

Revelatory letters and Royal painting join Fitzwilliam Museum

- Samuel Palmer's letters from later years, revealing a new take on his personality
 - First UK museum acquisition of Royal portrait by Spanish court painter Vicente López
- with support of the Art Fund

The Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge has announced two major new acquisitions; letters written by the artist Samuel Palmer in his final years and the first Royal portrait by Spanish court painter Vicente López to enter a UK Museum.

The new acquisitions are now on display in the Fitzwilliam's permanent collection, which ranges from antiquities to contemporary art, on the eve of its bicentenary in 2016.

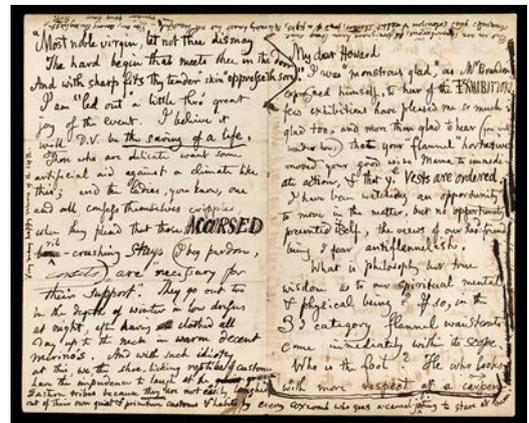
The 47 handwritten letters by Samuel Palmer comprise over 200 pages. They span over 16 years, the last one shortly before the artist's death, and give a new impression of his personality in later years: far from being melancholy, they show an extraordinary zest for life.

Samuel Palmer (1805-1881) is now acknowledged as one of the most innovative and influential British artists of the nineteenth century, but his last twenty years are often portrayed as a time of quiet reclusion in the aftermath of his elder son's death, described by Palmer as 'the catastrophe of my life'.

The letters challenge this view, showing the artist found ways to cope with his intense grief, and still had a great passion for work, a sense of self-effacing humour, and that his a deep seriousness was tempered always by a love of the absurd. They are signed S. Palmer, Samuel Palmer, Nogo, Mr Fearing, Vanity of Vanities, A good-for-nothing-little-baby-scamp who is ashamed to sign his name; one includes a small sketch. The letters are peppered with capitals, elaborate lettering, exclamation marks, crossing outs and postscripts. They touch on a wide range of subjects including religion, the 'dearly-longed for' Blake Exhibition of 1876, music, a visit to Coleridge's house in Highgate, loneliness, and poetry; and contain a wide range of meditations on art, life and philosophy. The purchase has been funded by the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum.



Vicente López y Portaña (1772 - 1850)
Maria Isabel de Borbón, Queen of the Two Sicilies, 1829-30
© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Letter written by Samuel Palmer
© Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Press | The Fitzwilliam Museum

The Royal portrait from 1829-30 of Maria Isabel de Borbón, Queen of the Two Sicilies by Spanish court painter Vicente López y Portaña (1772 -1850) is the first painting by the artist to enter a public collection in the UK. López is recognised as one of the most technically accomplished of all portrait painters of the period.

This portrait depicts the matronly Queen of the Two Sicilies, also known as the Kingdom of Naples. She is awash with blue velvet and fine lace, wearing an impressive set of diamonds and sapphires. The portrait of the fifty-seven year old Queen is touchingly honest, the asymmetry of her face, discolorations of skin, tired eyes, reddened hands, double chin and hint of a smile, all rendered with the same meticulous care as her lace, diamonds, and virtuoso crumpled kid glove.

The painting has been acquired with support of the Art Fund, the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum and other generous private donors.

Tim Knox, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum commented: "We are absolutely delighted to announce these two major acquisitions on the eve of our bicentenary in 2016. Our collections have constantly been growing over the past 200 years and we are committed to displaying works that have a strong research and learning focus, and offer something new and fascinating to our visitors. We would like to thank the Art Fund for their generous support of the Lopez acquisition, the first work by this artist to join a public collection in the UK. Our thanks also goes to the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum, made up of individuals whose subscriptions go towards acquiring works of art for the Museum - meaning anyone who joins becomes an art collector."

Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund, said: "We are so pleased to support the acquisition of this remarkable portrait by a rare artist. It is a striking addition to the Fitzwilliam's collection of European paintings, and will enrich their Spanish and early nineteenth century holdings. We wish the Fitzwilliam all the best for their bicentenary in 2016 and are delighted to be part of the celebration through making this grant."

Both works are now on display at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. Admission is free.

- Ends -

For further information and images contact the Press Office:

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Notes to editors:

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB

FREE ADMISSION

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00

Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00

CLOSED: 24-26 & 31 December, 1 January and Good Friday.

Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam Museum is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge and lead partner for the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) Major Partner Museum programme, funded by The Arts Council. The Fitzwilliam's collections explore world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century, world class prints and drawings, and outstanding collections of applied arts, ceramics, coins, and Asian arts. The Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation.

The Fitzwilliam is celebrating its 200th anniversary in 2016.

www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. In the past five years the Art Fund has given £34 million to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. The Art Fund also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, including ARTIST ROOMS and the 2013-18 Aspire tour of Tate's *Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows* by John Constable, and makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators.

The Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 117,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 230 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibition. In addition to grant-giving, the Art Fund's support for museums includes the annual Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year, a publications programme and a range of digital platforms.

Find out more about the Art Fund and the National Art Pass at www.artfund.org

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