

MANIFESTA

16

Ruhr

Press Release 25th of September 2025

## Manifesta 16 Ruhr: Intergenerational Team of Creative Mediators Announced to Work Across Four Cities in Abandoned Ruhr Area Churches

Press Release – 25th of September, 2025  
St. Josef Kirche, Gelsenkirchen, Germany

Manifesta 16, which will take place in 2026 in the Ruhr Area, investigated in its pre-biennial research phase how abandoned church buildings in different neighbourhoods could be transformed into communal centres for artistic and social practices. This research was developed by Manifesta 16 Ruhr's Urban Creative Mediator, Josep Bohigas, in his Urban Vision entitled *This is not a church* and through multiple Citizen Consultations which took place across the region. Both research projects presented the same conclusion.

Certain cities around the world focus their urban regeneration strategies on a radical idea of proximity, shortening the distances from our homes to the essential services of a fulfilling life. Many of these city initiatives aim to reclaim public space through the everyday dynamics of domestic life. The Ruhr Area, on the other hand, urbanised and expanded the development of neighbourhoods as early as the 20th century due to the close ties to the labour demands of the mining and steel companies. The result is a decentralised model of low-density settlements, forming a metropolis of (in)complete neighbourhoods within a polycentric region. The changing socio-economic construction of the Ruhr Area in the 21st century has demonstrated

the erosion of the functionality and identity of these neighbourhoods, reflecting a lack of social cohesion.

Cross-checking the outcome of the Urban Vision with citizens across the region has been an essential methodology for Manifesta in its recent editions. Through these Citizen Consultations, Manifesta 16 Ruhr gained a closer understanding of the current needs of the neighbourhoods and their communities around specific churches and what the role of the former local church buildings could become. The results revealed a distinct need to save these buildings and to ensure that the public space around them is reclaimed [see Annexe 3]. The municipal elections that took place across North Rhine-Westphalia on the 14th of September 2025 speak directly to this need, as many groups highlighted their dissatisfaction with the dysfunction of public space and their alienation from it.

These pre-biennial research processes offer the foundational methodology for the biennial. Building upon this research and reality, Manifesta 16 Ruhr poses the question: *How can artistic practices be used as an instrument to enhance socio-cultural change within these fragmented yet closely knit neighbourhoods and*

*become a resilient practice for addressing the ecological, social and economic challenges of the present?*

Having visited 200 churches across the region, the biennial has selected venues in four exemplary cities, creating a parcours of iconic, brutalist, underused or abandoned post-war churches. Manifesta 16 Ruhr will take place across Essen, Bochum, Gelsenkirchen and Duisburg [see Annexe 2].

The Artistic Team will consist of the Urban Creative Mediator Josep Bohigas, the newly appointed Public Programme Creative Mediator, Gürsoy Doğtaş, and an intergenerational model proposed by Manifesta 16 Ruhr's Director Hedwig Fijen. This polyvocal model introduces working with three tandems including internationally renowned European curators: René Block, Henry Meyric Hughes and Anda Rottenberg, each paired with a younger colleague in a collaborative tandem [see Annexe 4].

Each collaborative tandem of curators will respectively work in one city in the Ruhr Area. Anda Rottenberg (Poland), an acclaimed curator, will work alongside Krzysztof Kosciuczuk in Bochum. René Block (Germany), one of the pioneering figures of the Fluxus movement, will collaborate with Leonie Herweg, a young Berlin-based curator, in Essen. Henry Meyric Hughes (United Kingdom), former Director of London's Hayward Gallery, will develop a major historical project in Duisburg reflecting on Europe's past 30 years, investigating the changing DNA of Europe after the Cold War. He will work in collaboration with British writer and curator Michael Kurtz.

This initiative not only acknowledges the critical contributions of these pioneering professionals—who played roles in the formation of Manifesta—but also affirms the ongoing relevance of their experienced perspectives from the late 1980s and the fall of Communism to the current rise of populism and a war on the European continent. Each pairing will co-commission projects in the Ruhr Area's post-war modernist churches and their neighbourhoods spread across various cities.

The conceptual framework of Manifesta 16 Ruhr is profoundly shaped by the broader history of the biennial itself, marking its 30th anniversary since the first edition in Rotterdam in 1996. Born in a moment of post-Cold War optimism and European integration, Manifesta 16 Ruhr initially served as a platform for cross-border artistic exchange, particularly between East and West. Yet the past three decades have complicated that vision. Nationalist resurgence, political fragmentation, migratory upheavals and global crises—from wars to climate emergency—have redefined what Europe is and for whom it is imagined [see Annexe 1].

At a time of significant global realignment, this initiative underscores the importance of European solidarity and cultural cooperation. The collaboration between leading voices from the UK, Germany and Poland—three nations central to Europe's new political alliances—speaks to Manifesta's enduring mission: to respond to changing social and cultural conditions across the continent. The edition seeks to foster an urgent, shared transgenerational and transhistorical understanding of Europe—its past, its fractures and its potential futures.

## Notes to Editors

Manifesta 16 Ruhr will take place in Essen, Bochum, Gelsenkirchen and Duisburg from the 21st of June to the 4th of October 2026. The press and preview days will take place on the 18th, 19th and 20th of June 2025.

Press Kit: available [here](#)

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[Annexe 1](#) Manifesta 16 Ruhr Creative Mediators and Conceptual Framework

[Annexe 2](#) Manifesta 16 Ruhr Venues

[Annexe 3](#) Results Manifesta 16 Ruhr Citizen Consultations

[Annexe 4](#) Manifesta 16 Ruhr Creative Mediators Biographies

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