FINDING THE VALUE

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4 JULY – 2 NOVEMBER 2014
This year York Museums Trust is celebrating ten years of contemporary art in York St Mary’s. Located in the heart of the historic walled city of York, York St Mary’s is a deconsecrated church dating back to the 15th century. In 2004 we decided to invite artists to exhibit and create site-specific installations in response to this most beautiful building. The programme has been a welcome contemporary addition to the cultural life of York; not only introducing current visual art but offering a new response to the reinterpretation of an historic building.

This publication charts the various installations we have commissioned over the last ten years in all their different expressions of the building, including our latest exhibition Finding the Value.

This year the exhibition involves the work of five artists, all of whom have created new work using a private collection as the stimulus and its content as material for new art works. The collection was part of a bequest York Museums Trust received from Peter Emil Madsen in 2011. Over the last ten years we have worked with several artists who represented York St Mary’s in imaginative and thoughtful ways, enabling the visitor to experience anew the quality of the architectural space with its changing light. York Museums Trust wishes to thank everyone we have worked with over the decade with a special thanks to the artists who have made the building live again for us all.
In 2011, York Museums Trust was surprised and delighted to receive two bequests amounting, in all, to £2 million from brother and sister, Karen Madsen and Peter Emil Madsen. They had been living separately in retirement in York after long and successful careers. Amongst their interests were art and archaeology but we know little of them beyond that Peter Madsen worked at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment in Oxfordshire.

This generous bequest gave us the ‘seed money’ essential to launch a fundraising campaign to raise the £8 million needed to develop York Art Gallery. The building badly needed investment and, with the relocation of the City Archives to a new purpose built building, it was the right time to expand the gallery. The capital project is currently underway with funding from the Arts Council England and many other generous local and national sources. The gallery is due to reopen to the public in summer 2015 with 60% more space created within its existing footprint plus improvements to all aspects of the visitor experience.

As well as the £2 million, Peter Madsen also bequeathed his extensive and eclectic collection comprising paintings, books, works on paper, small sculptures and ethnographic objects.

The collection had been mostly purchased from auction houses in the south of England. Some of it was still in its original packaging straight from the saleroom. The range of objects and quality meant we had to assess it carefully to decide what to keep. It was a big collection and, in the end, we selected a small number of 16th century drawings and Japanese prints to accession into York Art Gallery’s collection. Much of the rest of the collection was sold at auction.
We wanted to honour Peter Madsen’s generosity in a creative and innovative way and so York Art Gallery invited five artists to make new art works in response to the residue of the Madsen Collection left after accessioning and the sales at auction.

His financial generosity is immediately obvious – enabling the York Art Gallery development project. Gifts of works of art, however, are also a trust obligation; the generosity is of more than financial value. These works meant something to Peter Madsen, their makers and the people who have owned them.

Peter Madsen left all of his collection to York Art Gallery, giving the gallery the option to sell any pieces not accessioned into the collection. Of course, some works immediately suggested themselves on a basis of historical importance and artistic quality as desirable additions to the permanent collection. These also form a direct memento of the bequest. Other works could be readily assigned a market value, sold at auction and so happily passed to the care of other collectors and a financial benefit gained.

What remained was a relatively large number of lesser value items. However these may well have been objects of high value in terms of personal meaning or affection.

How can the curator respond to these human values as opposed to straightforward calculations of financial worth?

The bequest was given in trust to a Trust and thereby implicitly raised questions of good faith with respect to past objects of cultural meaning and their potential positioning in the mind of the future.

At this point it was decided to use the monies raised from the works sold at auction to finance a creative response to Peter Madsen’s generosity. Rather than sell off the remainder of the bequest we decided to invite the five artists to join with us in taking what might be termed a cultural entrepreneurial risk.

We decided to take these works, both images and objects, as the raw material for new works. It is intended that the new works should respond to, investigate and develop the values and cultural meaning of the original works. It may even be the case that the financial value of the new works will greatly exceed the present value of the original material. It is hoped to be a creative questioning of, and experiment in, the inheritance and development of cultural values.

For a past generosity should not be simply cashed in against the vagaries of a present fashion. The present must actively inherit the past otherwise we will sell short the future.

The idea for creating an exhibition by commissioning artists to make new art works was suggested by Phil Barnes and York St Mary’s is grateful for this innovative and thought-provoking idea that questions our notions of value – both monetary and artistic.

Dr Janet Barnes CBE
Chief Executive
York Museums Trust
I chose a selection of paintings from the Madsen Collection with which to create new paintings. My ReconFigure Paintings feature an abstract painted structure superimposed upon the human figures in the paintings. The eye alternates between my geometric or crystalline additions and the background of the original picture, something that is usually sidelined when we focus on the dominant figure. Despite a consistency of rules adopted when painting, each work takes on its own unique character and alters the viewer’s perception of the original source.

I see my marks creating a consistency to the original paintings, as a way of bringing their diversity together, whilst also celebrating it. I also see a parallel with the somewhat unknown figures of the Madsen brother and sister and the painted-out figures in my paintings. In both cases they are present, almost hidden behind a veil, but are also something that is absent, no longer with us.

Andrew Bracey’s practice hovers on the fringes of painting as it crosses over and expands into installation, sculpture, drawing and animation. He often uses existing places and the readymade as alternatives to the traditional canvas support for painting, creating tensions between the hand-made and the man-made. Bracey is intrigued by the visual saturation of contemporary life. Work is often displayed en masse, with hundreds of individual elements combining to create a whole, to reflect how society has re-configured ways of viewing and processing mass-information in a variety of contexts, from the Sunday newspaper to walking down the high street.

Andrew Bracey is based in Waddington, England. He studied fine art at Liverpool John Moores and Manchester Metropolitan Universities and graduated with an MA in Fine Art in 2001. He has since exhibited widely in the UK and Europe. He is currently Programme Leader of MA Fine Art and MA Contemporary Curatorial Practice at The University of Lincoln.

www.andrewbracey.co.uk
'I have responded to and, in some cases, worked directly onto specific objects that I discovered in the Madsen Collection. By adding my own imprint onto these items I want to re-invigorate them, to add new meaning and show new value in what some would perceive to be ‘junk’.

Typically I create characters and scenarios from imagination and dreams, however for this project I have been inspired directly by a cast of characters I came across in the Madsen Collection. In particular, I was intrigued by a drawing of three blind mice about to have their tails cut off by a carving knife, some ornamental objects and a photograph album of Victorian theatrical scenes. The characters are re-imagined in the new painting compositions I have created for the exhibition.'

Alison Erika Forde creates paintings and objects that draw on dreams and memories of past experiences. Her imagery and illustrative style is influenced as much by book illustration, comic strips and kitsch as it is by fine art’s history. Alison uses found materials discovered in charity shops and second hand stores, alongside other discarded and donated items given to her by family and friends. Using the formal qualities and past histories of these objects as starting points, Alison creates engaging images which, on initial viewing, have a disarming playfulness. Closer inspection however, reveals a cast of wide-eyed characters frequently facing impending peril and uncomfortable scenes enacted on the periphery.

She graduated from Manchester Metropolitan University in 2008 with a 1st class BA (Hons) Fine Art. Her solo exhibitions include Smotherland at The International 3 and Better Out Than In at Mas Art Galeria, Barcelona. Her first solo public gallery exhibition, The Tallest of Tales took place in 2013 at Manchester Art Gallery. She is a founder member of the artists’ collective Yikes! Alison Erika Forde is represented by The International 3 and is supported by Martyn and Valerie Torevell and Islington Mill.

www.alisonerikaforde.com
‘Casing In explores the relationship between decay and preservation. I was particularly excited to find a small collection of Japanese hand-bound books in the Madsen Collection, and a collection of prints and paintings on Japanese rice paper. I was intrigued by markings and perforations through some of the book covers and pages that, on first inspection, were assumed to be intentionally made. These delicate marks are actually the trails left by insects – a beautiful tracery which coincidentally mirrors the landscape drawings found within the books. I worked with silkworms and their fascinating spinning techniques to mend and preserve books from the collection, which had been subject to both these insects and the decay of time. Casing In magnifies these uncontrollable interventions of nature and time.

For Casing In I created different environments that magnified these uncontrollable interventions of nature and time. I chose the title because it links to a book-binding process of ‘casing-in’, and to the cases or cocoons woven by the silkworms.’

Yvette Hawkins is a British paper artist of English-South Korean origin who makes installations and sculptural objects using books, maps and other found materials, utilising a variety of techniques that include cutting, folding, stitching and bookbinding.

Yvette trained at Glasgow School of Art and graduated from Newcastle University in 2007. She has had numerous group and solo exhibitions within the UK.

Yvette also works to commission and has work in collections in Italy, Australia, Japan and the USA. Her work has been featured in books and magazines and was included in Book Art: Iconic Sculptures and Installations Made From Books (2011). Yvette is currently represented by Globe Gallery, UK and is lead artist on Book Apothecary: The Travelling Museum of Artist Books.

www.yvettehawkins.co.uk
‘My response to the collection is centred on the idea of the gift and how that context transforms the perception of the object that has been given. After visiting the collection I began to think about gifts and the cultural rituals around them. My immediate response to the collection had been an intense sense of poignancy: these things, amassed through a lifetime, must have had personal significance and had many stories and private memories attached to them, none of which are now available to us. I was struck by what a loaded gesture the act of giving such a collection is. It touches all sorts of areas, from trust and responsibility to subjective perceptions of value and worth.

I am interested in how the ritual of wrapping can make something seem more significant and potentially precious. Wrapping or covering obscures objects and can transform what is visible into something more ambiguous and intriguing. I am curious about how this might shift focus from a reading of the qualities of the things within the collection to thoughts concerning gifts and the charged act of giving.’

Susie MacMurray is a British artist whose work includes drawing, sculpture and architectural installations.

A former classical musician, she retrained as an artist, graduating with an MA in Fine Art in 2001. She lives in Manchester and has an international exhibition profile, showing regularly in the USA and Europe as well as the UK.

Working in installation and sculpture she has gained a reputation for poetic site-specific interventions in historic spaces. Her work typically references the history of a space and merges the particularities of that history, the specifics of the site, and the meanings of materials to gain insight and raise questions about the relationship between place and people. Her site-specific installation Echo was presented in York St Mary’s in 2006.

Susie MacMurray is represented in the UK and Europe by Merville Galleries, and in North and South America by Danese Corey Gallery.

www.susie-macmurray.co.uk
'I became fascinated by how such a generous gift was made by just two letters, without the parties ever meeting, and that there is almost no information about or image of either Karen or Peter.

The exhibition’s church location prompted the idea of a triptych, as homage to the absent donors, with figurative imagery acting as stand-ins for them. I also brought in to play some of my other interests, such as Reliquaries, the elaborate containers for venerable objects of dubious provenance, and Cabinets of Curiosities, where questionably labelled eclectic collections fill beautiful purpose-built furniture creating incongruous and surreal juxtapositions.

Using only their artefacts and heirlooms I have created three animated tableaux which play with the dramas of life, death, transition, identity, relationships, reputation, depiction and portraiture whilst traversing the spiritual and secular worlds. Intrigued by how little is known about the Madsens, I felt their collection took on a greater significance in bearing testimony to their existence, outliving them, given new life and meaning, they march on in time transformed from personal to public ownership and from private collection to contemporary art.'

Simon Venus is a kinetic artist whose mechanical sculptures create an engaging, often humorous, interactive dialogue with the viewer. In his work he assembles and categorises objects only to subvert the order by introducing surprising or incongruous elements. He constructs magical, surreal worlds which are layered in meaning and explore many themes, including symbolism, metaphor, the conscious and the subconscious.

Simon Venus studied for a BA (Hons) Fine Art & Sculpture at Wolverhampton Polytechnic, and gained a BA (Hons) in Fashion Design from Birmingham University. His work has been exhibited in galleries across the UK, including the Kinetica Museum Spitalfields, Guildhall Art Gallery, Scarborough Art Gallery and First Gallery, Southampton. He lives and works in London.
A LIGHT CRESCENDO
ART ILLUMINATING YORK ST MARY’S
23 JULY – 30 OCTOBER 2004

The first exhibition of contemporary art in York St Mary’s, *a light crescendo*, included works by international artists using light, neon, projections, glass and reflective surfaces illuminating the historic space. The exhibition was curated by Paul Bradley with work by David Batchelor, Angela Bulloch, Langlands and Bell, Shaun Pickard, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Jaume Plensa, Gary Webb and Lawrence Weiner.

BREATHING SPACE
A SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION BY CAROLINE BROADHEAD
21 MAY – 9 OCTOBER 2005

Caroline Broadhead re-imagined the interior space of York St Mary’s by creating a suspended textile ceiling, dividing the upper and lower levels of the church. Experienced from the ground floor, the reduced height oppressed the space whilst from above, a breathtaking, open vista was created, bathed in the natural light from the church’s high windows.
Susie MacMurray’s Echo transformed the nave, filling it with a fragile cloud made from thousands of hairnets expanded into rounded shapes by violin strings. The installation reflected upon the untraceable sounds, experiences and emotions that have taken place at York St Mary’s over the last 600 years.

Keiko Mukaide used fire, water, glass, stone and light to convey her sense of the invisible energy in York St Mary’s. A pool filled the nave, flowing towards a suspended column of glass, dramatically top-lit, suggesting a spiritual path to a higher place. Visitors were invited to light a votive candle and float it in memory of loved ones.
FIVE SISTERS
A SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION BY EMMA BIGGS AND MATTHEW COLLINGS
23 MAY – 1 NOVEMBER 2009

Inspired by the famous ‘Five Sisters’ window in York Minster, Emma Biggs created a huge mosaic using York Museums Trust’s archaeological collection of pottery sherds. Oil paintings by Matthew Collings complemented and echoed the beautiful muted geometric appearance of the mosaic.

FLOOD
A SITE-SPECIFIC INSTALLATION BY SUSAN STOCKWELL
18 JUNE – 31 OCTOBER 2010

For Flood, Susan Stockwell created a tower of recycled computer components, which seemed to fall from the church’s ceiling and tumble into the nave. The computers were dissected, their innards exposed, revealing the underbelly of the machines we take for granted, an autopsy of our consumer society.
THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER
BY CORNELIA PARKER
28 MAY – 30 OCTOBER 2011

Loaned by Tate as part of Art in Yorkshire - supported by Tate, this installation comprised over 1000 silver objects, which had been flattened with a steamroller. Suspended in orderly rows by fine wires, the objects appeared to hover above the floor. The setting enhanced the religious allusion in the title of the work, which refers to the biblical story of how the apostle Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus in return for thirty pieces of silver.

TEMPLE OF A THOUSAND BELLS
AN INSTALLATION BY LAURA BELÉM
25 MAY – 4 NOVEMBER 2012

Brazilian artist Laura Belém created a mass of glass bells that seemed to float in the nave of York St Mary’s. The work was inspired by an ancient legend about a temple with a thousand bells, built on an island that sank, over time, into the ocean. Here, the bells were accompanied by specially composed music and sound effects to create a contemplative experience of memory, nostalgia and loss.

Temple of a Thousand Bells was a re-interpretation of the work presented at Liverpool Biennial in 2010.
THE AESTHETICA ART PRIZE EXHIBITION
6 MARCH – 26 APRIL 2013

York St Mary’s hosted the first Aesthetica Art Prize Exhibition, organized in collaboration with Aesthetica Magazine. It showcased eight contemporary artists from across the world and brought their work to a wider audience. The 2013 main prize winner was Damien O’Mara for his photographic series The Trespasser, and the student prize winner was Poppy Whatmore for her piece The Nostalgic Act of a Family Meal (above).

Exhibiting artists: Sara Brennan, Caroline Jane Harris, Mary Humphrey, Hgung-Gyu Kim, Damien O’Mara, Kyunghee Park, Clare Walter, Poppy Whatmore.

THE MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH
AN INSTALLATION BY JULIAN STAIR
10 MAY – 7 JULY 2013

Potter and writer Julian Stair explored themes and perceptions of death. Shown alongside groups of archaeological objects selected by the artist from the rich collections of York Museums Trust, this contemporary interpretation of the rituals surrounding burial demonstrated the enduring tradition and creative possibilities of funerary ware.
ARTIST ROOMS: BRUCE NAUMAN

26 JULY – 10 NOVEMBER 2013

ARTIST ROOMS: Bruce Nauman showed examples of the renowned artist’s work across a broad spectrum of different media. The exhibition gave an overview of his career spanning thirty years, from his early neon word pieces to his later light installations.

ARTIST ROOMS On Tour is a partnership with Arts Council England and the Art Fund, making available the ARTIST ROOMS collection of international modern and contemporary art to galleries throughout the UK. It is jointly owned by Tate and the National Galleries of Scotland.

THE AESTHETICA ART PRIZE EXHIBITION

4 APRIL – 22 JUNE 2014

The second Aesthetica Art Prize Exhibition brought together eight artworks and exhibited work on screen by a further 92 artists. The 2014 main prize winner was Sybille Neumeyer for her work Song for the Last Queen, and the student prize winner was Harriet Lewars for her piece Frustum Super Platum Cum Filia Lyrae.

Finding the Value

Contemporary Artists Explore Aspects of the Madsen Collection

4 July - 2 November 2014

In 2011 Peter Madsen left his estate to York Museums Trust. Part of his bequest was his collection. Finding the Value is an exhibition of five commissioned artists who have created new works by responding to the collection and thereby opening up questions about the inheritance of cultural values.

Exhibiting artists: Andrew Bracey, Alison Erika Forde, Yvette Hawkins, Susie MacMurray, Simon Venus.