

# SEANKELLY

Parsons, Elly. "Idris Khan's first UK public sculpture addresses our photo-obsessed culture."  
*Wallpaper\**. November 4, 2019.

## Wallpaper\*

### **Idris Khan's first UK public sculpture addresses our photo-obsessed culture**

Referring to his personal archive of some 65,000 photographs, the London-based artist has created a monumental tower that represents our collective zeal to document our lives



*Idris Khan's first UK public sculpture addresses our photo-obsessed culture*

Today, we hold more photographs in the palms of our hand than ever before, yet we physically touch next to none. In this Insta-age of post-physical-photos, London-based artist Idris Khan asks us to consider the spatial volume these many thousands of images would fill, stacked one on top of the other, should they be printed. Shaped like a tapering exclamation mark, his public sculpture – 65,000 Photographs – officially announced its presence in One Blackfriars square this morning, 5 November 2019.

Commissioned by St George City Ltd with London Borough of Southwark, as part of its One Blackfriars residential development transforming the South Bank, the artist had full creative flexibility. 'They initially had a much smaller sculpture in mind, but they allowed me to build much higher,' he says of the soaring 8m sculpture, which escalate skywards, its constituent blocks

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growing in size in relation to dimensions of standard photographic prints: 5x7, 10x7, 12x16 inches and so on.



*65,000 Photographs at One Blackfriars, by Idris Khan, 2019. Photography: © Stephen White. 65,000 Photographs was originally commissioned by London Borough of Southwark as part of the One Blackfriars Public Art Programme on behalf of St George City Limit*

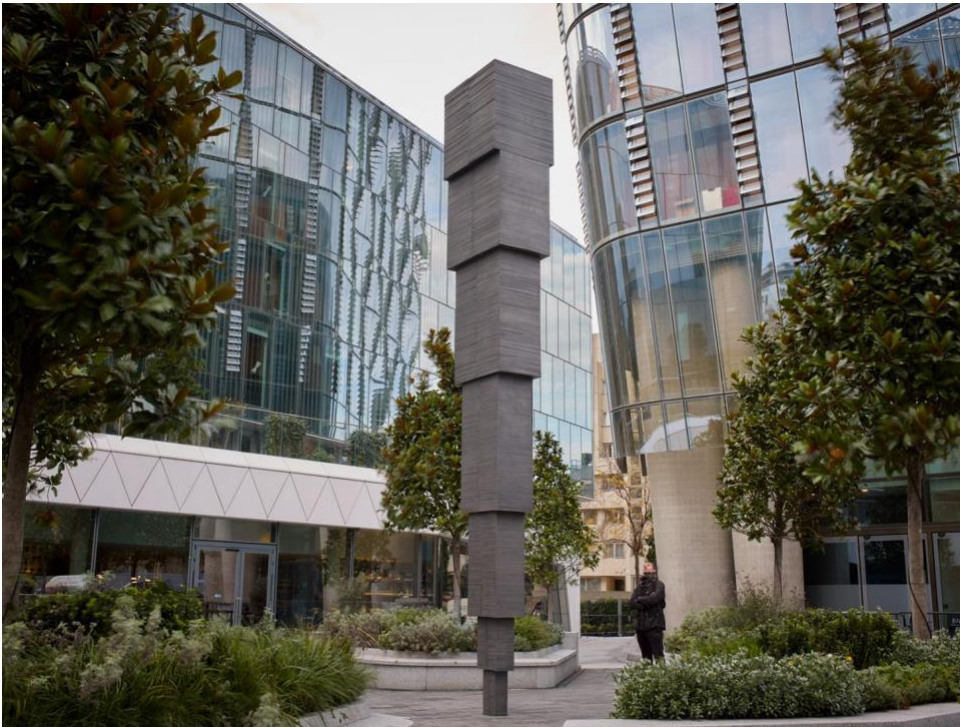
We're speaking at the artist's enviable north London studio, which he shares with wife and fellow artist Annie Morris. Together, to understand the inspirations behind the work, we flick through albums of family photographs nestling for space on the computer screen. It's easy to see how the artist has amassed a personal collection of 65,000. Indeed, the whole studio is bursting with life, family and colour – traces of the bright blue from Khan's famous abstract paintings (the latest iterations of which are currently on view at Victoria Miro Venice) leave blue fingerprint smudges



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on the coffee mugs. I come away with a stained blue palm, branding everything I touch across the city an Idris blue.

Fabulous as his space is, it's no place to have created the monumental aluminium structure (which wouldn't fit through the doors of Khan's workspace). Instead, Khan joined forces with



Top, the sand casting process, behind the scenes at the UAP foundry, 2019. Photography: Cian Sanders.  
Bottom, 65,000 Photographs at One Blackfriars, by Idris Khan, 2019. Photography: © Stephen White

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As such, Khan does not see 65,000 Photographs as a negative comment on today's progressions in digital photography, and the artist acknowledges the value that a platform like Instagram holds as a communication tool. 'I choose not to have an Instagram presence myself,' he explains, 'but I have created an account for the artwork, in the hopes that the public will enjoy interacting with it. I think they'd be more interested in seeing this, than seeing pictures of me!'

Rather than scrolling through a million images at a dizzying rate, the sculpture itself asks us to pause for a moment in quiet contemplation. Its textured surface, which appears almost frayed, echoes the delicate edges of each photographic print. Together, these lines create a dynamic rhythm that relates to much the artist's other works, in which lines – sometimes of text – are overlaid hypnotically.

65,000 Photographs distills Khan's photographed life into a physical column. Despite its long-distance production method, and initially austere physicality, this is an immensely personal project for Khan. 'I feel like a Londoner,' says the Birmingham-born artist, who moved to the capital in 2002 to nurture his career and family. 'This is my way of giving something back to the city that has given so much to me.'