

Focus on the University Western Art Collection

Durham University is home to an important collection of largely 20th and 21st century art. Although the collection currently has no dedicated public gallery space, it can be seen on display across the university estate. In addition, items from the collection are regularly loaned to external museums and galleries; curated in exhibitions within our museums and elsewhere in the city; as well as being used to support teaching, research and student engagement. A large part of the art team's work recently has involved thinking about how to increase access to a collection that doesn't have a publicly accessible "home".

The Art Collection includes prints by some of the most renowned artists of the 20th century, such as Andy Warhol, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore and Elisabeth Frink. Closer to home, it also boasts mining or industrial art by makers such as Theodore Major and Tom McGuinness. The collection has recently been further enhanced through the generosity of Fenwick and Joan Lawson and the Lawson family. Their gift of Fenwick's sculptures, works on paper and archival materials has created a huge opportunity for increased research and engagement with the work of this outstandingly important sculptor.

Contemporary artists represented in the collection include the feminist activist artists The Guerrilla Girls; Craig Oldham, an artist designer whose work around northern communities crosses the boundaries of fine art and digital practice; Jo Stanness, who uses brutalist and modernist architecture to play with pictorial space; and Stuart Langley with Curious Arts, presenting a reimagined neon HIV/AIDS charity ribbon. The Art Collection forms part of the University's wider collections housed in the Oriental Museum, Durham Castle, the Museum of Archaeology, and Palace Green Library. In common with these other University collections, the Art Collection has grown and developed over many years, and we are grateful to all those who have contributed to crafting and caring for the collection, often giving freely of their time and efforts.

The collection contains artworks that explore, investigate and offer interpretation around a wide range of subjects, and the collection is a key inspiration for many of our current projects. As custodians of this outstanding collection, Durham University is committed to ensuring that it is both utilised and accessible, not only within the University for teaching, research and student enrichment, but also as an accessible resource for our wider communities. Art and creativity can have huge benefits to wellbeing and mental health, as well as the development of critical thinking and self-expression. The Art Collection accordingly acts as a catalyst for work across the University.

Object-based teaching sits at the heart of the teaching developed and delivered by members of the Library & Collections team. Members of the team draw upon all of the University's collections to deliver teaching to students each year. The Art Collection is particularly closely linked to the MA Visual Culture degree, with students having the opportunity to use the collection as the basis of their own exhibition projects. In addition, newly developed modules delivered as part of the BA Visual Arts & Film degree make extensive use of the University's artworks. As well as supporting formal University teaching, the collection also plays a key role in delivering the University's widening participation agenda, with our Learning & Engagement team working in partnership with local schools and FE colleges to develop resources to support their students.

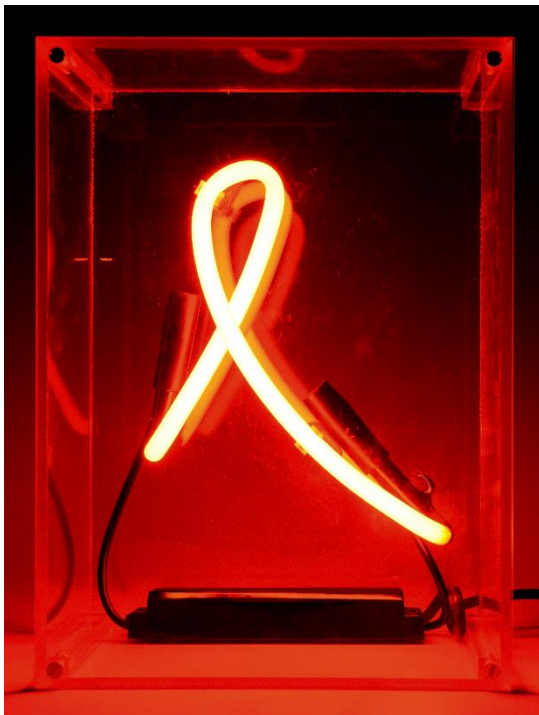
Although Durham does not formally teach art, members of our student community have a huge interest in the creative arts. This has manifested itself in the development of a thriving community of college art societies. In order to cement links between these well-established college art clubs, committees and societies, a new group - ICAN (Inter-College Arts Network) - was established a few years ago. The group is student-led and offers a social space for discussions, sharing practice and

artistic support. ICAN is actively supported by the University's Art Collection and, in addition to hosting regular meet-ups, studio visits and workshops, ICAN members have curated pop-up exhibitions, drawing together works from the Art Collection and regional contemporary artists.

As you may expect, exhibitions created around the art collection play a large part of what the team do. These often take place in our own museums (or online), with a recent major high-level partnership project involving the co-curation with the British Museum of *Pushing Paper*, a major exhibition showcasing the best of contemporary drawing.

Another initiative, the *Summer in the City* arts festival (sitcfestival.org), has been developed in collaboration with Durham Student Theatre and Music Durham and provides a welcome new platform for the arts in the city. The visual arts strand of the festival is very much inspired by and works with the art Collection. Indeed, one of our major Covid-response projects was to completely reimagine and repurpose our planned festival for 2020 and take it completely online. The 2020 festival acted as a test-bed for developing and sharing digital learning for both staff and students, and included live artist workshops, performances, outdoor art hunts, podcasts, resources, films and exhibitions.

A major new project launched in 2019 is the annual *Student Art Prize*. The prize was founded to provide a platform for our incredibly talented students to develop their arts practice, to showcase their work and to develop a new permanent student art collection. Collaboratively developed and generously funded by alumnus Richard Roberts, the competition offers a top prize of £1,500. The submission deadline for 2020/20 has just passed and our team now beginning the work of shortlisting our entries for display in an online exhibition, prior to the awards ceremony in June. Last year's Student Art Prize exhibition can still be viewed at sitcfestival.org/student-art-prize, while a feature on this year's successful entries is planned for the forthcoming issue of *Newswire*.



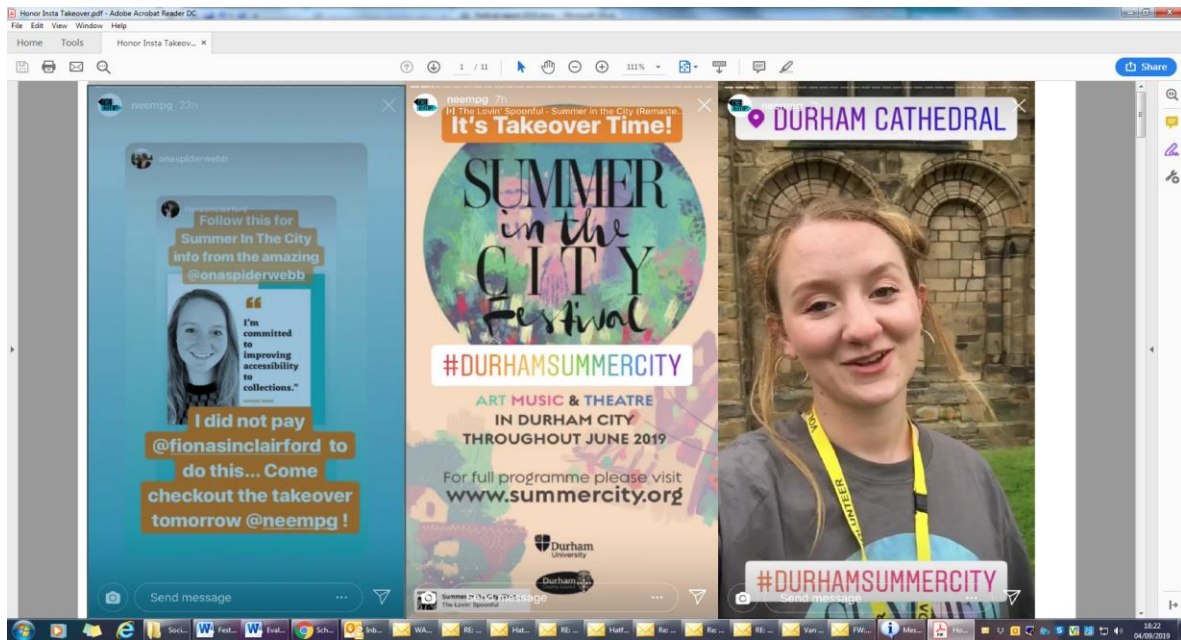
Stuart Langley
36.7, 2017
Neon
Produced by Curious Arts
Durham University Collection



Jo Stanness
Apollo Pavilion, 2018/19
Collage and acrylic paint on paper
Durham University Collection



#Visiblewomen exhibition
Palace Green Library, 2019



'Summer in the City' festival, 2019
Student Instagram takeover