

## **WHY DO WE TAKE DRUGS?**

### **Highs and lows of drug taking explored in radical exhibition programme at the Sainsbury Centre**

In September 2024, the Sainsbury Centre will activate art to address its next big question through a six-month season of interlinked exhibitions and programmes exploring *Why Do We Take Drugs?*

From alcohol and caffeine to ayahuasca and heroin, this season uses art to take visitors on a journey of investigation, inviting audiences to explore the world of global drug cultures from illegal to familiar across one mind-blowing museum landscape.

Substances are taken in every culture around the world, spanning a huge range of experiences for the human body. Drugs pervade society: creating shared experiences that bind people together and also fuelling individual addictions that tear communities apart. Art and artists help us explore and better understand this world of drugs across time and space. They help us to question whether there is a right way to manage their use in society. When and why are some drugs socially accepted, whilst others are not?

This carefully curated programme will delve into drug cultures around the world and bring to life the highs and lows of drug taking in society.

The season explores both the organised and chaotic use of narcotics and intoxicants within communities in different parts of the world alongside the human stories, experiences and cultural impact of mind-altering substances.

It's a timely question – in the year ending March 2023, around 10% of people aged 16 to 59 years in England and Wales used an illegal drug in the last 12 months (according to the Office for National Statistics).

### **Power Plants: Intoxicants, Stimulants and Narcotics**

**14 September 2024 – 2 February 2025**

From peyote to tobacco, for millennia people have used the psychoactive properties of plants as an integral part of social, ceremonial and religious life.

In many parts of the world, plants of power – whether this be spiritual, economic, mind-altering or cultural – are regarded as sacred. They are valued for their capacity to deepen human relationships, facilitate communication with ancestors, and heal the sick.

*Power Plants: Intoxicants, Stimulants and Narcotics* will feature objects, sculpture, yarn paintings, digital works, textiles, plus a selection of Japanese art, to explore the important role that stimulants and intoxicants continue to perform within societies.



The show will reference global artefacts that are connected with the traditional consumption of tobacco and snuff, betel nut, kava, tea and palm wine, alongside an exploration of the sacred, hallucinogenic cactus, peyote. The exhibition will show works by contemporary artists such as South African artist Sethembile Msezane (b.1991) and Mexican artist Guadalupe Muñoz (b.1974) and feature newly commissioned work from Togolese-British artist Divine Southgate-Smith (b.1995).

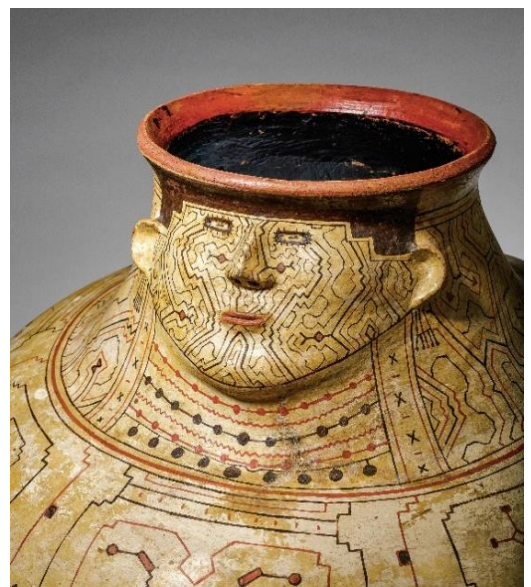
The green tea section, set out as a tearoom for a ceremony, will be curated by Mr Yasuhiro Yamaguchi, a Urasenke School tea ceremony practitioner and teacher.

### **Ayahuasca & Art of the Amazon**

**14 September 2024 – 2 February 2025**

This exhibition considers the impact of the mind-altering, psychotropic vine – ayahuasca – within Western Amazonian social life.

From the 1950s onwards, drugs were heavily linked with the emergence of the American literary and social movement of the Beat Generation. Artworks produced in North America and Europe speak to the ways in which hallucinogens are transforming the cultural landscape, becoming important for political emancipation, psychotherapy, and personal development.





In many Indigenous societies, hallucinogens continue to play a role in the determination of social position, therapeutic practices, and the maintenance of relationships with ancestors, spirits, and gods. And now, because of the boom in international tourism, increasing amounts of people are now experiencing the effects of ayahuasca.

*Ayahuasca & Art of the Amazon* will show that the ritual consumption of ayahuasca is intimately linked to the artistic production of ceramics, textiles, sculpture, painting and photography.

The exhibition focuses on the creativity of Indigenous artists of the Peruvian Amazon's Shipibo-Konibo community, presenting historical artefacts alongside contemporary works by living artists.

*Ayahuasca & Art of the Amazon* is a rare opportunity to appreciate the breadth of Amazonian art, which ranges from the mesmerising abstract geometrical patterns known as 'kené' to figurative portrayals of Amazonian cosmologies and spiritual encounters.

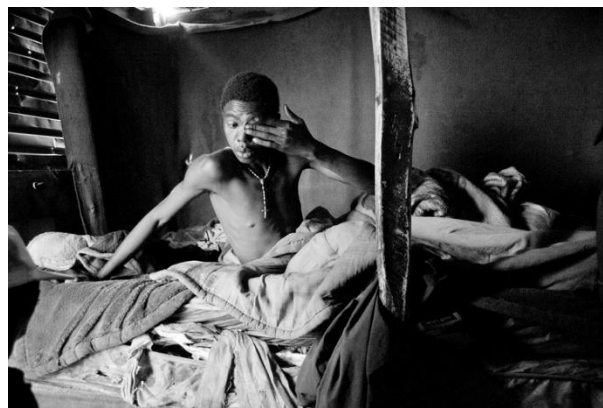
Visitors will also be able to take a virtual 'trip' on an ayahuasca journey – guided by a shaman – thanks to a powerful VR experience.

The exhibition will also feature an extended replica of Brion Gysin and Ian Sommerville's *Dreamachine*, first created in 1959. Intended to be viewed with your eyes closed, Gysin described the artwork as a "drugless psychedelic experience". A perforated cylinder turning around a light source, the stroboscopic machine creates a pulsing light that will cause you to hallucinate and see changing colours and patterns behind your shut eyelids.

This exhibition was developed by the musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac in Paris.

## **Heroin Falls**

**23 November 2024 – 27 April 2025**



*Heroin Falls* highlights the realities of heroin addiction through the juxtaposition of two different worlds through the eyes of two incredible photographers.

The exhibition aims to show connections which will lead viewers to acknowledge substance misuse is a global challenge that transcends race, location and class.

Magnum photographer Lindokuhle Sobekwa (b.1995) aims his lens at a group of young men from a South African township Thokoza whom have turned to using nyaope. Nyaope is a low-grade form of heroin which can be mixed with many different bulking agents including cannabis products, antiretroviral drugs, as well as other materials. Sobekwa documents their journey, capturing their daily activities and chores, whilst part two of his project is redemptive, focusing on rehab and introspection.

Most documentary projects about addiction expose someone else's self-destructive behaviour, but Scottish born, New York based photographer Graham MacIndoe (b.1963) took a very different approach: he photographed himself during the years he was addicted to heroin. He'd place a cheap digital camera on a table or bookshelf, set the self-timer to take a photo every so often, then turn his attention to the rituals of his habit. The resulting photographs document the harsh realities of drug addiction and the photographer's use of the artistic medium in his own recovery.

### **Lindsey Mendick: Hot Mess**

**23 November 2024 – 27 April 2025**

Lindsey Mendick (b.1987) subverts the tradition of ceramics with her darkly comic, confessional works. Her newly commissioned sculptures for the Sainsbury Centre will be strikingly personal, tackling social taboos and exposing the artist's secret fears.

For the *Why Do We Take Drugs?* season, Mendick will reveal her reliance on antidepressants and alcohol, used to navigate stressful social situations and cope with the threatening unpredictability of daily life. Mendick's subversive practice candidly addresses the stigma attached to the use of certain medications, such as antidepressants.

Positioning her works amongst paintings by Francis Bacon and Leonora Carrington and sculpture from the Arctic to Africa, Mendick will create a surprising intervention in the Sainsbury Centre's

'Living Area' collection display to disrupt the clean aesthetic like a wild and unwelcome guest at a party.



### **Sculpture Park Commission**

#### **Ivan Morison: Towards the Weird Heart of Things**

**October 2024 – February 2025**

The Sainsbury Centre, in collaboration with Orleans House Gallery, presents *Towards the Weird Heart of Things*, a new site-specific series of sculptures by artist Ivan Morison in response to the curatorial provocation, *Why Do We Take Drugs?*

The commissioned work features sculptures constructed from abundant agricultural organic materials such as hemp, straw, hay, and sheep's wool, and timber. These materials, sourced from the seasonal harvest of East Anglian farms and combined with natural binders like lime and clay, give the sculptures a haystack-like appearance.

These evolving four-meter-high sculptures in the Sainsbury Centre Sculpture Park will change colour, transform, or decay and compost over time, challenging the permanence of traditional sculpture. The works engage farming communities and encourage us to reassess and harmonise our connection to the natural world, presenting nature as a vital drug for human health and well-being.

At the heart of this commission is an 'eco-wakening' – to inspire hope and point us to the fact that fatal risk of anthropogenic climate change can be avoided if we collectively focus on taking climate action and finding innovative solutions.

*Towards the Weird Heart of Things* is co-commissioned by Orleans House Gallery and will travel there in March, for their Cultural Reforesting strand of programming, which invites artists to explore the question *How do we renew our relationship with nature?*



Dr Jago Cooper, director of the Sainsbury Centre, says: *"I think museums need to help people answer the most important questions in our society and taking drugs is a fundamental one. Drugs exist in every society and the role they play is huge. These incredible exhibitions from around the world take visitors over the highs and lows of that reality and their impact in so many people's lives around the globe."*

*"We are so grateful to the incredible range of friends and collaborators from around the world who are bringing their incredible practice and experiences to a new audience at the Sainsbury Centre. Visitors will be in for a mind-blowing experience."*

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

### **HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGES FOR MEDIA USE CAN BE DOWNLOADED HERE**

- Sara Flores, *Untitled* (Maya Kené 15, 2023), 2023, Vegetal dyes on wild-cotton canvas 51 5/8 x 90 11/16 in. (131.1 x 230.3 cm) © the artist. Photo © White Cube (Ollie Hammick)
- Anabel Diaz, *Untitled*, 2022. Copyright: Anabel Diaz. Image courtesy of Bienal de Arte Huichol / Arte Yawí
- Unknown artist, jar, Shipibo-Konibo, Peru, date unknown, painted terra-cotta. Courtesy of private collection
- Graham MacIndoe, *My Addiction*. Copyright: Graham MacIndoe
- Lindokuhle Sobekwa, *Thabang waking up in the early hours of the morning*, 2015, from the *Nyaope* project. Copyright: Lindokuhle Sobekwa / Magnum Photos
- Lindsey Mendick, *SH\*TFACED* at Jupiter Artland, 2023. Installation View. Copyright: Lindsey Mendick. Image: by John Mackenzie
- Ivan Morison. Image: Charles Emerson

**The Sainsbury Centre** is a world-class art museum with a unique perspective on how art can foster cultural dialogue and exchange. Following a radical relaunch in 2023 the Sainsbury Centre is the first museum in the world to formally recognise the living lifeforce of art, enabling people to build relationships across an arts landscape.

The art of the Sainsbury Centre is able to help reframe and answer the most important questions people have in their lives. It is not a museum to only learn more about artists, cultures or movements like Francis Bacon, the Tang Dynasty or Modernism, it is a place of experience, where collections are animate, and visitors are emotionally connected.

One of the first museums in the world to display art from all around the globe and from all time periods equally and collectively, Sir Robert and Lady Lisa Sainsbury created one of the most sought after yet non-conformist art collections. In 1973 they donated their collection, which transcended traditional barriers between art, architecture, archaeology and anthropology, to the UEA, and created an entirely new type of museum. Housed in Sir Norman Foster's revolutionary first ever public building, the space aimed for an interactive relationship between people, object and landscape, where art was placed within an open yet intimate 'living area'.

Visit [www.sainsburycentre.ac.uk](http://www.sainsburycentre.ac.uk) or call 01603 593199

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**FOR MORE INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS AND IMAGES**

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