil Service, Uzbek Design, VCUarts Qatar and World Monuments Fund and English Heritage.

About London Design Biennale

Established in 2016 by Sir John Sorrell CBE and Ben Evans CBE, London Design Biennale promotes international collaboration and the global role of design. Since its inception the Biennales welcomes the world's most exciting and ambitious designers, innovators and cultural bodies to the capital.

The fifth edition of London Design Biennale will take place from 5-29 June 2025, artistically directed by Dr. Samuel Ross MBE – British designer and artist who is the founder of A-COLD-WALL* and SR_A SR_A, as well as the Black British Artist Grants Programme. Taking over the entirety of Somerset House, from the Edmond J. Safra Fountain Courtyard to the Embankment Galleries, participants from across the globe are invited to imagine and enact new forms of international cooperation and participation, through the medium of design.

London Design Biennale's International Advisory Committee and Jury includes: Paola Antonelli, Rashid and Ahmed bin Shabib, Victoria Broackes, Ben Evans CBE, Dylan Jones OBE, Suhair Khan, Prof. Jeremy Myerson, Charlene Prempeh, Tosin Oshinowo, Jonathan Reekie CBE, Dr Christopher Turner and Ana Yang.

<https://www.londondesignbiennale.com/>

About Dr. Samuel Ross MBE

Dr. Samuel Ross MBE (26 May 1991) is a British artist & designer. Ross was born in Brixton, London, to second-generation Windrush parents of Caribbean descent.

His perspective is well documented, winning numerous awards, including three British fashion awards, two GQ awards and The Serpentine Hublot design prize. Ross' practice spans from intimate solo exhibitions with White Cube and Friedman Benda, to innovative wearable objects engineered with LVMH group, Nike group and Apple group.

He worked extensively with the late Virgil Abloh, as his first design assistant for numerous years, he exchanged thoughts, ideas and concepts with the generational polymath.

In 2014 Ross independently founded A-COLD-WALL*, a luxury sportswear brand, self-described as a 'material study for social architecture'. Then, in 2019 Ross founded SR_A SR_A. Its function is that of an ongoing exploration into the artisan-driven, industrial beautification of precious garments, objects and space. Additionally, in 2020, Ross founded The Black British Artist Grants Programme. Ross summarises the endeavour as 'holistic design for change'.

<https://samuel-ross.com/>

About Somerset House

Step Inside, Think Outside

As the home of cultural innovators, Somerset House is a site of origination, with a cultural programme offering alternative perspectives on the biggest issues of our time. In 2025, Somerset House celebrates its 25th birthday, marking its extraordinary transformation to one of London's best loved cultural spaces and home to one of the largest creative communities in the UK. To mark this milestone, there will be a special year of artistic innovation featuring genre-defying exhibitions, new commissions and events bringing audiences closer to the range of cross-disciplinary work from our unrivalled resident creative community, cementing Somerset House as a leading international arts destination.

From our historic site in the heart of London, we work globally across art, creativity, business, and non-profit, nurturing new talent, methods and technologies. Our resident community of creative enterprises, arts organisations, artists and makers, makes us a centre of ideas, with most of our programme home-grown. We sit at the meeting point of artistic and social innovation, bringing worlds and minds together to create surprising and often magical results. Our spirit of constant curiosity and counter perspective is integral to our history and key to our future.

<https://www.somersethouse.org.uk/>

Gusbourne: Drinks Partner

We planted Gusbourne's first vines in 2004 with a single-minded vision: to craft the world's finest sparkling wines. This means we're detail-focused and quality obsessed, pushing the boundaries of what's possible in English wine. We're also unwavering in what makes us special – crafting vintage-only bottlings from estate-grown, hand-harvested grapes.