

Media release: Wednesday 21 July 2021, amended 8 October 2021

The Whitworth launches the first Museum-accredited NFT for an exhibition, for sale for social benefit.

The Whitworth, in partnership with Vastari Labs, is entering into the emerging world of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) to test alternative models of financing social art practice. The first UK museum-accredited NFT has been created as part of the gallery's major exhibition and research project, *Economics the Blockbuster*.

The NFT image is generated from William Blake's *The Ancient of Days*, one of the most iconic and widely reproduced images within the gallery's collection. Reproduced endlessly since its original print for mass circulation in the 19th century, *The Ancient of Days* formed the frontispiece for Blake's illuminated book *Europe: a Prophecy*, and has since been realised in all kinds of forms, from postcards and posters, to a projection onto the dome of St Paul's Cathedral.

The NFT image is a new digital visualisation of Blake's original work, generated by the extraordinary imaging expertise held at The John Rylands Research Institute and Library, The University of Manchester. Using multispectral imaging software (MSI), the NFT image is created through the processing and analysis of images of Blake's *The Ancient of Days* which had been created using different wavelengths of light, from UV to infrared. MSI analysis works using algorithms and data science, reminding us of the exceptional research capacity within arts and cultural institutions such as The University of Manchester.

Economics the Blockbuster explores the problems of existing economic models and proposes new ones that offer wider social benefit - culminating in a large-scale exhibition in 2023. At a time of great economic and social instability, this NFT project explores the potentials of blockchain technology and cryptocurrencies to test new ways of diverting private capital into social funds. Sale proceeds will go to a Whitworth community fund to be used in socially beneficial projects in partnership with communities, organisations and constituents of the gallery's surrounding neighbourhoods and networks. These projects will be dedicated to applying artistic thinking to education, health and environment.

The Ancient of Days NFT can be viewed [here](#) from 14 July and will go on sale on 28 July 2021 on the Tezos-supported platform Hic et Nunc in an edition of 50, with two editions retained by the Whitworth for perpetuity. A 20% creator royalty will be written into each NFT and all sales activity will be recorded to analyse the impact of this emerging phenomena on the established operations of the museum. The low carbon footprint of Tezos means developers and users can prioritise innovation without compromising sustainability.

The Ancient of Days NFT is a project by the Whitworth, The University of Manchester, in partnership with Vastari Labs.

Visit the project here: <https://whitworth.vastari.com/theancientofdaysnft>

Notes to Editors:**About the Whitworth**

The Whitworth is proudly part of The University of Manchester, operating as a convening space between the University and the people of the city. It was 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” and continues this mission today in new contexts.

In 2015 the gallery undertook a £17 million redevelopment by architects MUMA, which doubled the public space, creating new facilities to house the collection of over 55,000 works of art, textiles and wallpaper. Along with expanded gallery spaces, a study centre, learning studio, and collections care centre, the gallery reconnected with its park, with communal gardens and outdoor programmes. The gallery is driven by a mission to work with communities to use art for positive social change, and actively address what matters most in people’s lives. This new vision has been developed as part of an international dialogue about how to evolve and adapt museums to a constantly changing world. This work is underpinned by three key concepts: Learning together, through making and doing; Creating a place of care, consideration and community; Taking action.
www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth

About Vastari

Since 2012, Vastari has been at the forefront of championing innovative ways to reconsider the relationships between the private and public sectors in the area of Arts, Culture, Exhibitions and Technology. With a database of nearly 10,000 institutions worldwide, including most of the world’s leading museums, Vastari facilitated over \$2bn of matches in content collaborations in 2019/20.

In launching a private collection loan database in 2014 and touring exhibition marketplace in 2016, Vastari revolutionised collaboration and innovation in the museum experience. The introduction of Vastari Labs in 2021 ensures the sector can meet, head on, the invention and commercialisation challenges of a hybrid world.

About multispectral imaging (MSI)

The NFT is created through the use of multispectral imaging equipment and expertise developed by the Imaging Team at The John Rylands Research Institute and Library. This state-of-the-art Advanced Imaging capability is led by the Rylands to support research and conservation across The University of Manchester. This technology and expertise have enabled the Whitworth to generate new visual readings of this iconic and much-repeated image.

About Economics the Blockbuster

Economics the Blockbuster is a major new research and exhibition project, developed in collaboration with Alliance Manchester Business School.

The project takes up economics as a social, as well as financial, set of relations; one that is shaped by us all through our everyday actions. Recognising the failures and limits of current systems, brought into sharp focus by the ongoing global impact of Covid-19, Black Lives Matter and climate catastrophe, the project uses artistic thinking to imagine and test other ways of living together. Over the next two years, the Whitworth will work with a range of practitioners, from artists, writers, and activists to environmentalists, bankers and technologists, to explore alternative economies. The project will include an online research platform www.dpe.tools alongside wide-ranging activity such as artist commissions, residencies, workshops, teaching, social enterprise, publications, community projects and merchandise.

The exhibition [Economics the Blockbuster](#) will open at the Whitworth in Summer 2023.

Press Images:

1. William Blake (1757-1827), *Europe Plate i: Frontispiece, The Ancient of Days*, c.1827, relief etching, ink, watercolour, body colour on paper. H 232 x W 170 mm. Gift from John Edward Taylor, 1892. Courtesy of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.
2. William Blake (1757-1827), *Europe Plate i: Frontispiece, The Ancient of Days*, c.1827, on display at the Whitworth. Courtesy of The Whitworth, The University of Manchester.
3. *The Ancient of Days NFT* (detail), 2021, digital multispectral image, 5000x7000px, edition of 50 with 2 museum proofs. Courtesy of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.
4. *The Ancient of Days NFT* (detail), 2021, digital multispectral image, 5000x7000px, edition of 50 with 2 museum proofs. Courtesy of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.
5. *The Ancient of Days NFT* (detail), 2021, digital multispectral image, 5000x7000px, edition of 50 with 2 museum proofs. Courtesy of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.
6. *The Ancient of Days NFT* (detail), 2021, digital multispectral image, 5000x7000px, edition of 50 with 2 museum proofs. Courtesy of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.

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