

**December 2022
Issue 219**



Japanese porcelain showcased

In this edition

- spotlight on Japanese ceramics
- an exhibition of video art
- visits to Albion Dockyard, Bristol Cathedral, Ashton Court Mansion, Roche Park and Sherbourne Castle
- news of upcoming exhibitions and events

From the Chairman

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Three months have now passed since the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Across the world many words of appreciation, respect and love have been written, and I will not add further to that but leave each of us with our private thoughts.

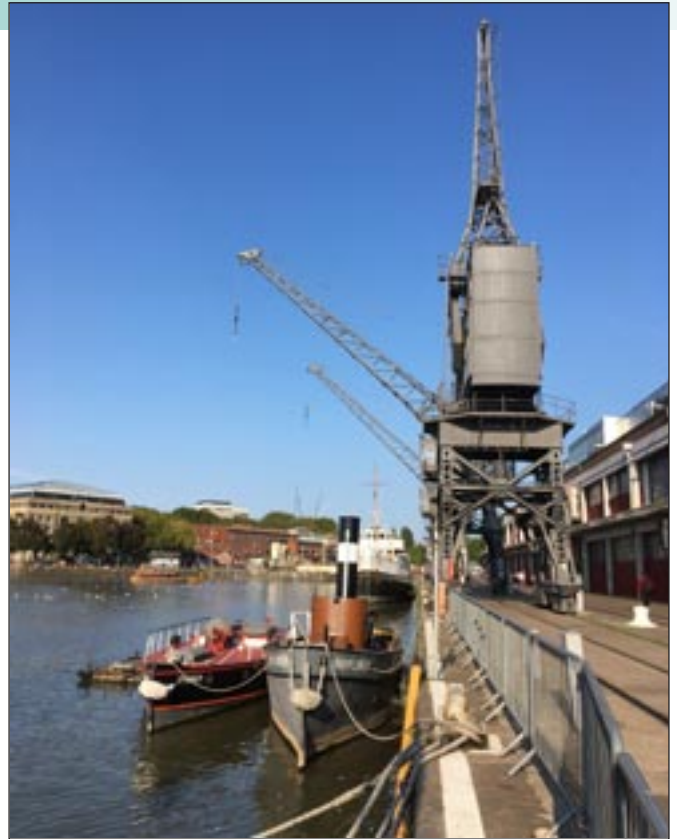
In November 2012, while on a visit to Bristol, the Queen and Prince Philip were welcomed at a civic reception and lunch in the Events Suite at the recently opened M Shed. As Chairman of the Friends, I was privileged to be one of the 150 guests invited, among many of the great and the good of Bristol.



▲ Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip arriving at M Shed in November 2012
© Bristol Culture

At lunch the carefully-constructed seating plan placed me next to a longstanding senior member of her touring support team, who entertained me with stories of foreign parts visited and with practical recommendations of places I might enjoy, such as the Titanic Experience in Belfast. We have often heard of the Queen's sense of humour, and one of his anecdotes illustrated this. She was on the Royal Yacht *Britannia* in the eastern Mediterranean and due to take part in a sail-by salute of a Royal Navy aircraft carrier which happened to be in the same area. As the carrier prepared for the salute, a helicopter returning to the vessel suffered a minor prang on landing which left it temporarily and very visibly stuck on deck at a rather jaunty angle. As the *Britannia* sailed past and the Queen took the salute, she apparently asked if anyone had been hurt in the accident. Having been reassured that all the crew were unscathed, she commented 'In that case I think they will prefer that I don't notice it'.

Cover photo: A woodblock print showing Kabuki actor, Nakamura Genosuke © Bristol Culture
The character he plays, Wada Shizuma, has stopped for a rest on his way to avenge his father's death. He has helped himself to water from the pail behind him using a ceramic bowl - an illustration of porcelain in use in the early 1800s.



▲ The M Shed electric cranes dipped as a mark of respect
© Sue Thurlow

▼ The traditional proclamation car was brought back to M Shed after being used in the City Hall ceremony to proclaim the accession of King Charles III
© Sue Thurlow



Museum Winter Lectures

As highlighted in our September issue, the museum's Thursday evening Winter Lectures Series is taking place at M Shed and, thanks to funding from us, is being simultaneously broadcast on Zoom. The first talk, in October on the life of Ken Stradling, was excellent and was delivered to an online audience somewhat larger than that in the room. It is good to know that our funding is enabling the museum to reach both those who enjoy the social aspects of meeting up for a lecture on a potentially chilly autumn/winter evening and those who would rather listen in from the comfort of home.

The last lecture this year is an appropriately seasonal one:

The History of Christmas with Professor Ronald Hutton. Professor Hutton is well known for his ability to entertain as well as enlighten so, as far as I am concerned, it is one not to be missed. Breaking with the normal pattern it is on a Tuesday (13 December).

Online Booking for Friends Events

Another successful adoption of newer technology has been the online booking for one of our November Saturday afternoon talks, *The Flying Sikh*. I was pleasantly surprised just how easy it was to use. It took me less than a minute to book and pay. Not only did it save me from completing the form, writing out the cheque, finding an envelope and a stamp and then remembering to put it in the post box, but of course it saved me the cost of a stamp, a not inconsiderable 68p!

Staff Changes at the Museum

You will see in the Museum Report that work is continuing to restructure the museums team to meet the very stretching target of reducing their operational cost to the council by over £400k a year. In the report you will read of a significant number of staff who have already taken the initiative and decided to leave the service. We wish them all the best for the future.

Among those leaving, Ray Barnett is taking early retirement after 33 years at the museum. For many years Ray has been our primary contact with the service. In the face of an ever-growing workload, he has come to all our Executive Committee meetings, kept us up to date with developments across the service, and quickly resolved any issues we had. We have very much valued his kindness, encouragement, common sense, unflappability, and untiring good humour. We wish him the very best in the new chapter of his life that will begin on 1 December, and warmly welcome him as he joins as a member of the Friends.

Ray's role as our primary contact is being taken on for the foreseeable future by Beth Cutter and Caroline Booth-Morris who job-share the role of Development Manager. They already run all the administration for Bristol Museums Development Trust and even prior to the news of Ray's departure we had been in discussion about areas where the two charities, the Friends and BMDT, could work more closely together.

British Association of Friends of Museums annual conference

I attended the BAFM Annual Conference in Dundee along with Mary Bailey, Liz and Campbell Mackenzie and Katherine Martin from the Friends. The theme was *Resilience: Growing and Maintaining Friendships in Changing Times*. There were some very enlightening presentations by excellent speakers such as the Director of the V&A Dundee, and their Director of Philanthropy & Partnerships. Perhaps the most directly relevant presentation was that of the Chair of the Friends of

Aberdeen Art Gallery, who had made innovative changes in their standard offer to encourage younger people and more diverse communities to become members. Our hosts were exceptionally welcoming and made sure that we made the most of the fascinating heritage that their city has on offer.

Sad News

I was sorry to hear the news that David Snelson died in September. Along with his wife Wendy he was a member of the Events Group for several years immediately before Covid lockdowns. I am sure many of you will remember the very enjoyable trips that the Snelsons organised. Our thoughts are with Wendy and their family and friends.

Sue Thurlow Chairman

▼ *Captain Scott's Royal Research Ship Discovery next door to the venue for the BAFM Conference*

© Sue Thurlow



Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives

As reported last time, the staff team is being reviewed currently. In addition, the Council offered over late summer the opportunity for some staff to apply for a Succession Scheme severance package. As a consequence, Simon Fenn (3-d designer) will now leave next March, Jackie Winchester (Participation Manager) will leave in December, and I will be leaving on 30 November. Several other members of staff have also left recently to move to other jobs elsewhere including Finn White and Kate Fox in the Participation team, Julia Thomson-Smith (Families Officer), Suzy Murray (Documentation Officer) and Lauren MacCarthy (Marketing and PR). David Emenev (Digitisation Officer) has retired.

The three posts which manage the museum and archive teams and report to Genevieve Adkins as Head of Culture & Creative Industries (including my own) will all be hopefully advertised soon, and new recruits put in place. Mid-November should see the commencement of the internal consultation on the changes planned for the remainder of the workforce.

In October the City Council went public with the news that it is facing a £31m hole in its budget for 2023-24 and so savings will be necessary. With museums and archives already under a review it is hoped that further reductions in budgets will not be expected to be found from this team. On

a positive note, Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology Programme 2021-22 (BBAP) has been shortlisted for the Engagement and Participation Award at this year's Archaeological Achievement Awards run by The Council for British Archaeology. The extensive and varied programme of events, walks and talks included a resident storyteller/crafter sponsored by the Friends of BMGA. Just to be short-listed is an excellent achievement in a very competitive field. The awards are due to be announced at a ceremony in Dublin on 29 November.

I am also pleased to tell you that Julie Taylor-Kent, Front of House team leader, has been appointed one of two Museums Association Reps for SW England.

At our sites, in Bristol Museum & Art Gallery the Japanese porcelain display and the new case of Chinese jade

Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology: Viking re-enactors demonstrate hand to hand combat

© Eve Andreski



Bristol's Brilliant Archaeology: historical re-enactors make camp at Blaise Estate

© Eve Andreski





in the east Asian gallery are attracting lots of compliments. Soon these will be joined by the new display of Bristol delftware in the adjacent ceramics gallery. The John Akomfrah film *Mimesis: African Soldier* showing in the temporary exhibition gallery on the ground floor is stunning visually and impactful. Even if you cannot stay for the full 73 minutes, you can dip in for as long as you like and be mesmerised by this work. *We Were Everywhere* in the upper picture galleries is an exhibition that explores the experience of Indians and Pakistanis during the two world wars and the partition of India. A more conventional exhibition, it nevertheless has a powerful message concerning the sacrifices made by peoples from around the globe during these conflicts, sacrifices that do not always get the recognition they deserve.

Finally, *Turning Point* is a series of four short films inspired by oral histories about the Black Caribbean experience after the First World War.

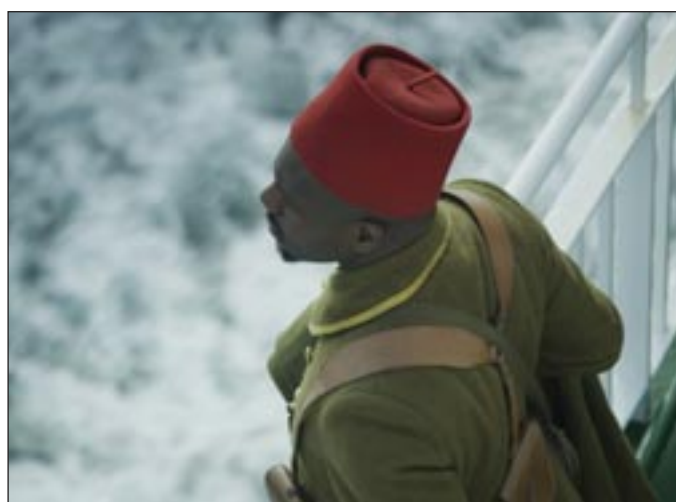
At M Shed the ever-popular *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* is now open.

The Red Lodge and Georgian House have now closed for the winter. Blaise Museum will remain open until the end of December, with all three houses planned to re-open in April 2023.

As mentioned above, I am leaving the museum and archive service at the end of November and after 33 years working here. For much of that time I have had the pleasure of being the museum representative on your Friends' Committee (and also for the Friends of the Art Gallery for a time when that was a separate entity). I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to all those who have served on those committees during that time (some sadly no longer

▲ Stills from the film *Mimesis* showing
▼ African soldiers

© John Akomfrah / Smoking Dog Films



with us) for their fantastic and unwavering support to the service and to the staff. There can be bumpy times when cultural services struggle for resources, as now, but the continued support of the Friends' committee, both financially and morally, is greatly appreciated by all the staff and myself. My particular thanks to Sue Thurlow and all preceding Chairs of the Friends who have been a constant source of that support. I look forward to receiving future newsletters as a member of the Friends rather than as a member of museum and archive staff!

Ray Barnett Head of Collections & Archives

Museum Events

The art of Japanese porcelain

Exhibit: Bristol Museum & Art Gallery until July. Free

In 1616 captive Korean potters discovered porcelain clay deposits in the hills above the small town of Arita in southwest Japan. Combined with the knowledge and skills of the potters this led to a flourishing porcelain industry and between 1640 and 1680, Japan became the world's leading makers of porcelain.

The exhibition explores how the luxury wares designed and developed in Arita to suit the tastes and fashions of European and North American markets wares differ in style and function from the porcelain wares made for people in Japan.

It also demonstrates how Japanese porcelain was made in Arita in the past and how it is made in the town and surrounding region today.

Much of the porcelain featured comes from the Irene Finch Collection, a large collection of Japanese ceramics gifted to Bristol Museum & Art Gallery in 2012. Many of the objects displayed relating to the production and use of the porcelain were acquired this year, funded by the Friends.

We Were Everywhere: world war experiences from pre-Partition India

Exhibit: Bristol Museum & Art Gallery until March. Free

This exhibit explores the experience of Indians and Pakistanis during the world wars and the partition of India. It combines archival material and objects from the British Empire and Commonwealth Collection, and new oral histories collected by curator Ananya Sharma.

The interviewees are Bristol residents sharing the stories of their family members who were caught up in the wars and their aftermath on the Indian subcontinent. They all shed light on a long, complex history that continues to play out today in South Asia and beyond.

John Akomfrah – *Mimesis: African Soldier*

Film: Bristol Museum & Art Gallery until 8 January. Free

This film reveals the story of the Commonwealth soldiers who volunteered to fight in World War I: the war of their colonial masters. Akomfrah blends archive imagery of African and Asian soldiers at work, digging trenches and fetching and carrying, with original, newly-filmed footage imagining the men as they leave their partners behind. With a soundtrack that mixes African and Indian song with new compositions, John Akomfrah paints a vivid cinematic portrait of a forgotten or overlooked history.



▲ Ceramics were not just used for dining; this woman uses porcelain dishes to hold ink for a fan painting, and a larger porcelain bowl to wash her brushes. A ceramic brush pot and water stopper sits on her desk.

©'Dragon' from the series 'The Twelve Zodiac Signs' Edo [Tokyo], Japan, Toyokuni III (1786-1865)

Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2022

Exhibition: M Shed until May. £7/£5

Wildlife Photographer of the Year is back at M Shed with a brand new set of images capturing the breath-taking diversity of the natural world. From fascinating animal behaviour to remarkable species, 100 powerful photographs illustrate the precious beauty of our planet.

Now in its 58th year, *Wildlife Photographer of the Year* is the most prestigious photography event of its kind, providing a global platform that showcases some of the best photography talent from around the world. Today the competition receives entries from over 90 countries all over the world.

Digging for Delftware

International symposium: Bristol Museum & Art Gallery and M Shed 27 & 28 February. £30-£100, advance booking needed

Bristol Museum has one of the largest and most important



Photo taken by a low-noise drone of the deserted settlement of Kolyuchin on an isolated island in the Chukchi Sea off Russia which has been taken over by polar bears
© Dmitry Kokh

collections of delftware in the UK. For over 100 years, Bristol was a leading manufacturer of delftware, producing objects that were exported across the globe.

Bristol Museum has been working for two years on a project funded by Arts Council England to research and re-display its collection of English delftware. In celebration of the project, this two-day symposium will bring together specialists from around the world. They will share insights into delftware from Bristol and beyond and explore the latest international research in the field of delftware studies.

There will also be an opportunity to visit the new displays and to see a selection of objects from our reserve collection.

Coming up in 2023: Celebrating 200 years

Exhibitions, events and experiences

Bristol Museums' forerunner, The Bristol Institution for the Advancement of Science, Literature and the Arts, opened on 6 January 1823.

Housed in purpose-build premises at the bottom of Park Street, the Bristol Institution had a number of objectives including the 'diffusion of useful knowledge by means of lectures and experiments'. It played a leading role in the cultural life of the city, staging art exhibitions, hosting scientific demonstrations and facilitating topical discussions, lectures and debates. To enable these activities, the Institution was equipped with a lecture theatre, laboratory, reading rooms, exhibition rooms and a museum.

Collections from this early museum included important



Delftware plate depicting King James II, made in Brislington, about 1685-88
© Bristol Culture

fossils, natural history specimens, archaeological artefacts and cultural material from around the world. The museum has been adding to these incredible collections ever since.

To mark the anniversary year 2023 will be jam-packed with exhibitions, events and experiences that promote the original collections and celebrate where the museum is today. More information will be online soon.

New Acquisitions from Japan

Earlier this year, I took a research trip to Japan to learn more about Japan's porcelain industry. This trip was funded by a Jonathan Ruffer Curatorial Grant through the Art Fund, and took me to the porcelain towns of Arita, Imari, and Hasami in southern Japan.

This trip provided a fantastic opportunity to make new acquisitions for the museum's collection. The Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives generously offered funds for new acquisitions to be purchased during this trip. The objects in this article are some of the pieces that were paid for with funding from the Friends.

I was thinking a lot about the exhibition I was working on: *The Art of Japanese Porcelain: The Irene Finch Collection* and I was keen to acquire objects that showed the processes of porcelain production. All these objects listed below are on display in the exhibition in the Eastern Art Gallery of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery.



Photos are copyright Bristol Culture or Amy Raphael

▲ The star purchase of the trip has to be this large porcelain dish. Measuring about 45cm wide, it depicts porcelain production in the town of Arita in the 1830s with 34 artisans performing over 20 jobs, from mining porcelain stone to firing vessels. The dish itself was made in the 1980s, and its design is based on two dishes from the 1830s, one of which is in Japan, and the other in the Netherlands.



Japanese porcelain owes its success to the porcelain stone found in the Izumiyama hills above Arita. This was discovered in 1616 by Yi Sam-pyeong, a Korean captive brought to Japan after the failed invasions of Korea in 1592-1598. Unlike the porcelain stone used in China, the stone from Izumiyama came with a ready-mixed blend of minerals, which means that it needs only be ground into a fine powder, mixed with water, and left to mature to make clay.

Porcelain stone from
Izumiyama quarry Arita,
Saga prefecture, Japan

◀ Izumiyama quarry in Arita, 2022. Today the disused quarry is a tourist site. It is remarkable to think that on this razed ground once stood a large hill of porcelain stone.



Many porcelain tools used today are the same tools that were used centuries ago. In the image of tools below, the gyūbera, or 'cow tongue' (far left), smooths and shapes the sides of bowls. The tsurunokubi, or 'crane neck' (second left), shapes the body of vases with narrow necks. The tonbo, 'dragonfly' (second right), is used for measuring.



▼ *Tools for porcelain production 2020-2022 made from Japanese oak, aluminium, steel, bamboo, and sheep hair.*

▲ *Potter Hirao Masami using a 'cow tongue' spatula to smooth the sides of the bowl.*



▼ *Porcelain being stacked expertly at Shingama Kiln, in preparation for wheeling into the gas kiln for firing.*



Visiting the kilns and potteries, I was struck by how much the porcelain changes in colour and size during the production process. The drying and firing processes change the colour of the clay and shrink it by as much as 20%. These three mugs were purchased to illustrate this. The porcelain mug on the left has been formed from porcelain clay and left to air-dry. After drying, it is then biscuit fired at 900°C (centre). Underglaze decoration is added at this stage, and a clear glaze if the porcelain is to be glossy. It is then high fired at 1,300°C (right). Firing at this temperature transforms the material into the hard and white recognisable form we call porcelain.

▼ *Air-dried, biscuit-fired and high-fired porcelain mugs Aizengama Kiln, Hasami, Nagasaki Prefecture, Japan 2022*



JAPANESE PORCELAIN

The vivid blue underglaze decoration on porcelain gets its colour from cobalt oxide. This grey powder is mixed with water and is applied to the biscuit-fired porcelain body with a brush. It requires great skill to apply because the body is very porous. The longer the brush is in contact with the body, the more colour gets absorbed. Painters hold the brush by the bristles to control the flow of the ink to the porcelain body.

Overglaze decoration is applied after firing the porcelain and is fired again to fix the enamels to the body. The enamels are made of powdered glass mixed with minerals. With the two samples on the right, the greyish powder contains copper which becomes a green when fired, and the orange powder contains iron which turns red.



▲ Cobalt oxide pigment for underglaze decoration



▲ Turquoise and red enamels for overglaze decoration.



▲ The plate on the left shows underglaze decoration; the plate on the right shows the finished overglaze decoration. Hozan Kiln, Saga prefecture, Japan c. 1984-89

These two photos show how a plate is decorated with a design of flowers and leaves. The left photo shows the dish after underglaze blue decoration is applied onto the dish after biscuit firing at 900°C. After the underglaze decoration is painted, the dish is coated in a clear glaze and then fired at 1,300°C.

The right photo shows the same dish after colourful enamel overglaze is applied. The enamels are fixed to the dish in yet another firing at a lower temperature of around 950°C.

Contemporaneous Japanese woodblock prints in our collection show how the ceramics in our collection would have been used. These prints were printed and purchased in Tokyo.

Amy Raphael Project Curator, Japanese Ceramics

▼ Scene from a kabuki play, Toyokuni III (1786-1865), 1856
In this scene from a kabuki play, the central seated figure holds a small porcelain cup of sake, rice wine. A table of food is laid out before him. On the windowsill in the background is a stack of used porcelain bowls and chopsticks.



Ashton Court Mansion

Friday 30th September

On a wet Friday afternoon twenty of us were treated to an interesting and informative tour of parts of Ashton Court Mansion kindly arranged by Carol Ouvry. Some were already familiar with the park and mansion, having been to various company parties, family celebrations, exhibitions and antique fairs which have been held on the ground floor of the mansion since the 1970s.

We were met by two Friends of Ashton Court Mansion, Tish O'Connor and Lynne Street. The rain abated for a few minutes and we were able to gather in the West Courtyard to look at the front of the mansion before starting on our tour of the interior. Tish showed us the outside of the northwest wing that was severely damaged by a fire in 2013.

She told us that Esme Smyth (pronounced 'Smith'), the reclusive last owner, died in the house in 1946. Avon Council acquired the derelict house in 1959 under a compulsory purchase order. The Council did a considerable amount of work to stop the roof leaking and make the ground floor dry and safe and then, after refurbishment, made it available for functions.

Tish and Lynne took us into the building where, for safety reasons, we split into two groups of ten. The first group were issued with hard hats and taken carefully up the grand staircase to the south-facing rooms on the derelict first floor. The remaining group stayed on the ground floor and investigated display boards showing photographs of the house and its history. They then admired views of the grounds from the south-facing windows as well as seeing such marvels as the vaulted hall and the twin fireplaces in the music room.

The first-floor tour showed us the unrestored rooms such as the long gallery and Dame Esme's boudoir. We had to pick our way carefully through piles of labelled timber panelling, floorboards, and doors. We saw places where workers had removed the ceilings and floorboards. Layers of old plasterwork, wood panelling, wallpaper and tiles enabled us to imagine how the interior of the mansion appeared at various times in its history.

We saw the original east-facing window which became an interior window when the single-storey gate house was altered and extended upwards. Until his death in 1901 Greville Smyth, a naturalist and collector of natural history specimens, kept his private museum in what is now known as the music room. His widow, Lady Emily, presented the bulk of his collection, including extinct Great Auk eggs, to Bristol City Museum, adding to what is now one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of blown birds' eggs in the world.

We discussed with Tish and Lynne possible plans for the restoration and future running of the mansion. Since 2018 Artspace Lifespace, a charity which transforms problem properties into creative resources, has run the building. In 2019, the Purcell Report indicated that fully restoring the mansion could cost up to a staggering £40 million. For this reason alone, there will be considerable debate and discussion as to what can be done, how restoration costs are raised and future uses of the mansion.

We are fortunate to have such a historic and interesting building so close to our homes. I do hope that a coherent and realistic restoration plan can be agreed, and works can be carried out before the mansion deteriorates beyond repair.

Giles Woodward



▲ **Hard hats for safety**

© Giles Woodward

Websearch the Smyths at Long Ashton. There are excellent details on the Bristol and Avon Family History Society, Bristol Historical Association, the Bristol Mag and Bristol Archives websites.

▼ **A temporary halt to the rain meant we could gather for a briefing in the West Courtyard**

© Giles Woodward



Video Art

This autumn we have launched *Mimesis; African Soldier* by John Akomfrah at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. Commissioned by 14-18 NOW to mark the centenary of World War I, it is a monumental three-screen immersive video work that brings together archive footage from the war with film created by the artist and a soundtrack of traditional African and Indian song alongside newly-composed soundscapes. We programmed *Mimesis* to coincide with Remembrance Sunday and there are two complementary shows, *We Were Everywhere* and *Turning Point*, both of which deal with the war from a postcolonial perspective.

For a long time artists' film and video has been treated with some scepticism as an art form. It is distinct from television and cinema. It is a radical, experimental, sometimes immersive form, often challenging the medium in its mainstream iterations. It is only recently that our national collections such as Tate have begun to collect it. And yet the form makes it highly accessible, flexible to install and even accessible to make. The artist Charlotte Prodger used an iPhone for some of the footage in LHB, (which we have acquired). Arguably video breaks down traditional barriers to experimental art such as accessibility. This was the intention of the practitioners of the 1960s when their short films were screened on national television between programmes. Now the Turner Prize frequently includes nominees who work with video and film installation, sometimes the whole shortlist is made up of video artists.

In 2017 the Friends supported our award of £200,000 from the national charity Art Fund to collect artists' film and video with a pledge of 6% towards the full award. Why video? The international collecting remit of the Art Fund International £1million award (2007-12) was an attempt to show how contemporary art reflects the current concerns of the regions represented in the historic international collections, often with a postcolonial theme. We acquired 41 works, of which ten were videos, including *A Season Outside* by the Indian artist Amar Kanwar. This is Kanwar's personal reflections on the Partition of India and we are currently showing it in the modern and contemporary gallery at BMAG to mark the 75th anniversary of the division of the continent.

On completing the AFI collecting programme, we have begun to focus on artists based in Europe and the UK, concentrating on women and diaspora artists.

Video art has a long avant garde history that begins with the early days of film and modernist experimentation with it, such as Ferdinand Léger's 1924 *Ballet Mécanique* or Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Balle*, through Robert Breer's animations in the 1940s, to Andy Warhol, the London Film-makers Co-op in the 1960s, Derek Jarman in the 1970s, and finally to the current superstars of the form, Bill Viola, Shirin Neshat, Gillian Wearing, Olafur Eliasson, Tacita Dean and of course John Akomfrah, who has been awarded a CBE.

Artists' film and video takes many forms, from animation and experimentation with the material of film itself; the critique of the methods of mainstream film and television; narrative, documentary and performance; immersive installation and digital experimentation; back to the origins of film with 8mm and 16 mm practised by artists such as Ben Rivers who develops films made on a Bolex camera in his bath. Bristol has two works by Rivers.

The collection now numbers 36 videos and films including examples of all of these. There is a viewing 'dark space' in our modern and contemporary gallery to show them, but we also include video and artists' film in exhibitions – for example the upcoming *Lumen* by Sutapa Biswas at Red Lodge – and there is a video screen by the steps in the geology gallery where we have shown *Erdkunde* by John Wood and Paul Harrison. I am keen to present interventions of video around the museum, for example *Araba al Madfuna III* by Wael Shawky, which tells a short story,



▲ John Akomfrah, *Mimesis; African Soldier*, 2018

© Smoking Dogs Films commissioned by 14-18 NOW and presented to Bristol Museum & Art Gallery and Gallery of



▲ This blurry still is from a video by Charlotte Prodger (Turner prize winner in 2018). In it she examines the physical relationship between the viewer and her artwork with the iPhone seen as an extension of the body

© Charlotte Prodger



▲ Amar Kanwar, *A Season Outside*, 1992. The image is grainy because of the age of the film. The feet belong to Indian and Pakistani men passing sacks of grain across the border at Wagah. The film, currently on show at BMAG, depicts the ceremony of the closing of the border and reflects the artist's feelings about the Partition of India

© Amar Kanwar

Sunflowers by Egyptian writer Mohamed Mustagab, where children excavate ancient temples, would make a sumptuous experience in the Assyria gallery: the children mime the dialogue of adult actors and the film is in negative, through a cobalt blue filter.

This autumn and winter visitors can get a taste of some of the new works: in our main exhibition gallery, where we are showing *Mimesis* by John Akomfrah, and upstairs in the modern and contemporary gallery where *A Season Outside* by Amar Kanwar is being screened.

Julia Carver Fine Art Curator



◀ **Sutapa Biswas**, *Lumen*, 2021, commissioned by Baltic, Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, Kettle's Yard and Film and Video Umbrella through Art Fund Moving Image Fund
© Sutapa Biswas

▲ **Harry Houdini (1994)** by Bristol-based artists, John Wood and Paul Harrison. John Wood 'is' Houdini trapped in a box with no way out. This dark film shows the futility of his efforts as he performs rather like a contemporary Sisyphus. As a viewer you also puzzle over how the film was made
© John Wood and Paul Harrison



Sherborne Castle, Dorset

Wednesday 24 August 2022

On our arrival at the castle, we were divided into four small groups and shown round by experienced guides who were happy to answer questions.

Every room contained such beautiful things. The books in the library date from the 14th to the 19th century. We were assured that they had all been chosen and read by successive generations rather than bought merely for display. The fireplaces in the solarium and the green drawing room were undoubtedly built to impress and the red drawing room contained *The Procession of Queen Elizabeth* by Robert Peake the Elder, a familiar image which has been in the possession of the family for at least three centuries.

The original castle was built in the 12th century. Sir Walter Raleigh acquired the lease from Elizabeth I. However, he was soon sent to the Tower for marrying without the Queen's permission. He returned to Sherborne but his attempts to modernise the castle failed and he built a new house which he called Sherborne Lodge. His troubles were not over, however. He was arrested for treason by James I and was executed in 1618.

The Digby family then acquired the house. Like Sir Walter they played their part in English history. They supported the Lancastrian cause in the Wars of the Roses; they were involved in the capture of Perkin Warbeck, pretender to Henry VII's throne; and John Digby accompanied the future Charles I to Spain in the abortive attempt to negotiate a marriage to the Spanish Infanta.

The 6th Lord Digby started to modernise in 1757 and employed the ubiquitous Lancelot 'Capability' Brown to build a lake between the old and new castles. There is a seat in the garden where, as the story goes, Raleigh was enjoying a pipe of tobacco when his servant, approaching with a jug of ale, feared his master was on fire and poured the contents all over him to douse the flames!

Thank you to Carol Lear for a very enjoyable day.

Lesley Pugsley

▼ **Front view of Sherborne Castle**
© Mary Bailey



'All God's Children'

Exhibition at Bristol cathedral

Thursday 6 October 2022

We assembled at the cathedral at 10.30 and were split into four groups to be shown round. My group had Nell Dand as our guide, who was very knowledgeable and gave us far more information than I could possibly remember, including why College Green is so called!

The cathedral started life as an Augustinian abbey in the 12th century. The Augustine monks said prayers several times a day and during the night – freezing no doubt in the winter – hence the rather uncomfortable seats in the choir where the monks could perch if they were too tired to stand up. No cushions for them! Monks were often the younger sons of the wealthy. The stairs used by the monks to descend from their dormitories for night-time services are part of the original abbey. They are now covered with wooden treads to protect them and enable people to use them safely. Another very old relic is the *Harrowing of Hell* stone. This bas relief is one of the few major works of Anglo-Saxon sculpture in existence and is found in the south transept of the cathedral.

Sadly, we were unable to see the chapter house, part of the mediaeval abbey building, due to a conference being held there. We did admire the interesting stained-glass windows close by and investigated the Berkeley chapel. The cathedral had close links with the Berkeley family of Berkeley castle. The chapel is where prayers were said for the souls of the family, their tombs being nearby.

The exhibition *All God's Children* is being held in the south choir aisle. Looking with today's eyes it seems incomprehensible that people found slave trading compatible with their Christian faith. The cathedral is working with others to decide how to tell the story of slavery and its impact, and what to do with the legacy of the slave trade that exists in the cathedral, such as the Edward Colston window.

We were shown the other chapels including the Elder Lady Chapel (so called because a second lady chapel was built later) which was originally separate from the Abbey and ended our tour in the Nave which I had not appreciated was so 'modern' – Victorian from about 1860. The rose window survived the bombings of World War II, unlike the windows on the north side. These were replaced in the 1950s by war memorials remembering Bristolians, from soldiers to nurses, who served in the war.

We looked round the exhibition *All God's Children* at our own pace. I found it very thought provoking. The story of the impact of the slave economy on cathedral life, past and present, was quite an eye opener. I wonder what the cathedral will eventually decide about the many memorials and grave markers it has. The cathedral is asking for help from visitors to inform its decision.

If you have not been on a guided tour, it is well worth going on one. Our thanks to Carol Ouvry for organising this and to Nell for giving us such an interesting morning.

Rose Boswell

Photos by Carol Ouvry



▲ The entrance to the night stairs



▲ The Harrowing of Hell stone – Anglo-Saxon carving



◀ Exhibition boards

Roche Court Sculpture Park

Thursday 22 September 2022

After an interesting start to the day with a coach driver not knowing the Bristol area, we had an hour for lunch at Salisbury. I can now recommend Henderson's Artisan Bakery & Café in Market Square.

The New Art Centre at Roche Court sits in a lovely valley outside Salisbury and the house was built in 1804 as a retirement home for Lord Nelson. Today it is owned and lived in by Madeleine Ponsonby, Countess Bessborough. The New Art Centre was established in London in 1958 and moved to Roche Court in 1994. From its inception the gallery has championed young and emerging artists, such as Antony Gormley, Richard Long and Anthony Caro, and continues to do so – showing the work of artists, now in mid- or late-career, who were first exhibited decades ago. It is an educational centre for children, but adult groups are welcomed to boost income for the schools' visits. The gallery also represents the Barbara Hepworth estate and features examples of her work in the galleries and the parkland. Since 1994 Stephen Marshall has been commissioned to add four new indoor galleries to house special exhibitions.

We were taken around in three groups with discussion at each sculpture visited. Our first monument was by Bill Woodrow and was a bronze cannon and 'world' cannon balls shaped like the earth. Parts of the cannon had interesting stories relating to issues of the time. We also saw *Celloswarm* by Bill Woodrow, a cello made of bronze, stone and gold leaf.

In the garden were two cast iron statues of two figures by Antony Gormley (similar but smaller than those at Crosby Beach) and also *Quantum Cloud XIV* in the old Orangery, a stainless steel 'fuzzy' structure in a vague human form. Some sculptures are in place for a short time or until they are sold, and some stay longer, such as Anthony Caro's *Double Tent* in stainless steel. In the past Caro has worked for Henry Moore.

One of my favourite pieces was *Tame Buzzard Line* by Richard Long – a row of stones including flint found in the fields, emulating (in my view) a stream. Whilst designing this, Long was visited several times at the site by a wild buzzard.

Thanks to our three leaders, Bella, Francesca and Laura, at Roche Court and Richard Avery for organising a lovely day out in beautiful surroundings.

Catherine Dixon



▲ *Celloswarm* by Bill Woodrow
Photo by Catherine Dixon



► *Endeavour* by Bill Woodrow
Photo by Mary Bailey



► *Double Tent* by Anthony Caro
Photo by Mary Bailey

Behind the Scenes

Albion Dockyard, Gas Ferry Road

Tuesday 13 September 2022

Natalie and Lucy from the *SS Great Britain* Trust were our guides at the Albion Dockyard. The *SS Great Britain* Trust now have funding to take over half of the dockyard on a 99-year lease and, following essential repairs, hope to build a replica of Brunel's *SS Great Western* within the next 5-10 years just half a mile from where it was originally constructed. At the time of our visit, the *Fridtjof Nansen* was in dock for repairs. This tall ship is owned by an educational charity, *Seas Your Future*, which offers first sail training and ocean science voyages for personal and character development.

The Albion Dockyard is a Grade II listed site and one of only two dockyards left in Bristol harbour. When it was built by James Martin Hillhouse in 1820, Albion Dockyard covered a huge area with two slipways and eventually included workshops, forges, accommodation and even an Albion girls' school. In 1870 a coffee house was added.

In its heyday over 1,400 people worked at the yard. The most important area was the dry dock. It was originally 360 ft long and in 1891 was increased to 500 ft. Over the years, 40 boats have been constructed there including three gunboats for the Crimea war. The last vessel built there was the *Miranda Guinness*, named after the Countess of Iveagh. She was one of the ships in the Guinness fleet which made regular voyages between Dublin and Liverpool between 1977 and 1985. Eventually she collided with the East Link Bridge in Dublin and was scrapped in 1993.

Charles Hill became the owner of the yard in 1824. In 1846 he renamed it the Albion and ten years later he finally cleared all existing debts and moved it into profit. In 1980, David Abel took over ownership and in 2016 left his uncompleted offices when the yard was taken over by Bristol City Council.

Boats are constructed and repaired in the dry dock so that all parts of the hull can be accessed. Once the boat is in the dock, the water is emptied away. Originally the dry dock had wooden lock gates to seal it. These days a caisson – a shaped tank – is used to seal the entrance to the dock. The caisson is floated into place then water is pumped in to make it sink in place. It can take two days to empty the dock. The water is pumped out of the dry dock through a culvert which was hand dug underneath the road into the New Cut. Here water drains away through a sluice gate.

This was an absorbing history lesson. Thanks to Natalie and Lucy and thanks to Carol Ouvre for again arranging such a fascinating visit.

Catherine Dixon



▲ The dry dock is still in use.

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▼ The gantry crane

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The opinions expressed in this newsletter do not necessarily represent those of the FBMGA or Bristol Culture

**Next issue: copy deadline
21st January 2023 for early
March publication**