

PRESS RELEASE

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12 October 2020

WINNERS OF £200,000 ART FUND MUSEUM OF THE YEAR 2020 UNVEILED

Aberdeen Art Gallery (Aberdeen, Scotland)
Gairloch Museum (Gairloch, Scotland)
Science Museum (London, England)
South London Gallery (London, England)
Towner Eastbourne (Eastbourne, England)

- Five winning museums share increased £200,000 prize in exceptional year
- Art Fund and all five winners stage digital events and activity throughout a week of celebration, 12–16 October, including storytelling by Outlander star Sam Heughan, a panel discussion on art and sustainability with Caroline Lucas and chaired by David Dimbleby, a live archaeological dig, and a museum mindfulness retreat



www.artfund.org/museum-of-the-year

[#museumoftheyear](https://twitter.com/museumoftheyear)

Aberdeen Art Gallery, Gairloch Museum, Science Museum, South London Gallery, and Towner Eastbourne have been announced as winners of Art Fund Museum of the Year 2020 this evening (12 October 2020), the largest arts award in Britain and the most prestigious museum award in the world.

In a unique edition of the prize, Art Fund responded to the unprecedented challenges that all museums face this year by selecting five winners and increasing the prize money to £200,000, a 40% rise over previous years. The outstanding museums are recognised for their achievements in 2019 – 20: from bringing art to local audiences, moving to a repurposed nuclear bunker, redisplaying collections through major refurbishment, making museums a community hub, opening new permanent galleries and championing under-represented artists.

Jenny Waldman, Director, Art Fund, said: *“The winners are exceptional examples of museums offering inspiration, reflection and joy in the heart of communities. The UK’s museums - admired worldwide and vital locally - were thriving before Covid-19. They can help rebuild our communities and confidence as we emerge from the virus. But they face financial peril. Not only do we need sustained investment from government, but we encourage everyone to go and explore their local museum – they need our support now.”*

The judges, Jago Cooper (Curator of the Americas, The British Museum), Dame Liz Forgan (Trustee, Art Fund), Ryan Gander (artist), Melanie Keen (Director, The Wellcome Collection) and Jenny Waldman (Director, Art Fund), chose the museums for their achievements in 2019 – 20:

Aberdeen Art Gallery

Aberdeen Art Gallery is responsible for an exceptional collection of art and heritage, rightly celebrated as among the finest in the UK. 2019 marked the culmination of the most ambitious redevelopment project in the museum’s 135 year history, completely re-imagining the gallery so its extraordinary treasures, and the stories they tell can be celebrated, shared and better understood. The judges were impressed with the scale and ambition of this project, which increased the number of works on show from 370 to 1080, the beautifully executed restoration, and the commitment to involve the people of the city in the future of this rediscovered jewel on their doorstep. They looked forward to seeing what the next 100-years would bring.

Gairloch Museum

The story of the rebirth of this truly special museum nestled on the remote north-westerly coast of Scotland captivated the judges; a tale of people-power, determination, and local pride. The museum’s move in 2019 to a new home – not a grand new build but a repurposed nuclear bunker – transformed a village eyesore into an important visitor attraction. It was the culmination of an 8-year, £2.4 million redevelopment project realised by this community and more than 120 volunteers. The redisplay of the museum’s collection which encapsulates the history, culture, beauty and character of Gairloch and its new home have reaminated the village’s pride in its heritage, created a buzzing new community hub, and produced a sustainable cultural landmark for generations of visitors to enjoy.

Science Museum

The Science Museum has undergone a profound transformation over a decade of thinking big, thinking local, and thinking radically. 2019 was a landmark year which saw the museum inspire the next generation of scientists with the culmination of Tim Peake’s spacecraft nationwide tour, its biggest ever sleepover to mark the Apollo 11 anniversary, and the opening of two exceptional new permanent galleries - Medicine: The Wellcome Galleries and Science City 1550-1800: The Linbury

Gallery. The judges recognised the shift-change that had taken place in this well-known and much respected institution, not only in its spaces, but also in its relationship with its visitors and local communities. The museum has become the world's leading destination for people to be excited, inspired and delighted by science.

South London Gallery

South London Gallery is a world-class contemporary art space, built for and with its culturally diverse communities. For more than 125 years it has stayed true to its aim, 'to bring art to the people of south London', evolving in response to the needs of artists and audiences and promoting inclusion at the heart of its mission. Alongside delivering an exciting programme of exhibitions and events, and a highly regarded free education programme, 2019 was a vitally important year for the gallery - the first since it doubled in size through the opening of a neighbouring site in an elegantly converted former Fire Station. The judges were impressed by the gallery's integrity, creativity and inspiring leadership.

Towner Eastbourne

Towner Eastbourne, an art gallery on the East Sussex coast, has been collecting and exhibiting contemporary art for almost 100 years. Despite a funding cut Towner has redefined its purpose as a free and open community resource and launched a new vision to transform communities through art. 2019 marked the tenth birthday celebration of its 'new' building, and a dynamic fresh phase for the gallery, increasing its profile, securing financial sustainability and truly serving the needs of its intergenerational and diverse communities. The judges admired Towner Eastbourne's genuine commitment to promoting under-represented artists in its programme, and its newly cemented status as an invaluable asset to Eastbourne.

From 12 – 16 October, specially coinciding with the BBC Art's #museumpassion season, all five winning museums will stage events including live-streamed curator talks, artist Q&As, and digital activities: www.artfund.org/museum-of-the-year

Highlights include *Outlander* star Sam Heughan bringing a beloved folktale from the western Scottish Highlands to life, relating to Gairloch Museum's collection and local histories. Towner Eastbourne will stage a panel discussion on art and sustainability moderated by museum chairman David Dimpleby, and host a daily 'digital mindfulness retreat' tapping into the beauty of the museum's location and collection. Aberdeen Art Gallery will unveil Spotify music playlists reflecting the museum's collection, chosen by fans of the museum. South London Gallery will reveal a newly commissioned poem by Jude Yawsom inspired by Walter Crane's wooden panel at the Gallery and read by members of its community. The Science Museum will release a series of 'Secret Science Club' films on Instagram, with science experiments to watch or recreate by families at home.

Art Fund's celebrations kick off with the announcement of the winners by artist Grayson Perry on BBC 1 The One Show at 7pm on 12 October, followed by a 'Meet the Winners' live discussion, in collaboration with The Art Newspaper, at 11am on Tuesday 13 October exploring urgent and topical challenges faced by museums large and small alongside examples of the innovative work museums are undertaking even in the current challenging climate. Panellists will include all five museums directors and Art Fund director Jenny Waldman, moderated by art critic and commentator Ben Luke. Register via <https://art-fund.arttickets.org.uk/>

Christine Rew, Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums Manager, said: "*Covid-19 abruptly interrupted the fantastic momentum built since the revitalised Art Gallery re-opened. We welcomed over 100,000 visitors in 100 days and then suddenly, we were closed again. Being Art Fund Museum of the Year*

winner is the best 'welcome back' present imaginable. The award will help us make a difference to the lives of artists and audiences. We have so much to share with visitors including introducing them to a new generation of exciting contemporary artists when the British Art Show comes to Aberdeen next summer. Prior to our redevelopment we couldn't have hosted such an ambitious exhibition; now the whole exhibition will be seen in the Gallery's spectacular new spaces."

Karen Buchanan, Curator of Gairloch Museum, said: *'The recognition that comes with this award brings our small, independent museum to the national stage. With the prize money, we will be able to invest in our planned outdoor museum space and procure expertise and equipment to redesign our events and outreach programme for a sustainable, digital future. We rely on tourism to our small community and expect our Art Fund Museum of the Year status to boost visitor numbers. Our must-see event for 2021 will be an exhibition of the art of Alison Dunlop RSW, celebrating the rugged beauty of the Shiantis – the enchanted isles of the Minch.'*

Sir Ian Blatchford, Director of the Science Museum Group, said: *'The last decade has seen a radical transformation of the Science Museum, culminating in the opening of Science City 1550 – 1800: The Linbury Gallery and Medicine: The Wellcome Galleries to critical acclaim last year. So, it means a great deal to have this achievement acknowledged by this magnificent prize. Our museums are at the heart of national cultural life and, particularly during this time of uncertainty, provide solace, inspiration and joy to so many. We'll be using the prize money to support local school children from communities that aren't able to currently visit the museum with special outreach sessions, so that we continue to inspire futures beyond our museum walls.'*

Margot Heller, Director of South London Gallery, said: *'We hope this endorsement will entice people from across the UK and beyond to visit the SLG. We have a great reputation among those who know us, but there is huge potential to grow. There are plenty of reasons to visit – from Bloomberg New Contemporaries (December) to solo shows by the American painter Christina Quarles and London-based Rita Keegan (spring 2021). September 2021 will be the fifth anniversary of our beautiful garden designed by Gabriel Orozco. The financial insecurity brought by lockdown has forced us to find new ways to connect with local schools and families. The award will allow us to continue our existing programmes, as well offering us the chance to commission an exciting new work.'*

Joe Hill, Director of Towner Eastbourne, said: *'It's been a privilege to lead the Towner Eastbourne since 2018 and to work with colleagues and partners to develop Towner into a community hub for art and culture at the heart of Eastbourne. In 2019, we marked the tenth anniversary in our current building by celebrating the impact that the arts can have on a place. In the current unprecedented circumstances, we are proud to have continued to deliver a wide-ranging programme. As we look ahead, I am excited to begin planning our centenary programme for 2023, using this award to ensure we develop a celebration for the people of Sussex and a programme for all ages taking place across our town.'*

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For downloadable press images, please go to:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/zgckoct1qrc377o/AABge0LmJ8hN_WfZ4ZWJ3bdta?dl=0

Notes to editors:

About Art Fund Museum of the Year

Art Fund has supported Museum of the Year since 2008. Its forerunner was the Prize for Museums and Galleries, administered by the Museum Prize Trust and sponsored by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation from 2003-2007. The prize champions what museums do, encourages more people to visit and gets to the heart of what makes a truly outstanding museum. The judges present the prize to the museum or gallery that has shown how their achievements of the preceding year stand out, demonstrated what makes their work innovative, and the impact it has had on audiences.

Winners 2008 - 2019:

- 2008 - The Lightbox, Woking
- 2009 - Wedgwood Museum, Stoke-on-Trent,
- 2010 - Ulster Museum, Belfast
- 2011 - British Museum
- 2012 - Royal Albert Memorial Museum,
- 2013 - William Morris Gallery, London
- 2014 - Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield
- 2015 - Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester
- 2016 - Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), Londo
- 2017 - The Hepworth, Wakefield
- 2018 - Tate St Ives
- 2019 - St Fagans National Museum of History, Cardiff

About Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. It provides millions of pounds every year to help museums to acquire and share works of art across the UK, further the professional development of their curators, and inspire more people to visit and enjoy their public programmes. In response to Covid-19 Art Fund has made £2 million in adapted funding available to support museums through reopening and beyond, including Respond and Reimagine grants to help meet immediate need and reimagine future ways of working. Art Fund is independently funded, supported by the 159,000 members who buy the National Art Pass, who enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and receive Art Quarterly magazine. Art Fund also supports museums through its annual prize, Art Fund Museum of the Year. In a unique edition of the prize for 2020, Art Fund responded to the unprecedented challenges that all museums are facing by selecting five winners and increasing the prize money to £200,000. The winners are Aberdeen Art Gallery; Gairloch Museum; Science Museum; South London Gallery; and Towner Eastbourne

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