# Dame Judi Dench inspires £20,000 fundraising art event for lymphoedema research



At Claridge’s hotel in London on a recent evening, a unique fusion of art, celebrity, and philanthropy unfolded as Dame Judi Dench modelled for a live sculpture created by artist Frances Segelman. The event, intended to raise funds for lymphoedema research, saw ticket sales exceeding £20,000, with expectations that the completed bust, once cast in bronze, could fetch double that through bids for the final piece.

The atmosphere in the hotel’s opulent art deco ballroom was charged with anticipation as artist and model began their task. The evening commenced with Dench, a cinematic and theatrical icon, sitting patiently next to Segelman. The sculptor, known for her lively art exhibitions featuring various public figures, transformed a 12kg lump of clay into an oversized likeness of Dench in just three hours. With gentle hands, she chiselled at the clay as guests arrived, creating a striking representation that measured 50% larger than Dench’s actual head.

Frances Segelman, glamorous in a black lace gown, deftly measured Dench’s facial features with tools reminiscent of both a tailor and a surgeon, while Dench, despite advancing age and health struggles, remained the epitome of grace and humour. Speaking during the event, her daughter Finty Williams remarked on the experience, noting how the sculpture became more recognisable to the audience as the process unfolded.

The event served a dual purpose: entertaining guests while raising awareness about lymphoedema, a condition that is often overlooked yet impacts many individuals, especially those recovering from cancer treatments. Dr Peter Mortimer from St George’s Hospital highlighted the deficit in public understanding regarding the condition's serious implications, describing it as a “hidden epidemic” that can lead to severe complications if left untreated.

The gathering consisted of around 200 supporters, many of whom had connections to Dench through her work and philanthropic efforts, including renowned photographer Gemma Levine. Levine, who has championed lymphoedema fundraising, shared a long-standing friendship with Dench that began over three decades ago. She praised Dench as not just a great subject for art but as a beacon of professionalism and kindness.

As the evening progressed, guests mingled, exchanging remarks about their favourite Dench performances in film and television, with memorable roles from her James Bond days to her comedies like "As Time Goes By" emerging as crowd favourites. Simon Callow, in a poignant moment, recited Christina Rossetti’s poem “A Birthday,” encapsulating the spirit of celebration surrounding Dench.

The atmosphere turned intimate as Dench, now 90 and living with macular degeneration, expressed her joy in participating, even though she admitted, “I can’t see a thing.” Despite her inability to visually assess the work, she felt the warmth of the event, commenting on the sea of friendly faces around her. This sentiment resonated with Williams, who noted her mother’s modesty and self-perception, reflecting, “She’s a Quaker, so she’s not a big fan of looking at herself.”

Ultimately, as the clay form of Dench transformed into a captivating bust, Segelman reflected on the process with admiration for Dench’s spirit. “She was so sweet and kind and she never moved,” she said, marveling at the actress's youthful qualities throughout the creative process.

The finished piece, still wet, was carefully transported away as guests departed, leaving an indelible impression of an evening devoted not only to art but also to understanding and supporting a vital health issue. As the curtain fell on this unique blending of creativity and charity, it was clear that both the event and the artistic work created in real time had elevated the excitement and awareness surrounding lymphoedema, embodied in the spirit of an enduring cultural icon.

### Reference Map

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* Paragraph 2: (1)
* Paragraph 3: (1), (2)
* Paragraph 4: (1), (2)
* Paragraph 5: (1), (3), (4)
* Paragraph 6: (1)
* Paragraph 7: (1)
* Paragraph 8: (1), (3)
* Paragraph 9: (1), (2)
* Paragraph 10: (1)
* Paragraph 11: (1)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/20/judi-dench-models-for-a-live-sculpture> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2025/may/20/judi-dench-models-for-a-live-sculpture> - An article detailing Dame Judi Dench's participation in a live sculpture event hosted by artist Frances Segelman at Claridge's hotel in London. The event aimed to raise funds for lymphoedema research, with ticket sales exceeding £20,000. The completed bust, once cast in bronze, is expected to fetch double that amount. The piece was created in front of an audience, with Dench sitting quietly as Segelman sculpted her likeness in clay.
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