



AXEL RÜGER APPOINTED AS NEW SECRETARY AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS

The Royal Academy of Arts announced today that Axel Rüger has been appointed as the new Secretary and Chief Executive. He replaces Sir Charles Saumarez Smith who stepped down at the end of 2018. Rüger is currently the Director of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

Rüger spent his early career in museums in the US, before becoming curator of Dutch Paintings at the National Gallery, London in 1999. He has been Director of the Van Gogh Museum since 2006 and, during his tenure, has made it one of the most successful museums internationally.

Rüger's appointment has been approved by the Royal Academy's Council, General Assembly and Her Majesty The Queen. He will start his new role at the Royal Academy in June 2019.

Axel Rüger said: "It is a great honour for me to have been asked to become the new Secretary and Chief Executive of the Royal Academy. The RA derives its unique character from being independent and artist-led and I greatly look forward to working with the Royal Academicians as well as the dedicated staff to develop further the standing of the RA at home and abroad. Following the 250th anniversary and the RA's recent expansion, it feels like the Academy is now ready to embark on a new and exhilarating chapter in its rich history. I am excited about the opportunity to join at this critical moment and to work to tell great stories through ambitious and varied exhibitions, innovative programmes and debate and, more generally, to make the RA, its activities and collections ever more accessible to audiences from around the globe."

Christopher Le Brun, President of the Royal Academy of Arts, said: "I am delighted that Axel Rüger will be joining the Academy as our new Secretary and Chief Executive in June. His appointment coincides with a moment in history when the international reputation of the Academy has never been higher. Axel is the perfect fit. His success at the Van Gogh Museum is highly acclaimed, and he is widely acknowledged as one of the leading directors of his generation. His experience, both in the UK and abroad, makes him ideally suited to work alongside our distinguished Royal Academicians and staff in guiding the RA towards a highly promising future and I am very much looking forward to working with him."

Rebecca Salter, Keeper of the Royal Academy, said: "Axel Rüger brings with him a wealth of experience, which will enhance the profile and independent character of the Royal Academy. I know my fellow Academicians and all our staff will enjoy working with him as we continue to explore the potential of our new campus and shape the Royal Academy for the future."

Notes to Editors:

Biography: Axel Rüger

Axel Rüger was born in 1968 in Dortmund, Germany. He studied Art History at the Freie Universität in Berlin, the University of Cambridge and Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario.

Rüger worked in various museums in Atlanta, Detroit and Washington D.C. before he was appointed Curator of Dutch Paintings, 1600-1800, at the National Gallery in London in 1999.

He curated a number of international exhibitions for the National Gallery including *Vermeer and the Delft School* (2001), *Aelbert Cuyp* (2002) and *Masterpieces of Seventeenth-Century Dutch Portrait Painting* (2007).

In 2004, whilst still at the National Gallery, he was selected to take part in the first year of the then newly created Clore Leadership Programme – a high level initiative of the Clore Duffield Foundation, which focuses on the development of leadership in the cultural sector. Part of that programme was a four-month secondment to the Royal Court Theatre in London.

In 2006 Rüger became the Director of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and The Mesdag Collection in The Hague. At the Van Gogh Museum, he has been primarily responsible for artistic direction and public affairs. He completed various research projects such as the new complete edition of Van Gogh's letters (2009) and has been responsible for the new display of the collection and numerous exhibitions, including: *Van Gogh and the Colours of the Night* (2009), *Munch : Van Gogh* (2015), *Van Gogh & Japan* (2018) and *Hockney – Van Gogh: The Joy of Nature* (2019).

He also developed the collection further through acquisitions, including: Vincent van Gogh's *Pollard Willow* (1882), Edgar Degas' *La lecture après le bain* (c.1879-1883), Paul Signac's *The "Ponton de la Félicité" at Asnières (Opus no. 143)* (1886) and Edvard Munch's *Felix Auerbach* (1906).

Besides the artistic aspects, Rüger developed the museum by building a new conservation studio and adding a new Entrance Hall, the latter greatly enhancing the museum's capacity. During his tenure, visitor numbers grew from 1.4 million to around 2.2 million a year. Fundraising, marketing and commercial activities were also significantly increased. Further initiatives include *Van Gogh Museum Professional Services* and the *Meet Vincent van Gogh Experience* that is to be re-launched in March 2019 in Barcelona.

The museum also developed its digital offer. It introduced a Multimedia Tour available in 11 languages for the permanent collection and each exhibition. The website has now 6.5 million viewers per year and on social media the museum has over 7 million followers and the highest engagement rate of any art museum worldwide.

In 2017, the Erasmus University, Rotterdam, published a report on the reputation of the 18 most famous art museums in the world. International respondents ranked the Van Gogh Museum second after the Louvre in Paris.

Rüger also holds several external board positions and appears regularly on television and radio.

About the Royal Academy of Arts

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

The Royal Academy launched a new campus as part of the celebrations of its 250th anniversary year in 2018. Following this transformative redevelopment, designed by the internationally-acclaimed architect Sir David Chipperfield RA and supported by the National Lottery, the new Royal Academy of Arts reveals more of the elements that make the RA unique – sharing with the public historic treasures from its Collection, the work of its Royal Academicians and the Royal Academy Schools, and its role as a centre for learning and debate about art and architecture – alongside its world-class exhibitions programme. Royalacademy.org.uk

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