

MANIFESTA

16

Ruhr

Press Release

4th of December 2025

Manifesta 16 Ruhr announces neighbourhood projects selected through a region-wide Open Call forming the Manifesta 16 + Programme in abandoned churches across the Ruhr Area

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 St. Josef, Gelsenkirchen-Ückendorf

Manifesta 16 Ruhr, the 16th edition of the European Nomadic Biennial, presents a selection of projects that will transform underused or abandoned post-war churches into community spaces in different places in the Ruhr Area. The proposals were selected as part of the Open Call “This is not a church” to establish social, cultural and environmental projects across the Ruhr Area. The call for submissions opened in July 2025 and was directed towards individuals, collectives, grassroots initiatives, neighbourhood associations and institutions with strong connections to the region. The call focused on creatives who are deeply rooted in the area and are able to grasp the region’s social dynamics whilst designing projects in close collaboration with local communities. The selected projects will be presented as part of Manifesta 16 Ruhr + Programme parallel to the biennial from 21st of June until 4th of October 2026.

The Open Call saw an impressive 217 creative submissions, out of which 145 projects were from applicants based in the Ruhr Area. Led by a strong turnout from Dortmund, Herne, Essen, Mülheim an der Ruhr, Oberhausen and Gelsenkirchen, the submissions represent a diverse, decentralised geography. Applications also

arrived from Düsseldorf, Cologne and Berlin. International submissions from the Netherlands, Belgium and Barcelona show a lasting legacy of engagement from previous editions of Manifesta. From all submitted projects, more than half were newly conceived proposals.

Neighbourhood projects in ten cities in the Ruhr region

Reflecting interdisciplinary approaches and participatory formats, 16 outstanding local projects have been selected by an interdisciplinary jury. Spanning the ten cities of Essen, Bochum, Gelsenkirchen, Duisburg, Bottrop, Marl-Sinsen, Dortmund, Herne, Mülheim an der Ruhr, and Oberhausen, they invite citizens and visitors to immerse themselves in a delicate network of local narratives and realities representing the rich and diverse perspectives that constitute the fabric of the Ruhr Area. In this context, churches are reimagined as spaces of collective exchange, transforming into archives, acoustic laboratories, venues for community happenings or inclusive spaces for reading and creativity [see annexe 1].

As part of Manifesta 16 Ruhr + Programme, the selected initiatives aim to cultivate a sustainable

socio-cultural legacy by animating neighbourhoods, uniting social groups, and expanding the communal role of churches as secular, shared spaces through inclusive, contemporary methods.

Selection by an international jury of cultural professionals

Following the end of the submission phase by the end of September 2025, a jury of local and international cultural professionals selected the projects carefully to ensure diversity in both format and approach.

The jury members included: Hedwig Fijen (Director of Manifesta 16 Ruhr), Stefanie Reichart (Head of the Department of Culture, Sports and Industrial Heritage at the Regionalverband Ruhr), Carlos Antunes (Co-founder of Atelier do Corvo and director of Círculo de Artes Plásticas de Coimbra (CAPC) and Anozero Coimbra Biennial), Dr. Gürsoy Doğtaş (Curator, art historian and Public Programme Creative Mediator of Manifesta 16 Ruhr), Amira Gad (Conservator of Modern & Contemporary Art at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam), Prof. Dr. Renée Tribble (Head of Urban Development, Urban Land-Use Planning and Urban Design Processes at TU Dortmund University) and Prof. Dr. Barbara Welzel (Professor of Art History and Cultural Education at TU Dortmund University and co-initiator of the *Church Manifesto*).

Key priorities guiding the selection of projects were local engagement, with preference given to initiatives proposed by individuals or collectives either based in or actively working within the Ruhr Area.

Emphasis was also placed on participatory and community-based projects that will create a long-term impact within the local socio-cultural ecosystems, rather than traditional, exhibition-focused formats.

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.

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Annexe 1 Winners of the Manifesta 16 Ruhr
Open Call

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