

NEWS ANNOUNCEMENT: For immediate release Wednesday 28 February 2024

barbican

Devyani Saltzman appointed Barbican's Director for Arts and Participation



The Barbican is thrilled to announce that **Devyani Saltzman** has been appointed its new **Director for Arts and Participation**. Saltzman is a Canadian writer, curator, public thinker, and cultural leader with over fifteen years of experience in cultural institutions, at the intersection between art, ideas, and social change. She will take up her new role in early July.

The appointment follows an extensive international recruitment campaign, launched in autumn 2023, for an exceptional individual to lead the Barbican's Arts and Participation team, with the skills and vision to steer the Barbican towards its next creative chapter. This appointment completes the Barbican's search for engaged and experienced Directors to drive the organisation's ongoing transformation: to grow and diversify its audiences, better serve its public, and fulfil its commitment to inspire, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

Working with Barbican's Heads of artforms – across Cinema, Creative Collaboration, Immersive, Music, Theatre & Dance, and Visual Arts – Devyani Saltzman will develop an inspiring, distinctive, and forward-looking arts and participation programme. She will act as an enabler for the arts, championing the industry, and connecting within and outside the organisation. Working with partners across the Square Mile, she will also play an important role in delivering Destination City, the City of London Corporation's flagship programme which sets out a vision for the Square Mile to become a world-leading leisure destination for UK and international visitors, workers, and residents to enjoy. The City Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican.

Saltzman was most recently Director of Public Programming at the Art Gallery of Ontario, North America's fourth largest museum, where she worked with the programming team to shape the museum as a forum for discourse, reflecting all communities and the narratives of Torontonians. She was previously the Director of

Literary Arts at the Banff Centre, a leading arts and creativity incubator, as well as a founding Curator at Luminato, Toronto's international multi-arts festival. She is a published author and her work has appeared in The Globe and Mail, The National Post, the Atlantic, Room Magazine and Tehelka, India's news magazine known for investigative journalism. She is the Vice Chair of the Writers' Trust of Canada and President of the Toronto Arts Council. Saltzman has written and spoken extensively about social change and leadership for The Walrus Talks, the Canadian Arts Summit, the World City Forum. She hosted the podcast The Culture Shift and is a founding member of the think tank Public Imagination Network.

Saltzman has a degree in Human Sciences from Oxford University, combining sociology, anthropology, animal behaviour and evolutionary biology to look at the complex underpinnings of human experience.

Key to her vision for the next chapter of the Barbican is the potential to create a new type of ethos in public institutions that is truly in service to their people and public, in addition to presenting the best of cutting-edge programming. Her upcoming nonfiction book, *EXITING: Towards a Future of Work that Serves Us All*, comes out with Random House in 2025. It explores the trend of increasing pushback against systemic change in our institutions, the exiting of diverse leaders from organizations they were invited into, and what new healthier systems could look like. Her first book, *Shooting Water*, a memoir of family relationships and Indian politics, was called 'A poignant memoir' by The New York Times and received starred reviews in both Publishers Weekly and Library Journal.

Claire Spencer, Barbican CEO, said: *"We are so thrilled with this appointment. As a Canadian with strong ties to artists and companies in South Asia, North America, and the UK, Devyani brings a wealth of experience, an international voice, and a new ethos of leadership based on collaboration, values and service to the public, both local and international. Her ideas and experience will be instrumental in our ongoing journey towards a revitalised Barbican, as London's creative catalyst for arts, curiosity, and enterprise, and a truly welcoming and transformational space for artists, audiences, and communities."*

Devyani Saltzman, Barbican Director for Arts and Participation, said: *"We are living through such an important moment in which cultural institutions have the opportunity to enter into a new way of serving their people and the public. I really believe this generation of leadership can envision not only the best of creative practice and programming, but embody a healthier way of thinking and working, especially for the communities we serve and our own staff. I'm honoured to be joining the extraordinary team at the Barbican. I can't wait to work with them and London's many communities, to create a space that is both international and deeply local: daring, trust-based, politically relevant, and at the forefront of artistic practice. I look forward to working with the team to present the most innovative and thought-provoking work, that addresses and makes space for the issues we are collectively facing and ensures the Barbican is authentically welcoming for all."*

Tom Sleigh, Chair of Barbican Centre, said: *"Devyani will be a fantastic addition to the Barbican's leadership team. The Barbican has always had a deeply international outlook, and I'm delighted that it continues to attract the best talent from around the world."*

Devyani Saltzman's arrival completes Barbican's senior team following the appointment of **Philippa Simpson**, Barbican's new Director for Buildings and Renewal, and **Beau Vigushin**, new Director for Audiences. They will join Barbican CEO **Claire Spencer** and the Director of Development **Natasha Harris** and **Sarah Wall**, Head of Finance & Business Administration; as well as recently appointed **Ali Mirza**, Director of People, Culture, and Inclusion; and Director of Commercial **Jackie Boughton**.

Further reaction to the appointment of Devyani Saltzman as the Barbican's Director for Arts and Participation:

"One of the most enriching experiences in life, is to witness someone else's journey; their outer and inner growth; their ups and downs, and how they manage at both states and in between them. I have followed Devyani's journey from the moment we met in the summer of 2010, from observing and learning about her

travels as she always seeks authenticity for the beautiful books she writes, to her curation of major cultural events, and to leading big teams from different backgrounds and different experiences in life, especially in a multicultural city like Toronto. And with all the challenges that face the arts and literature in the last, at least, five years, Devyani's spirit is always positive to build projects – of immense high quality – that bring communities together. Having Devyani in London is a great step towards a healthy artistic and cultural scene that a remarkable and hugely diverse city like London needs. Devyani's unmatched understanding of the essential ingredients of bringing different cultures together through art will be one of the strongest pillars that can hold the Barbican and different art organisations, their venues, and their communities together. I cannot wait to see the beauty and richness Devyani's appointment will bring to our city". **Ammar Haj Ahmad, Actor, The Jungle.**

"Devyani Saltzman's wide ranging international experience and knowledge of art, performance and politics and her understanding of audiences and communities makes her an inspired and inspiring choice for the Barbican Arts Centre. I have known the Centre since it opened the same year I first moved to London, and I look forward to this new, re-invigorated phase in its life as a cultural hotspot." **Aminatta Forna, FRSL, OBE.**

"After twenty-three years of knowing Devyani Saltzman in a hundred different places and lives, I'm thrilled beyond words that she's returning to my homeland and to a place I have long associated with the highest and most exciting forms of culture. I can't wait to see how the Barbican – and all Britain – will move into an exhilarating new future thanks to her presence and her vision." **Pico Iyer, essayist and novelist.**

"Devyani has an exceptional understanding of, and experience in, cross-genre arts programming. BAFTA shares a similar ethos with our year-round public programme showcasing the very best of film, games and television programme making in all its forms. I am excited to see the vision Devyani will bring to an already rousing Barbican programme!" **Mariayah Kaderbhai, Head of Programmes, BAFTA**

"As a London composer, producer and creative, I am so excited to welcome Devyani Saltzman as the new Director of Arts of the Barbican Centre. Having known Devyani for a number of years, I have no doubt that she will bring her exceptional understanding and knowledge of the arts to the Barbican along with her incredible passion and inspiring creative vision. I can't wait to see what she has in store for audiences and performers alike." Musician, producer, composer, and Ivor Novello Lifetime Achievement Award recipient **Nitin Sawhney CBE, D. Mus.**

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Notes to Editors

For further information, images or to arrange interviews please contact:
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Barbican press room

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communications team's contact details are listed on our website at www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room

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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