

Joseph Wright of Derby and Single Artist Collections British Art Network Seminar

Monday 30 June 2014, 11.00 – 17.00
Derby Museum and Art Gallery

The British Art Network brings together professionals working with British art from the 16th century to the present day. The aim of the network is to contribute to the sharing of expertise, research and ideas across cultural organisations; to enable improvements in curatorial skills and collection knowledge; and to foster greater collaboration between partners leading to enriched understanding and enjoyment of British art for audiences across the UK.



Joseph Wright of Derby
Vesuvius in Eruption, with a View over the
Islands in the Bay of Naples c.1776-80
Oil paint on canvas
Purchased with assistance from the National
Heritage Memorial Fund, the Art Fund, Friends of
the Tate Gallery, and Mr John Ritblat 1990

Today's seminar will explore questions and issues around 'single artist collections' - the in-depth holdings of key individual artists found in many museums and galleries across the UK. Often of international importance, these collections are major assets and a focus for public and scholarly interest. Using the collection of Joseph Wright's work at Derby Museums as a starting point, the day will explore some of the challenges these collections can pose, in terms of presentation, administration and research and offer the chance to share experiences and insights through case studies and group discussion.

Programmed by Lucy Bamford, Keeper of Art, Derby Museums, in collaboration with Martin Myrone, Lead Curator, Pre-1800 British Art, Tate

Programme

- 10.30 – 11.00 Welcome Tea and Coffee
- 11.00 – 11.15 Welcome and introduction to the Joseph Wright Institute, by Lucy Bamford, Keeper of Art, Derby Museums and Tony Butler, Director of Derby Museums Trust
- 11.15 – 12.15 Tour of the *Joseph Wright of Derby: Bath and Beyond* exhibition and the Joseph Wright Study Centre led by Lucy Bamford, Keeper of Art and Matt Edwards, Curator of Visual Art and Joseph Wright Study Centre, Derby Museums
- 12.15 – 13.00 **Session 1**
- 12.15 – 12.25 Introduction to the seminar by Martin Myrone, Lead Curator, Pre-1800 British Art, Tate Britain
- 12.25 – 12.40 Alice Insley
Painter and place: Joseph Wright and Derby in the 19th century
- Joseph Wright's adopted name 'Wright of Derby' has linked the artist with his hometown from his lifetime up to the present day. However, this relationship has been interpreted and understood in different ways, and this talk will therefore seek to discuss this in relation to the 19th century, an important time for the development of Wright's posthumous reputation.
- 12.40 – 13.00 Followed by discussion, chaired by Martin Myrone
- 13.00 – 14.00 Lunch will be served
- 14.00 – 15.30 **Session 2**
- 14.00 – 14.15 Mark Bills
Gainsborough's House
- Gainsborough's House is the childhood home of Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788) in Sudbury Suffolk. It is an independent museum that showcases the life and art of Gainsborough, has changing exhibition and displays and a working print workshop. This paper will discuss the issues faced in developing Gainsborough's House given the particular nature of the site and the artist's life and work.
- 14.15 – 14.30 Dr. Nicholas Tromans
Limnerslease and Watts Gallery
- Watts Gallery near Guildford holds a collection dominated by the work of its founder, George Frederic Watts (1817-1904), one of the Victorian era's pre-eminent painters and sculptors. A century after its opening, the Gallery was thoroughly restored and reopened in 2011. Since then, the Gallery has acquired Limnerslease, the house across the lane to which Watts and his

wife, the designer Mary Seton Watts, moved in 1891. Here we will be showing more of Mary's work and telling the local social history of the Wattses in Compton. But the nature of our collection means that all our initiatives must always circle back to G. F. Watts himself. This paper considers the challenges and opportunities faced by an ambitious small museum based on a single-artist collection.

14.30 – 14.45 Laura Turner
William Etty and York Museums Trust

Born in York in 1787, William Etty (1787-1849) is the city's most famous artistic son. As an artist who specialised in the female nude, he was frequently criticised for his depictions of 'pulpy' flesh. This presentation will focus on York's collection of works by the artist (the largest holding in the UK) and the ways in which we are exploring Etty's work through new research, public programmes and a new collecting strategy.

14.45 – 15.00 Alex Kidson
Charles Towne and the Walker Gallery

Charles Towne (1763-1840), largely forgotten now, was in his day a prolific and successful painter of animal subjects in Liverpool in the tradition of George Stubbs. He deserves to be represented in his home town art gallery – but arguably not by as many as 98 paintings. This paper will describe the circumstances behind this imbalanced acquisition of the work of a minor figure, and examine some of its museological consequences.

15.00 – 15.15 Frances Guy
What's in a Name? Barbara Hepworth and Wakefield

The Hepworth Wakefield opened in May 2011 to critical and public acclaim. Its core remit is two-fold: to celebrate Wakefield as the city where Hepworth was born and brought up and, in so doing, to contribute to the economic and cultural regeneration of the area. So, three years into its history, has the association with Hepworth's name had the desired impact on Wakefield and what are the wider implications for the gallery's programme, research and understanding of Hepworth's legacy?

15.15 – 15.30 Followed by discussion, chaired by Lucy Bamford

15.30 – 16.00 Tea and coffee will be served

16.00 – 17.00 **Session 3**

16.00 – 16.50 Group discussion chaired by Prof. Sam Smiles, University of Exeter

16.50 – 17.00 Closing remarks from Martin Myrone, Lead Curator, Pre-1800 British Art, Tate