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New education opportunities at The Fitzwilliam Museum

The £12 million Courtyard Development at the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, launching in July 2004, gives the Museum enhanced education facilities alongside new galleries and improved visitor facilities.

Until now, all the Fitzwilliam's education activities have of necessity been entirely based in the galleries themselves. The galleries and the collections will always remain at the heart of the programme, but now the new education suite will provide opportunities for visitors of all ages to explore their reactions to the collections through a wide variety of participatory activities.

The new studio and seminar room are fitted out to accommodate a full range of active interpretative work; drama, artwork, music, creative writing, demonstrations and discussion will be available for all. This new provision will add a whole new dimension to the Fitzwilliam's already active educational programmes for all ages.

The Fitzwilliam education department works with anyone who wants to become involved with the collections. Activities include full and active programmes for schools, adult learners and university students, alongside more specialist work for sufferers of Alzheimer's disease and those who care for them, people enrolled on Basic Skills courses, homeless people in Cambridge, people with mental health difficulties, excluded pupils and children at risk. Much of this work is undertaken in collaboration with partners from the health and education sectors.

A recent collaborative project involved a small group of women who participated in a five-week pilot Basic Skills course. Their work - writing of depth and insight, reflecting their personal experience of, and dialogue with, paintings from Dutch masters to French Impressionists - was published by the Fitzwilliam in a book entitled *Art into Literacy*.

Two further innovations will be launched as the Museum opens officially: *Pharos*, the Fitzwilliam Museum's web-based guide to its collections; and the *eGuide*, audio-visual information for visitors delivered *via* a handheld computer. These initiatives will give a wide audience access to information about the treasures in the Fitzwilliam collections at a level of detail and interest of their choosing.

Frances Sword, the Head of Education at the Fitzwilliam is very enthusiastic about the new Courtyard development: "The new spaces are more than just rooms, they are opportunities: they will be active, they will provide children and adults alike with experiences to take them into closer contact with great art - and that can lead anywhere."

Further information on the Courtyard Development and the Fitzwilliam's collections and education programmes can be found on the Museum's website: www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk.

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Notes for Editors

The Fitzwilliam Museum

The Fitzwilliam Museum not only houses the University of Cambridge's art collection but is also a public museum and art gallery with an international reputation. More than half a million objects and works of art are held in five curatorial departments: Antiquities, Applied Arts, Coins and Medals, Manuscripts and Printed Books and Paintings, Drawings and Prints. The Fitzwilliam's treasures range from Ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman antiquities to the arts of the 21st century and include masterpieces by Titian, Canaletto, Stubbs, Constable, Monet, Renoir and Picasso, one of the world's foremost Rembrandt print collections, Handel music manuscripts and the famous Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, one of the most significant collections of Korean ceramics outside South-East Asia, medieval illuminated manuscripts and outstanding collections of pottery, porcelain and medieval coins.

The Fitzwilliam Museum attracts around 250,000 visitors a year. It is open Tuesday to Saturday, 10.00 am to 5.00 pm, Sunday, 12.00 noon to 5.00 pm; closed Mondays. Admission to the permanent collection and to temporary exhibitions is free.

Pharos

Pharos is the Fitzwilliam Museum's new web resource designed to guide visitors through the extensive collections of the Museum, illuminating a selection of the treasures it contains. *Pharos* offers visitors a number of ways of exploring the Museum's collections, presenting the information in multiple layers, enabling the visitor to choose the level of detail he wishes to study. A visitor to the website can either take the Introductory Tour of key works; explore the Collection by theme or time period; or look at how works of art are created by viewing the interactive demonstrations of Making Art. *Pharos* is available from the Museum's new IT suite situated near the Courtyard.

eGuide

The Fitzwilliam Museum has embarked on an innovative project to deliver a dynamic range of audio and visual information for visitors. This information is provided to visitors on a handheld computer and triggered by electronic tags positioned around the Museum. When in front of a "tagged" exhibit the visitor can "point and click" at the tag to view the information about that exhibit on the handheld computer. This includes audio and video clips, as well as comparative images, text and graphics, all of which can be selected from the computer's interactive menu. The visitor's control of the timing and level of additional information offers a flexible environment in which to learn more about the collections.