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MUSEUM OF THE YEAR 2015 SHORTLIST **ANNOUNCED**

The six museums shortlisted for the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015 were announced today. They are (in alphabetical order):

Dunham Massey (National Trust), Altrincham

IWM London

The MAC, Belfast

Oxford University Museum of Natural History

HM Tower of London (Historic Royal Palaces)

The Whitworth, Manchester

The Museum of the Year annually surveys museums and galleries across the UK, awarding one outstanding winner a prize of £100,000. Previous winners have been diverse in scale - from the British Museum (2011) to Walthamstow's William Morris Gallery (2013). Last year's winner was the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, an outdoor museum cited for its "perfect fusion of art and landscape" and its major projects with artists such as Yinka Shonibare MBE and Ai Weiwei.

Stephen Deuchar, director of the Art Fund, said today: *"This is by any measure an exciting and diverse shortlist, showing great heights of creativity and ambition. Despite a difficult environment of funding cuts, UK museums continue to be inventive, surprising and exhilarating."*

The announcement of the 2015 winner will be made at an awards dinner at Tate Modern on **Wednesday 1 July 2015**. The event will follow the Museum of the Year Debate, also taking place at Tate Modern.

The members of the Museum of the Year 2015 Jury are:

Stephen Deuchar (chair), director of the Art Fund
Michael Landy, artist
Alice Rawsthorn, design critic and author
Fiammetta Rocco, books and arts editor of The Economist
Axel Rüger, director of the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam

In a new partnership with the BBC, the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015 will be celebrated on BBC Radio 2, BBC Radio 3 and BBC News Online, in a series of broadcasts and online interactive presentations during the period leading up to the announcement of the winner, enabling a widespread national debate about the value of the UK's museums.

Museum of the Year National Photography Competition

The renowned British documentary photographer and photo-journalist, Martin Parr, is the official photographer for the Prize, and has created a special collection of photographs celebrating each museum. He will also be a judge of the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year National Photography Competition, inviting members of the public to make and submit their own photographs of the shortlisted museums. Entries should be submitted to the Art Fund website no later than Sunday 31 May 2015.

VocalEyes

The Prize will continue to partner with VocalEyes, a charity that provides access to arts and heritage for blind and partially sighted people. As well as creating introductory audio descriptions, VocalEyes will offer visual awareness training opportunities for staff and volunteers at the shortlisted museums to ensure that they are equipped to greet and guide blind and partially sighted visitors - while also setting a model of good practice to the sector.

The Museum Prize Trust founded the Prize for Museums and Galleries in 2003. The Art Fund has funded the Prize since 2008 and took over responsibility for organising it in 2013, re-conceiving it as Museum of the Year.

Full information about the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015 can be found at artfund.org/prize. Follow the conversation on #museumoftheyear

Martin Parr's images of the shortlisted finalists can be accessed by journalists online:
<http://bit.ly/1HrHA2M>

About the finalists and their 2014 achievements:

Dunham Massey (National Trust), Altrincham

A Georgian country house in Cheshire, appointed with an extensive collection, Dunham Massey has been home to the Booth and Grey families for some 350 years. In 2014 the National Trust venue put on an extraordinary exhibition "Sanctuary from the Trenches", which faithfully recreated the Stamford Military Hospital as it had been in 1917-19, using artefacts and furniture from the House's own archive. The team placed much of the main collection from the principal rooms - over 5,000 items - into store, which freed up the same set of rooms and spaces which had been used during the First World War to set up and run a hospital for wounded troops. Working alongside Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre, professional actors were brought in to tell fully-researched, real stories through live interpretation. Between 1 March and 11 November 2014, visitor numbers to the House more than trebled, with the exhibition attracting both national and international visitors. The ground-breaking initiative enabled Dunham Massey to reach new audiences as well as create the means to embark on a much larger conservation programme for their collection. Due to the success of the exhibition it will continue to run until November 2015.

IWM London

2014 saw one of the largest national commemorations experienced in decades: the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. The conflict is now out of living memory and we no longer have the ability to draw at first hand from those who experienced it. However, Imperial War Museums (IWM) holds in its vast collections the voices, letters and diaries of those men and women as well as thousands of objects and works of art that tell a myriad of stories. 2014 saw IWM bring these stories to life through new permanent First World War Galleries, broadcast and media partnerships that reached millions in their homes, the First World War Centenary Partnership's events and activities across the world, and the launch of a new, digital memorial, to crowd-source, save and remember the individual stories of eight million men and women who served on the home and fighting fronts. The iconic atrium at IWM London was also transformed in 2014 following a major redevelopment. Designed by Foster + Partners, the space tells the story of conflict from the First World War to the present day.

The MAC, Belfast

The MAC (Metropolitan Arts Centre) is a cultural powerhouse in the heart of Belfast's Cathedral Quarter. It is one of Europe's most significant purpose-built multidisciplinary arts venues, offering an outstanding programme of events and exhibitions. 2014 was an exceptional year across the organisation: the visual arts programme in particular attracted significant numbers of visitors and profile. Audiences enjoyed an eclectic offering, from the acclaimed exhibition by Kara Walker to the inaugural *MAC International* exhibition, which attracted over 1,000 artist entries worldwide. The exhibition offered a £20,000 prize to one outstanding artist and is the largest art prize in Ireland. Through their activities in 2014 the MAC has firmly cemented its place as the leading visual arts venue in Northern Ireland, and is now a significant contributor to national and international discourse around contemporary visual arts practice.

Oxford University Museum of Natural History

Oxford University Museum of Natural History combines exceptional collections with innovative public engagement, set within a spectacular, and unique, neo-gothic building. In 2014, Oxford University Museum of Natural History reopened its doors after 14 months of closure to restore its important, Pre-Raphaelite inspired, iron and glass roof. The museum re-emerged into the light from the £4m project with a revitalised public space, a substantially expanded engagement programme, an enhanced commercial operation and new LED lighting to enhance the visitor experience of the interior. The collections also received close attention, with a major conservation project undertaken on the suspended whale skeletons. Innovative displays, tailored to diverse audiences of all ages, explore the natural environment and the interface between art and science. 2014 set the museum on track to a dynamic, outward-looking and sustainable future. The renovation work to the Museum brilliantly restored and re-presented an icon of Victorian design, complemented by new techniques in visitor interaction.

HM Tower of London (Historic Royal Palaces)

Historic Royal Palaces is the charity which looks after six royal palaces, including the iconic HM Tower of London, built by William the Conqueror, which has a thousand-year history as a palace, prison and fortress on the north bank of the Thames. In 2014 Historic Royal Palaces commissioned for HM Tower of London a work of art that was to become the defining public commemoration of the First World War centenary: *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*, by Paul Cummins and Tom Piper. This evolving installation of 888,246 ceramic poppies, which eventually filled the 16-acre moat, was viewed by over five million visitors. Each poppy represented a British or Colonial military life lost at the front in the First World War, creating a

powerful visual metaphor, both epic and personal. This exceptional public art project helped to place HM Tower of London at the forefront of innovation in the museum sector.

The Whitworth, Manchester

During 2014 the Whitworth underwent the largest physical transformation in its 125-year history. The £15m redevelopment project by McInnes Usher McKnight Architects doubled its size and created a myriad of new spaces. During 2014 the Whitworth was a conspicuously open 'closed' gallery, with pop-up projects all over the city and beyond, maintaining established audiences and building new ones. Through its dynamic, experimental and lively pre-opening programme the Gallery ensured that its collections worked as hard for its public as ever, whilst gearing up for its grand reopening in early 2015. It has also created new opportunities for people of all ages, and all backgrounds, to engage with art of the highest quality. The new building allows the Whitworth to undertake larger and more ambitious projects, presentations and exhibitions realising its full potential as a major UK cultural destination.

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Notes to Editors:

About the Art Fund

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art, driven by the belief that everyone should have access to great 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 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.

Finalist Museums - Directors' quotes

Stephen Adams, general manager, Dunham Massey (National Trust) said:

"Having won the National Trust's own "Outstanding Achievement" Award I didn't believe 2015 could get any better, but it just has. Being a Museum of the Year finalist is a testament to the hard work, dedication and creativity of the team here at Dunham Massey. In 2014 Dunham opened its doors as the Stamford Military Hospital in memory of the 282 "tommies" who found an often all too brief sanctuary here from the horrors of the trenches. This, the most ambitious project we have ever undertaken, has led to a deep emotional engagement with the hundreds of thousands of visitors who have walked through the hospital and learned the stories of the men who came and the remarkable women who nursed them.

"Previous generations of those who lived at Dunham have left their mark through its treasured collections, glorious gardens and great estate. Our legacy is to ensure its stories - like those of the Stamford Military Hospital - continue to inspire and engage with those who not only visit today but also for future generations to come."

Diane Lees, director-general, IWM said:

"At IWM London we have had record number of visitors to our new, permanent First World War Galleries and transformed Atrium after a major redevelopment. We created Lives of the First World War, a permanent digital memorial, where you can discover, remember and share individual stories of eight million men and women who served on the home and fighting fronts. We also lead the First World War Centenary Partnership, a network of organisations from over 50 countries worldwide who have joined together to remember and commemorate the centenary in a way that is meaningful to them.

"We are honoured and delighted to be shortlisted for the Museum of the Year award. 2014 was a major year for IWM London, and a year in which we truly cemented our reputation as a world class museum, shared the stories we are guardians of with millions of people across the world and continued the founding mission of the Imperial War Museum, to record toil and sacrifice of all those affected by the First World War."

Anne McReynolds, chief executive, The MAC said:

"It's hard to believe that the MAC is only three years old. It has so quickly become a home for the arts in Northern Ireland, a shared and welcoming space that offers outstanding art for everyone. Last year's ambitious visual arts programme epitomises what the MAC stands for. It was a carefully considered balance between bringing important internationally renowned artists like Kara Walker to our audience, as well as creating a national profile for British and Irish Artists like Richard Gorman, Colin Darke, Peter Liversidge and Susan Connolly. And of course 2014 ended with the first ever *MAC International*, an open submission exhibition that received over 1000 submissions from 30 countries, which firmly positioned the identity of the MAC in artists' minds globally. For us to receive this recognition from the Art Fund is hugely gratifying - it's a real landmark for the arts in Belfast."

Paul Smith, director, Oxford University Museum of Natural History said:

"After a year under wraps during the restoration of our glass roof and court, Oxford University Museum of Natural History reopened in February 2014. We emerged from our chrysalis with more than just a fixed roof - after some creative experimentation during closure we reopened with a vibrant and revitalized public programme. This encourages visitors of all ages to understand and engage with the natural environment, and sits alongside our world-class research and teaching. The museum's small team and our volunteers are delighted that this transformation has led to being named as a finalist in the prestigious Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015."

Michael Day, chief executive, Historic Royal Palaces, said:

"We are delighted to have been nominated as a finalist. 2014 was an extraordinary year for us as we marked the anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, as well as opening a new display exploring the stories of the Tower during the war and hosting a successful learning initiative on the importance of remembrance, Historic Royal Palaces worked with the artist Paul Cummins and installation designer Tom Piper to create a stunning display of 888, 246 ceramic poppies in the Tower's moat that truly captured the imagination of people not only nationally but globally. Over the last 1,000 years the Tower of London has been at the heart of our history and to be able to reach out to new audiences and generations at such a significant time was remarkable."

Maria Balshaw, director, The Whitworth:

"When we reopened the Whitworth on 14 February we asked visitors to 'Fall in Love Again' with the Whitworth. With 130,000 visitors in two months we have exceeded all our hopes for

our new building. Architects MUMA have delivered a thoughtful and sensitive expansion of our gallery that connects us to our park and to new and more diverse audiences. Our period of closure allowed us to develop programmes and partnerships that have taken the gallery to people we would have never reached: from locals at Moss Side Asda, to the crowds at Manchester's best pubs, to city centre shoppers at Selfridges. Being shortlisted for Museum of the Year is a huge honour and a thank you to all visitors, old and new, who have come with us on this journey of transformation."

Museum of the Year photography competition opens, Martin Parr to judge

As part of the **Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015**, the Art Fund is calling on amateur photographers and smartphone snappers to send in their best shots of any of the six shortlisted museums: **Dunham Massey (National Trust), Altrincham; IWM London; The MAC, Belfast; Oxford University Museum of Natural History; HM Tower of London (Historic Royal Palaces); The Whitworth, Manchester**

The Art Fund is looking for the images that most creatively represent the six finalist museums. Images could explore any aspect of the museum – they might study the museum’s architecture, showcase a favourite object in the collection or be a snapshot of visitors enjoying the space.

The renowned British documentary photographer and photo-journalist, Martin Parr, has been selected as the official photographer of the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015 and will also judge the national photography competition.

Martin Parr, photographer, said: *“With strange objects, striking buildings and hoards of visitors, museums are wonderful places to capture on camera. We’re calling for Britain’s amateur photographers to celebrate six of the nation’s finest museums and send us snapshots that showcase the Museum of the Year shortlist.”*

Participants must be over 18 years old to enter and the deadline for submissions is **Sunday 31 May**. All submissions will be whittled down by Martin Parr to a shortlist of six photographs – one for each museum.

The winner will be chosen by a public online vote (**open 8 - 22 June**), with the winner announced on **25 June**. The top prize is a photography weekend for two in Berlin courtesy of Frui Creative Holidays and Courses, and the winning image will be published in Art Quarterly’s Autumn 2015 issue. The winner will also receive a £500 voucher for photography equipment from Calumet.

Each of the six shortlisted photographers will win a National Art Pass and a copy of the

ArtFund Museum of the Year 2015

bestselling book "Read This If You Want to Take Great Photographs", by Henry Carroll, photographer, writer and Frui Creative Holidays and Courses co-founder.

Participants can enter a photograph either via an online form or via Instagram or Twitter, using the hashtag **#motyphoto** as well as the name of the shortlisted museum depicted in the image. Full information on how to enter can be found at **artfund.org/motyphoto**

The Art Fund is a Get Creative champion, joining nearly a thousand voluntary arts groups regularly running cultural activities and events in the UK, inspiring millions of people across the country to Get Creative. Get Creative is a year-long programme of activity to promote creativity in the UK, led by a partnership between the BBC and the What Next? movement.

About the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year

The £100,000 Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year is the largest arts award in Britain and the biggest museum prize in the world. It is awarded to the museum or gallery in the UK that is judged to have best demonstrated excellence, innovation and imagination. The winner will be announced at a ceremony at Tate Modern in London on Wednesday 1 July 2015.

For further information, please contact Madeline Adeane, Press Relations Manager at the Art Fund on madeane@artfund.org or 0207 225 4804

Martin Parr's images of the shortlisted finalists can be accessed by journalists online:

<http://bit.ly/1HrHA2M>

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Museum of the Year: VocalEyes Partnership

For a second year, the Art Fund is partnering with VocalEyes, a charity which works with partners in museums, heritage, architecture and theatre to enhance blind and partially sighted audiences' engagement with and enjoyment of the arts and culture, through audio description.

VocalEyes will create audio descriptions for each of the six finalist museums for the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015. The museums are: **Dunham Massey (National Trust), Altrincham; IWM London; The MAC, Belfast; Oxford University Natural History Museum; HM Tower of London (Historic Royal Palaces); The Whitworth, Manchester.**

The audio described introductions to each site will be available on the Art Fund and VocalEyes's websites (www.artfund.org and www.vocaleyeyes.co.uk) from 18 May 2015.

The audio described introductions provide a useful guide to each of the finalist museums, highlighting their 2014 achievements as well as providing detailed descriptions of distinctive architecture and features of each, and enhancing overall engagement with the arts for blind and partially sighted listeners.

Onsite at the museums, VocalEyes, will train volunteers and Front of House Staff on how to welcome and guide blind and partially sighted visitors. VocalEyes will also work with each of the venues to share the facilities, events and interpretation to ensure that the venues connect with their audience.

VocalEyes is grateful for the generosity of The Goldsmiths' Company in supporting the volunteer and front of house training.