

MANIFESTA

Press Release

30th of April, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Founding Director Hedwig Fijen Steps Down as Manifesta Appoints New Leadership

After 30 years of developing Manifesta, the European Nomadic Biennial, into one of the most influential experimental cultural platforms in Europe, Founding Director Hedwig Fijen will step down on the 5th of October 2026.

Hedwig Fijen has served as director of Manifesta since 1991, when she was commissioned by the Netherlands Office for Fine Arts in The Hague to develop a pan-European platform. Over the past three decades, she has overseen the selection of Host Cities, curatorial teams and programme direction, while also leading the organisation as a whole.

“I am deeply thankful that Manifesta has helped shape a generation of curators and cultural practitioners, contributing to a vast body of more than 1,000 newly commissioned, site-specific works. It is especially rewarding that many artists realised their first major commissions within Manifesta, even under challenging geopolitical conditions. Working with ever-changing teams across more than 15 cities — alongside approximately 750 colleagues — has been an extraordinary experience, each contributing their own energy and perspective. I am proud to have transformed Manifesta into a hybrid, interdisciplinary platform focused on experimentation and transformative processes as an incubator for change.”

Hedwig Fijen

During her tenure, Fijen significantly expanded the biennial’s mission, transforming it from a primarily art-focused exhibition into a hybrid, interdisciplinary platform addressing social and urban change. She also introduced the pre-biennial research phase, bringing together architects, urbanists and cultural practitioners to engage deeply with local contexts.

“After 30 years, Manifesta as a nomadic biennial — founded in the aftermath of the Cold War — remains highly relevant within the cultural and urban landscape. Each edition asks not only what contemporary art is, but what culture can do in a specific place, at a specific moment — how it can engage with urbanism, public space and the lived realities of the city. This emphasis on context, long-term research and civic engagement sustains its influence, particularly in today’s debates around the social role of art, urban transformation and the connections it fosters.”

Supervisory Board, International Foundation Manifesta

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New leadership for the International Foundation Manifesta

Following a six-month transition period, the Supervisory Board has confirmed that the future leadership of Manifesta will be entrusted to Dutch-British Deputy Director Emilia van Lynden and Berlin-based Australian curator Catherine Nichols.

From October 2026, the organisation will adopt a co-leadership model, with Emilia van Lynden appointed as General Director and Catherine Nichols as Artistic Director. Together, they will begin developing future editions of the biennial, starting with Manifesta 17 in Coimbra, Portugal. Emilia van Lynden has been part of the International Foundation Manifesta since 2019, working closely with Hedwig Fijen across the past four editions. Catherine Nichols has previously contributed to Manifesta as Creative Mediator for Manifesta 14 Prishtina and as a member of the Artistic Board for Manifesta 16 Ruhr.

“It is a privilege to continue working within such a distinctive European platform, one that engages deeply with the cultural, social and urban fabric of cities and regions. Opportunities to collaborate in this way are exceptionally rare, especially given Manifesta’s transformative nature. At a time when Europe’s unifying principles must be actively upheld, I look forward to advancing Manifesta’s work in engaging with local civic issues that reverberate across the continent.”

Emilia van Lynden

“It is a profound honour to take on the role of Artistic Director of Manifesta, a platform that has, for more than three decades, continually redefined what a biennial can be and do. What I find compelling is its nomadic structure and its commitment to being embedded in the social, cultural and urban realities of each host context through a research-driven format grounded in listening and learning. At a time of transformation in Europe, I look forward to building on this through artistic thinking, urban enquiry and storytelling that open up new cultural, political and civic imaginaries.”

Catherine Nichols

For more than three decades, Manifesta has operated as a nomadic biennial and knowledge platform, moving across Europe to engage with the social, cultural and geopolitical contexts of each host city and region. This mobility has never been an end in itself; rather, it enables Manifesta to question, learn and continuously redefine its role in relation to local realities.

Founded in Rotterdam in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Manifesta has developed an interdisciplinary and intergenerational approach to the relationship between art, culture and urban development. Through close collaboration with local communities, it seeks to investigate and catalyse positive change through contemporary culture.

Manifesta has taken place in more than 15 European cities and regions, including Palermo (2018), Prishtina (2022) and Barcelona (2024). The upcoming edition, Manifesta 16 Ruhr, will take place across four cities and twelve venues in Germany in 2026.

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Notes to the Editors

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