

MANIFESTA

16

Ruhr

Press Kit

29th of April 2025

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Manifesta 16 Ruhr will open in former church buildings in the Ruhr Area in Germany in the summer of 2026.

The 16th edition of Manifesta, the European Nomadic Biennial, will be held in Germany's Ruhr Area from the 21st of June until the 4th of October 2026. Spanning more than 100 days, Manifesta 16 Ruhr will feature artistic, urban and social interventions across multiple cities in the region. Building on the success of Manifesta 15—which concluded in Barcelona and 11 surrounding metropolitan cities in November 2024, attracting over 291,000 visits—the Manifesta 16 team has developed a clear framework for the upcoming edition during its pre-biennial research phase.

Following a successful Bid led by prominent local cultural professionals and the support of key political stakeholders, Manifesta 16 will seek to engage with the Ruhr Area's unique social and urban fabric. In line with Manifesta's core mission, the biennial will investigate how art and culture can inspire civic engagement and instigate positive social change through inclusive and participatory practices.

The Ruhr Area, with its rich industrial heritage, experienced widespread destruction during the Second World War due to its strategic significance as a centre of coal and steel production. In the post-war period, the region underwent rapid reconstruction, with new architectural and social models reshaping city

centres and neighbourhoods. In preparation for Manifesta 16, the team has explored this history through the lens of urban transformation that played a central role in rebuilding neighbourhoods in the region.

As part of its long-term ambition to map European cities and regions, Manifesta 16 has appointed Catalan architect and urbanist Josep Bohigas as its First Creative Mediator. Bohigas is renowned for his leadership in the creation of Barcelona's "superblocks"—a model of urban planning that places community, sustainability and liveability at the heart of neighbourhood design. His previous work, in collaboration with former Barcelona mayor Ada Colau, focussed on enhancing urban connectivity and social resilience in Barcelona. In the context of Manifesta 16 Ruhr, Bohigas is developing an Urban Vision that will be presented later this year. This vision will guide the biennial's artistic and urban interventions and propose ways in which neighbourhoods can become more dynamic and focussed on social cohesion.[See Annexe 2 for further details.]

A key feature of this urban research concerns the role of churches in the post-war reconstruction of the Ruhr Area. These buildings, often constructed by local communities, came to symbolise civic identity and democratic

participation. Today, however, many of these churches face redundancy. In Germany alone, nearly half of the country's 40,000 churches are expected to be closed, demolished, or sold within the next decade. [See Annexe 1 for further details.]

Manifesta 16 Ruhr will explore how these former places of worship might be repurposed as inclusive cultural and community spaces. By reimagining these vacant structures as sites for community gathering and artistic exchange, the biennial aims to promote intercultural dialogue and social cohesion—especially in response to current global tendencies of polarisation and nationalism.

“One of the urgent questions we’re addressing in this 16th edition of Manifesta—relevant not only for Germany but globally—is how art, culture and architecture can offer new perspectives on former church buildings, which are closing their doors at a rapid rate. How can these spaces, once sacred, now serve as vital sites for community life and social cohesion? ‘This is not a church’ was our starting point—but the real question is: what can it become?” Hedwig Fijen, Director Manifesta 16 Ruhr

Central to the pre-biennial phase will be a series of Manifesta 16 Citizen Consultations taking place across the Ruhr Area from May 2025. These bottom-up consultations are designed to engage local residents and communities in the development of the biennial's programme, providing input on the themes and proposals raised in the Urban Vision. The outcomes of these consultations will be published in September 2025 and will directly inform the participatory creative mediation process.

In addition, an Open Call will be launched in the summer of 2025 for regional social and cultural actors, inviting them to contribute to the transformation of their neighbourhoods within Manifesta 16 Ruhr's programme. Selected initiatives will be presented as part of the biennial programme and will contribute to a more community-driven approach. These projects, together with the announcement of the Second Creative Mediator(s), the artistic framework, and the list of participating cities, will be unveiled this summer.

Notes to the Editors

Manifesta 16 Ruhr will take place in various cities across the Ruhr Area from the 21st of June to the 4th of October 2026.

About Manifesta 16: manifesta16.org

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