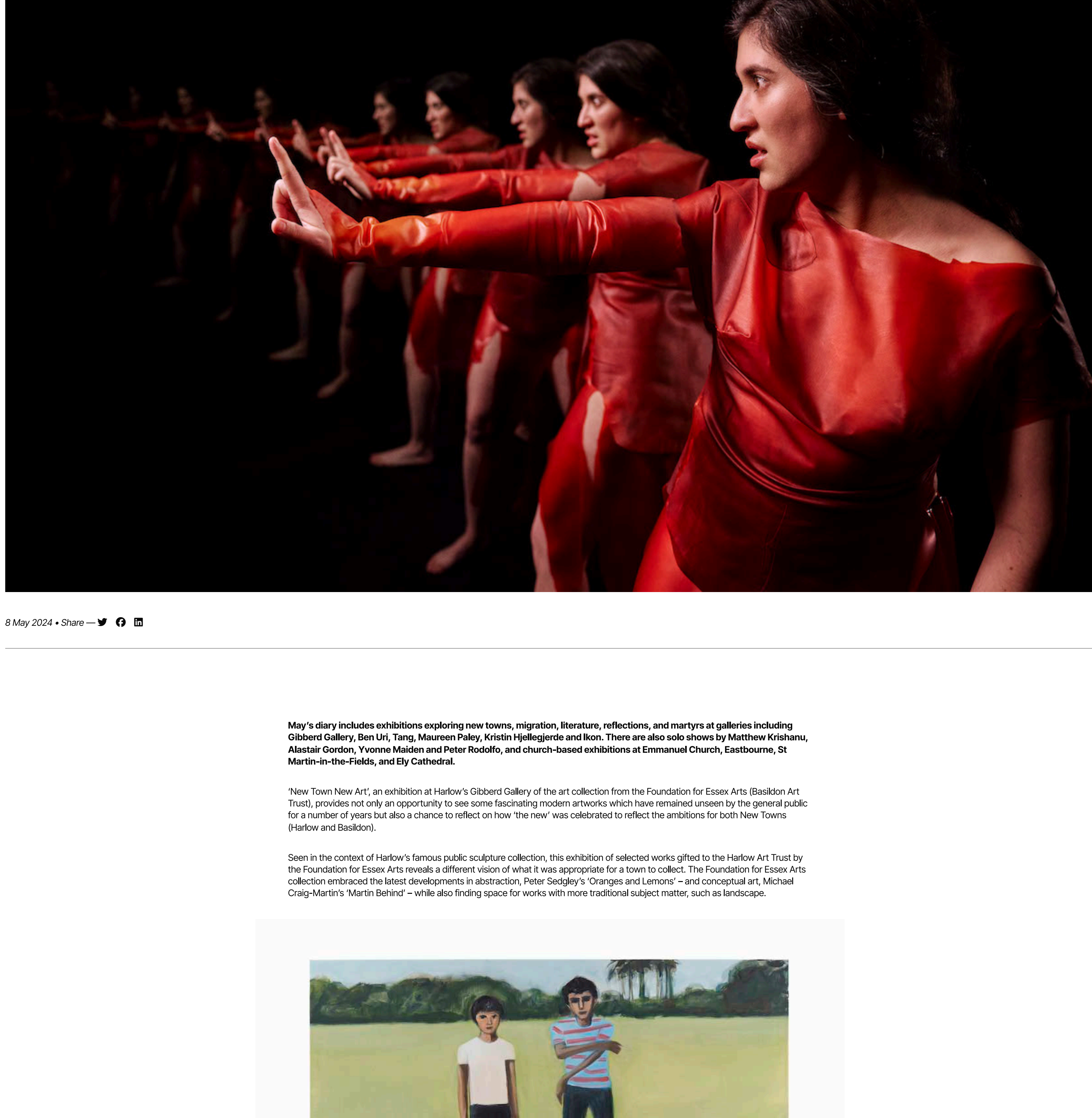


The Art Diary May 2024 – Revd Jonathan Evens



8 May 2024 • Share —

My's diary includes exhibitions exploring new towns, migration, literature, reflections, and martyrs at galleries including Gibberd Gallery, Ben Uri, Tang, Maureen Paley, Kristin Hjellegjerde and Ikon. There are also solo shows by Matthew Krishanu, Alastair Gordon, Yvonne Malden and Peter Rodolfo, and church-based exhibitions at Emmanuel Church, Eastbourne, St Martin-in-the-Fields, and Ely Cathedral.

'New Town New Art', an exhibition at Harlow's Gibberd Gallery of the art collection from the Foundation for Essex Arts (Basildon Art Trust), provides not only an opportunity to see some fascinating modern artworks which have remained unseen by the general public for a number of years but also a chance to reflect on how the 'new' was celebrated to reflect the ambitions for both New Towns (Harlow and Basildon).

Seen in the context of Harlow's famous public sculpture collection, this exhibition of selected works gifted to the Harlow Art Trust by the Foundation for Essex Arts reveals a different vision of what it was appropriate for a town to collect. The Foundation for Essex Arts collection embraced the latest developments in abstraction, Peter Sedgley's 'Oranges and Lemons' – and conceptual art, Michael Craig-Martin's 'Martin Behind' – while also finding space for works with more traditional subject matter, such as landscape.



Matthew Krishanu, Skeleton, 2014. Oil on canvas. Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London. Photo: Peter Mallet.

The Gibberd Gallery itself is a visual arts space run by the Harlow Art Trust. It is home to the Sir Frederick Gibberd Watercolour Collection, several sculptures, and an annual programme of exhibitions. Sculptures on permanent display include the iconic Henry Moore 'Harlow Family Group', as well as works by Malcolm Woodward, Geris Rubinstein, Sally Day and Jane Ackroyd.

Harlow is known for its sculpture collection and became the world's first 'Sculpture Town' in 2010. Harlow Art Trust is also guardians of Harlow Sculpture Town's many other public sculptures, which include over 100 sculptures by Henry Moore, Ralph Brown, Elisabeth Frink, William Mitchell, Barbara Hepworth, Auguste Rodin, and Nick Hornby.

Sir Frederick Gibberd was an Architect, Town Planner and Landscape Architect who undertook 94 major projects during his career and was knighted in 1967 for services to architecture. In 1946, he was appointed master planner for Harlow New Town and his original plan for the town is regarded as one of the greatest achievements. He was passionate about art and accumulated a magnificent collection of modern British watercolours and drawings. During his lifetime, he donated over forty works to Harlow Council, now displayed in the Gibberd Gallery. In his will, Sir Frederick also left his house, garden, sculptures and art collection to Harlow Council to benefit the people of Harlow. The Gibberd Garden Trust now owns these.

'Us: from There to Here – Britain's Gain' at the Ben Uri Gallery shows 50 works by 45 artists from 20 different countries of birth who migrated to Britain and have made a significant contribution to our visual cultural mosaic. The exhibition brings together 1st and 2nd generation refugees and immigrant artists who were from there to here – Britain's gain'. They include Iwona Kubiak, Jacob Epstein, Eva Frankfurter, Lucien Freud, Josef Herman, Clara Klinghoffer, Bernard Meninsky, Alex Sokol, and Clem Wintner.

The exhibition also provides a great opportunity to be introduced to some rarely exhibited artists. Special features are of artists born in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, India, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, South Africa, Canada and the USA who all were born 'there and came here' and made a significant contribution to British visual culture since 1900.

To leave, to live, then to return once again. How do we make sense of the newly unfamiliar? Expectations, hesitations, and new contemplations unfold and transform before, during, and upon diasporic people's return to their homelands after their 'forced' and/or 'voluntary' migration. 'Aloha, only in flesh' is a site-specific, collaborative meditation on three diasporic artists' experiences in and between lands and waters, and how those experiences shape untranslatable connections to home and identity.

In this exhibition, Antonius-Tin Bui, Theresa-Xuan Bui, and MZU seek the language of alters—spaces of presence, transcendence, and transmission—with their viewer and welcome all to continue with the unknown. Through a combination of spoken word poetry, experimental cabot, traditional Vietnamese ao dai (garments), Southeast Asian home goods, and Asian snacks, the installation engages all five senses—aural, visual, haptic, olfactory, and gustatory.

Opening on Lunar New Year and stretching across several significant dates, including the anniversary of the Fall of Saigon, this is an installation that will continually evolve. The artists will return to 'Aloha, only in flesh' after visits to Vietnam and Japan and make new offerings reflecting their ever-changing relationships with their motherlands. In this way, the expanding exhibition invites visitors to immerse themselves in it each time anew.

Antonius-Tin Bui is a polydisciplinary artist and shape-shifter invested in the transformative potential of improvisation, portraiture, craft, and ritual. Theresa-Xuan Bui is a queer, non-binary Vietnamese American artist questioning the intersections of the personal and political. MZU is a multidisciplinary collective of artists from New York, USA, formed by Angel Abreu and Ricardo Savion. The collective bases their works on literary texts, recognizing the emancipation to be found in the process of reading. They often work directly onto the pages of found books or sheet music that they adhere in a grid to the surface of a canvas or board.

Standing for 'Kids of Survival', Studio K.O.S. began as a community initiative for teenagers in the South Bronx led by Tim Rollins, who was an active member in the music, arts, and HIV/AIDS ministries at Memorial Baptist Church in Harlem. An artist, teacher, and activist, Rollins taught at the Intermediate School 55 in the Bronx and sought to use the consumption and discussion of literature as an active part of art production. The current members started with the group between the ages of 12 and 16. Initially called Tim Rollins and K.O.S., the collective changed its name following Rollins' death in 2017, and they continue to honour his legacy. The group upholds his work in education, initiating workshops with school and university students as part of their artistic production.

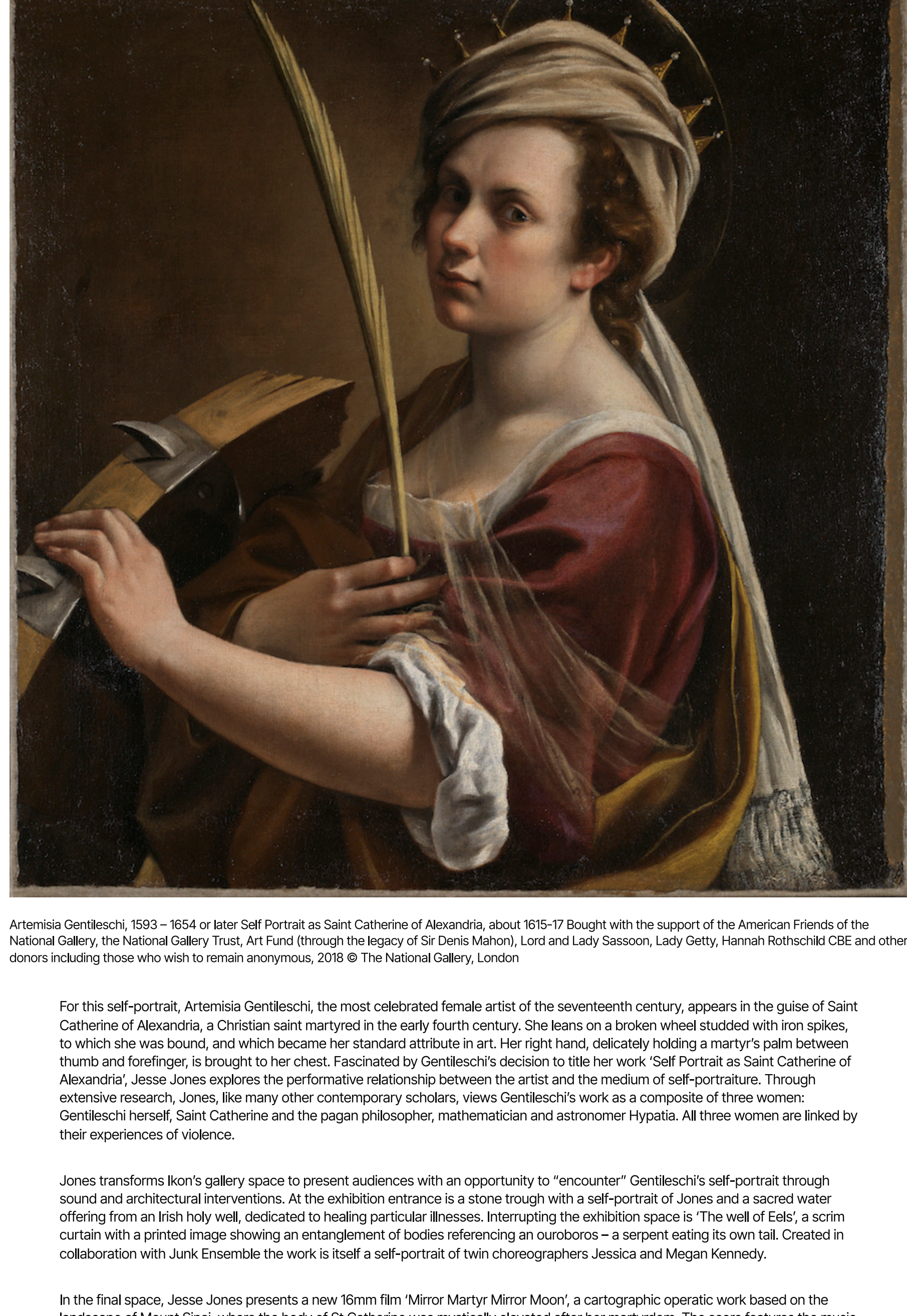
Their exhibition with Maureen Paley in How includes 'A Midsummer Night's Dream (after Shakespeare and Mendelssohn)', images which are decorated with colourful "flowers" that serve as physical manifestations of Puck's power. 'The Scarf Letter / All About Love (after Nathaniel Hawthorne and Ted Hughes)', which is a series made in collaboration with the University of Massachusetts and upward Bound High School through a workshop in which participants studied hooks' text, writing down words that resonated with them. 'The Invisible Man (after Ralph Ellison)' are collages which originate from a series of workshops that took place during the pandemic over Zoom with MFA New York. 'The Water Art Center Minneapolis, Temple University, Philadelphia, Windward School Los Angeles and the School of Visual Arts New York. 'The Fire Next Time (after James Baldwin)' and 'Where Do We Go From Here (after Martin Luther King)' came from workshops in which excerpts from books were read, and participants were encouraged to use blues to sculpt the texts and create poetry by subtraction, addition, and omission.

'Mirror, Mirror' is a group show bringing together fifteen artists whose work explores the rich and varied symbolism of mirrors. Featuring painting, sculpture, photography, mixed media and conceptual work, the exhibition examines how reflection can be used to evoke ideas around identity, truth, and identity. The idea of instability is brought through the exhibition with works that contain and invite multiple perspectives. These unsettle our sense of space and challenge our expectations of what an image can be. With this exhibition, we were interested in exploring how contemporary artists are bringing their own symbolism to an ancient theme', says Soheila Sakharov whose sculptural works use physical materials not only to evoke the language of Islamic architecture and devotional objects, but also to invite the viewer into the work.

Elaine Cooper's portrait paintings depict women holding or gazing into mirrors but what is reflected is unsettling. We glimpse not just the likeness of her subjects, but another version of the self as well as elements that are absent from the main image – details of their surrounding or, in 'Object of Desire', another figure. 'Libation to Hützelböckli', a suspended bronze sculpture by Michael Peiry, makes reference to ancient and occultish belief systems. The serrated-edged sculpture appears both as a sun, with a reflective mirror on one side, and as a weapon, the polished bronze evoking the appearance of chivalric blades. 'Lest Demons Enter' a video work by Rachel Garfield, explores ideas around ritual, recognition, mis-recognition and estrangement. In a Jewish tradition mirrors are covered in the first seven days after a death as it is believed that demons may use them to enter into a person's soul during this vulnerable time. In Garfield's film, footage of mirrors being covered in people's homes merges with demons from Hollywood and medieval illustrations.

The Ikon Gallery is a partner in 'National Treasures', a key strand of the programme celebrating the National Gallery's Bicentenary, 2020. The Gallery is presenting a masterpiece by Artemisia Gentileschi, 'Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria'. Wrapped around the Gentileschi work, and made as a direct response, is a solo exhibition by contemporary fish artist Jesse Jones, whose artistic practice crosses film, sound, performance, sculpture and installation. 'Mirror Martyr Mirror Moon' considers art history, cinema, feminism, ritual and healing, presenting multiple interconnected archetypes of feminist resistance.

'National Treasures' sees twelve partners, one in each region of the UK, receive a masterpiece from the National Gallery's collection and curate around it, with all displays opening simultaneously on Friday 10 May, the 200th anniversary of the National Gallery's opening in London. For the duration of the exhibitions, 35 million people – more than half the UK population – will be within an hour's journey of a National Gallery masterpiece.



Artemisia Gentileschi, 1633 – 1634 or later Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria, about 1615-17 Bought with the support of the American Friends of the National Gallery, the National Gallery Trust, Art Fund through the agency of Sir Dennis Mahon, Lord and Lady Sassoon, Lady Getty, Harvath Rothschild CBE and other donors including those who wish to remain anonymous, 2018 © The National Gallery, London

For this self-portrait, Artemisia Gentileschi, the most celebrated female artist of the seventeenth century, appears in the guise of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, a Christian saint martyred in the early fourth century. She leans on a broken wheel studded with iron spikes, to which she was bound, and which became her standard attribute in art. Her right hand, delicately holding a martyr's palm between thumb and forefinger, is brought to her chest. Fascinated by Gentileschi's decision to title her work 'Self Portrait as Saint Catherine of Alexandria', Jesse Jones explores the performative relationship between the artist and the medium of self-portraiture. Through extensive research, Jones, like many other contemporary scholars, views Gentileschi's work as a composite of three women: Gentileschi herself, Saint Catherine and the pagan philosopher, mathematician and astronomer Hypatia. All three women are linked by their experiences of violence.

Jones transforms Ikon's gallery space to present audiences with an opportunity to "encounter" Gentileschi's self-portrait through sound and architectural interventions. At the exhibition entrance is a stone relief with a self-portrait of Jones and a sacred water offering from an Irish holy well, dedicated to healing particular illnesses. Interrupting the exhibition space is 'the Well of Eke', a scrim curtain with a printed image showing an entanglement of bodies referencing an ouroboros – a serpent eating its own tail. Created in collaboration with Junk Ensemble the work is itself a body-part of twin choreographers Jessica and Megan Kennedy.

In the final space, Jesse Jones presents a new 16mm film 'Mirror Martyr Mirror Moon', a cartographic operatic work based on the landscape of Mount Sinai, where the body of St Catherine was mystically elevated after her martyrdom. The score features the music of Francesco Cacciari, a friend and contemporary of Gentileschi. The film includes a score composed by Irene Buckley and stars a Colombian American singer Stephanie Lamprea vocalising texts from the lives of Hypatia, Saint Catherine, Made using a two-way mirror stage to create the impression of multiple performers, the film also explores the unseen labour and physicality of self-portraiture and the use of the mirror as a tool in the painting process.

Matthew Krishanu paints atmospheric, pared-back compositions including scenes from the artist's life, particularly his childhood years in Bangladesh growing up with his brother, and their parents who were Christian missionaries. 'The Bough Breaks' presents a body of new work, including paintings and works on paper that form the expansive world of Krishanu's artistic practice. The exhibition foregrounds Krishanu's drawings and works on paper—what he describes as the generative heartbeat of the exhibition.

In his paintings, seemingly familiar narratives are alluded to but destabilised. The viewer's own projections are called upon to fulfil the interpretive loop, rising questions about culture, religion, race, power, and the legacies of empire. Personal stories are told through layers of memory, imagination, and conversations with the history of painting. Drawing on multiple influences including El Greco, Gwen John, Noah Davis, and the Ajanta cave paintings, Krishanu's work often explores how representations in the canon of Western art have shaped our collective unconscious around questions of race and gender.

The exhibition's title, 'The Bough Breaks', relates to images from Krishanu's 'Two Boys' series, in which the artist and his brother are depicted perched on, and to some extent dwarfed by, the majestic branches or 'limbs' of the banyan tree—an iconic symbol in Indian culture. The potential failure of this security—the bough was to break—alludes to the dark undertones of the nursery rhyme 'Rock-a-bye Baby', as well as to the evident failure of the structures that should protect, provide for, and perpetuate society; a poignant metaphor for contemporary life.

'Lost on the Machair' at An Larrain'at gallery in Stormway, Isle of Lewis, is the first solo exhibition by Alastair Gordon in a public museum and is also a major exhibition of new and large works, while 'Tales from the North' is a two-person exhibition with fellow Scot, Elaine Woo MacGregor, at the Cynthia Corbett Gallery in London. The latter exhibition features recent and new works by both artists, exploring the intersection of painting and narrative, both personal and deeply immersed in the context of art history. Both artists trained at the prestigious Glasgow School of Art.

The exhibition includes a series of Gordon's meticulous illusionist paintings that explore the possibilities of 'quodlibet', a form of trompe l'oeil that proliferated in 17th Century Northern Europe. Quodlibet (in Latin word meaning 'whatever you please'), usually includes a board with objects and prompts the artist's own surroundings and life. Gordon's works hold precision and expression in an exquisite tension. Similarly, the academic and historical possibilities of the Quodlibet genre dance with the expansiveness of the Scottish landscape, and deep Celtic history. Gordon's works are as much about painting as depicting the landscape itself: a commitment to observational painting, made in sight of the subject. Some of the works for this show were painted in Gordon's native Scotland on the Isles of Lewis and Harris. Others were painted more locally to his London studio. Wimbleton and Tooting Common, heralding a new season of paintings about the common grounds of London; pockets of famed wildness in the city.

Elaine Woo MacGregor's work is similarly engaged with the processes of making, and the narrative and imaginative possibilities of painting. Combining mark-making and imagery, she weaves together atmospheric and theatrical stories. Brushstrokes and areas of colour have a free-flowing placement interjected with deliberate acts of drawing and mark-making. The subjects of her paintings are drawn from popular and high culture: the life of Audrey Hepburn, Matisse drawing his muse, Peggy Guggenheim, in her prime. Black and white stills are rejected with colour, dredging the past in new colours.

Yvonne Malden studied as a fine arts major at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and completed her MFA at the San Francisco Art Institute. After many years as an art therapist, her exhibition at the Personage Gallery is her first solo exhibition as a returning artist. There is an unquenchable power to her paintings and sculptures, which seem to have gathered strength and ambition as they gestated, coming into being in a surge of creative energy over the past year. At the same time, Malden's works are equally tender, both formally and thematically. The artist often crosses her correspondence with a single word, "gentle," and in this simple valediction, an entire ethic and aesthetic sense reside. Only in tender recognition of others' burdens do we unburden ourselves.

There is no easy sentimentality here but rather a deliberate choice to engage softly with the world in all its vulnerabilities. The title of the exhibition, "Burdens of the Bird," captures the artist's unique sensitivity to invisible wounds and hidden anguish—the weight we bear even unto heaven. Her muted palette of powder blue, blushing pink, and creamy white conjures a world just beginning to open into reality, or perhaps a past one, visible only through the gauzy veil of memory.

Peter Rodolfo was born in Washington, D.C., in 1958. His early years were spent in Australia and India before he came to England in the mid-sixties. He was educated in Suffolk before studying painting at Norwich School of Art from 1975 to 1979. Since then, he has exhibited all over the world, shown in solo shows. Rodolfo has a prolific output in many different media, such as oil paint, watercolour, etching, bronze sculpture, and assemblages.

Joyce Dunbar writes that Rodolfo "finds the mystery in the mundane, the glow beneath the surface". Carnival is one of many strands of his work, each with different patterns. Dunbar's 'Carnival' series, once called Caribbean beaches and food stalls, green landscapes, rocky mountains, seascapes of all kinds, water water everywhere, in lakes, streams, fountains, rivers, gleaming, flowing, bubbling, lapping. Trees are also a favourite subject "with their twisted, winding forms and shapes" while the "sandy, rundown streets of 'Yarmouth', where he lives, "have a strong literary quality, also the redundancy of T.S. Eliot's 'Frustrated'.

The Methodist Modern Art Collection is one of Britain's most important collections of modern religious art, comprising over fifty paintings, prints, drawings, reliefs and mosaics. The collection includes famous names from the British art world of the last 100 years (Graham Sutherland, Edward Bawcutt, Patrick Heron, Elisabeth Frink) alongside more contemporary artists. Started by Methodist layman and art collector, who along with a Methodist minister, wanted Methodists to have an appreciation and understanding of contemporary art and what it could bring to illustrate the Christian story, the collection has steadily grown since then and has visited many towns and cities giving people of all denominations an opportunity to see this for themselves.

Following the recent opening of its new church building, Emmanuel Church, Eastbourne is hosting an exhibition, 'New Vision', which features 35 pieces from this collection. The 35 pieces selected depict scenes from events in the life of Jesus Christ. The images offer widely differing perspectives on the Christian story. The exhibition opens on Pentecost, an 'an' light of life. The exhibition takes its name, 'New Vision', 'invented' by John Brokenshire is one exhibit that epitomises this theme. In his work, the artist wanted to "convey a sense of 'hovers' and offers strong intimations of the early years of Genesis, darkness covering the face of the deep and the spirit of God 'hovering' on the face of the waters' first day", as John Bell puts it. Bird and spittle images which go hand in hand, and so the painting also speaks of that same Spirit, which would re-create, assure, discipline, fill them with radiant courage.

The exhibition 'All Shall Be Afforded Dignity' at St Martin-in-the-Fields celebrates 30 years of democracy in South Africa and offers a chance to reflect on the enduring question of 'dignity for all' in South Africa and beyond. People worldwide, particularly those in or from the global South, continue to be impacted by the denial of inherent rights, long recognised by signatories to the United Nations Charter, established 75 years ago. Too often, we see such rights ignored. 'All Shall Be Afforded Dignity' is organised around the work (of the same name) that artist Norman Kaplan made in 1995 in response to a call for art to respond to the 'home' of the Constitution permanently displaced: South Africa. His linocut, 'All Shall Be Afforded Dignity', was awarded the honour of being engraved and prominently displayed in the South African Constitutional Court.

Kaplan is a South African of Russian Jewish heritage. His lived experience of, and solidarity with, the effects of the stratification of race under apartheid is articulated through his public-facing printmaking and, in the cartoons and design work created for the liberation movement, including clandestine cartoons and false copies to avoid apartheid censors, created for political publications and public awareness raising materials created for advocacy within the International Defence and Aid Fund. The exhibition brings together works from both these strands of Kaplan's artistry, speaking to the power of collaboration, solidarity, and art as a tool of struggle to create awareness and change, paving the way for widespread acceptance and understanding of the value of human rights and implementation of change towards true freedom and equality for all.

Curator Jacqueline Creswell writes, "In a world sometimes plagued by division and indifference, the question, Am I my brother's keeper", can be interpreted as an enquiry into one's moral responsibility towards others." The exhibition of sculptures by Sean Henry that she has curated at Ely Cathedral "prompts reflection on the extent to which individuals can support one another" and "stimulate a discussion about the interconnectedness between people and highlights the positive impact of our responsibility to care for and support one another".

Henry conveys the depth and complexity of the human experience through his sculptures, saying, "We don't know who they are, and while the figures might seem familiar and – hope – emotionally present, the ambiguity around their status is an important part of how and why we engage with them." Creswell says: "His figures go far beyond mastering technical skills and require a profound understanding of and empathy for the subjects being portrayed. He captures the human form with compassion, depicting the emotions, struggles, and joys that define us as human. His figures also convey the vulnerability, strength and resilience that exist within each individual. They tell stories, evoke emotions and create connections with the viewer."

Creswell suggests that the work in the context of this sacred space, "Am I my brother's keeper?" is a portal through which bridges may be built between people inside and outside the community, helping to open up discussion about our shared humanity".

Lead image: Jesse Jones, Mirror Martyr Mirror Moon (2024) 16mm film 16 minutes duration Production still by Mark Duggan x 2

'New Town New Art', 6 April – 8 June 2024, Gibberd Gallery – Visit Here

'Us: from There to Here – Britain's Gain', 10 April – 14 June 2024, Ben Uri Gallery – Visit Here

'Elevator Music 48: Aloha, only in flesh', Feb 10 – May 19, The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Siddhant College Visit Here –

'STUDIO K.O.S.: Where we have gone', 13 April – 16 June 2024, Maureen Paley at Morena di Luna, 3 Adelphi Crescent, Hove – Visit Here

'Mirror, Mirror', 26 APRIL – 25 MAY 2024, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery – Visit Here

'National Treasures: Artemisia in Birmingham' and 'Jesse Jones: Mirror Martyr Mirror Moon', 10 May – 8 September 2024, Ikon Gallery Visit Here –

'The Bough Breaks: Matthew Krishanu', 26 April – 23 June 2024, Camden Art Centre – Visit Here

'Lost on the Machair', from 21 May 2024, An Larrain'at gallery, Stormway and 'Tales from the North: Contemporary Painting from the Glasgow School – An exhibition of works by Alastair Gordon & Elaine Woo MacGregor', 31 May – 15 June 2024, Cynthia Corbett Gallery – Visit Here –

'Burdens of the Bird: Yvonne Malden', 27 May – 30 June 2024, The Personage Gallery – Visit Here –

Peter Rodolfo: 'As a man looks, so he is', 27 April – 26 May 2024, Chappel Galleries – Visit Here

'New Vision', 19 May – 13 June 2024, Emmanuel Church, Eastbourne – Visit Here

'All Shall Be Afforded Dignity', 22 April – 7 May 2024, St Martin-in-the-Fields – Visit Here

'Am I my brother's keeper?' by Sean Henry, 26 April – September 2024, Ely Cathedral – Visit Here

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