Acclaimed performance artist Nikhil Chopra brings his unique style of storytelling to Southbank Centre this month with a major new commission, The Black Pearl: The City to the River. Chopra takes up residency at the Royal Festival Hall, where he will spend 98 hours living, sleeping, eating and working in costume in an open set, as visitors observe the live creation of a large-scale artwork. The glass façade of the 5th floor of the Royal Festival Hall acts as the canvas for an extensive drawing made from oil pastels and lipstick that will be visible from the street and river below. Audiences can watch the artwork unfold from Thursday 26 May to Monday 30 May and the commission will remain in place until 1 September 2016. The event is free to attend.

The Goa-based artist will arrive at Southbank Centre by boat, following a 24 hour journey along London’s waterways in which he will capture the sights and sounds of the city through drawings, photographs and recordings. These elements will form part of the final artwork, which will also be influenced by Chopra’s personal experiences and the cultural history of his homeland. Themes such as the colonial relationship between Britain and India, how Britishness has redefined itself over the past 50 years and the influence of Chopra’s Punjabi roots will come together in a fascinating fusion of ideas.

Throughout the duration of the event Chopra will blend live art with performance, playing the character of a ‘Punjabi aunty’. The performance artist – whose artistic practice ranges between live art, theatre, painting, photography, sculpture and installations – is known for his use of characters to express ideas about times, places and identities. For his Southbank Centre commission Chopra’s
persona is called ‘The Black Pearl’, a title that has historically been given to people for their exceptional talent, while also referring to the colour of their skin. The performance will materialise in slow, considered movements, adding another layer of intrigue for audiences watching the spectacle.

*The Black Pearl* follows the success of Chopra’s performance piece *Coal on Cotton* at the Manchester International Festival in 2013. Chopra also took part in the festival in 2009 in character as Yog Raj Chitrakar as part of his *Memory Drawing* series, in a show curated by renowned Serbian performance artist Marina Abramović. Other performances in the *Memory Drawing* series included the 53rd Venice Biennale.

*The Black Pearl* forms part of Southbank Centre’s *Alchemy* festival, the biggest celebration of South Asian culture outside the subcontinent (20-30 May). Other visual art highlights during the festival include a free exhibition that tells the story of home-grown British Asian phenomenon *Desi Pubs* (16-30 May). For over 30 years, the Black Country’s ailing pubs have been salvaged by the Asian community and reinvented to combine the classics of the English pub with Punjabi food and Bhangra music. As well as bringing the venues back to life, ‘Desi’ pubs have created a new type of social space for Asian communities. Held in the Central Bar of the Royal Festival Hall, *Desi Pubs* showcases the work of six artists and six pubs. Additional free exhibitions include: *Marigold*, a series of pop-up art installations by Geetika Alok; *Towards Marg*, featuring photography exploring South Asian LGBT identities in the UK’s political and cultural scenes; *RPM*, a digital exploration of Karachi and its charged urban landscape using photography, video and music, presented by Salt Arts; and the UK premiere of *Burka Avenger*, the hit Pakistani animation series about Jiya - teacher by day and superhero by night whose weapons are books and pens.

# ENDS #

**Southbank Centre’s *Alchemy* Partners**
*Alchemy* Principal Partner is Asian Media & Marketing Group (AMG). *Alchemy* Programming Partners for 2016 include BBC Asian Network and The British Council.

For further information and interview requests please contact the Southbank Centre Press Office:
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**NOTES FOR EDITORS**

**About Alchemy**
Southbank Centre’s *Alchemy* festival celebrates the cultural connections between South Asia and the UK. The festival returns for a seventh year (20-30 May 2016), exploring the region’s art, artists, politics and society as a whole. Over the last six years, *Alchemy* has grown to become the largest festival of South Asian culture outside the subcontinent. A full list of *Alchemy* events is available here and at www.southbankcentre.co.uk/alchemy.

Press Images can be found here. Follow the conversation on #AlchemySC

**About Southbank Centre**
*Southbank Centre* is the UK’s largest arts centre, occupying a 21-acre site that sits in the midst of London’s most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 *Festival of Britain*. Southbank Centre is home to the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and the Hayward Gallery as well as The Saison Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. For further information please visit www.southbankcentre.co.uk. Southbank Centre is carrying out vital restoration work on the Hayward Gallery, Queen Elizabeth Hall and Purcell Room to make the buildings fit for future generations to enjoy, more information can be found here: letthelightin.southbankcentre.co.uk.
About Nikhil Chopra

Nikhil Chopra’s artistic practice ranges between live art, theatre, painting, photography, sculpture and installations. His performances, in large part improvised, dwell on issues such as identity, the role of autobiography, the pose and self-portraiture, reflects on the process of transformation and the part played by the duration of performance. Taking autobiographical elements as his starting point, Chopra combines everyday life and collective history; daily acts such as eating, resting, washing and dressing, but also drawing and making clothes, acquire the value of ritual, becoming an essential part of the show.

Chopra’s performances on the international art scene began in 2008 on the back of a series of performances titled Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing Series that first opened at Chatterjee & Lal, Mumbai. The artist was invited to contribute to Time Crevasse (Yokohama Triennale, Yokohama), Chalo India! (Mori Art Museum, Tokyo) and Indian Highway (Serpentine Gallery, London). In 2009 he showed his work at the Astrup Fearnley Museum Oslo, Kunstenfestivaldesarts Brussels, and also took part in Making Worlds (53rd Venice Biennale) and Marina Abramovic Presents (Manchester International Festival, The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester). In April 2012, he returned to India after a 1 year Fellowship in Berlin at Freie Universität’s International Research Center, Interweaving Performance Cultures and a solo exhibition at Galleria Continua in San Gimignano, Italy. 2013 took him back to the Manchester International Festival for a solo project where he received critical acclaim for his performance Coal on Cotton. In 2014 Chopra performed Give me your blood and I will give you freedom.at the Singapore International Festival of Art.

Nikhil Chopra was born in Calcutta in 1974, and lives in Goa. After studying at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Maharaja Sayaji Rao University in Baroda, India, the artist continued his studies in the United States, where, in 2003, he had his first solo exhibition, Sir Raja II. In 2009 he returned to the US with the solo exhibition Yog Raj Chitrakar: Memory Drawing IX, at the New Museum of New York, and the group show Production Site: The Artist’s Studio Inside-out at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago (2010). The artist made a film called Man Eats Rock in collaboration with Munir Kabani for the H Box, presented at the Artsonje Center in Seoul, at the Today Art Museum in Beijing and at the Guangdong Museum of Art in Guangzhou (2011).

For more information and details of Chopra’s work see www.nikhilchopra.net.