

Press release

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The Whitworth begins new chapter with a response to John Ruskin

Joy for Ever: how to use art to change the world and its price in the market
29 March – 9 June 2019

In the 200th anniversary of his birth, the Whitworth responds to the artist, art critic, teacher and social reformer John Ruskin - in a year when his words seem as relevant now as they did then, in a climate of perceived ecological, political and social catastrophe. Ruskin was complex, difficult and flawed, as well as profound. He also hated Manchester, and therefore it seems fitting that the city responds with equal complexity and irreverence.

Joy for Ever: how to use art to change the world and its price in the market combines the Whitworth's renowned collection of art and design (itself founded in the 19th Century on Ruskin-esque thinking) with archival documents, contemporary installations, a cast of the wall of Westminster Hall, a road building, textiles, politics, pictures, a protest on the EBacc by local school children and commissions from Manchester-based design studio Standard Practice and Grizedale Arts from the Lake District.

In 1857, John Ruskin (1819-1900) delivered one of his most important public lectures in response to the Great Art Treasures exhibition in Manchester, the largest art exposition ever held in the UK, where paintings, drawings and prints borrowed from wealthy private collectors across the country went on public display for the first time. In *The Political Economy of Art, or A Joy For Ever (and Its Price in the Market,)* he berates a city that he sees as the epicentre of all ills in the world: a manifestation of the rampant free market capitalism, industrialisation and its dehumanising effects engulfing the 19th century world. This lecture later became the seminal book *Unto This Last* (1860), his treatise on political economy that became the founding text for the Labour Party and inspiration for Ghandi's post-colonial reform of India. Referencing *A Joy For Ever*, the exhibition is structured as a wayward lecture, a step-by-step guide on how to use art for social change.

In the first gallery, the displays respond to Ruskin's question: how can an art collection be used for wider social advantage? Here some of the Whitworth's collections are curated by the gallery's 'Handmade' group, who meet regularly as part of a city-wide campaign to develop Manchester as an age-friendly city, alongside Year 9 pupils from The Hyndburn Academy in Blackburn who, in protest against the introduction of the EBacc that devalues arts education in schools.

The next gallery focuses on the relationship between art, architecture and ideas of good governance, speaking of how Gothic style was appropriated in the 19th century and became the architecture of state and commercial power. Ruskin admired the city of Venice as a model society, in which its Gothic buildings were created by the mutual cooperation of architect and craftsman, forming much of his thinking on the relationship between labour and happiness. Depictions of Gothic architecture by Ruskin's favourite artists JMW Turner and Samuel Prout from the Whitworth's collection will be displayed.

Jorge Otero-Pailos' *The Ethics of Dust*, is a large-scale latex cast of the wall surface of Westminster Hall, the oldest part of the Houses of Parliament. This was first shown at Westminster Hall in the immediate aftermath of the EU referendum result in June 2016. Here, it will be displayed alongside wallpaper designs by Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin for the Houses of Parliament and Alfred Waterhouse's designs of Manchester's neo-Gothic Town Hall.

As the exhibition opens on the day the UK is due to leave the European Union, a new moving image work by Greek artist Aikaterini Gegisian is included. This draws from the archives of the US Library of Congress and explores the breakdown of the European Union manifested in both the Greek debt crisis and Brexit.

The final gallery explores art's role in education and social design. Ruskin believed that drawing from nature helps shape our understanding of citizenship. He had a huge teaching collection, often making and commissioning copies of paintings and drawings of art, design and natural specimens as tools for instruction. Here a selection of drawings from Manchester's collections alongside an original lecture diagram, plaster casts of leaves and models of feathers borrowed from The Ruskin Museum are presented. Manchester design studio Standard Practice has been commissioned to make a series of drawing lecterns for visitors to make drawings inspired by the collections on display.

Manchester philanthropist and Ruskin follower, Thomas Horsfall (1841-1932), who set up the Ancoats Art Gallery and a picture loan scheme for schools in Manchester is also featured through letters of thanks from pupils and teachers related to the loan scheme. Horsfall's plans for Ancoats Art Gallery included the commissioning of a model interior designed by William Morris to inspire better home environments for the millworkers and the exhibition will feature elements of Morris' design including *Strawberry Thief* furnishing fabric and *Daisy* wallpaper.

Grizedale Arts marks its 10 year anniversary of projects in Coniston, the town where Ruskin lived for the last 28 years of his life and where he implemented many of his social experiments on craft, farming, water supply, dairy producing etc. This exhibition will present a mini survey of around 100 projects they've created to date, such as the Honest Shop, mini library and exhibitions of local crafts with a series of connected making workshops and talks.

About the Whitworth

The Whitworth is proudly part of the University of Manchester and serves as a bridge between the University and the people of the city; a place to meet, play and learn in public.

Its mission is to use art for social change; founded in 1889 as The Whitworth Institute and Park in memory of the industrialist Sir Joseph Whitworth for "the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester", with clear practical aims to counteract the malaises of inner-city life and to educate and inspire a city of makers and manufacturing.

The Whitworth re-opened to the public in 2015 after a major £17 million redevelopment by architects MUMA. It has welcomed over one million visitors since re-opening, and more than doubled its previous annual records. The redevelopment doubled the public space and created state-of-the-art new facilities to house the collection of over 55,000 works of art and included expanded gallery spaces, a study centre, learning studio, and a collections centre. The gallery was crowned Art Fund Museum of Year 2015, nominated for the prestigious Stirling Prize and named Best Emerging Cultural Destination in Europe. www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth

The gallery has historically been at the centre of civic and cultural life and this is also its future.

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