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barbican

Barbican's Lakeside Terrace transformed with monumental new public commission by Ibrahim Mahama

Ibrahim Mahama: *Purple Hibiscus*

Barbican Lakeside Terrace

10 April – 18 August 2024

The commission has been made possible by Tia Collection with Associate Sponsor: Culture Mile BID. Additional generous support from The Ampersand Foundation and The African Arts Trust.



Ibrahim Mahama's Purple Hibiscus during installation at the Barbican, 2024. Courtesy Ibrahim Mahama, Red Clay Tamale, Barbican Centre, London and White Cube. © Pete Cadman, Barbican Centre.

April 9 2024 – The Barbican presents the first large-scale UK public commission to be presented in the UK by Ghanaian artist **Ibrahim Mahama** (b.1987). Transforming the Barbican's famous Lakeside Terrace, which sits at the heart of the brutalist complex, the site-specific artwork dramatically envelops the building's iconic concrete exterior with approximately 2000 square metres of bespoke woven cloth.

Purple Hibiscus, named after Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's eponymous 2003 novel, is an ambitious new commission created in collaboration with hundreds of craftspeople from Tamale in Ghana. The work has been woven and then sewn by hand to produce colossal panels of pink and purple fabric that fit the brutalist planes of the Barbican's Lakeside façade.

Embroidered onto the cloth are approximately 130 'batakaris' – robes worn by Northern

Ghanaian royals and ordinary people – which Mahama has collected through a process of exchange and barter from numerous communities across Northern Ghana. These precious textiles, often saved by families over generations, tucked away in wardrobes or stored below beds, carry the imprints of the lives, lineage and power of the figures they once clothed. Worn and bearing traces of years of use, these smocks are testaments to the endurance of traditional belief systems, and the continued relevance of intergenerational knowledge. Incorporating these smocks into the commission carries forward Mahama's deep interest in the life cycles of textiles and what can be learnt from the historical memories embedded within them.

By collaborating with networks of women weavers and sewing collectives for the production of *Purple Hibiscus*, Mahama is actively engaging with local economies. He believes that the making of his artworks should be connected to their local contexts and the lives of those communities. The vibrant hues of this particular work are a departure from his usual palette and are an expression of allyship with marginalised communities, while aiming to build new alliances.

Transported to the Barbican's Lakeside Terrace, Mahama's monumental commission gains new resonance. The Barbican Centre stands on the former Cripplegate parish, which was largely destroyed during the Second World War. A centre for the 'rag trade' in London, the area was sought out for the buying, selling and production of cloth. Viewed together, the hand stitched panels of *Purple Hibiscus* and the hand pitted concrete of the Barbican's rough concrete façade offer an expanded reflection on the relationship between the handcrafted and the monumental.

Mahama's practice is grounded in the democratic belief that art belongs to all. Fearless when it comes to scope and scale, his works claim space, demand questions and enquiry, but also reflect solidarity with the craftspeople, weavers and makers in Ghana with whom he collaborates. Committed to institution building, his Red Clay Studio and Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art in Tamale, Ghana, provide social infrastructure for arts education, exhibition making and residencies. At the heart of Mahama's practice is his conviction that Ghanaians, and all those outside of the exclusive environs of the art market, should have the opportunity to engage with art.

The Barbican commission coincides with the recent announcement of Ibrahim Mahama as the inaugural recipient of Dia's Sam Gilliam Award, which includes a \$75,000 gift and the presentation of a public programme at Dia Art Foundation in autumn 2024. The Sam Gilliam Award is made possible by a generous gift from the Sam Gilliam Foundation.

The commission forms part of the exhibition ***Unravel: The Power & Politics of Textiles in Art*** at Barbican Art Gallery until 26 May 2024.

Ibrahim Mahama, Artist, says: *"It's like doing plastic surgery, but this time you require a soul that dwells within the body, which is immaterial to build on the physical material. Collecting the individual smocks from communities can be quite challenging, but also opens up a portal of new formal aesthetics. Using the Alui Mahama sports stadium in Tamale as the primary studio space for the production of Purple Hibiscus allowed for us to organise the different layers of the work in ways we couldn't have possibly imagined. The scale of the material forms needed some level of freedom, which the space gifted."*

Shanay Jhaveri, Head of Visual Arts at the Barbican, says: “*Following Ranjani Shettar’s exquisite commission for the Barbican Conservatory, we are thrilled to be presenting Purple Hibiscus by Ibrahim Mahama. At a time of increasing fracture and disharmony, Mahama, with this monumental site-specific artwork – the second in our newly launched commission series – will transform the Barbican’s iconic Lakeside into a site and space for the commemoration of community, intergenerational memory and solidarity, all achieved by the incredible capabilities and capacity of the human hand.*”

Mahama’s commission reflects the Barbican’s commitment to platforming the best artists from around the world, delivering a diverse international programme across the Barbican Art Gallery, The Curve and beyond. Cementing the centre’s reputation as one of the UK’s leading commissioners of new artistic work, *Purple Hibiscus* forms part of a new strand within the Barbican’s visual arts programme which invites contemporary artists to create work in response to its unique public spaces. This exciting programme activates the Barbican’s unparalleled setting – recognised as one of the most significant architectural achievements of the 20th century – bringing artistic interventions and introducing dynamic, invigorating and stimulating art practices to new audiences.

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About Ibrahim Mahama

Ibrahim Mahama was born in 1987 in Tamale, Ghana. He lives and works in Accra, Kumasi and Tamale. His work has appeared in numerous international exhibitions including the 18th International Venice Architecture Biennale curated by Lesley Lokko (2023); *Thinking Historically towards the Past*, 15th Sharjah Biennial, U.A.E (2023); *Garden of Scars*, Oude Kerk, Amsterdam; The High Line, New York (2021); *NIRIN*, 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020); *tomorrow, there will be more of us*, Stellenbosch Triennale (2020); *Future Genealogies*, *Tales From The Equatorial Line*, 6th Lubumbashi Biennale, Democratic Republic of the Congo (2019); *Parliament of Ghosts*, The Whitworth, University of Manchester (2019); *Ghana Freedom*, inaugural Ghana pavilion, 58th Venice Biennale, Venice (2019); *Labour of Many*, Norval Foundation, Cape Town (2019); Documenta 14, Athens and Kassel (2017); *All the World’s Futures*, 56th Venice Biennale, Venice (2015); *Artist’s Rooms*, K21, Düsseldorf (2015); *Material Effects*, The Broad Art Museum, Michigan (2015); *An Age of Our Own Making*, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen and Holbæk (2016) and *Fracture*, Tel Aviv Art Museum, Israel (2016).

In March 2019, Ibrahim Mahama opened the artist-run project space Savannah Centre for Contemporary Art (SCCA) in Tamale, Ghana, followed by the opening of a vast studio complex, Red Clay, in nearby Janna Kpenɔ in September 2020. Encompassing exhibition space, research facilities and an artist-residency hub, both sites represent Mahama's contribution towards the development and expansion of the contemporary art scene in his

home country. In April 2021, Mahama opened a renovated silo, Nkrumah Volini, in Tamale. This was the third educational institution the artist opened in Northern Ghana in two years.

About Culture Mile

The fifth and latest business improvement district (BID) to launch in the City of London in April 2023, the Culture Mile BID represents the area stretching from Farringdon in the west to Finsbury Circus in the east.

Brimming with cultural creativity, commercial vibrancy and a strong sense of community, the area is home to globally famed institutions such as the Barbican Centre and the future Museum of London (reopening in 2026), as well as hidden gems including St Bartholomew The Great, London's oldest surviving church, and some of the last surviving sections of the 2,000 year old wall that once surrounded the City of London.

Through its work, the Culture Mile BID will inject £9m into the local area over the next five years, working in partnership with its levy-paying member businesses as well as the public sector to deliver a range of ambitious projects including major public realm enhancements, agenda-setting green and climate resilience initiatives and high-profile destination marketing campaigns.

About Tia Collection

Founded in 2007, Tia Collection is a global art collection based in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with a mission to support artists and museum institutions by acquiring and loaning works of art. Tia aims to foster dialogue, stewardship, and scholarship of art through its lending program, partner exhibitions and publications.

About Unravel

Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art is at Barbican Art Gallery from 13 February to 29 May 2024. The exhibition will travel to Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam from 14 September 2024 to 5 January 2025. The exhibition is curated by Wells Fray-Smith (Barbican), Lotte Johnson (Barbican) and Amanda Pinatih (Stedelijk), with Diego Chocano (Barbican). The advisor for the exhibition is Julia Bryan-Wilson. Architectural design is by Studio Donna van Milligen van Bielke & Ars de Vries Architecten and graphic design by Atelier Dyakova.

#Unravel @barbicancentre

About the Barbican Art Gallery

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

About the Barbican

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We're proud to be the home of the [London Symphony Orchestra](#), and a London base of the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#). We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other associates and partners including the [Academy of Ancient Music](#), [the BBC Symphony Orchestra](#), [Boy Blue](#), [Britten Sinfonia](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), [Darbar Festival](#), [Doc'n Roll Film Festival](#), [Drum Works](#), [EFG London Jazz Festival](#), [Human Rights Watch Film Festival](#), [London Palestine Film Festival](#), [Serious](#), and [Trafalgar Entertainment](#).

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Press Room

The image sheet is available in the [press room](#). Please contact the press team for high-res press images.

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