



UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 7.45PM, 19 JUNE 2012

Press contact: Philip Abraham, PR Manager
pabraham@artfund.org / 020 7225 4888

Exeter's 'magical' Royal Albert Memorial Museum crowned Museum of the Year, winning £100,000 Art Fund Prize

Following a six month nationwide search, and with tough competition from a shortlist consisting of three other widely-praised and much-loved museums, the Royal Albert Memorial Museum has this evening been named as the winner of the 2012 Art Fund Prize for Museums and Galleries

The museum reopened to the public on 15 December 2011 following a £24 million transformation. Founded in 1868 and established in memory of Queen Victoria's husband, the museum's founding principles were based on the cultural ideals of the Prince Regent, who aimed to bring art and science, design and technology together into one universal vision.

In the course of its 144-year history the museum has pursued these values by amassing over a million objects in a wide array of fields; from gemstones and taxidermy to medieval coins and modern art. The new museum offers a dramatically reinterpreted display of the museum's collection, one which both reveals a range stories about the local region and the wider world, and the history and character of this unique museum itself.

Chair of Judges, Lord Smith of Finsbury, said of the Museum: "The new Royal Albert Memorial Museum is quite simply a magical place, modest in scale but vast in its ambition and imagination. The Victorian aspirations to bring the world to Exeter are stunningly realised through some of the most intelligently considered displays on view in any museum in the UK. Every exhibit delights with a new surprise, and provokes with a new question, and at a time when local authority museums in particular are in such danger, this brilliant achievement proves how daring, adventurous and important such institutions can be."

The Royal Albert Memorial Museum staved off competition from three other shortlisted museums, which were:

- **Hepworth Wakefield, West Yorkshire**
- **Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh**
- **Watts Gallery, near Guildford, Surrey**

Exeter Council Leader, Pete Edwards, said: "We are over the moon at winning the Art Fund Prize. RAMM's redevelopment has been a labour of love and shows what can be done when popular support is backed by the local council and aided by central government and the HLF. Together we've taken a great museum, made it even better, and now with your help we've really put RAMM on the map."

He continued: "This is an honour for the people of Exeter, Devon and the Southwest and I hope also a source of inspiration for all the far flung parts of Britain that like us have the ambition and drive to compete with the best. Exeter has a long and rich history which is well recorded in RAMM. It's great that today it's the museum that is making history."

The Art Fund Prize was decided by an independent panel of judges chaired by **Lord Smith of Finsbury**, former Labour MP and Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The judging panel includes **Professor Jim Al-Khalili** OBE, theoretical physicist, author and broadcaster; **Charlotte Higgins**, Guardian journalist and author; **Lucy Worsley**, Chief Curator at Historic Royal Palaces, author and broadcaster; **Sir Mark Jones**, Master at St Cross College, Oxford and former V&A director; **Rick Mather**, architect; and **Lisa Milroy**, artist and Head of Graduate Painting at the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL.

The Art Fund Prize is the annual celebration of the very best UK museums and galleries. The purpose of the £100,000 award is to recognise and stimulate originality and excellence in museums and galleries, and to increase public appreciation and enjoyment of all they have to offer.

Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund said: "The Royal Albert Memorial Museum is a wonderful winner from an exceptional shortlist. Curators and designers have joined forces to display and interpret a huge and eclectic collection with great clarity, creativity and wit. The end result is a masterpiece of museum presentation."

Penelope, Viscountess Cobham, Chair of The Museum Prize Trust said: "The redevelopment of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum has been a truly wonderful success, and is a most deserving winner of the tenth annual Prize for Museums. It is a shining example of the innovation and imagination that makes our museum sector so special. Congratulations to all involved in this most inspiring enterprise."

The winner has been announced live on BBC Radio 4 Front Row and at an event at The British Museum on 19 June 2012.

Ends

Notes to Editors

The Art Fund Prize 2012 rewards excellence and innovation in museums and galleries in the UK for a project completed or undertaken in 2011. The annual prize has been awarded since 2003.

The ten longlisted museums are:

- **Bletchley Park**, Milton Keynes, Bucks.: *The Life and Works of Alan Turing*
- **M Shed**, Bristol: *A New Museum for Bristol*
- **National Museum of Scotland**, Edinburgh: *National Museum of Scotland Development*
- **Riverside Museum, Scotland's Museum of Transport and Travel**, Glasgow: *Riverside Museum Project*
- **Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery**, Exeter, Devon: *RAMM Development Project*
- **The Hepworth Wakefield**, Wakefield, West Yorkshire: *The Hepworth Wakefield*
- **The Holburne Museum**, Bath, Somerset: *The Holburne Museum Development Project*
- **The National Galleries of Scotland**, Edinburgh: *Portrait of the Nation*

- **Turner Contemporary**, Margate, Kent: *Turner Contemporary*
- **Watts Gallery**, Guildford, Surrey: *The Watts Gallery Hope Project*

Clore Award for Museum Learning

Organised under the umbrella of the Art Fund Prize, the winner of the Clore Award for Museum Learning was also announced tonight. Supported by the Clore Duffield Foundation, the £10,000 award champions quality museum and gallery learning with children and young people in or out of school. The award is judged by a separate panel co-chaired by Dame Vivien Duffield DBE, Chairman of the Clore Duffield Foundation and Sally Bacon, Executive Director.

The winning museum learning initiatives, each awarded £10,000, are **Leicestershire County Council Heritage and Arts Service**, for their *Held in the Hand* and *Touch Tables* programmes, and the **Whitworth Art Gallery** for the Manchester Early Years Partnership

More information on the Clore Award for Museum Learning can be found at www.artfundprize.org.uk/clore-award

Ten Years of the Museum Prize

2012 is the tenth year of the Art Fund Prize for Museums (formerly the Gulbenkian Prize).

The past winners are:

2011 The British Museum, for *A History of the World*

2010 The Ulster Museum, Belfast

2009 Wedgwood Museum, Stoke-on-Trent

2008 The Lightbox gallery and museum, Woking

2007 Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, East Sussex

2006 Brunel's SS Great Britain, Bristol

2005 Big Pit: the National Mining Museum of Wales

2004 Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh

2003 National Centre for Citizenship and the Law, Galleries of Justice, Nottingham

The Art Fund Prize is administered by The Museum Prize, a charitable company created in 2001 by representatives of National Heritage, the Museums Association, the Art Fund and the Campaign for Museums and chaired by Lady Cobham. These organisations agreed to put aside award schemes they formerly ran (including National Heritage's Museum of the Year) and lend their support to this single major prize.

The Art Fund is the national charity which helps museums and galleries to buy, show and share art for the enjoyment of all. Over the past five years, the Art Fund has given over £24 million towards art of all kinds, from Old Masters to new media, and supported a range of programmes which share and show art to wider audiences, including the national tour of ARTIST ROOMS, the Art Fund Prize for Museums and Galleries, and Art Guide, a pioneering smartphone app offering the most comprehensive guide to seeing art in the UK. The Art Fund is independently funded and the majority of its income comes from 90,000 supporters who purchase a National Art Pass, costing from £50, which gives free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off many major exhibitions.

Find out more about the Art Fund and the National Art Pass at www.artfund.org.uk. The press office can be reached on 020 7225 4888 or media@artfund.org

The Clore Duffield Foundation is chaired by Dame Vivien Duffield DBE and has a strong focus on supporting cultural learning, particularly within museums and galleries and at heritage sites. www.cloreduffield.org.uk. It is one of the founding partners of the Cultural Learning Alliance, a collective voice working to ensure that all children and young people have meaningful access to culture in this difficult economic climate. www.culturallearningalliance.org.uk