**PRESS RELEASE**

**Wednesday 5 October 2016**

**WOW - Women of the World festival comes to Hull**

The people of Hull are being invited to help shape the **WOW - Women of the World** festival, which is part of a global movement to champion gender equality and makes its debut in the city next March for UK City of Culture 2017.

Through a weekend of talks, music, debate, comedy and performance, WOW Hull will celebrate International Women’s Day (8 March), asking why true gender equality is taking so long to achieve and what we need to do to bring about real and lasting change.

Ahead of next year's festival, a series of **'Thinkin'** events is being organised throughout October at different venues around the city. The first is taking place at the Freedom Centre on Tuesday 11 October, designated International Day of the Girl Child by the United Nations.

People of all genders and ages are being encouraged to get involved in WOW, which since being founded at London's Southbank Centre in 2011 has become a rapidly expanding global movement with festivals taking place on five continents.

The Thinkin sessions will bring together local people to share ideas, suggestions and speakers, which will influence the shape of the topics, issues and debates. WOW Thinkins are free, fun and informal and will be led by Hull’s Assemble Festival Artistic Director, Madeleine O’Reilly.

Madeleine O’Reilly commented: "We want women, men, girls and boys to get involved in WOW Hull next year. It's an opportunity to celebrate the significant role that women have played in Hull's history, but also to look at what we can all do to help bring about real gender equality. The Thinkins are a chance for local residents to have their say in what will happen next March and to influence an event that is not just of national significance, but is part of a global movement."

Jude Kelly, Southbank Centre's Artistic Director and founder of WOW, said: "Based on the premise that an equal world is better for all of us, WOW is a celebration not only of women and girls but of equality on all its forms. The festival is a celebration of the lives that women of all ages live, not just locally, but right across the world, the challenges they face, the gender issues that affect them, the indomitable spirit they have and the hope they give for the future."

Martin Green, CEO and director of Hull 2017, added: "Taking inspiration from Hull’s own women of the world, from Amy Johnson, Lilian Bilocca and Barbara Buttrick, to Ethel Leginska, Maureen Lipman and Lucy Beaumont, this is an opportunity for the city to become part of a global network of festivals that stretches from Europe to the US, Asia to Australia. We are hoping to replicate the success of our fellow City of Culture, Derry, which premiered WOW in 2013 and has gone on to host the event annually."

The series of Thinkin's are being held at:

* Freedom Centre, Preston Road, Tuesday 11 October, 1100-1230
* Hull University, Wednesday 12 October, 1400-1530
* Bransholme Library, Thursday 13 October, 1330-1500
* Pave Bar, Princes Avenue, Monday 17 October, 1945-2115
* Asda Mount Pleasant, Wednesday 19 October, 1330-1500 and 1800-1930
* Rayners, Hessle Road, Friday 21October, 1730-1900
* The Mercure Hull Royal Hotel, Monday 21 November, 1800 – 2000

WOW Hull is produced in partnership with Southbank Centre London and Jude Kelly will give a keynote speech at the final Thinkin in November.

To find out more and register your interest in WOW Hull, contact wow@hull2017.co.uk

**-ENDS-**

For press information, please contact:

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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

**About Hull UK City of Culture 2017**

Hull secured the title of UK City of Culture 2017 in November 2013. It is only the second city to hold the title and the first in England. The vision of the Hull 2017 Culture Company, the delivery organisation of the project, is “to deliver 365 days of transformative culture in 2017 through a range of diverse and high-profile events and projects”.

The Culture Company is an independent organisation with charitable status, funded both publicly and privately. It has raised £32 million to deliver the programme, with key contributions coming from: Host City – Hull City Council; Principal Partners - Arts Council England, BBC, Big Lottery Fund, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Heritage Lottery Fund, KCOM, KWL, Spirit of 2012, Yorkshire Water and the University of Hull; Major Partners –Associated British Ports, Arco, BP, the British Council, Hull Clinical Commissioning Group, MKM Building Supplies, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Sewell Group, Smith & Nephew and Wykeland Group.

Hull 2017’s International Partners are: Aarhus, Denmark, which is European Capital of Culture 2017; Reykjavik, Iceland; Rotterdam, The Netherlands; and Freetown, Sierra Leone (twinned with Hull).

Links for background information on Hull, the UK City of Culture bid and the UK City of Culture programme:

www.hull2017.co.uk

www.visithullandeastyorkshire.com www.gov.uk/government/policies/supporting-vibrant-and-sustainable-arts-and-culture/supporting-pages/uk-city-of-culture-programme

**WOW boilerplate**

**International Women's Day**

International Women's Day is marked on 8 March each year and is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity.

**International Day of the Girl Child**

The United Nations has designated 11 October International Day of the Girl Child "to help galvanize worldwide enthusiasm for goals to better girls’ lives, providing an opportunity for them to show leadership and reach their full potential.”