

Press release
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THE WHITWORTH IN MANCHESTER WINS MUSEUM OF THE YEAR 2015

1 July 2015. The Whitworth has been awarded the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year 2015. The £100,000 Prize was presented by novelist Ben Okri and accepted by Maria Balshaw, director of The Whitworth, part of The University of Manchester, at a ceremony this evening at Tate Modern. The Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year is the biggest museum prize in the world and the largest arts award in Britain.

The judges said the Whitworth is an adventurous institution that has cemented its place at the centre of the cultural national stage. Through its impressive £15m reinvention, the Whitworth has redefined the way that it engages with its public, connecting the building and surrounding park to create a space with a sense of openness and invitation. The appeal of the newly-developed building (designed by architects MUMA), combined with the creativity and originality of its outreach programmes during closure, resulted in record-breaking visitor figures following its reopening. From the director Maria Balshaw to the 'cultural park keeper,' the Whitworth is led by a visionary team committed as much to the needs of the local community as to the celebration of international artists. It is a truly modern building that has established its place at the heart of the city.

Stephen Deuchar, chair of the judges and director of the Art Fund, said: *"The transformation of the Whitworth - architecturally, curatorially, and as a destination - has been one of the great museum achievements of recent years. Its galleries offer intellectual, visual and creative stimulus of the highest order; the collections are innovatively presented, the community engagement programmes are both original and unusual, and the visitor experience is exceptional throughout. We were particularly taken with the relationship between the reconceived building and its surrounding park: museum, locality and community merge as if one. And in a wider sense the Whitworth has changed the landscape: it truly feels like a museum of the future."*

Maria Balshaw, director of the Whitworth, said: *"During 2014, while MUMA created our new gallery, we took the Whitworth and its collections out into the city. We used the time to*

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create more ambitious programmes. We considered what sorts of collaborations could work at the Whitworth, between young people and our collections, say, or between artists and the academics we share a campus with. And we created an ambitious opening season of exhibitions and events that could only happen here at the Whitworth," says Maria Balshaw, Director of the Whitworth.

"That period of intensive work paid off. In the five months since our reopening, 200,000 people have enjoyed everything from Cornelia Parker's collaboration with the Nobel Prize-winning scientist, Konstantin Novoselov - alongside her monumental new commission, War Room - to hip hop in the Grand Hall, tai chi in the art garden and an exhibition curated by older men from a local care home. In between, we've hosted ten, critically-acclaimed exhibitions and witnessed a 'takeover' of the gallery by young people. What we have done this year is the culmination of all that we achieved in 2014. It has been a momentous period for the gallery - and winning this award is a wonderful way to say thank you to all those who made it possible, and to those visitors, old and new, who joined us on our journey."

The Whitworth was one of six finalists chosen by a panel of judges: Dunham Massey (National Trust), Altrincham; IWM London; the MAC, Belfast; Oxford University Museum of National History; HM Tower of London (Historic Royal Palaces); the Whitworth, Manchester.

In 2014 the Whitworth, part of The University of Manchester, underwent the largest physical transformation in its 125-year history. During the £15m architectural redevelopment, it doubled in size, connected with its surrounding park and meanwhile remained conspicuously open - taking to the streets of Manchester to engage with the community. The newly presented building and its initial programme of displays, events and exhibitions has received wide critical acclaim and record visitor numbers.

The Museum of the Year 2015 judges were: Stephen Deuchar; Michael Landy, artist; Alice Rawsthorn, design critic and author; Fiammetta Rocco, books and arts editor of The Economist, and Axel Rüger, director of the Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam.

The Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year finalists

Dunham Massey (National Trust), Altrincham

In 2014 Dunham Massey mounted an extraordinary and acclaimed exhibition, Sanctuary from the Trenches, faithfully recreating Stamford Hospital, a First World War facility that treated 282 wounded tommies. Sanctuary used artefacts and furniture from the house's own archive to help tell fully researched, real life stories that were performed by professional actors.

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IWM London

Last year IWM London reopened following a £40m transformation that included a newly configured atrium and new permanent First World Galleries. In a year-long programme that reached millions around the world, IWM London brought to life the stories of men and women who experienced the First World War first-hand. IWM London leads the First World War Centenary Partnership, an international network of over 3,000 not-for-profit organisations.

HM Tower of London (Historic Royal Palaces)

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 filled the 16-acre moat and was viewed by more than five million visitors.

The MAC, Belfast

The MAC (Metropolitan Arts Centre) is a cultural powerhouse in the heart of Belfast's Cathedral Quarter. Audiences have enjoyed a varied offering from the acclaimed exhibition by Kara Walker to the inaugural MAC International exhibition (the largest arts prize in Ireland), which attracted more than 1,000 artist entries worldwide. Since launch the MAC has cemented its place as the leading visual arts venue in Northern Ireland.

Oxford University Museum of Natural History

In 2014 Oxford University Museum of Natural History reopened its doors after 14 months of closure to restore its iconic, Pre-Raphaelite inspired iron and glass roof. The museum re-emerged into the light following the £4m project with a revitalised public space, a substantially expanded engagement programme, innovative displays, with major conservation work on its internationally renowned collections completed.

Belinda Hasties won the Museum of the Year photography competition with an image of HM Tower of London. 6,000 votes were cast by the public to select an image from a shortlist chosen by Martin Parr, representing the six finalist museums. **Download Belinda's image.**

For more information, visit artfund.org/prize
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About the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year

The Art Fund has funded and managed the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year since 2013. Its forerunner was the Prize for Museums and Galleries, administered by the Museum Prize Trust and sponsored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (2003-2007) and the Art Fund (2008-12).

About the Art Fund

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 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.

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