

Cambridge

The university city is celebrating 200 years of the Fitzwilliam Museum and also a new gallery at Downing – the first college art gallery to be open to the public. By *Matilda Bathurst*. Illustrations by Toby Morison

SPOTLIGHT

Always learning



Right: the Fitzwilliam Museum on Trumpington Street. The building was designed by George Basevi, a pupil of Sir John Soane, and inspired by the Capitolium in Brescia. Left: the Polar Museum

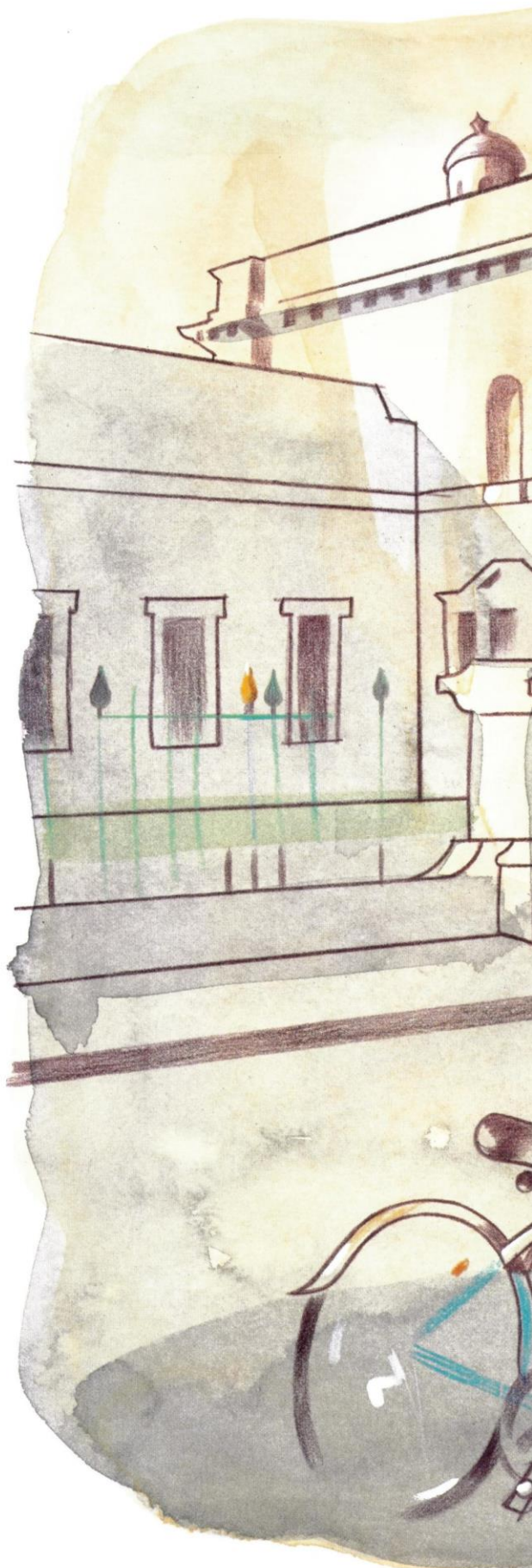
Preview

It might be known as the ‘city of perspiring dreams’, but Cambridge is beginning to prove more than a match for Oxford’s dreaming spires. It is now one of the fastest-growing cities in the UK, and developers are proposing a series of ambitious new public art strategies. Meanwhile, the Fitzwilliam Museum is celebrating its bicentenary, and Downing College recently opened the city’s first public college art gallery. Oxford is often said to have the upper hand when it comes to the arts. That idea might soon be discredited.

The **Fitzwilliam** has been called ‘the finest small museum in Europe’ – although ‘small’ hardly does justice to its vast Neoclassical portico and hulking wings of Portland stone. The ground floor is dedicated to antiquities and the applied arts; upstairs, visitors move through galleries of Italian and Dutch Old Masters, between rooms of Blakes and Turners, past Pre-Raphaelite art and through to paintings by Picasso. Later in its bicentenary year, the museum will

mount an exhibition of the illuminated manuscripts prized by its founder, the 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam, a chubby, bright-eyed portrait of whom, by Joseph Wright, can be found in Gallery 3 at the top of the main stairs, en route to the French Impressionist room or Titian’s *Tarquin and Lucretia*.

When the former Tate curator Jim Ede and his wife, Helen, arrived in Cambridge in 1956, they bridged the gap between the academia of the Fitzwilliam and the city’s wider art scene. Their home, **Kettle’s Yard**, became a hub for art-hungry students who came to admire the Edes’ extraordinary collection of work by 20th-century Modernists: students would occasionally go home with a work by Alfred Wallis or Georges Braque to hang on their walls. Kettle’s Yard is currently undergoing an £8.7m renovation programme, and in the meantime its collection has gone nomadic. Cambridge colleges, faculties and the University Library will all be hosting highlights from the



collection, and a changing display at the Fitzwilliam reflects the Edes' idiosyncratic arrangements of paintings, furniture, sculpture and natural objects: a single lemon sits on a 16th-century pewter dish, a painting by Joan Miró hovers above a cider press.

Walking between the Fitzwilliam and Kettle's Yard, you'll find art embedded into the city streets. Eric Gill's carved crocodile creeps over the walls of the Cavendish Labs, and Michael Ayrton's bronze *Talos* stands defiantly outside the shopping mall. Look out for the elegant inscriptions by local letter-cutters the Cardozo Kindersley Workshop, best known for designing the gates of the British Library. Their lettering appears on street signs, plaques and beneath the extraordinary Corpus Clock, installed in 2008 and unveiled by Stephen Hawking, at the junction of Bene't Street and Trumpington Street.

There are plenty of excellent museums to be found beyond the main stretch. Over on the Sidgwick Site, the shadow of a colossal Apollo in an upstairs window is the only clue that the 1950s Classics Faculty houses the **Museum of Classical Archaeology**, renowned for its collection of Greek and Roman sculpture casts. Likewise, **David Parr House** at 186 Gwydir Street can barely be distinguished from the rest of the terrace. Inside, it is a paean to Arts & Crafts design.

Then, of course, there are the colleges. Oxford's purpose-built Christ Church Picture Gallery has been around since 1968, but it has taken till 2016 for Cambridge to open its first public college art gallery – not at Christ's, King's or Trinity, but at Downing. Designed by Caruso St John, the **Heong Gallery** echoes



Above: Wysing Arts Centre, an important influence on the contemporary art scene in Cambridge

the college's Regency quads with a chapel-like space dedicated to modern and contemporary art. For the opening exhibition, the art historian Alan Bowness has lent paintings from his collection, by, among others, Peter Lanyon, Alan Davie and Allen Jones.

The grounds of **Jesus College** are filled with modern and contemporary sculpture: Cornelia Parker's *Moon Landing* sits squat on the Fellows' lawn, and Barry Flanagan's *Bronze Horse* has withstood decades of drunken freshers. While King's and Trinity keep their art away from the public gaze, some of the best collections can be seen in the newer colleges outside the city centre. **Murray Edwards College** (formerly New Hall) is home to Europe's largest collection of art by female artists. Next door, **Churchill College** is known for monumental outdoor sculpture by the likes of Geoffrey Clarke and Bernard Meadows, and further along Huntingdon Road **Girton** has a long-term exhibition of contemporary portraits and its own museum of

antiquities. **Wolfson College** has an excellent exhibition programme, and **Robinson** is also worth a look-in for the John Piper stained-glass windows in the chapel.

There's a lot of money around for artistic commissions, but arguably there's only so much you can do within the hallowed walls of a college. Instead, artists are finding opportunities in the housing developments and science parks springing up around the city, each with a stipend for public art. At first glance, these areas don't look too promising: Sim-cities of office blocks and glassy apartments, marketing suites promising modern misery. However, with Kettle's Yard director Andrew Nairne heading the advisory panel for the North West Cambridge Development, and **Wysing Arts Centre** consulting on Great Kneighton in South Cambridge, the proposals are more enlightened than you might expect. Most notable is the emphasis on participatory art.

One of the first projects to materialise is **ELAN**, a studio and performance hub located in the CB1 development around the station. Aid & Abet, the arts practice behind ELAN, emphasises the importance of having a physical space to work from – without a base, community art projects risk becoming groundless. At the moment, that's part of the problem. Public art is expanding exponentially across the city, and if for the moment there's something of a lack of visibility and cohesion, as new projects come to fruition with the support of its museums and university, then 2016 could yet prove a turning point. It may require a bit more perspiration, but there's no doubt the Cambridge art scene is thriving.

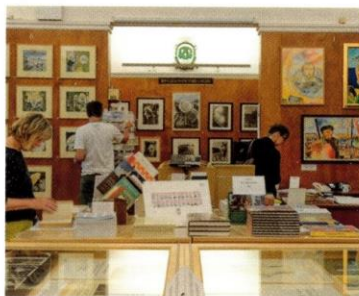
Preview

Three to see in or near Cambridge

Fry Art Gallery, Saffron Walden

On 3 April the Fry Art Gallery reveals a rehang of its permanent collection, noted for its works by Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden. There will also be exhibitions of works by their sons: first the painter and printmaker Richard Bawden, who turns 80 this year; and later in the summer the photographer James Ravilious.

● fryartgallery.org
Free to all



Death on the Nile: Uncovering the afterlife of ancient Egypt

Showcasing its remarkable collection of coffins and sarcophagi, not least the seven-tonne granite one made to entomb Ramesses III, the Fitzwilliam explores funerary objects and – thanks to a collaboration with the radiology department at Addenbrooke's – examines how they were made.

● fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk
Free to all



The Polar Museum, Cambridge Home

to an important collection of Inuit art and, as part of the university's Scott Polar Research Institute, the memorial to Captain Scott and his team, who perished in the Antarctic in 1912. The present exhibition, 'By Endurance We Conquer', however, focuses on Ernest Shackleton's expedition in 1914-17 (to 18 June).

● spri.cam.ac.uk
Free to all

