



PRESS RELEASE - 27 NOVEMBER 2023

THE ROYAL COURT THEATRE CREATES DIGITAL ARCHIVE ALLOWING OPEN ACCESS FOR ALL IN MAJOR NEW PROJECT - LIVING ARCHIVE

The Royal Court Theatre today announced the launch of Living Archive, their first ever standalone online archive. The digital archive holds information on every play which has ever been presented on the Royal Court stages from when it opened its doors in 1956 to the present day, totalling almost 2000 works by over 1000 writers.

The independent website will be accessible to all and can be navigated by users through pathways created by guest curator-writers. It has been designed to challenge preconceptions around what we archive, who gets to decide what is archived and how we mark historic projects. The site also features an interactive portal, where visitors are encouraged to contribute to the archive themselves. The Royal Court's physical archive is and will continue to be held by the V&A.

Living Archive evolved out of Living Newspaper, a project the Royal Court undertook in 2020. Living Newspaper raised questions around the politics of archiving, and who gets to decide what is remembered. This led to a series of research and development performances which took place in the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Upstairs over two weeks in June 2022. The performances in turn led to the Living Archive website, which has been in development since last year. In line with the Royal Court's commitment to supporting and developing writers, the archive is, in the first instance, being targeted at emerging writers. This will expand and grow with time.

Living Archive presents an innovation in archiving, and marks the beginning of a total democratisation of Royal Court archive access. It is built around the idea that an active theatre archive can and should never be finished.

Vicky Featherstone, Artistic Director of the Royal Court, said, *"Living Archive was born out of the long summer of 2020 which felt like it was changing the world forever. It grew from several questions: Who tells our history? Who controls what is remembered? What do we gain from obsessing over legacy and how can we create something which provides more insight into possible futures?"*

Living Archive is a portal into the words, passions, beliefs and craft of the writers and theatre-makers who have brought their skill, care and curiosity to the Royal Court.

This is only the beginning of what Living Archive can be. Arriving at this stage is the result of hours of interrogation, argument, research, reading, and I am deeply grateful to everyone who has poured so much into this vital project. Living Archive is not merely a celebration of the Royal Court's extraordinary past, but a much-needed tool to fire us into new and as yet unimagined futures, standing on the shoulders of everyone who has toiled before us, each showing us worlds in new ways. It would have not been possible without the significant support and vision of Bloomberg Philanthropies and it is a privilege, as I leave the beloved Royal Court, to be part of the team who was able to make this happen."

Sula Douglas-Folkes, Lead Researcher and Project Coordinator, said, "Participating in the Living Archive project has been both an honour and a deeply enriching experience. We've unearthed a wealth of plays, each rich in diversity and storytelling, which is a testament to the unexplored depth in our theatrical heritage. Our aim has been not just to bring to light unserved and underseen voices but to create a platform where these voices lead the narrative. The Living Archive stands as an educational resource, a spark for creativity, and a tribute to the storied history of the Royal Court. It's designed to inspire writers, theatre enthusiasts, and creatives to engage with our past, and in doing so, to ignite the creation of new and meaningful work. I am immensely proud to contribute to this project, which is a significant step in preserving and celebrating our unique theatrical legacy while fostering new artistic dialogues."

Hamish Pirie, Royal Court Associate Director, said, "Living Archive is a natural extension of the Royal Court's work as an opportunity for the writers of the past to support the writers of the future."

In October 2023, the Royal Court also announced The Unfinished Archive. This was a public call-out orchestrated by artists Matilda Feyişayo Ibini, Shahid Iqbal Khan and Tom Ryalls for people's memories of seeing D/deaf, Disabled or neurodivergent work. The artists intend to collate these memories into texts, building an archive that does not currently exist for Disabled work, which will eventually come to contribute to Living Archive.

The Living Archive project has been commissioned by Royal Court Artistic Director Vicky Featherstone, led by Royal Court Associate Director Hamish Pirie, Lead Researcher and Project Coordinator Sula Douglas-Folkes and Bloomberg Tech Fellows Robert Smael, Royal Court Head of Sustainability and Operations, and Katherine Osborn, Royal Court Director of Development. Dr Nicholas Holden, University of Greenwich, is a specialist on the Royal Court's history and is project consultant and associate researcher on the Living Archive.

Living Archive was developed with the support of Bloomberg Philanthropies' Digital Accelerator Grant for Arts and Culture, which supports arts organisations through strategic improvements to technology infrastructure. Bloomberg has supported the Royal Court for more than 20 years.

The V&A have been generous supporters of this initiative and are ongoing contributors to Living Archive. The Royal Court greatly values this vital partnership and look forward to developing and deepening this collaboration.

To go to the Living Archive site, click [here](#).

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A selection of images from the archive can be downloaded [here](#).

Bloomberg Philanthropies

Bloomberg Philanthropies invests in 700 cities and 150 countries around the world to ensure better, longer lives for the greatest number of people. The organisation focuses on five key areas for creating lasting change: the Arts, Education, Environment, Government Innovation, and Public Health.

Bloomberg Philanthropies has invested \$43 million in the Digital Accelerator Programme to help strengthen arts organisations through strategic improvements to technology infrastructure. The programme supports leadership development and infrastructure investment that builds audiences, increases fundraising, drives revenue, delivers dynamic programming, and helps develop best practices to share across a network of nonprofit cultural organisations. The programme currently includes institutions in the U.S. and U.K.

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