

Friends of York Art Gallery

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



Claude Monet, *The Water-Lily Pond*, 1899. © The National Gallery, London

Fostering the appreciation of Fine Art since 1948



NEW ACQUISITION: Mary Ellen Best (1809-1891), *A Woman Paring Apples*, 1828-31, pencil and watercolour on paper, 21.9 x 28.6cm. Bequeathed by a supporter of the Gallery.

Photo: York Museums Trust

Best was born in York, and her first married home was on Clifton, probably no. 14 (formerly no. 1).

Front cover image:

Claude Monet (1840-1926), *The Water-Lily Pond*, 1899, 88.3 x 93.1 cm, oil on canvas. © The National Gallery, London

2024 has been an exciting year for York Art Gallery and the Friends. The Burton Gallery and the stairwell have been transformed by the relighting, supported by a £30,000 grant from the Friends. This was helped by the advent of the Monet show *The Water-Lily Pond*, on loan from the National Gallery, London, which broke all records here in York, with over 70,000 attendees. In January 2024, Kathryn Blacker, Chief Executive of the York Museums Trust (YMT), agreed to waive entry charges for Friends to the Gallery and special exhibitions; subsequently there have been an extra 100 new members, taking the total to over 800. But this success must be set against continued budget constraints for YMT. We have outstanding staff running the Gallery, but the annual grant from York City Council (who currently run a debt of nearly £300 million) is in decline, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for Beatrice Bertram and the other staff at the Gallery to maintain the high standard of exhibitions we have enjoyed.

The Friends' Committee continues to meet five times a year. It is led by Charles Martindale who has tirelessly advocated the relighting of the Burton Gallery and stairwell; we are all delighted that this has now been achieved. The Friends continue to support an MA in the Department of History of Art at the University of York with a £4,500 grant. The Committee agreed to fund the conservation of five pictures from our permanent collection for the Monet show. The bookstall has been very generously supported by donations from many members of the Friends and by the University of York's History of Art Department. Accumulated sales currently stand at over £18,000, and this goes directly to support the Gallery. The Friends' Committee has done outstanding work. Susan Smallpage has been hard at work with the increase in membership, and Paul McLean has exercised a steady hand on the finances, which are, at present, in a healthy state. Ron Clayton has continued to find informed speakers for the *Artwork of the Month* talks, and John Roe is kept busy as Secretary. In 2024 we welcomed a new member to the Committee, Nicholas Dunn-Mcafee. We are fortunate to have such an outstanding Committee, and to all of them we, as members of the Friends, extend our heartfelt thanks. We also thank the Events Sub-Committee, chaired by Moira Fulton, which devised a full programme of 19 fascinating visits to exhibitions and galleries in various parts of the country.

I am extremely sorry to record the death of Alan Hitchcock, who has been such a support to the Friends over the years, and also of Professor Jim Sharpe, who was the editor of our e-Bulletin. But overhanging all our activities is the challenging financial situation facing the Gallery. It means that private donations and support will have to play an increasing role if the Gallery is to continue to offer such an impressive programme. More than ever, our first duty as Friends is to support the Gallery's activities - which we are extremely glad to do.

PETER MILLER

President, Friends of York Art Gallery

The Year in the Gallery

The first quarter of 2024 was spent gearing up for our major summer show, 'National Treasures: Monet in York – *The Water-Lily Pond*'. Part of the National Gallery's bicentenary celebrations, 'National Treasures' involved lending masterpieces from their collection to institutions across the country. At York, this ambitious project resulted in a three-gallery exhibition, a striking artistic commission, a digital interactive, a Monet-inspired wildflower meadow in the Artists' Garden, plus a lively programme of indoor and outdoor events. Prior to the opening, the curatorial team re-hung several walls in the Burton Gallery, and we were also able to re-light the entire room thanks to a generous grant from the Friends. This work, alongside the concomitant redecoration, re-lighting and re-hanging of the Gallery's stairwell, has had a transformative effect on our spaces and permanent displays. Our exhibition – with Claude Monet's beautiful *The Water-Lily Pond* (1899) hanging at its heart – was about appreciating and depicting nature, landscapes, and gardens. Visitors first encountered artists who had led the evolution of French *plein air* painting during the 19th century, while the next section was devoted to his lifelong fascination with Japanese woodblock prints. Monet's masterpiece was presented within the context of his gardens at Giverny. The show also highlighted the far-reaching influence of Monet's radical approach to painting on the development of modern art, culminating in a new body of work by contemporary artist Michaela Yearwood-Dan.

Once Monet's canvas had returned to London in September, we installed 'The Art of Wallpaper: Morris & Co.', a touring exhibition organised by Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh and produced in collaboration with Morris & Co. Celebrating the work, influence, and legacy of the renowned Arts & Crafts pattern designer William Morris, the displays in the Madsen Galleries offered a fresh perspective on his iconic wallpaper designs. The exhibition featured over 100 examples of his wallpapers from the Sanderson and Morris & Co. archives, as well as printing blocks. Collectively, these revealed intriguing insights into wallpaper design and production processes, and illustrated how Morris' pioneering influence continues to inspire domestic interior design



The 'Monet Garden', viewed from the Gallery balcony

Looking ahead, we have an exciting programme of exhibitions and events planned. In March 2025, internationally acclaimed artist and writer Harland Miller will return to the Gallery to present 'XXX', a new exhibition showcasing paintings and works on paper from his renowned 'Letter Paintings' series. Inspired by the intricate illuminated letters found in medieval



Jean Baptiste Antoine Guillemet (1843-1914), *Artist in a Landscape*, 38.1 x 54.6 cm, oil on canvas. Photo: York Museums Trust. This landscape was one of a number of works included in the Monet show which were conserved with a grant from the Friends.

manuscripts, these distinctive works deploy bold colours and typefaces to accentuate the expressive versatility of monosyllabic words and acronyms. 'Harland Miller: XXX' will coincide with the release of a book of the same title by Phaidon, and will feature several new works by the artist, one of which celebrates the city of York. We are delighted to welcome Miller back to his hometown and to collaborate with the artist and White Cube again, having been forced to curtail our 2020 exhibition, 'York: So Good They Named It Once', due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Following the conclusion of our popular exhibition 'W.A. Ismay: the Yorkshire Tea Ceremony', displays in our main ceramics gallery will be changing over the coming months. 'Not a Pot' will look at the more challenging uses of clay seen in our collections, taking the work and interests of Gordon Baldwin – arguably the UK's most important sculptural potter – as a starting point. Newly displayed cases will explore themes such as surrealism, imagined landscapes, rejecting the wheel, and anti-function, and will showcase artists in our collection who have approached clay in innovative ways. There will be star works, new acquisitions, and other collection pieces which have not previously been on display. We are extremely pleased to be working with the local sculptor Harold Gosney to develop an exhibition of his work in the Upper North Gallery for autumn 2025. Friends may well have spotted two new long-term loans from Gosney on display in the Burton Gallery: *Equine Head* (2020) and *Reclining Figure* (2024).

Artworks from our collection have appeared in several national and international exhibitions this year. We supported the National Galleries of Scotland's major project 'Canaletto and the Splendour of Venice', which is being shown at four Japanese venues: Yamaguchi, Kyoto, Shinjuku (Tokyo), and Shizuoka. I am looking forward to being reunited with Bernardo



Domenichino (1581-1641), *Portrait of Monsignor Agucchi*, 1603-04, oil on canvas, 60.3 x 46.3cm. Photo: York Museums Trust. This major work is currently on loan to an exhibition in Rome on Guercino in the Scuderie del Quirinale.

Bellotto's *The Piazza San Martino, Lucca* (1742-46) and William Etty's *The Bridge of Sighs* (1833-35) after a year's absence! In addition, we lent paintings to two blockbuster exhibitions in Italy: 'Preraffaelliti: Rinascimento Moderno' at the Museo Civico San Domenico, Forlì, and 'Guercino: The

Ludovisi Era in Rome' held at the Scuderie del Quirinale, Rome. To the former, we sent Etty's copy of the Louvre's *Concert Champêtre* (1830), and to the latter, Domenichino's *Portrait of Monsignor Agucchi* (1610-15). An important group of ceramics by Lucie Rie are currently on display in 'Lucie Rie: The Adventure of Pottery' at CLAY Keramikmuseum, Denmark. Closer to home, our works have featured in shows up and down the country from Winchester and Whitby to Hutton-le-Hole.

In terms of acquisitions, there have been some notable additions to the collection during 2024. Our fruitful partnership with the Contemporary Art Society resulted in the Gallery receiving *Porth II* (2023), a gouache and watercolour by the talented Sunderland-born artist Ro Robertson, via the Society's Fine Art Award 2023-24. We were also very pleased to accept a significant 16th-century panel from the Antwerp School depicting the Black King Balthasar. Kindly gifted by a Friend, this painting would originally have formed part of a triptych showing the Adoration of the Magi. Having been beautifully restored and framed thanks to a grant from the Friends, *Balthasar* is now on display in the Upper North Gallery. *A Woman Paring Apples* (1831) by the important 19th-century York watercolourist Mary Ellen Best was bequeathed to us by another supporter of the Gallery. We were also delighted to secure Sara Moorhouse's assemblage of colourful earthenware pots, *Aerial Landscape* (2015), and four pieces by the sculptor and potter John Maltby.

In August, we bid a sad farewell to our Curator of Fine Art, Becky Gee, who left to pursue a collaborative PhD with the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA), Teesside Archives, and Teesside University. Becky made a considerable contribution to the Gallery over her five years in post, bolstering our collections of contemporary art with impactful acquisitions, redisplaying the Burton Gallery, and leading on a number of major exhibitions. We look forward to welcoming Dr Eleanor Jackson as our new Curator of Fine Art, who will join us in January from the British Library. Having completed her MA and PhD in History of Art at the University of York, Eleanor was lead curator on the British Library's recent acclaimed exhibition 'Medieval Women: In Their Own Words' (2024), and co-curated 'Gold' (2022).



View of the Upper North Gallery. The Friends have recently funded the conservation of three panels, all of which are on display: the two 15th-century Nuremberg School Panels, part of the Lycett Green collection (at the front, the one on the left recently recovered after being stolen in 1979), and the newly acquired Balthasar (on the wall to the right), generously gifted to the Gallery by one of its members. Photo: York Museums Trust

2024 was a significant year for the Gallery, with the buzz of visitors in our spaces as we welcomed record numbers during the Monet show, the smart new lighting in the Burton Gallery, and the refurbishment of the stairwell, together with a varied programme of well-attended events. Each of these activities involved support from the Friends. I was recently reminded of the legacy of Friends' contributions when choosing to display Pieter Claesz Soutman's *Samson and Delilah* (1642) in the stairwell. The first painting to be gifted by the Friends 75 years ago, it now hangs proudly alongside Francis Cotes' *The Hon. Lady Stanhope and the Countess of Effingham as Diana, and her Companion* (1765), which was likewise acquired with Friends' help in 1987. It has been a year to remember, and I look forward to building on this progress with your Committee in 2025.

BEATRICE BERTRAM
Senior Curator, York Art Gallery

Hosting a National Treasure

MONET IN YORK – THE WATER-LILY POND

On 10 May 2024, York Art Gallery unveiled 'National Treasures: Monet in York - *The Water-Lily Pond*'. In celebration of the National Gallery's bicentenary, 12 masterpieces from their collection were loaned to venues across the UK. York Art Gallery was selected to host the Yorkshire and Humber region's loan, continuing a series of successful collaborations with the National Gallery. The venues participating in the 'National Treasures' tour received the initial invitation in March 2022. However, confirmation of their loans, and the news that York Art



'Monet in York'.
Photo: York Museums Trust

Gallery would host the French Impressionist, Claude Monet's *The Water-Lily Pond* – painted in 1899 in his beloved garden in Giverny – only arrived in October, when the full exhibition schedule was shared by the National Gallery. The selection remained confidential until the public announcement of 'National Treasures' in February 2023.

The exhibition team, led by Beatrice Bertram (Senior Curator) and Jenny Alexander (Exhibitions Project Manager), began work on a detailed exhibition proposal, which was presented to the National Gallery in May 2023. Monet's *The Water-Lily Pond* would sit at the heart of an exhibition celebrating nature, landscapes, and gardens, one which would capitalise on our own collections and be supplemented by key loans to create an immersive display across all three Madsen galleries and beyond, into the Museum Gardens and Artists' Garden.

The proposal outlined key themes, beginning with the development of the 19th-century French landscape tradition, featuring 'Pioneers of *Plein Air* Painting' such as Pierre-Henri de Valenciennes and Camille Corot. 'Pictures of the Floating World' would showcase Japanese prints by Katsushika Hokusai and Utagawa Hiroshige, whose work influenced Monet's practice and inspired the bridge depicted in his painting. Upon entering the central gallery, visitors would encounter *The Water-Lily Pond* itself as the centrepiece, accompanied by large facsimiles of Monet in his garden, offering a glimpse into his world. This room would also feature works by Monet's mentors, such as Eugène Boudin and Johan Jongkind, as well as artists he inspired including Wynford Dewhurst ('Manchester's Monet') and Charles Conder. The final room would bring the narrative into the present with a commission by the abstract



Installing the exhibition 'Monet in York'.
Image courtesy of Gareth Buddo

and the Public Engagement team were putting together a comprehensive programme of workshops, talks, and wellbeing activities. Funding for the exhibition included a £5K grant from the National Gallery and a generous contribution of £3K from the Friends of York Art Gallery for the conservation of several collection works, including two paintings by Diaz de la Peña that had not been displayed for 20 years. Substantial sponsorship was also obtained from the local wealth management company JM Finn.

Following approval from the National Gallery, final preparations for the exhibition began. As projects of this size typically take two years to complete, the short timeline posed significant challenges. The exhibition team's dedicated efforts ensured that, by the end of 2023, all loan agreements were in place. The final object list consisted of 28 pieces from the Gallery's collection, and 32 loans from national and regional lenders, including the British Museum, the Bowes Museum, and Pallant House Gallery. Aside from the label for the Monet, all exhibition texts were written by the Senior Curator over the course of several months. The Leeds-based company Journal was enlisted for the exhibition design, producing all text and graphics, including the vinyl reproduction of *The Water-Lily Pond* that adorned the gallery's entrance. Since 2023, Little Greene has been the paint sponsor for the Gallery, and once again supplied the colours used throughout the exhibition.

The installation took three weeks, beginning on 22 April 2024 with the removal of the previous exhibitions. At the same time, thanks to a grant of £30K from the Friends, the Burton Gallery was fully re-lit. The opportunity was also taken to install new lighting and redecorate the stairwell, ensuring that the building and collections were presented in the best possible manner ahead of the opening. As loans arrived in the second week, the exhibition started to take shape with the gallery team and technicians working alongside couriers to unpack, condition-check, and hang the works; the final week was spent installing text and graphics, and setting lighting levels. On the evening of 9 May, guests gathered for a private view with speeches from colleagues across York Museums Trust and representatives from the National Gallery. The next morning, following a sold-out preview for the Friends, the exhibition opened to the public on the National Gallery's 200th anniversary.

'National Treasures: Monet in York - *The Water-Lily Pond*' was a resounding success, receiving extensive praise for its content and presentation, and has been shortlisted for the Cultural Experience/Festival category of the 2025 Visit York Awards. While anticipated to be popular, the exhibition exceeded all expectations and targets, attracting 70,900 visitors over its 17-week run, 55% of whom were first-time visitors to the Gallery.

ROBERT WAKE
Associate Collections Curator



Visitors in the 'Monet Garden', which proved as popular an attraction as the exhibition itself
Image courtesy of Gareth Buddo

A Favourite Painting

A series in which a member of the Friends writes about a painting in the Gallery

Earlier this year, I went to the Gallery after some months abroad. I looked forward to revisiting some of my favourites, but was also excited to see any additions to the display. Little did I know that there was a real surprise waiting for me – a medieval Bohemian painting! You don't get to see many of these in British galleries, especially outside of London. What a treat to see a Czech work at York! Despite my usual research focus being on the 'long' 19th century, this painting captured my imagination and unleashed a minor obsession in me, eventually leading to some exciting discoveries.

The label mentions an unknown Central European painter, but the subject seems to be distinctly Czech. In the 15th century, the Kingdom of Bohemia (nowadays the Czech Republic, where I was born) was a culturally and politically significant realm within Central Europe, which was nevertheless marked by political instability and disputes between Catholics and Protestants. A more peaceful period began in 1471 when Vladislaus of the Polish Jagiellonian dynasty ascended the Czech throne.

While the label describes the figure on the left as St Wenceslas, I believe there might be other possibilities. St Wenceslas (*Václav* in Czech) is the patron saint of Bohemia and the country's most venerated saint. Wenceslas was born around 907 into the Přemyslid dynasty and became Duke of Bohemia in 921, when he was only 15 years old. As a ruler, he mainly worked to promote Christianity in Bohemia. Wenceslas became celebrated for his justice, mercy, and charity, particularly toward the poor and the oppressed. However, his younger brother, Boleslaus the Cruel, conspired against Wenceslas, and finally assassinated him in 935 at Stará Boleslav, outside a church door. Based on the legend, St Wenceslas is usually shown as a young man, since he was barely 28 years old upon his death. He is also normally shown beardless, or with a very short beard emphasising his youth. This conflicts with our painting where the character is portrayed with a lush long beard. More importantly, the crown shown in the painting is a full-fledged one with ornamental lilies, typical of a king's crown. Wenceslas was, however, not a king but a duke, and his crown is therefore usually depicted in simpler forms.

Fascinated by the painting and intrigued by its mysteries, I joined forces with Dr Tomáš Gaudek, a specialist on medieval art at the National Heritage Institute in Prague. Together we believe the character is most probably St Sigismund (475-523), King of the Burgundians, a saint whose relics were brought to Prague by the Czech King and Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV in 1365. The relics were placed in St. Vitus Cathedral, which elevated St Sigismund to one of the patron saints of Bohemia. Unlike St Wenceslas, St Sigismund is usually depicted with a grown beard, as a man of some age.

Both St Wenceslas and St Sigismund were so popular in Bohemia that Emperor Charles IV named his two sons Wenceslas and Sigismund. The older son later became known as Sigismund of Luxembourg (1368 –1437), who reigned as the King of Bohemia from 1419. A famous painting of Emperor Sigismund from 1433 is in the collection of the Kunsthistorisches

Museum in Vienna. Sigismund of Luxembourg was celebrated as a symbol of a supreme European leader and his first name became popular among the nobility in the late medieval period, resulting in multiple noble sons bearing this name. One of these was Sigismund the Old of the Jagiellonian dynasty, whose brother Vladislaus II became the King of Bohemia in 1471. The Jagiellonians remained in power until 1526, which makes their reign synchronous to the dating of the painting at York. Depicting St Sigismund in the painting at York, strikingly similar to the portrait of the Emperor Sigismund in Vienna, would therefore fit well with political developments in Bohemia at the time.

The other figure shown on the painting is described as St Lawrence; however here too some other options arise. Dr Gaudek and I are currently finalising a publication dedicated to the painting. While we have some doubts about the other figure's identity, St Lawrence remains a possibility. Like St Wenceslas, St Lawrence was celebrated as an advocate of the poor and the oppressed. Such advocacy is touchingly captured in the English 19th century carol 'Good King Wenceslas'. Although not based on the historical Duke Wenceslas, the carol describes the brave Bohemian noble making his way through a snowstorm to feed the poor.

Thus there are ongoing questions about the York painting; however, as we find ourselves in the festive season, I hope that it will bring uplift and peace to anyone who comes to the Gallery over the winter months. Whoever the depicted saints are, their composure and spiritual strength can be inspiring in this time of long nights, frosty weather, and mounting uncertainties. The delightfully painted green plants, leaves of grass, and gentle bluebells that the saints stand among signify trust in an upcoming renewal, a time of hope which we can hold on to despite the discomfort of lingering unanswered questions.

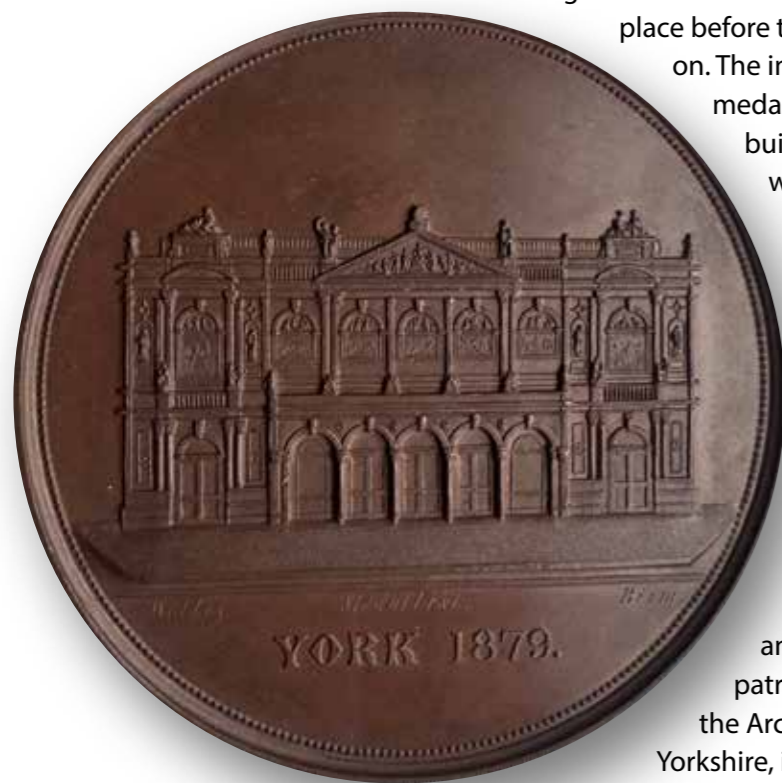
HELENA COX
Friends Committee Member

Unknown Central European Master, *Two Standing Saints: currently identified as St Wenceslas and St Lawrence*, 1480-1500, oil on wood, 139cm x 65cm; bequeathed by David Harrison with Art Fund Support, 2019



The Origins of York Art Gallery

The building which today houses York Art Gallery was built in 1879 for the second Yorkshire Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition, the first having been held in 1866 in a purpose-built but temporary building in the grounds of Bootham Asylum. The 1866 exhibition attracted 338,000 visitors (including the Prince and Princess of Wales), and made a profit of almost £2,200 which was carried forward to fund permanent premises for the 1879 exhibition. A plot of land was bought which lay between the King's Manor and the old walls of St Mary's Abbey. It had previously been the site of nursery gardens, and leased to the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. A local architect, Edward Taylor, who had been involved in the design of the earlier exhibition building, was employed to design the new one. To make extra space and to enhance the setting, some old properties on St Leonard's Place were cleared and Exhibition Square formed.



Bronze prize medal awarded at the Yorkshire Fine Arts and Industrial Exhibition, 1879

A great deal of discussion, and not a little argument, took place before the final Italianate design was agreed on. The image illustrated on the exhibition prize medal (150 of which were issued) shows the building as it was originally envisaged, with more statuary and decoration than today. Funds had run out, and the organisers were obliged to explain in their catalogue that the design had not been completed and to appeal for donations. The exhibition was organised by an Executive Committee comprised of forty civic dignitaries and prominent citizens, several of whom had been involved in the earlier exhibition and some whose names are still familiar, for example, George Leeman and Dr Tempest Anderson. The list of patrons is even more prestigious: headed by the Archbishop of York and the High Sheriff of Yorkshire, it includes a duke, two marquesses, eight earls, seven viscounts, and a further thirty-five lords, baronets, and honourable gentlemen. The floor area of the exhibition building was more than twice as large as the one we know today, and there was a 'Great Exhibition Hall' at the rear, which suffered bomb damage in World War II and was demolished.

There were seven categories of exhibit: Fine Art, Natural Products, Manufactures, Machinery, Applied Science, Education, and Literature and Antiquities. The largest of these was the Fine Art section which included almost 2,000 paintings. Particularly fine artworks were loaned by the Earl of Feversham, some of which showed the effects of a devastating fire which

had taken place at Duncombe Park only a few months earlier. Another significant group of paintings was loaned by John Burton, a local citizen and horse-dealer, who served on both this and the earlier Committee. At his death in 1882 Burton bequeathed his collection to the Fine Art and Industrial Institute, the successor to the organising Committee, and the Burton Gallery is so named in recognition of his generosity.



The first Yorkshire Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition, 1866. From 'The History of the Yorkshire Fine Art & Industrial Exhibition, York: opened July 24th, 1866-closed October 31st'

The exhibition ran for six months, from May to November 1879, with visitor numbers exceeding half a million, and a profit of £14,000. At the closing event, speakers noted that there was both a need and demand for a permanent art gallery in York. In the years that followed, the Council of the Fine Art and Industrial Institute worked hard to satisfy this ambition, holding regular Summer Exhibitions and renting out space for meetings and concerts. Amongst visiting speakers was Oscar Wilde, who came more than once to speak in the hall.

The costs of maintaining such a large building quickly became burdensome, and by the mid-1880s the Committee was reporting an annual loss and issuing fresh pleas for donations. A welcome contribution of £70 was received in 1889 from a visiting 'medicine man', the Great Sequah, who performed for three weeks at the exhibition building. His troupe of musicians, dressed as American Indians, performed loudly while he pulled the teeth of audience members desperate for dental care. He made his money by selling his Prairie Oil ointment for rheumatism and other conditions ('as sure to cure as the summer sun to melt ice'). Making donations to local causes was part of his strategy to make a favourable impression in the towns he visited and to attract audiences.

The Institute struggled on until 1892 when a deal was struck between the Committee and the City Council, and the exhibition building with its contents, including the Burton collection, changed hands for £6,000. At a celebratory hand-over ceremony the Lord Mayor remarked how lucky the ratepayers of York were to come into possession of an art gallery already stocked with such a valuable collection of paintings. The Gallery remained under the management of the City Council for over a hundred years until, in 2002, responsibility transferred to York Museums Trust, the independent charitable trust which cares for it today.

ANNE MCLEAN

Website and Online Communications Officer

Programme of Events 2024

In 2024, thanks to the hard work of the Events Sub-Committee, members were offered a very varied programme of 19 events, one more than in 2023. All the events were well supported, and some were very quickly oversubscribed.

In order to act as a precursor to the loan from the National Gallery of Monet's *The Water-Lily Pond* to York Art Gallery in May, we organised a talk in April by Michael Clarke, the pre-eminent specialist on French Impressionism. This event in the Tempest Anderson Hall, which was financially supported by York Museums Trust, attracted an audience of over 100, and raised £1,912 for FYAG funds. Our other major fund-raising event was the Summer Soirée held in July in David Lamb's newly refurbished house and garden in St Saviourgate. The very pleasant and convivial evening was attended by over 60 members, and, thanks to David's generosity, added an additional £1,400 to our funds.

Our programme started in March with a visit to the Quilt Museum, organised by Margaret May. Another event, with a textile interest, was the visit, also in March, to the remarkable tapestry of the Battle of Stamford Bridge which is now displayed in the former Railway Station buildings in the town. In April, the visit to Brockfield Hall, a recently restored early 19th-century house was quickly oversubscribed, so, to accommodate more members, an additional visit was arranged in October. On both occasions members enjoyed the tour by the owners of the tastefully restored house and the opportunity to see the fine collection of paintings by the Staithes Group of Artists. We had two very different events in May. The first was a talk, in the York Medical Society Rooms, organised by Margaret May, on the early 19th-century, fashionable portrait painter Thomas Lawrence. The second event, organised by Sue Greenhow, was a day journey by coach to Cambridge to Kettles Yard and the Fitzwilliam Museum. Despite the length of time spent travelling, the tour was thoroughly enjoyed by 27 members. At the end of May, Dorothy Nott, organised a very unusual tour to Buckinghamshire whose highlight was our visit to Garsington Opera to see a superb performance of Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*. Also, during the 2-night tour, we visited several widely differing venues, including Waddesdon Manor, Stowe House, and Sulgrave Manor.

Keeping to our policy of including some moderately priced York-based events, in early June Margaret May organised a visit to York Cemetery Chapel, where members heard from Dr Richard Keesing the fascinating story of how the York Cemetery Trust saved the grand neo-classical Chapel. Later in June, organised by Moira Fulton and David Lamb,



An evening at Garsington Opera, Womersley Park, Buckinghamshire.

Photo: A.McLean



Susannah Lyon-Whaley (postdoctoral student at the University of York) giving an Artwork of the Month talk on Peter Lely's Portrait of Charlotte Fitzroy. Photo: C.Doley

we had a visit by coach to the former Catholic seminary of Ushaw Hall and the Oriental Museum in Durham. Unfortunately, the increasing cost of coach hire means that tours by coach have become very expensive and therefore are limited to 3 day-trips a year. Seminars studying a particular artist or artistic movement in depth have continued to prove popular. Margaret May organised 2 seminars, both of which were held at the Bar Convent. The first in September, was on 'Edward Manet and the Path to Modernity', delivered by Lizzie Derbyshire, and the second in October, presented by Helena Cox, was on 'The Influence of Japanese Art on Western Artists'. Both aroused a great deal of interest and were oversubscribed. As we have had a steady increase in membership over the last few years, Dorothy Nott organised in September a welcome reception for all our new members at Bedern Hall. Our third coach tour of 2024 in September, organised by Dorothy Nott, was to Gorton Monastery in Manchester and Nostell Priory. Our last three events of the year were all in November. The first, held in the Art Gallery was a fascinating talk by Rob Wake on the challenges of mounting an exhibition, with a particular reference to the problems of setting up the one featuring the National Gallery's loan of *The Water-Lily Pond*. To enhance our appreciation of the current exhibition at York Art Gallery on 'The Art of Wallpaper: Morris & Co', Charles Martindale organised a talk by Dr Imogen Hart on the creative impulses for William Morris's designs for wallpaper. The final event of the year, organised by Sue Greenhow, appropriately was an instructive and enjoyable Wine Tasting, hosted by Dr Stuart Calder, held in the York Medical Society Rooms at the end of November.

Thanks to the hard work of the Events Sub-Committee we have been able to raise, in 2024, the much-needed sum of £8,325 for FYAG funds. This means we can cover the cost of the day-to-day running expenses of the Society as well as help fund the MA Student without dipping into reserve funds. These are kept for major expenditure, such as the cost of the lighting in the Burton Gallery and assisting in the purchase of new works of art. To end our year on a festive note profit from the Events Programme provided the Christmas Tree which was erected in the Art Gallery foyer.

MOIRA FULTON
Events Coordinator

Over the course of the academic year I was able to explore a variety of subjects under the umbrella of my research topic: art and climate change. Before I describe the development of my work, I would first like to extend my thanks to the Friends of York Art Gallery for their encouragement and generosity. I would also like to thank my numerous mentors, whose advice and incredible patience were invaluable throughout this project. Overall, the year was a very productive one during which—as I was thrilled to find—many of the Gallery’s activities aligned closely with my research interests. I am happy to have had this experience, and to have had the opportunity to learn about gallery work firsthand, primarily under the supervision of Becky Gee, Curator of Fine Art until August 2024, and Dr Helen Walsh, Curator of Ceramics.



Percy Robert Craft (1856-1934), *An English Garden*, 1882-1903, oil on canvas, 71cm x 92cm, restored for the exhibition ‘Bloom’ with a grant from the Friends. Photo: York Museums Trust

My initial survey of the collections at York Art Gallery yielded several interesting finds. I was enamoured with the variety of landscapes in the collection, ranging from idyllic visions of the British countryside, to abstract depictions of floodwaters in France, and majestic Japanese landscapes printed in vibrant hues. I resolved to focus on one particular painting as the jumping point for my research: *An English Garden* by Percy Robert Craft (1856-1934), a Newlyn painter who later became a member of the Royal British Colonial Society of Artists. This work is a depiction of a woman walking through a finely manicured garden. Although the work might not immediately conjure thoughts of the contemporary climate crisis, for me it raised multiple pertinent questions. These questions swirled around the

Victorian garden and Britain’s relationship

with the Caribbean landscape during this time period. My interest in the subject stemmed from my learning of the works by Aubrey Williams that are held by the Gallery and the University, as well as from my own personal connections to the Caribbean region. I wondered how the proliferation of monocultures, and the extractive approaches to natural resources during the transatlantic slave trade, may have impacted on the development of today’s climate crisis. Moreover, I considered how viewers’ embodied experience of a work of art might help them to draw these connections in a gallery space. With that in mind, I read about plantation agriculture, mapping connections with the template of Craft’s painting and idyllic landscapes. During the first semester, my interests also travelled into spiritual landscapes through my analyses of the work of Ugonna Hosten. Hosten, whose works were on display



Théodore Rousseau (1812-1867), *Landscape with Red Sunset*, c.1850-55, oil on wood, 38.5cm x 53.5cm. Photo: York Museums Trust

from October 2023 to April 2024 in her exhibition ‘chi; Altarpieces, Liturgy & Devotion,’ was generous enough to allow me to interview her in December 2023. I learned a great deal from this interview, and my time examining Hosten’s work solidified my choice to focus my dissertation on artwork by members of the African diaspora.

I carried the above interests with me into the second semester. It was then that I clarified my research approach, choosing to conduct my work from an eco-critical perspective, although philosophical studies of atmosphere, embodied experience, and the environment were of great interest to me as well. The opening of ‘Monet in York’ during this part of the year allowed me to continue exploring my questions about landscape paintings and their ability to affect our understandings of climate change and colonialism. I thus decided to look further into some of the artworks featured in ‘Monet in York.’ Théodore Rousseau’s *Landscape with Red Sunset* (c.1850-55) was one example which allowed me to make important connections within my writing. The fiery palette of the sky in this painting evokes images of the climate crisis and the many wildfires we have seen over the last decade.

Ultimately, my research covered questions that ranged from the environmental to the postcolonial. This allowed me to write multiple articles alongside my dissertation, one of which—about the Guyanese artist Donald Locke—was eventually published in Issue 37 of *Emerging Potters* magazine. I have learned a great deal about these subjects, as well as about the inner workings of York Art Gallery. As a result of this experience, I have a much better understanding about the installation and deinstallation processes of exhibitions, the planning of exhibitions and their layouts, the research processes followed by curatorial teams, gallery-artist relations, among other matters. Many thanks to my mentors and, most of all, to the Friends of York Art Gallery for making this experience possible.

DANAE BROWNE
MA Bursary Student, 2023-4

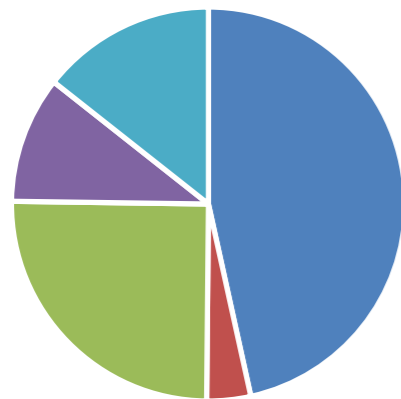
Treasurer's Overview

This year we have had to take the decision to increase our subscriptions from 2025. This is because we felt that to continue our work it was necessary to replace the loss in value due to inflation since they were last increased ten years ago.

In the current year we have made grants totalling £45,720 which were funded from income and reserves (£21,181 came from reserves). The largest grant was £30,000 for the new lights in the Burton Gallery; other grants were £2,720 for conserving and framing the 16th-Century panel of Balthasar recently donated by a Friend, a £7,500 general grant to the gallery and £4,500 for the bursary for an MA student.

As usual, our finances have benefited from a full program of events.

Income



- Membership
- Events net
- Collection Fund
- Donations
- Gift Aid

Use of funds



- Grants
- Admin expenses
- From Reserves
- MA Bursary
- Service providers

The group of members donating regularly to the Collection Fund have now built up a fund of £45,000 for acquisitions. In addition, the Friends' general funds, including legacies, now stand at £159,000 (unaudited, audited figures to be presented at the AGM in March 2025).

PAUL MCLEAN
Treasurer



Mary Ellen Best, *Still life with peeled orange*, watercolour on paper. This work is currently on display in the Burton Gallery.

Friends of York Art Gallery (Registered Charity No. 510659)

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Professor Jeanne Neuchterlein
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Charles Martindale, Anne McLean, Benjamin Hilliam; designed by Appletree Design Solutions Ltd; printed by Fulprint.



Wynford Dewhurst (1864-1941), *An Ancient Stronghold in France*, oil on canvas, 81 x 100 cm.

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