



WORLD  
ECONOMIC  
FORUM

# Art at the Edge of Change

Arts and Culture  
Programme  
Annual Meeting  
2026



# Foreword

Art has always been humanity's most enduring conversation. Long before words were written down, colours, rhythms and gestures carried the truths that language often struggles to hold. Every brushstroke, melody and movement is an attempt to speak across time, across difference, across silence. At its core, the act of creating and experiencing art is a dialogue, an open, evolving exchange between selves, societies and generations.

To make art is to listen as much as to express. The artist listens to history, memory and the subtle murmur of the present. The audience listens in return, not passively but as participants who interpret, question and transform what they encounter. In that back and forth, something unique occurs – understanding that transcends words and empathy that outlives debate.

Culture, too, is a living conversation. It is shaped not by isolation but by exchange, by the meeting of traditions, the blending of ideas and the willingness to be changed by what is different. A poet weaving words from different languages, a painter reimagining traditional patterns in new colours, a quilt stitched by multiple generations; each proves that creativity grows through connection.

**“Culture, too, is a living conversation. It is shaped not by isolation but by exchange, by the meeting of traditions, the blending of ideas and the willingness to be changed by what is different.”**

These exchanges teach us something important: differences are not obstacles but pieces that can come together to make something richer and more beautiful.

Against a backdrop of global fragmentation, accelerating complexity and rapid technological change, the spirit of dialogue calls us back to curiosity. It asks us to approach others, and ourselves, with openness rather than fear. When we truly listen, we discover that every culture, every story, is an unfinished sentence waiting for our response. Art gives us the language to answer with compassion, imagination and courage.

The Arts and Culture Programme at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026, convening under the theme, *A Spirit of Dialogue*, plays a unique and valuable role. In aligning with the meeting's theme, the programme underscores that dialogue isn't only what we say, it's what we create together. By integrating art, performance and cultural exchange into the broader agenda of global cooperation, innovation and shared growth, the World Economic Forum affirms that creativity is a necessary force in solving our collective challenges.

In this spirit, the Arts and Culture Programme serves both as a mirror and catalyst, a dynamic embodiment of *A Spirit of Dialogue* at the Annual Meeting. Through curated exhibitions, performances and cultural exchange, it affirms that creativity is not peripheral to global progress but central to it. Art extends dialogue beyond language, enabling empathy where division persists and imagination where solutions seem scarce. By positioning artistic expression within the architecture of global collaboration, the Arts and Culture Programme underscores a simple truth: when we create together, we innovate together and, ultimately, we build the foundations of a more connected and resilient world.

**Joseph Fowler**  
Head of Arts and Culture,  
World Economic Forum

# Opening Concert



The AM26 Opening Concert is designed to set an inspiring tone for the dialogue and collaboration that will shape the discourse and direction of the days to follow. More than a cultural prelude, the concert is a powerful testament to music's unparalleled capacity to dissolve boundaries, bridge differences and reaffirm the shared values that anchor our humanity.

In an era marked by fragmentation – social, geopolitical and technological – music emerges as a rare and universal language of connection. It speaks directly to emotion while inviting reflection, collaboration and empathy across divisions of culture, ideology and geography.

↑  
Image: The Mahler Chamber Orchestra. Credit: Deniz Saylan

The Opening Concert is envisioned not simply as a performance but as a powerful statement, a testament to how creativity and culture can work in harmony to inspire a more connected, compassionate and cohesive world.

As participants gather from across the globe, the concert will underscore a critical truth, that sustainable progress depends not only on economic strategy and technological advancement but also on the human capacity for understanding and shared purpose.

In bringing together diverse voices, the concert embodies the spirit of collaboration, empathy and hope that defines the World Economic Forum's mission, reminding all present that harmony, musical and societal alike, is both an aspiration and an achievable goal when pursued together.



## Part One: Classical Excellence Meets Digital Innovation

The Opening Concert begins with a performance by the acclaimed Mahler Chamber Orchestra, joined by the internationally celebrated violinist Renaud Capuçon. They will present a programme of works by Bach, Haydn and Vivaldi, exemplifying the enduring resonance of musical craftsmanship and artistic dialogue.

Enhancing this experience, pioneering artist and technologist Ronen Tanchum will showcase his groundbreaking AI-driven visual installation created especially for the Opening Concert, which responds in real time to the orchestra's performance.

By integrating live music with cutting-edge technology, Tanchum's work transforms the concert into an immersive, living artwork, a dialogue between sound, environment and technology that reflects our interconnected world.



← Images: *Human Atmospheres* by Ronen Tanchum - a World Economic Forum commissioned artwork, 2025

## Part Two: The Transformative Power of Soul and Rhythm

The concert's second half features multi-Grammy award-winning musician and composer Jon Batiste, whose electrifying blend of jazz, soul and R&B embodies the vitality and diversity of human expression. Drawing on his New Orleans roots and a deep belief in the unifying force of music, Batiste's performance infuses the concert with energy, spontaneity and joy, a celebration of the human spirit at its most vibrant and resilient.

Through its curated programme and artistic innovation, the Opening Concert underscores music's power to bridge divides, foster understanding and ignite collective action. It serves as a reminder that unity and compassion are not abstract ideals but living principles that can shape a more inclusive and harmonious future.

As the final notes fade, participants will not only be moved by the artistry on stage but also inspired to carry forward the concert's message – that through connection, creativity and shared purpose we can build a world defined by understanding, collaboration and hope.

### Harvey Mason Jr is a 2026 Cultural Leader

↑ Image: Multi-Grammy award-winning artist Jon Batiste  
Photo: Jen Rosenstein



“When Jon Batiste plays, you feel the world shift a little closer to

hope. His music is a bridge, a beacon and a reminder that beauty can be a force for change. He brings forward the full weight of tradition while imagining a future that is brighter, kinder and more connected. Jon's artistry is a gift to all of us.”

Harvey Mason Jr, CEO, Recording Academy

# The Musicians

## The Mahler Chamber Orchestra

Since its founding in 1997, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra has been dedicated to shaping a distinctive artistic voice defined by independence, agility and collaboration. True to its founding principles, the MCO is governed by its musicians, working in close partnership with its management team to sustain a dynamic and democratic organizational model.

A truly international ensemble, the MCO has performed in over 40 countries across five continents, continuously expanding its artistic horizons. Its sound is distinguished by the transparency and intimacy of chamber music, an approach that celebrates the individuality and responsiveness of each musician. The repertoire, spanning the Viennese Classical and early Romantic periods to contemporary compositions and world premieres, reflects its exceptional versatility and commitment to musical exploration.

The MCO's artistic direction has been profoundly influenced by its founding mentor, Claudio Abbado, and by Conductor Laureate Daniel Harding, both of whom have left lasting imprints on its identity. Its evolving artistry is further shaped through long-term collaborations with its artistic partners, such as pianists Mitsuko Uchida and Yuja Wang. Concertmasters Matthew Truscott and José Maria Blumenschein regularly lead the orchestra in its chamber repertoire, while the partnership with Artistic Adviser Daniele Gatti focuses on symphonic works of greater scale and depth.

Each summer, the MCO forms the core of the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, continuing a longstanding partnership that unites some of the world's finest musicians. Under the direction of Harding and Gatti, the orchestra regularly appears at leading concert halls and festivals across Europe. Since 2024, the MCO has also served as Artistic Director of Musikwoche Hitzacker, guiding the festival's artistic vision over a five-year term.

With its spirit of independence and collaboration, the MCO continues to redefine what it means to be a modern ensemble, one that connects artistry, community and innovation across borders.



**“The Mahler Chamber Orchestra is a true jewel among the symphony orchestras in the world, an ensemble defined by its chamber music spirit, where every musician contributes as an equal. It does more than perform music. It inspires, elevates and reminds us of the transformative power of making music together.”**

– Michael Haefliger, Former Executive and Artistic Director, Lucerne Festival



## Renaud Capuçon

Renowned violinist Renaud Capuçon studied at the Paris Conservatory and later in Berlin with Thomas Brandis and Isaac Stern. A protégé of Claudio Abbado, he served as Concertmaster of the Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra before embarking on a distinguished international solo career. Today, he performs with the world's leading orchestras and conductors and is equally celebrated as a chamber musician, collaborating with artists such as Martha Argerich, Yo-Yo Ma and Yuja Wang.

Capuçon has served as Artistic Director of the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra since 2021 and also directs the Gstaad Menuhin Festival, the Aix-en-Provence Easter Festival (which he founded) and the Evian Musical Encounters. His acclaimed recordings for Deutsche Grammophon include works by Mozart, Fauré and Richard Strauss, earning him widespread recognition and multiple awards. A dedicated educator at the Lausanne University of Music, he was honoured as a Knight of the Legion of Honour in 2016, one of France's highest distinctions.

Renaud Capuçon is a 2026 Cultural Leader

↑  
Image: World-renowned concert violinist Renaud Capuçon  
Photo: Universal Music



## Jon Batiste

Jon Batiste is an acclaimed multi-instrumentalist, composer, arranger and singer, celebrated for his innovative contributions to jazz, pop and film music. Best known as the bandleader and musical director of *The Late Show with Stephen Colbert* (2015-2022), he blends the rich traditions of his New Orleans roots with contemporary funk, R&B and jazz.

Batiste's early work includes his 2005 instrumental debut, *Times in New Orleans*, and his ensemble Stay Human, formed in New York City. Their EP *My N.Y.* (2011), recorded on subway trains and street corners, was followed by the album *Social Music* (2013). Other notable releases include *Christmas with Jon Batiste* (2016), *Hollywood Africans* (2018) and the live albums *Anatomy of Angels* and *Chronology of a Dream* (2019). His 2020 releases included *Meditations* and the Black Lives Matter anthem “*We Are*”, followed by the full-length pop album *We Are* (2021) with collaborations including Mavis Staples and Zadie Smith. Most recently, he released *World Music Radio* (2023), featuring Lana Del Rey and Kenny G.

In addition to recording, Batiste has composed and performed for film, including Spike Lee's *Red Hook Summer* (2012), Pixar's *Soul* (2020) and the documentary *The First Wave* (2021). His work on *Soul* earned him an Academy Award, Golden Globe, BAFTA, NAACP Image Award and a Grammy for Best Score Soundtrack, making him the second Black musician, after Herbie Hancock, to win an Oscar for composition. His song, “*It Never Went Away*”, from *American Symphony* (2023) was also nominated for an Academy Award.

As a performer, Batiste brought jazz to mainstream audiences on *The Late Show*, appearing on 338 episodes with Stay Human. He has won five Grammys from nearly 20 nominations, including Album of the Year for *We Are* (2022). Batiste is also a dedicated advocate for music education, serving as a travelling ambassador for Music Unites and co-artistic director of the National Jazz Museum in Harlem, reflecting his commitment to community, creativity and the transformative power of music.

Jon Batiste is a 2026 Cultural Leader



# Seeing the Unseen

# Art, Environment and Empathy

**Our Forests. Our Future.**

**Location:** The Gallery

**Date & time:** Congress Centre, 19-23 January

Art has a unique capacity to illuminate what often escapes our perception – the subtle, intricate and invisible connections that shape our world. It can articulate the unseen forces, patterns and relationships that govern both human life and the natural environment, inviting us to move beyond surface appearances and to engage with the hidden dialogues between creativity and the ecosystems we inhabit.

Through artistic expression, we are offered a lens to perceive the intangible: the quiet exchanges between species, the shifting rhythms of landscapes, the impact of human activity on delicate ecological balances. Art transforms observation into understanding, turning abstract environmental concerns into experiences that can be felt, imagined and empathized with. In this way, creativity becomes a form of ecological insight, revealing the threads that connect us to the planet and to each other.

Empathy lies at the heart of this process. By encountering the world through an artist's vision, we are invited to feel the vulnerability of nature, the interdependence of life and the consequences of our choices. Art does not merely show us what exists; it makes visible what is often overlooked, prompting reflection, awareness and care. In articulating the unseen, art becomes a vital bridge – between perception and understanding, between human experience and environmental responsibility, and ultimately between awareness and action.

←  
(Opposite) Image: Thijs Biersteker | Woven Foundation

# Our Forests. Our Future.

Featuring the artwork  
*Forestate* by Thijs Biersteker  
in collaboration with UNESCO

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*Forestate* turns live environmental data, a real-time portrait of the state of the planet's forests, into a visible, tangible experience.

The data-driven choreography of leaves appearing and fading animates the rhythms of loss and recovery. Each disappearing leaf represents 100 square metres of forest lost right now; each returning leaf marks the same amount gained. This shifting canopy draws directly from UNESCO-validated Global Forest Watch data.

By using weekly GFW data alerts, *Forestate* generates an evolving, real-time image of global deforestation. As forests grow back slowly, real-time measurement of regrowth is not possible. Instead, *Forestate* uses the scientifically accepted 20-year average rate of tree cover gain, based on the standard 30% canopy threshold used in satellite analysis.

By placing rapid loss and slow recovery side by side, *Forestate* reveals the widening gap in how quickly forests disappear and provides a flicker of hope by showing how gradually they return, a quiet but urgent reminder that closing this gap is essential for a nature-positive future.

## Credits:

Data partner  
**UNESCO**

Artist  
**Thijs Biersteker**

Sustainably produced at  
**Woven Studio**

Communication  
and education by  
**Woven Foundation**

Studio Director  
**Sophie de Krom**

Software & Data Processing  
**Denisa Půbalová,  
Thijs Biersteker**

Lead Technician  
**Tomáš Potůček**

Construction  
**Daan van der Sman,  
Tom Bekkers, Lara  
Rodrigues Ris, Marie  
Colombeen, Yoana  
Elazarova, Theo Rekelhof**

Notable Collaborators  
**Meriem Bouamrane,  
Paulo Massoca**



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## Thijs Biersteker

Ecological artist Thijs Biersteker collaborates with leading scientists to translate complex scientific environmental data into immersive installations and experiences that make people feel the facts.

Merging scientific data with cutting-edge technology and sustainable materials results in an iconic fluid mixture between AI and mushrooms, sensors and forests, ocean plastics, glaciers and data sets and giant robotics, exhibited in museums and presented at conferences worldwide.

As the founder of Woven Studio and the Woven Foundation, Biersteker and his team use the imaginative power of art to turn the complexity of science into experiences that reach heads of state and the hearts of the public.

The global appeal of Woven's work lies in its seamless movement between the artistic, scientific and political worlds. Woven brings its vision to stages such as the G20, Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Art Basel and the Montreux Jazz Festival, and collaborates with partners ranging from UNESCO and LVMH to the European Space Agency and Polestar. Its vision has been shared on stages such as TED, at the United Nations and even in *Donald Duck* magazine.

**Thijs Biersteker is a 2026 Cultural Leader**



Image: Thijs Biersteker | Woven Foundation

# The Collective Human Experience



# Reclaiming Presence in the Digital Age

Across centuries and civilizations, artistic expression has provided a space to pause, to slow and to attune ourselves to the rhythms of life beyond the rush of daily existence. Through painting, performance, or sound, art creates moments of stillness, inviting reflection, contemplation and deeper engagement with the world around us. In an age defined by speed and constant connectivity, these experiences offer a vital opportunity to reclaim presence, to step back from the relentless flow of information and to encounter life with intentionality and care.

However, this reflective dimension of art risks being drowned in the ceaseless hum of technology. The contemporary world is one of perpetual acceleration, a condition in which connection is constant but seldom deep, and access infinite but rarely mindful. Amidst the glow of screens and the velocity of information, the simple act of *being present* has become an act of resistance.

Marina Abramović's *THE BUS* emerges as a counterpoint to this culture of acceleration, an embodied invitation to decelerate, to disconnect and to return to the immediacy of human experience. Reimagined from a former school bus into a mobile sanctuary, *THE BUS* exists as both sculpture and space for contemplation: a vessel of slowness travelling through a world entranced by speed. Participants are invited to step away from the digital grid and enter a state of heightened awareness, to listen, to breathe, to simply *be*.

By situating art beyond institutional walls and within the rhythms of daily life, *THE BUS* reconfigures how and where we encounter creativity. It becomes not an object to be consumed but a living environment of presence and empathy, a communal threshold between inner reflection and shared humanity.

← (Opposite) Image: *THE BUS* is a collaboration between Marina Abramović, the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), Cart Department and Mirjam Varadinis Art Agency (MVAA), and with the support of Monsol Foundation

→ Image: Marina Abramović



Making its world premiere at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026, *THE BUS* will serve as a sanctuary of pause amid the intensity of global dialogue, an invitation to restore stillness and rediscover connection. Its debut marks the start of a global journey – each stop a moment of reconnection; each encounter a reminder that slowing down is not retreat but renewal.

*THE BUS* is presented as part of the World Economic Forum's 2026 Arts and Culture Programme and is a collaboration between Marina Abramović, the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), Cart Department and Mirjam Varadinis Art Agency (MVA), and with the support of Monsol Foundation.



### Marina Abramović

Since emerging in Belgrade in the early 1970s, Marina Abramović has been a pioneer of performance as a visual art form. Early landmark works include *Rhythm 0* (1974), in which she offered herself as an

object of experimentation to the audience, or *Rhythm 5* (1974), where she lay within the burning frame of a wooden star until losing consciousness. With these performances she pushed the limits of both her and her audience and set the foundation for her lifelong engagement with time, energy, pain and long-duration practice.

In 2012, she founded the Marina Abramović Institute (MAI), a non-profit platform dedicated to performance art, long-duration work, and the Abramović Method, fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Abramović has been widely embraced by major institutions across Europe, the US and beyond. Highlights include *The Artist Is Present* (MoMA, New York, 2010); her first European retrospective *The Cleaner* (2017-2019); her groundbreaking 2023 solo exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, in collaboration with Kunsthau Zürich; and her first solo exhibition in China, *Transforming Energy* (MoMA Shanghai, 2024).

Accolades include the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale (1997), numerous national and international honours (Austria, France, Serbia, Spain), TIME 100 recognition (2014) and major institutional awards such as the Sonning Prize (2023-2024). She has received honorary distinctions from universities and academies in Europe and in 2025 was awarded the Premium Imperiale for Sculpture.

**Marina Abramovic is a 2026 Cultural Leader**

**“*THE BUS* is a mobile capsule where people can experience stillness and a connection with the present moment and themselves. It’s an invitation for an inner journey that becomes collective. This is how we begin to find common ground and create space for dialogue and peace.”**

Marina Abramović, Artist



### Mirjam Varadinis

Mirjam Varadinis is Director/ Founder of Mirjam Varadinis Art Agency and Curator-at-Large at the Kunsthau Zürich. She has an extensive curatorial career, with many of her projects addressing

expanding formats of contemporary curating, often working beyond the border of the institution.

Varadinis is a regular contributor to artists' publications, catalogues and art magazines and has curated a number of large-scale international contemporary exhibitions. Group exhibitions include the itinerant biennial *Manifesta 12* in Palermo (2018), a special project for the 5th Moscow Biennial of Contemporary Art (2013) and an annual festival of contemporary arts in Toulouse, using the city as material. Prominent contemporary artists featured in her curatorial projects for Kunsthau Zürich include Marina Abramović, Yoko Ono, Olafur Eliasson, Kader Attia, Pipilotti Rist, Cindy Sherman, Rosa Barba and Urs Fischer.

# The Culture of Togetherness

Hans Ulrich Obrist,  
Artistic Director,  
Serpentine Galleries,  
London



To move forward as a society, we must bring together different disciplines and break down the silos that separate them. True innovation happens when people from different fields communicate and collaborate. This spirit of connection is increasingly visible in culture and technology, perhaps most strikingly in video games.

Once considered a niche pastime, gaming now engages more than one-third of the global population, approximately 3 billion people worldwide. What began as a subculture has become one of the defining cultural forces of our time. Play is a fundamental human drive and a vital source of culture. Today, video games embody that insight, creating new spaces for creativity, community and shared experience.

At the Serpentine Gallery, this understanding of play and participation has been central to our work. Twelve years ago we established a dedicated technology department to explore emerging innovations such as artificial intelligence, blockchain and virtual environments. This commitment led us to commission video games and other interactive works as part of our artistic programme.

One of our current exhibitions, by artist Danielle Brathwaite-Shirley, uses a multiplayer game engine to immerse visitors in themes of polarization, censorship and social connection. The experience places the audience at the centre, inviting them to pause, reflect and reconnect with one another.

↑  
Image: Peter Doig: *House of Music*,  
Serpentine South, 10 October 2025  
– 8 February 2026. Photo: Prudence  
Cumming Associates



In our South Gallery, a parallel exhibition by Peter Doig unites art and music, encouraging visitors to spend more time within the gallery and experience art as a multi-sensory encounter. Artist-designed tables have been placed throughout the space to encourage conversation between visitors, challenging the traditional silence of museums and transforming them into places of social connection, exchange and dialogue.

Beyond digital innovation, the creation of physical spaces where people can come together remains equally important. The Serpentine Pavilion programme, now in its 25th year, exemplifies this approach. Each summer, a new pavilion is built outside the gallery, designed by leading or emerging architects. The 2023 pavilion, by Paris-based architect Lina Ghotmeh, was inspired by the concept of “À table”, an invitation to gather and reflect on our relationship with food, nature and sustainability. Throughout the summer, the space became a vibrant meeting point where hundreds of thousands of people, many strangers, shared ideas, meals and conversations.

Creating connections also means forming unexpected alliances. Something that is at the core of what our CEO Bettina Korek and our teams do at the Serpentine. One example is the Serpentine’s collaboration with the gaming platform Fortnite, the artist Kaws and the tech company Acute. Together, we created an exhibition that existed simultaneously in the physical and digital worlds. Within two weeks, more than 152 million people experienced the Serpentine through Fortnite, while tens of thousands of teenagers visited the gallery in person, often bringing their parents, a reversal of the usual museum dynamic.

In summer 2025, coinciding with World Play Day on 11 June, the Serpentine and the LEGO Group launched the Play Pavilion, designed by British architect Sir Peter Cook. This interactive public art project celebrates play as a universal human impulse and incorporates LEGO® bricks into its structure, inviting visitors of all ages to build, imagine and explore together. Extending into Kensington Gardens, the pavilion became a joyful, creative environment that welcomed hundreds of thousands of children and families, many visiting a museum for the first time.



The potential for collaboration extends beyond art, technology and play. At the Manchester International Festival, we paired 11 contemporary artists with 11 professional footballers. The project asked what art and sport can learn from each other and demonstrated how creativity can transcend traditional boundaries, fostering new forms of teamwork and understanding. Equally vital is the dialogue between the arts, humanities and sciences. Maja Hoffmann’s Luma Foundation exemplifies this through Atelier Luma, a platform that brings together artists, designers and scientists to address ecological and social challenges. These initiatives show that meaningful innovation arises when knowledge is shared across disciplines.

As we look to the future, it is also essential to remain connected to the past. In the digital age, access to information has grown, yet collective memory has weakened. Remembering, actively resisting forgetting,

has become an act of preservation and creativity. Through curated archive projects, we can explore how history informs innovation. Thinkers such as Édouard Glissant remind us that cultural progress depends on keeping the world’s diverse voices in conversation.

The late poet and artist Etel Adnan, who worked across painting, poetry, film and journalism, embodied this spirit of connection. In one of my many conversations with her, she said: “The world needs togetherness, not separation; it needs a common future, not isolation; it needs love, not suspicion.” Her words continue to guide and inform. Whether through art, architecture, technology, or play, our aim must be to create spaces, both real and imagined, where people can come together, share ideas and build a more connected, compassionate, and creative future.

**Hans Ulrich Obrist is a 2026 Cultural Leader**

← (Opposite top) Image: Serpentine Pavilion 2023 designed by Lina Ghotmeh. © Lina Ghotmeh - Architecture. Photo: Iwan Baan, courtesy of Serpentine Galleries

← (Opposite bottom) Image: KAWS x Fortnite, Serpentine & Acute Art, 2022 © Epic Games

↑ Image: Hans Ulrich Obrist Archives - Chapter 1: Édouard Glissant, Luma Arles, 2021. Photo: Arthur Fouray

↓ Image: Hans Ulrich Obrist. Photo: ©Elias Hassos for DLD/Hubert Burda Media





# Technology as a Co-Creator

Technology has always extended the reach of human imagination, from the first pigments pressed on to cave walls to the digital tools that shape today's creative landscape. Yet in our time, a new relationship is emerging. Technology no longer serves only as a passive instrument; it has become a co-creator, a partner that collaborates with us in the act of creation.

From art and music to design and writing, intelligent systems now engage with human creators in generative, exploratory ways. Algorithms suggest harmonies we might not have heard, language models offer new phrasing and visual tools experiment with colour, texture and form alongside us. These technologies do not replace the spark of human creativity – they amplify it, opening paths that might remain unseen without their participation.

What makes this partnership powerful is not imitation, but dialogue. The human brings intuition, emotion and intent; the technology contributes speed, pattern recognition and a capacity for surprise. Together, they form a loop of inspiration, a conversation that pushes both to evolve. In this sense, creativity becomes less a solitary act and more a shared process of discovery.

Seeing technology as a co-creator invites us to rethink authorship and imagination. It encourages us to move beyond fear of replacement towards curiosity about collaboration. When humans and machines create together, the result is not less human, it is more deeply human because it reflects our enduring desire to connect, to experiment and to make meaning in new ways.

In the end, technology as co-creator is not the story of machines learning to create like us. It is the story of us learning to create with them, a partnership that expands the very boundaries of what creation can be.

←  
(Opposite) Image: *SheBodyNull*  
by Emi Kusano

# Human Atmospheres

## A Generative Landscape of Sky and Presence by Ronen Tanchum

*Human Atmospheres* by Ronen Tanchum

Location: Main Corridor, Congress Centre

Date & time: 19-23 January



“The artist should paint not only what he sees before him but also what he sees within him.” – Caspar David Friedrich

Commissioned by the World Economic Forum, *Human Atmospheres* is an immersive, generative installation that transforms real-time weather data from Davos into a living digital landscape, a dynamic interplay of mountains, clouds and human presence.

Created by artist and technologist Ronen Tanchum, the work merges climate information with embodied interaction, allowing the atmosphere itself to respond to the viewer.

Within the space, movement becomes meteorology, each gesture a breeze, each pause a clearing sky. Slow steps draw drifting clouds, while sudden gestures may summon storms.

↑  
Image: *Human Atmospheres*  
- A World Economic Forum  
commissioned artwork by  
Ronen Tanchum, 2025

Human presence leaves visual traces in the landscape, echoing the quiet yet persistent imprint of humanity on the natural world.

As the viewer departs, the scene gradually returns to its untouched state, a digital echo of how nature might be without us.

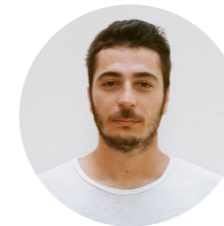
At once poetic and technological, *Human Atmospheres* invites reflection on the unseen relationships between environment, perception and impact. It is not merely a portrait of nature but also of the systems we inhabit and influence, an emotional mirror of the climate we live within and the presence we project into it.

In this shared atmosphere, presence is not passive. It shapes the sky, just as the sky shapes us.

→  
(Opposite) Image: *Human Atmospheres*  
- A World Economic  
Forum commissioned artwork by  
Ronen Tanchum, 2025



### Ronen Tanchum



Ronen Tanchum is a generative artist and technologist whose multidisciplinary practice merges computational innovation, visual storytelling and immersive

installation. Through his studio, Phenomena Labs, he creates large-scale interactive works exploring the intersection of technology, ecology and human experience.

At the core of Tanchum's inquiry is a fascination with the balance between algorithmic precision and natural unpredictability. Using neural networks and generative algorithms, he examines how digital systems can mirror organic growth and ecological dynamics, inviting audiences to reflect on humanity's evolving relationship with nature and technology. His art celebrates the harmony that emerges when technological structures integrate seamlessly with the natural world.

With over a decade of experience as a visual effects director for major Hollywood films, Tanchum honed his expertise in realistic simulation and visual storytelling. This background

deeply informs his artistic vision, positioning his practice at the confluence of the digital and the organic. His generative works intertwine the spontaneity of nature with the logic of machine learning, revealing parallels between biological evolution and AI while questioning the essence of creation in an age of digital omnipresence.

Through coded simulations of natural phenomena, Tanchum's installations probe the philosophical and ecological implications of our technological landscape. His art illuminates the tension – and potential harmony – between the organic and the synthetic, envisioning a future where AI and natural ecosystems evolve in symbiotic coexistence.

Tanchum's installations have been exhibited at Art Basel Miami, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Dubai Expo, CADAF, Galerie Met Berlin, LOAD Gallery Barcelona, and Artblocks Gallery Marfa. His work has been featured in VICE, The Creators Project, Hyperallergic, Creative Applications, and Colossal. As part of the OpenAI Artist Program, he continues to explore new frontiers in generative storytelling and AI-driven art.

**Ronen Tanchum is a 2026 Cultural Leader**

# The Human Compass in the Age of Intelligence

Emi Kusano,  
Multidisciplinary  
Artist, CEO & Founder,  
Fictionera Co., Ltd

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Throughout my life, I drifted between painting, photography and singing, driven by an insatiable curiosity but hindered by a temperament that struggled to master a single craft. I was a “jack of all trades”, overflowing with ideas but often lacking the technical longevity to perfect them alone.

However, the emergence of AI changed everything. It did not just offer me a new tool; it offered me a partner. Today, I define myself as an artist collaborating with AI. For me, technology has evolved from an instrument into an “eternal consultant” – a tireless companion ready to converse, brainstorm and co-create, 24 hours a day.

Growing up, I was part of the generation that learned through search bars and YouTube tutorials. But AI has accelerated this learning process exponentially. Unlike traditional programming, where a single misplaced character can break the entire code, AI invites a conversation. It tolerates ambiguity. This dialogue is the heart of my practice.

I often think of AI as an “alien intelligence”. It possesses a logic and a vastness distinct from our own. Precisely because it is such an unknown, alien presence, we must think deeply about how to build a relationship with it, how to “befriend” it, in a sense. This challenge extends beyond the realm of engineering. It demands an interdisciplinary discussion involving philosophy, ethics, sociology and art to navigate how we can coexist harmoniously with this new form of intelligence.

When I collaborate with this alien mind, it takes my personal memories and cultural context and refracts them through its massive dataset, producing results that I could never have reached alone.

↓  
Image: *SheBodyNull*  
by Emi Kusano

↓  
Image: *Neural Fad*  
by Emi Kusano



In a paradoxical sense, we are the ancestors of this future intelligence. We have an ethical obligation to consider what we are leaving behind. AI itself has no ethics; it has no moral compass. That role belongs strictly to us. As creators, we must curate, guide and inject meaning into this partnership. We must ensure that we are not just adding noise but contributing to a legacy of creativity and empathy.

We must not fear this technology. The acceleration of AI is inevitable, but our role within it is not fixed. It is up to us to decide how to use it. As the technical barriers to creation come down, the “why” behind our work becomes more important than the “how”. The message, the intent and the human heartbeat behind the work are what will resonate and endure.

In this era of co-creation, technology provides the ship and the wind but the human spirit must remain the compass. Let us sail into this new ocean not with fear but with the courage to expand what it means to be human.



Emi Kusano is a 2026  
Cultural Leader and 2025  
Young Global Leader

↓  
Image: *Algorithm of Narcissus*  
by Emi Kusano

↓  
Image: *Office Ladies Rituals of Overflow*  
by Emi Kusano

In my recent works, I use this friction to explore the malleability of history and identity. In *Neural Fad*, I generate street snaps of non-existent fashion tribes, remixing the visual vocabulary of Tokyo's past subcultures. In *Office Ladies*, I train the AI on my own face to reenact the archetype of the Japanese female clerk, questioning gender roles and the “consumed self”.

These works are not merely about nostalgia. My goal is to render our collective memories into a new state of hyper-reality. By blending the factual with the fictitious, I aim to create visuals that feel more real than memory itself, unearthing the subconscious narratives that sleep within our data.

Walter Benjamin, in his seminal essay, worried that mechanical reproduction might destroy the “aura” of art. However, the more important realization was how the very nature of art shifted. We stand at a similar threshold today. The question is not whether AI art has a soul but how AI expands the definition of human creativity. It allows us to weave together personal and collective memories in ways previously impossible.

However, this co-creation comes with a profound responsibility. We must remember that AI is a mirror. It is built upon the sum of human input, our masterpieces, our biases, our kindness and our prejudices. If we use it passively, we risk merely reproducing stereotypes and creating a feedback loop of mediocrity.

This leads me to a critical realization. Everything we create today, every prompt we type and every image we generate becomes the dataset for the future.

25



# Faces of Change



**Wrinkles of the City** by JR  
Location: Main Entrance, Congress Centre  
Date & time: 19-23 January

Change rarely asks for permission. It moves through our lives uninvited, unsettling what we've known, forcing us to let go of what's familiar and step into the unknown. But behind every change, there are people, real lives, real moments, facing uncertainty with courage that often goes unseen.

When one person finds the strength to rise again, they light the way for others. Hope spreads, quietly, powerfully, turning fear into focus and hardship into growth.

When we listen to these stories, of loss, renewal and hope, we're reminded that the human journey is not linear but cyclical. Each ending folds into a beginning. Each setback carries the seed of wisdom. And through the exchange of those lived experiences, we learn not only how to survive change but also how to grow from it.

As the world continues to shift and transform, these lived stories keep us grounded. They remind us that change, for all its uncertainty, is also an invitation to begin again, to rebuild, to imagine something better.

# Stories of Resilience

← (Opposite top) Image: *Wrinkles of the City* - Marino Sauro Oton, Cartagena, Spain 2008

← (Opposite middle) Image: Katie Piper - AM26 Cultural Leader.

← (Opposite bottom) Image: Hiro Iwamoto - AM26 Cultural Leader

# Wrinkles of the City by JR

How does a city remember  
– and who carries its memories?

Launched in 2008 in the historic Spanish town of Cartagena, *Wrinkles of the City* is a global artistic endeavour that has since unfolded across six major cities: Cartagena, Havana, Shanghai, Los Angeles, Berlin and Istanbul.

Through extensive travel and deep engagement with local communities, French artist JR has sought to honour the elderly residents of these cities, using their faces as living records of both personal and collective histories.

This evocative project explores the universal process of ageing, positioning the elderly as vital witnesses to societal transformation. In a world often dominated by youth-centric narratives and relentless progress, JR's work restores dignity and visibility to those whose contributions and experiences are frequently overlooked.

Each portrait serves not only as an intimate reflection of individual life stories but also as a lens on the broader social, cultural and political contexts of the cities themselves.

JR's approach is both authentic and unembellished. By capturing the unique features, expressions and textures of his subjects' faces, he transcends mere individuality, highlighting intergenerational narratives and the shared human experience of ageing.

The project ultimately elevates these citizens as living archives of modern history, reminding audiences that the wrinkles etched on their faces are emblematic of resilience, memory and the passage of time.

As such, *Wrinkles of the City* is a compelling intersection of art, history and social commentary, offering a profound reflection on the human condition.

↓  
Image: *Wrinkles of the City*,  
Action in Shanghai - Shi Li,  
horizontal - China 2010

→  
(Opposite) Image: *Wrinkles of  
the City* - Marino Sauro Oton -  
Cartagena, Spain 2008



## JR

French artist JR creates monumental public art projects that inspire passersby to ask questions and confront their own perceptions. After his first major project, *Portrait of a Generation*

(2004-2006), which challenged stereotypes of Parisian suburban youth, he began working internationally. Whether pasting the faces of Israeli and Palestinian people on both sides of the Separation Wall (2007), the eyes of women on train cars in Kibera, Kenya (2009), or a giant toddler peeking over the US-Mexico border fence (2017), JR's larger-than-life installations amplify the stories of everyday people and foster dialogue.

From creating a *trompe-l'œil* at the Louvre with 400 volunteers (2019) to pasting alongside incarcerated men in a California maximum-security prison (2019-2022), he seeks to involve everyone in the act of artistic creation, hoping to spark conversations and drive social change. As of September 2025, his global participatory art project *Inside Out* has empowered more than half a million people to stand up for what they believe in through large-scale black-and-white portraits.

JR also maintains a rigorous studio practice, creating gallery artworks that are exhibited internationally. He has had major retrospectives at the Brooklyn Museum (2019) and the Maison Européenne de la Photographie (2018), and shown works and installations at the Venice Biennale (2022), the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (2019) and the NGV Triennial (2020).

JR is a 2026 Cultural Leader





## Hiro Iwamoto

### Navigating Life Beyond Sight

Hiro Iwamoto's journey is a profound testament to human resilience, purpose and the transformative power of perspective. From losing his sight as a teenager to becoming the first fully blind person to complete a non-stop Pacific crossing, Iwamoto's life invites reflection on the nature of limitation, adventure and meaning.

Born in Japan, Iwamoto began losing his sight at the age of 13. By 16, he was completely blind. For a young person, such a loss is not just physical, it fractures identity, autonomy, and hope. Iwamoto recounts the despair vividly, describing moments when even routine tasks seemed insurmountable. At one point, the darkness became so overwhelming that he attempted to end his life, only to be stopped by an inexplicable inner force.

That moment marked the beginning of a profound transformation. While lying on a park bench afterwards, he dreamt of his uncle urging him to live, to inspire others who had lost their own sense of purpose.

This turning point shifted Iwamoto's life from despair to mission. He embraced judo, a discipline that taught him balance, spatial awareness and resilience, and later moved to San Diego in 2006 with his wife, seeking better opportunities for his daughter. It was there he discovered sailing, a pursuit that might seem paradoxical for someone without sight. Yet for Iwamoto, the ocean became a medium of empowerment, an arena where intuition, tactile feedback and trust in his crew allowed him to reclaim agency.

In 2019, he completed a non-stop Pacific crossing aboard the yacht Dream Weaver. Covering 8,700km from San Diego to Japan with his sighted partner Doug Smith as navigator, the journey was as much a triumph over fear as it was over distance. His first attempt in 2013 ended in disaster when a collision with a whale sank his boat, leaving him adrift in a life raft. But rather than yielding to failure, he transformed it into fuel for growth, reflecting that simply being alive made

all else secondary. On the successful voyage, Iwamoto relied on audio instruments and his partner's guidance, demonstrating that adaptability and determination can redefine what is possible.

Iwamoto's story illuminates several profound themes. First, it challenges the conventional notions of disability: blindness is not a limitation but a different lens through which to engage the world. Second, his life emphasizes agency through discipline, whether through judo, triathlon, or sailing, mastery over one's environment is possible even amid adversity. Third, purpose and gratitude shape his narrative; he views his achievements not merely as personal triumphs but as tools to inspire and support others. Finally, vulnerability and authenticity define his approach, as he openly shares moments of fear, failure and despair, reminding us that resilience is forged in the interplay of struggle and persistence.

Beyond individual accomplishment, Iwamoto's journey carries broader societal implications. It challenges stereotypes of adventure and capability, redefines inclusion in competitive and exploratory fields and underscores purpose-driven action transcending ability. Yet it also invites critical reflection: his story depends on technology, partners and resources, highlighting that extraordinary feats often emerge through collaboration.

Looking ahead, Iwamoto has set his sights on a solo Pacific crossing, yet the most enduring impact of his journey lies in its ripple effects – motivational speaking, outreach and raising awareness about visual impairment. His life demonstrates that vision extends beyond the eyes, cultivated through courage, intuition and the determination to live fully despite adversity.

More than a tale of adventure, Iwamoto's journey serves as a mirror, challenging us to confront our own fears and limitations. Even in darkness, we can navigate towards meaning, purpose and transformation. In a world that often equates seeing with knowing, Iwamoto exemplifies the power of vision born from blindness – an inner compass guiding us towards courage, gratitude and possibility.

**Hiro Iwamoto is a 2026 Cultural Leader**

↑  
Image: Hiro Iwamoto - AM26 Cultural Leader

## Katie Piper: From Tragedy to Triumph

### A Story of Resilience and Advocacy

Katie Piper's life story is a remarkable testament to human resilience, courage and the transformative power of purpose. Best known for surviving a horrific acid attack in 2008, Piper has since become a prominent campaigner, television presenter and author, demonstrating that tragedy, while deeply scarring, can be channelled into meaningful change.

The attack left her with life-threatening injuries and permanent facial disfigurement, alongside the psychological trauma that naturally accompanies such violence. For many, such an experience would have defined the rest of their lives. But Piper refused to be solely defined by her suffering. Instead, she embarked on a journey of recovery that was both physical and emotional, confronting not only her own pain but also societal perceptions of beauty, worth and identity.

Piper's openness about her experiences has been profoundly influential. Through her memoirs, media appearances and charitable work, she challenges society to rethink the stigma associated with visible differences. She underscores that resilience is not about erasing scars, literal or metaphorical, but about finding agency and purpose despite them.

One of her most significant contributions is the Katie Piper Foundation, which provides support for burn victims and individuals facing disfigurement. Her advocacy extends

→  
Image: Katie Piper - AM26 Cultural Leader

beyond medical or cosmetic support; it emphasizes mental health, self-esteem and the social inclusion of those who are often marginalized. By doing so, Piper reshapes the narrative on trauma from one of helplessness to one of empowerment.

Piper's story is also a meditation on forgiveness, justice and human complexity. She has spoken about the importance of holding her attackers accountable, yet she also demonstrates a profound understanding of the human capacity for error and redemption. Her perspective invites society to consider not only how we support survivors but also how we foster restorative justice and empathy.

In a world that often equates beauty with perfection and success with appearances, Piper's journey is a radical reminder that strength is cultivated through vulnerability, courage and authenticity. Her life asks an essential question: what does it truly mean to be resilient and how can we transform personal tragedy into a source of communal good?

Piper's influence is ongoing. She embodies a rare combination of vulnerability and leadership, illustrating that survival is not merely about enduring adversity – it is about reshaping it into a force that inspires, uplifts and transforms the lives of others. Her story is not simply one of recovery; it is a call to action for empathy, advocacy and the courage to redefine one's narrative in the face of unimaginable challenge.

**Katie Piper is a 2026 Cultural Leader**





# The Cultural Table

In a world often divided by inequality, misunderstanding and tension, Cultural Leaders stand at the forefront of societal transformation. Through their creativity, they have the capacity to provoke reflection, challenge norms and inspire action, forging paths to a more united and inclusive future. Creative expression transcends borders, languages and ideologies, offering a universal language through which shared human experiences can be recognized, celebrated and amplified.

Today, visionary Cultural Leaders are harnessing this transformative power with purpose and intention, dismantling barriers, fostering empathy and creating spaces where dialogue and understanding can flourish. The Cultural Table offers a distinctive platform to explore the many ways in which Cultural Leaders are shaping a society that values equity, inclusion and collective progress. By engaging directly with these leaders, participants gain first-hand insight into the strategies, visions and courage that drive contemporary creative movements.

Through collaboration and exchange, participants will witness how art functions not only as a reflection of society but also as a catalyst for meaningful change, provoking conversations, inspiring action and mobilizing communities to imagine and build a more harmonious world. This Cultural Table confirms the vital role of artistic voices in confronting social, environmental and cultural challenges, showing how innovation and creative expression can foster empathy, understanding and shared progress.

Launched in 2023, the Cultural Table is more than a dialogue; it is a call to action – an invitation to witness and engage with the transformative power of Cultural Leaders, whose creativity drives the design of a brighter, more inclusive future for all.

←  
(Opposite top) Image: Dina Amin, CEO, Visual Arts Committee, and Joseph Fowler, Head of Arts & Culture, World Economic Forum

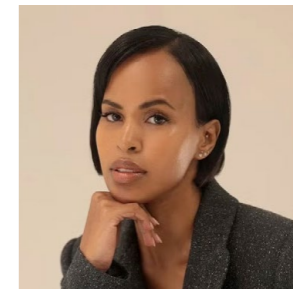
←  
(Opposite middle) Image: Katherine Fleming, President and CEO, J. Paul Getty Trust

←  
(Opposite bottom) Image: French singer and songwriter Vanille

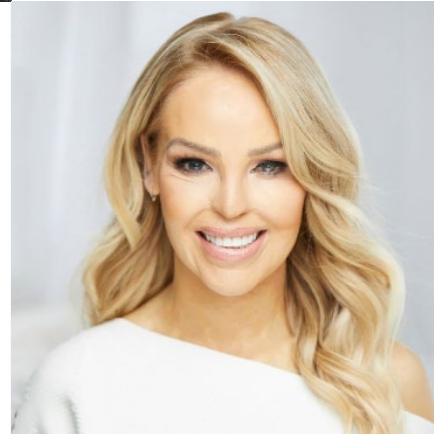
## Featured speakers at The Cultural Table 2026



Harvey Mason Jr



Sabrina Elba



Katie Piper



Jon Batiste

# The Cultural Leaders



Ronen Tanchum



Sabrina Elba



Jon Batiste



Emi Kusano



Marina Abramovic



Yo-Yo Ma



Hiro Iwamoto



will.i.am



Thijs Biersteker



JR



Maja Hoffmann



Ahmad Joudeh



Renaud Capuçon



Mirjam Varadinis



Sir David Beckham



Suleika Jaouad



Katie Piper



Harvey Mason Jr



Hans Ulrich Obrist

## Arts and Culture Team at the World Economic Forum

**Joseph Fowler**  
Head, Arts and Culture

**Natalie Hendro**  
Senior Lead, Arts and Culture

**Pascale Ferorelli**  
Senior Lead, Arts & Culture



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