

the Whitworth

Podcast transcript

A Walk In The Park

A Walk in the Park is a podcast series from the Whitworth. A university gallery, set in parkland in central Manchester. Hosted by the Cultural Park Keeper Francine Hayfron, each episode takes a look at what is happening inside and out at the Whitworth.

EPISODE 2

We're introduced to the *Queering the Whitworth* project led by the Visitor Team staff member Dominic Bilton. Examining works of art from the Whitworth's Collection that have an LGBTQ+ connection.

All of the episodes are available to listen to at:

<https://www.mixcloud.com/TheWhitworth/playlists/a-walk-in-the-park-podcast/>

Social tags:

Instagram – @whitworthart @whitworthcpk1 @foldedwinguk

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Hashtag – #AWalkInThePark #TheWhitworthAtHome #GalleryInThePark

A WALK IN THE PARK

EPISODE 2 - SPEAKERS

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A WALK IN THE PARK

EPISODE 2

<Music plays in the background: Bonobo – Second Sun>

FH: Hello and welcome. You're listening to A Walk in the Park – a podcast series from the Whitworth Art Gallery.

In each episode, we check out what's happening indoors and outdoors at the Whitworth, and we also take a look at other great work happening outdoors in museums and galleries across the country.

I'm **Francine Hayfron** - Cultural Park Keeper at the Whitworth, and your host for the next 30 minutes.

In this episode, we take a look at Queering the Whitworth - a project from the Whitworth that looks at the gallery's art collection from an LGBTQ perspective:

DB: *"We highlight particular queer pieces of artwork from the collection, and we tell the stories of those artists and their biographies. It's important that these connections are spoken about, because they were influential on the output of the artworks that's on the walls"*

FH: We visit MIMA, the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, to find out more about their community garden learning project:

K: *"It's all about connection, really. Connection, and skilling up, but very much about bringing a community of people together."*

FH: And we will catch up with Patrick Osborne, the man responsible for ensuring that the gardens at the Whitworth always look their best.

PO: *"One minute, I can be tending our community garden growing fruit and veg, the next minute I can be installing a stainless steel tree. So, yeah, just a huge amount of variety, and it's very interesting."*

QUEERING THE WHITWORTH

<Music plays in the background: Quantic - Atlantic Oscillations>

FH: Queering the Whitworth started as an online project via social media in the summer of 2018. The project examined works of art from the Whitworth's collection which have an LGBTQ connection.

The Whitworth's collection spans centuries and is prime place to tell the history of the LGBTQ community through its history.

The project was then developed into a tour, which expanded into curator tours, including one for the LGBTQ History Month, which showed a chronological sequence of artworks from the Renaissance to the present day. Since then, the gallery has conducted over 10 specific queer tours of the collection which are currently on the display.

I caught up with Dominic Bilton, who created the project, to find out more.

Here we are about to enter what we call Gallery 5 – the Exchanges exhibition.

DB: Yes. So this is a great space, with some great queer artists in it.

I'll start with a chap called William Beckford.

William Beckford was one of the richest people in England. When his father died, at the age of 10, he inherited plantations. His father was heavily involved in textiles and had plantations in the Caribbean. Beckford inherited those and his money came from plantations. The wealth that this man had, being one of the richest men in the country, came from slavery.

This exhibition is important and does open up that conversation about Beckford's past. This tour just adds on other element and another layer to the history of Beckford.

He had a thirst for hedonism and partying and everything else that is associated with money. In 1779, he met his cousin William Courtenay. William Courtenay, depending on this historian that you read, was 11 years of age at that time. It is said that William Beckford started a relationship with William Courtenay.

Within the upper classes, in Georgian England, it was quite common for heterosexual couples, heterosexual men particularly, to marry a girl who was 12. That was quite common practice.

They were together for six years until William Courtenay's uncle, Lord Loughborough, outed the relationship. So disgusted was he that Beckford and Courtenay were together, that he went to the courts and the papers to uncover this scandal. What this scandal did was bring shame upon him [Beckford] and force him to leave the country. So disgusted was George III with Beckford and his relationship with William Courtenay, that George III said: "This man should be hung." Homosexuality was still illegal by death at this time.

Because they had the money they escaped to Europe. This watercolour that we are seeing here on the wall by John Robert Cozens was a painting that was commissioned by Beckford whilst he was in Europe – exiled from Britain because of his homosexuality.

Beckford stayed in Europe for 10 years, mainly in Portugal, until he came back to Fonthill Abbey.

Fonthill Abbey was his family home. Villagers of that time, on his return from Europe, say that Beckford had a harem of boys and would often hold orgies on several occasions – so wild were the parties. Whether or not that's true or not, I think that depends upon the historian and the angle that they are coming from. However, what we do know is that when Beckford returned from Europe he had a relationship, yes, with a younger man, but he was with that man for quite a long time.

But it is important that, as a gay community, we also recognise those people who perhaps don't have as glorious a past as other artists, or other people, do. Because it is

important that we don't pick or choose who we include within our history. And that's why Beckford is included in this tour – because he has a scandalous past, because of the drama that goes with it, but also because of the negative element that he has within his biography as well.

<Music plays in the background: Georgia Anne Muldrow – Almost Trendy>

FH: Wow. What a fascinating start to the tour. OK, so what next?

DB: On to Dame Ethel Walker.

FH: Dame Ethel Walker.

DB: Dame Ethel Walker. Within Exchanges at the moment we have one of her pieces on the wall – this seascape of Robin Hood's Bay in North Yorkshire.

Dame Ethel Walker started painting when she was in her mid-20s. She decided that working wasn't for her, and she wanted to pursue a career within the arts.

We have two pieces of her work within our collection. She was a portraitist, as well as a painter of seascapes. Her portraits were of women. She was a gay woman, painted women, because she loved to paint and look at women.

She became Britain's greatest exponent of the impressionist style in 1900 and was admitted into many art clubs and societies because of this. In 1951, she died.

In 1952 there was a retrospective exhibition of hers along with two other artists – Gwen John and Frances Hodgkins – at Tate. That retrospective was quite interesting, in that it was three gay artists -- in 1952. What's interesting about that is that up until 1967 homosexuality was still illegal. Whilst the exhibition didn't obviously go into their sexuality, it's interesting that as we're scratching through the collections and finding and revealing histories, queer histories, with the artworks, it's interesting that we see these exhibitions that fly under the radar. But if you know what you are looking for, you can pick up those associations.

After she died, in 1951 and after the retrospective at Tate in 1952, Dame Ethel Walker fell out of grace with art history and the art world. Not until 2017, until she was exhibited again at the Queer British Art exhibition in Tate Britain, was her work rediscovered.

I include Dame Ethel Walker into this collection: a) as a recognition of her work as a woman, but b) as recognition of work as a queer woman.

We need to ask ourselves: "Why has she fallen out of grace with the artworld? Was it because she was a woman? Was it because she was gay? Was it because she was both of those things?" But now she's exhibited here with her work on the wall in Gallery 5.

<Music plays in the background: Georgia Anne Muldrow – Broken Folks>

FH: OK, so moving on from Exchanges, where are we off to next?

DB: We are going to go and walk about Pearl Alcock – a Jamaican artist, who came over to Britain in the Windrush generation.

FH: Pearl Alcock, I love her stuff! So, tell our listeners a little bit more about Pearl Alcock.

DB: Pearl Alcock was an artist, who started painting at the age of 50. She was very late to art.

Wanting to give a birthday card to a friend, she decided to draw one. And this is where her artistic career started, at the age of 50. After a friend saw how talented she was with drawing, her friends would come round with materials for her to be able to create more artworks. And this is where we really start with this exhibition up here ... is that some of the earlier works we can see use pencils and felt tip pens. But we can start to see the emergence of how talented she is with her use of colours and with form, as we can see with some of the earlier works within this collection.

As the years go by, she starts to develop her practice, with acrylics and with oils; and within the exhibition that we have on display at the moment on the mezzanine, we can really see the development of her practice.

She said that she had visions, where she would create these mood paintings. These mood paintings that she created seem to have this longing of return back to Jamaica.

She left an abusive relationship in Jamaica in 1958. She arrived initially in Liverpool - moved to Leeds for a while, while she got some money together working in factories or hotels where she really didn't like the work that she was doing - got the money together to move to London, where she lived in Brixton. Once again, she worked in hotels and in factories, doing jobs that she really hated, to get the money together to open a boutique shop on Railton Road. And beneath the boutique shop, was a cellar where she opened a shebeen

This shebeen was frequented by the local black gay community. It was an important anchor for that community within that area. Pearl Alcock, being a bisexual woman herself – people felt drawn to her shebeen because of that. What Pearl did was facilitate queer community within Brixton. It anchored black gay men to that area.

Unfortunately, due to the Brixton Riots in 1981, she lost her clothes shop. She then opened in that space a café, where she displayed her artwork. Second riots happened in 1985, which finished off the café. There was no trade. Nobody was going down to Railton Road, or the "front line" as it was called. So, the café closed as well.

This is the first time that Pearl's work has been displayed in a solo exhibition of this kind. So, it's a really important exhibition that we have on display at the moment - for Pearl Alcock, a woman of colour, with a solo exhibition. But her place in queer history is massively important - for that anchoring of gay community in Brixton, for the black gay community, and the white gay community, and for what she did in the formation of that community in London.

I am giving the highlights tour of Pearl Alcock's exhibition in the hope that the black gay community can come in, recognise Pearl as part of their community, and come in and really enjoy her exhibition, so that I am aware that as a white gay man I am not white-washing anybody's history.

<Music plays in the background: Georgia Anne Muldrow - When The Fonk Radiates>

FH: Why do you think it is important for us to reveal these connections?

DB: It's giving place and community to people. It's being able to identify gay men, gay women, of colour, cis-white, and being able to tell those stories of those people in order so that people can come in and be inspired by what they see.

We're tackling prejudice, with regards to telling these stories about these people. We're educating about these artists and about their biographies. It's important that these connections are spoken about, because they were influential on the output that's put out on the walls. Those themes come through, and those biographies come through in the artworks. By not telling those stories, you're missing connections that ordinarily wouldn't be there.

FH: So, what next for Queering the Whitworth?

DB: Well, already we've been making some ground-breaking steps within the gallery.

By uncovering these histories and connections to these artworks it's facilitating conversations within the gallery spaces where we are noticing now with the interpretations on the wall we've got the acronym LGBTQ+ for the first time in the gallery's history. We're having interpretation on the wall that's talking about black gay communities, with regards to Pearl Alcock's interpretation and show. So, this is just the start of this work that we hope will continue.

This research project will continue to uncover these histories of these artists - for example, Dame Ethel Walker, who was being forgotten for nearly 60 years. We have these artists within our collections; and by this programme ongoing, hopefully we can reveal these connections, more LGBT connections to the artworks.

FH: So it started off as a social media and online project, can you still follow this online?

DB: Yes, you can: #queeringthewhitworth on Twitter and Instagram etc.. We highlight particular queer artworks from the collection, and we tell the stories of those artworks. So that is an ongoing process and it happens quite regularly

FH: And if somebody comes to the Whitworth and would like to go on a Queering the Whitworth tour, how often do they take place?

DB: Yes. We have tours that start from the parkside entrance at 2 o'clock every day. Everybody within the visitor team is aware of the LGBTQ connections now that we have the artworks, and so an open conversation about the biographies that those artists have can be had within those tours. The highlights tours are specific to the person doing the tour, in that it is a highlight that they want to give of the collection. However, these biographies are available to everybody.

SPOTLIGHT

<Music plays in the background: Bonobo – Second Sun>

FH: The Whitworth is more than just a place which hangs art on its walls or sculptures on its grounds. We work with people and with communities.

Ever wondered what it is like to work in an art gallery? Each episode we shine a spotlight on a different role in the gallery. Today we catch up with the Whitworth's Landscape and Sustainability Technician and find out how much work goes in to looking after the gallery's green spaces.

PO: Hi, my name is Patrick Osborne and I am the Landscape and Sustainability Technician for the Whitworth.

<Music plays in background: Alex Attias (ft. Georgina Anne Muldrow) - Vibes>

So, I manage our gardens. I manage our volunteers that look after our gardens; I manage all the ordering for our gardens. I also manage sculpture installations when we have them, and I work on our large scale events like Frost Fair, WARP, or MIF (Manchester international Festival) for the ... logistical difficulty that they all are!

FH: And so can you give us an idea of what your average day of the gallery is like?

PO: It can be very mixed, and I am not sure there necessarily can be an average day at the gallery. It's always a bit crazy!

So my average day would be sort of coming in, catching up on my emails, start doing a bit of ordering maybe, and then I usually start outside with volunteers at 10 o'clock.

Particularly with the Grow group on Tuesdays and then, meeting Liz and the group outside and then I get them set up to do some sort of maintenance task, or some sort of planting task, or getting things prepped for the next season.

So, I also feed in quite a lot to our exhibition, and Health and Safety as well. So, recently we had the Ibrahim Mahama exhibition, and I helped with the unloading and loading of very large materials and sculptures as well. Obviously, that's the quite a big task. They don't happen all that often anymore, but it used to, so managing those from start to finish – the initial idea to actually installing them.

FH: What do you enjoy most about your job?

PO: The variety, to be honest. There's a huge amount of variety in my role. One minute, I can be tending our community garden growing fruit and veg, the next minute I can be installing a stainless steel tree. So, yeah, just a huge amount of variety, and it's very interesting.

FH: Thank you so much for that, Patrick. And over the course of time, we will be catching up with Patrick in the gallery gardens and the park to discover how they change over the seasons.

<Music plays in the background: Bonobo – Second Sun>

COMMUNITY GARDEN AT MIMA

FH: In this series, I want to take a look at other great work that's happening across museums and galleries up and down the country.

Community gardens are a wonderful resource. They enable people to come together to form social bonds, share new skills, share knowledge, and help to improve communities.

<Music plays in the background: James Blake – Barefoot in the Park>

As you approach the entrance to MIMA, the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, you will find a welcoming and vibrant community garden that hosts a weekly drop in session for members of the community. The project creates opportunities to work with artists, academics, and makers who are interested in supporting ecosystems which sustain the environment.

I paid a visit to MIMA to find out more about this growing project, and to speak to those who enjoy getting their hands dirty in the garden.

A: Hello. I'm Alice and I'm an Assistant Learning Curator here at MIMA.

K: Hi. I'm Kate. I'm Public Programmes and Events Assistant Curator here at MIMA.

FH: So, here we are in the wonderful little plot at the side of MIMA. So, how big actually is this site?

A: What we say to kids is that MIMA's 15 elephants wide, so there's a little visual there for you that you could use!

<Laughter>

FH: Perfect! OK, and what was here before you built the garden?

A: Before we built the garden ... I think it was just wasteland?

K: Yes, it was wasteland. It's between the main MIMA building and the library. It's making use of a space that perhaps wasn't used at all.

FH: OK, so let's take a walk around... So, I can see a bed over there, first, where we've got courgettes, and what else are you growing? What other veg are you growing here?

A: We've got some huge marrows, there haven't we?

K: Yes.

A: This year, we've kind of used donated seeds. So, we've grown a lot of things things that were donated from the people at the university, people that we've worked on green projects with. So, that has been courgettes, broccoli, which hasn't done very well this year. I know that's not just us, it's across the board! The conditions haven't been the best for it. We've had lots of beetroot. We've had countless lettuce.

FH: Fabulous. So, the produce that you grow here you take it and use it in the café? You use it for your lunches?

K: Yes. At the end of each garden session as well there's an opportunity to take produce home by the people that come to the session. So, yes, we use the produce for special events and regularly service the café with what we've grown too.

FH: OK, so what are the aims of the project? Was it about getting people to learn how to grow stuff, and learning about plants, or was it more about bringing people together?

A: (to K) It was off the back of evaluations of that you did, wasn't it? With the residents of North Ormesby, because they kind of expressed that they were lacking green space.

K: Yes, absolutely. It was a real mixture of different things – like lack of own space, lack of private garden space. Lack of knowledge really, about plants, and what you might do

with food, beside just buying readymade, or ready-packaged foods. But, yeah, it's very much about connections really.

A: Yeah.

K: Connection and skilling up, but very much in the aims of the MIMA Community Campus Learning Garden I think, for me, it's very much about bringing a community of people together.

<Music continues to play in the background: James Blake – Barefoot in the Park>

J: Hello. I'm Joe.

S: Hello. I'm Sue.

M: Hello, I'm Mcvey.

S: Hi. I'm Stephen.

FH: So tell me a little bit about what you enjoy about the garden outside first of all.

J: Yes, we've learned a few tricks here. We've got a little garden at home. So, we come here, learn, and try and replicate it at home. And, of course, it's not as successful, but we try our best!

<Laughter>

M: I think that the garden is a wonderful place, where people come and get cabbage and get to know each other, and learn about the different kind of veg. And you can make your own things – make a lovely salad and keep healthy.

And most people don't know anything about it, but since I came here, you know, I've learned a lot, you know. I think the garden's a very special place for me - I used to bring my Mum here as well so, for me, from my heart, it is. And I meet a lot of good friends here. It's like a big family here in MIMA, you know! And I'm so proud as well, you know. I come in sad, and when I go home, I'm laughing!

<Laughter>

FH: Fantastic. Brilliant!

S: I like the fact that it's so inclusive – for anyone. You know, there's no like barriers or bars for anyone coming in. And I think gardening is very tactile, you know, I think people get stuck in and all that and it's just a good experience altogether – learning new things all the time.

There's people in that garden, and sat round this table now, that blow me out the window with the information they've got about plants and stuff like that. But, you know, it's always interesting stuff.

<Music continues to play in the background: James Blake – Barefoot in the Park>

MIMA'S BIOVERSE PROJECT

AW: Hi, I'm Alex Woods. I'm the Graduate Intern at MIMA, and I'm also a member of the Green Team Society at Teesside University.

FH: And so how did you get involved with MIMA first? Was it to do with this gardening project?

AW: Yeah. So, I was a student lead for a Bioverse Project, which is about using recycled or repurposed items to create green spaces for people's windowsills. So, the bioverse was a small jam jar on your windowsill that you could take home. It was completely free for the local community to take home.

So some of the things, the seed packets were actually leftover MIMA leaflets - from the community days that kids that came on. So the Mini MIMAs, they're under 5s, and then Cultural Conversation and Creative Age - they all helped fold them. They're origami seed packets. They decorated some of them as well. It's the same with the jam jars. They were collected in at MIMA. So, it ended up being a little garden you could eat - salad toppings and bits. And mine's still going strong - I'm still growing peas!

FH: I was going to say. Have people come back to you and said "I've still got my jam jar?"

AW: Yeah, sometimes. So, I mapped out - I made a big map of where the jars ended up. So, there is some in London. I've not heard from them! There's one in the Isle of Mann.

FH: And are there any plans to do something like that again? Another bioverse?

AW: Yeah. Another bioverse - we're looking for funding. We've just applied for that. Because we want to take the bioverse to primary schools - make it sort of ... put a kit together that they can expand on and make their own bioverse, rather than it all led.

So, the children can really push that for themselves. Which, I think, at the end of the day, it's all good learning, but if you get a physical thing to take with you it sort of cements that feeling and you can sort of learn about sustainability and recycling. So, that's the dream for the bioverse!

<Music continues to play in the background: James Blake – Barefoot in the Park>

GREEN AND SUSTAINABILITY WORK BETWEEN MIMA AND TEESIDE UNIVERSITY

H: Hiya, I'm Hazel, and I work as a Wellbeing Coordinator at Teeside University.

FH: So, what does your role involve?

H: I guess on a grander scale I work following something called the Settings Approach to Health. So that's about thinking about the entire organisation from an organisational and environmental procedural point of view. So, everything the organisation does, we try to embed health and wellbeing into the everyday life of the organisation.

FH: And does a lot of the work you do link to the Grow project that's outside then at all, or using the outside spaces?

H: Absolutely. Yeah, I mean in our team we have a member of staff who's an Outdoor Activities Officer as well. So, I work in a Supporting Wellbeing team. We do a number of projects, particularly supporting students with mental health problems, whereby they get to take part in outdoor activities.

But also the work with MIMA. I'm a massive fan of yoga, pilates – anything movement, anything that helps keep people moving improves their mobility. Which, obviously, has massive mental health benefits as well as physical health benefits.

I do a lot of work around food and sustainability. So the work that we've been doing with MIMA has just kind of snowballed from being a project around gardening, to incorporating some physical activity into that space and just trying to make the activity a little bit more engaging and different for the people that can't kind of come along.

And I started in the summer just literally doing a 20-minute yoga class, alongside their gardening. And I was really taken by how well everyone actually got involved and just really enjoyed the comments I got afterwards: *"I feel much better. I can really stretch now!"* It was just really nice to see! You know, people really benefiting and just enjoying a little bit of exercise.

<Bonobo – Second Sun>

FH: To find out more about MIMA's community garden work learning project, contact Claire Pounder, Learning Curator at MIMA, or visit their website for more details.

<https://visitmima.com/?home=true>

A WALK IN THE PARK - EPISODE 2

FH: That's it for this episode. We hope that you enjoyed listening, and that you will join us again for another *Walk in the Park*.

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All of the episodes are available to listen to at:

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