

# Flux: Parian unpacked

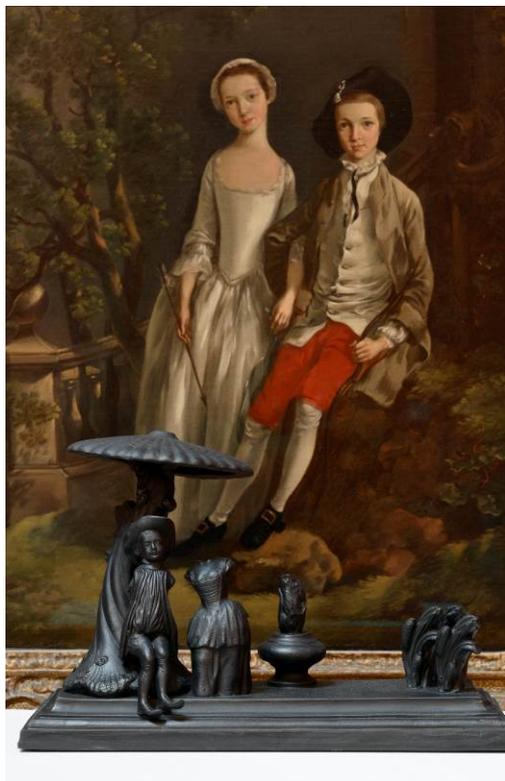
6 March – 1 July 2018 | Fitzwilliam Museum Cambridge

*Flux: Parian unpacked* is a bold installation by ceramic artist and curator Matt Smith, displaying for the first time over 100 busts from the newly-acquired Glynn collection of parian ware. The exhibition seeks to question why Museums and society celebrate the lives of some people, but not others, and to challenge established notions of British history and colonialism.

Parian is a fine, unglazed porcelain resembling marble. It is named after Paros; the Greek island renowned for its brilliant white marble, used since antiquity to create sculpture. Invented in around 1845 by a Staffordshire pottery manufacturer, parian allowed manufacturers to mass-produce sculpture quickly and cheaply. However, it is by nature an inherently unstable material, and this unpredictability provides a platform from which Matt Smith examines changing views of history and our opinions of those individuals depicted.

In 2016, the Fitzwilliam was allocated the David Glynn Collection of over 300 pieces of parian by H. M. Government in lieu of Inheritance Tax from the estate of G. D. V. Glynn. The collection comprises mainly busts of widely celebrated historical figures, including William Shakespeare, Lord Byron and members of the Royal family, mythological figures, but also busts of contemporary Victorians, who were immortalised in parian ware during, or shortly after, their lifetime. Many of the busts were produced when the British empire was at its height, as a popular way of celebrating these 'eminent' Victorians and their achievements. In contrast, part of this exhibition seeks to explore how our understanding of the establishment, these historical figures, and history, especially colonial history and the abuse of power, is always in flux.

Over 100 busts will be massed in an imposing display, with six different individuals and events highlighted. These individuals include Sir Henry Havelock (1795-1857) and his connection to India's First War of Independence and Field Marshal Colin Campbell (1792-1863) and his connection to the First Opium War.



After Gainsborough © Matt Smith

Press | The Fitzwilliam Museum

Busts of these individuals will be juxtaposed against a series of specially-commissioned designs that incorporate historic images, challenging the often sanitised history that is passed down to us and questioning the established reputation and achievements of those immortalised in parian. Matt Smith said:

“These busts were created to memorialise and celebrate individuals. The installation seeks not to talk of whether these were good or bad people, but to provide a more balanced view of their lives and the differing views that might be held, depending on whether you were colonising, or colonised.”

The second part of the exhibition consists of a number of pieces from the Glynn collection and new works in both black and white parian, which have been made especially by Matt, displayed in amongst the Museum’s internationally-renowned permanent collections. As Matt Smith explained:

“It is not only our understanding of the past that is always in flux, but the physical museum and its collections too. They are always changing, and I was intrigued to see what the effect of placing pieces from the newly acquired Glynn collection, and my new works, around the galleries would have on the Fitzwilliam’s wider collection.”

These surprising new pieces challenge us to revisit and review the museum’s own collections of porcelain, Renaissance bronzes, and fine art, including a painting by Gainsborough. Beneath Millais’ *The Twins*, *Kate and Grace Hoare*, two identical Victorian parian busts are joined by Matt’s contemporary intervention, a double-ended bust of twins locked in a tussle, both seeing and looking away. Matt described these new works, saying:

“As an artist, I am continually drawn to making connections, both historically and physically. These connections rely less on didactic narratives and more on shared ideas of form.”

A guide will lead visitors around these interventions, before they visit the main display itself in the Octagon gallery.

The exhibition opens on 6 March and is accompanied by an exhibition catalogue and a series of events, including a public study day on the role of contemporary artists in museums, entitled ‘The Museum is not neutral’, taking place on 30 April 2018.

-Ends-

## Notes to editors:

For all enquires please contact the Fitzwilliam Museum Press Office: +44 (0) 1223 332941 | [press@fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](mailto:press@fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

**Matt Smith** is an artist who works with museums and historic houses. He is interested in exploring how cultural organisations construct history and whose voices are heard and whose are unheard within those organisations. In 2015/16 he was Artist in Residence at the Victoria and Albert Museum. His work is held in the collections of the V&A, the Walker Art Gallery, Brighton Museum and Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.

Previous solo shows include *Queering the Museum* at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and *Other Stories* at the Stanley and Audrey Burton Gallery. He is Professor of Ceramics and Glass at Konstfack, University of the Arts, Stockholm.

## About the Fitzwilliam Museum

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 coins, Asian arts, ceramics and other applied 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.

[www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

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, Good Friday

**Business Partners** The Museum is supported by our Business Partners during 2018; TTP Group plc and Brewin Dolphin