

17 October 2006

Literature, art and theatre take centre stage in Fitzwilliam Museum autumn exhibitions

A fascinating new exhibition at The Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge explores the complex relationships that developed between art and literature, and between artists and writers, in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain. From the narrative painting of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, through the revival of wood-engraved illustration in Victorian periodicals and the typographical innovations of the *Book Beautiful*, to the Shakespearean fairylands of Richard Dadd and the birth of the cartoon in the pages of *Punch*, text and image intersected, reinforcing one another but also competing for pre-eminence.

Focusing on illustration, artists' books, fantasy and caricature, *Literary Circles: Artist, author, word and image in Britain 1800-1920* includes paintings, drawings and literary manuscripts by John Everett Millais, Elizabeth Siddal, Sir Edward Burne-Jones, William Blake, Samuel Palmer, George du Maurier and Max Beerbohm. It highlights the growth of literary journals and serialised novels, which brought illustrated narratives to a wider readership, and contrasts it with the development of the private press movement, stimulated by the book designs of William Morris and exemplified in the works of Walter Crane, Charles Ricketts and Kate Greenaway.

Drawn from the Fitzwilliam's exceptionally rich holdings, the exhibition also illuminates the network of interests that linked, with each other and with the Museum, authors and artists such as John Keats, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Robert Browning, Algernon Swinburne, Burne-Jones, Thomas Hardy, Augustus John and Siegfried Sassoon. In this way, it uncovers the bonds of affection and creative collaboration that were central to the Museum's evolution and to the enrichment of its collection. A programme of talks and courses complements the exhibition; details from www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 332904.

To complement *Literary Circles*, the exhibition *Chasing Happiness: Maeterlinck, The Blue Bird and England* extends the dialogue between text and image into theatre through the display of captivating stage sets for Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*, one of the most popular and celebrated theatrical productions of the Edwardian era. The original set designs were recently acquired by the Museum with generous support from the Art Fund and the MLA/V&A Purchase Grant Fund and are here on public display in a formal exhibition for the first time. The play enjoyed phenomenal success when first staged at the Haymarket Theatre in London in 1909. Its cultural influence was so great that the blue bird came to be directly associated with happiness and was adopted throughout the twentieth century as a name or symbol for everything from face cream and biscuits to racing cars and football strips.

Both exhibitions are accompanied by colour catalogues, available from the Museum shop (01223 470474; sales@fitzwilliammuseum.org), and are on display at The Fitzwilliam Museum, admission free, until the end of the year. The generous support of Cambridge University Press and Lowell Libson Ltd is gratefully acknowledged.

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.../Further information and images

Press | The Fitzwilliam Museum

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Exhibition details (for publication):

Literary Circles: Artist, author, word and image in Britain 1800-1920

Mellon Gallery (Gallery 13) from 17 October – 30 December 2006

Chasing Happiness: Maeterlinck, The Blue Bird and England

Shiba Gallery (Gallery 14) from 3 October 2006 – 7 January 2007

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB

Tel: 01223 332900

www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Open: Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00 – 17.00

Sunday: 12.00 – 17.00

Closed: Mondays and 24, 25, 26 & 31 December 2006 and 1 January 2007

Admission to both exhibitions and to the Museum's permanent collections is FREE

Further information and images from: Fiona Brown or Angela Metcalfe,
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Notes for Editors

The Fitzwilliam Museum

The Fitzwilliam Museum houses the University of Cambridge's art collection and is 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 has a wide-ranging programme of temporary exhibitions and events and an award-winning Education Service. The Museum is open Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00 – 17.00, Sunday: 12.00 – 17.00 and Bank Holiday Mondays. Admission to the permanent collections and to temporary exhibitions is FREE. Website: www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk.

The Art Fund

The Art Fund is the UK's leading independent art charity. It offers grants to help UK museums and galleries enrich their collections and campaigns widely on behalf of museums and their visitors. It has 80,000 members. Since its foundation in 1903, The Art Fund has helped UK public collections acquire over 850,000 works of art, ranging from Bronze Age treasures to contemporary works of art. Visit the charity's website at www.artfund.org.

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