

Bluecoat

MEDIA RELEASE

UK's oldest arts centre to conclude landmark 300th anniversary celebrations with new exhibition

***In the Peaceful Dome* will be the final exhibition in a programme celebrating the tercentenary of Bluecoat, the UK's oldest arts centre and Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, housed in the oldest building in Liverpool's World Heritage Site.**

In the Peaceful Dome (Friday 13 October 2017 – Sunday 25 March 2018) takes the idea of Bluecoat as a continually evolving building - from charity school to the UK's first arts centre - and looks afresh at the institution, some of the art it has presented and debates it has engaged with through the years.

The exhibition will trace threads that connect Bluecoat's history with the present through a combination of new commissions, existing work including significant loans from public and private collections, and archival material. The exhibition will be structured around five main themes:

- The building, its iconic architecture and the passing of time
- Global trade and legacies of Empire
- Modernism and the fine and applied arts
- Artists' responses to war and gender
- The gallery as a continuing site for critical engagement

The exhibition features work by local, national and international artists. Highlights include:

- **Jacob Epstein's** *Genesis*, previously exhibited at Bluecoat in 1931 when almost 50,000 visitors paid sixpence each to see the controversial sculpture. Loaned from the Whitworth, it will remake the journey it took from Manchester 86 years ago, and will be accompanied in the gallery by documentary material relating to its first showing at Bluecoat. Continuing Bluecoat's history of arts patronage, *Genesis* will also be the focus of a crowdfunding campaign. The campaign will invite the public to support the exhibition by contributing towards the costs of the sculpture's journey from Manchester to Liverpool.
- Alongside *Genesis*, **Jo Stockham** will revisit sculptures and prints she first displayed at Bluecoat in 1990, a response to war and nuclear proliferation, informed by feminism and peace studies.
- Work by members of the **Sandon Studios Society**, the pioneering arts group that established Bluecoat as an arts centre, including **Roderick Bisson** and **Edward Carter Preston**, with rarely seen and historically significant early Modernist paintings; **Will C Penn's** 1920s/30s painted portraits of black men in Liverpool; caricatures by **Edgar Grosvenor**, including a 'Sandon Vamp'; an arts & craft bookplate designed by Fanny Calder who was instrumental in establishing and securing the building for the arts; and **Julia Carter Preston's** distinctive *s'graffito* ceramics.

- Printed text works by **Nathan Jones, Sean Borodale, Sumuyya Khader** and **Juniper Press** will be presented on **The Grantchester Pottery's** specially designed wallpaper installation.
- **Dan Coopey's** elegant 'basket' objects created using archaic crafting methods.
- **Joanne Masding's** new installation continuing her ongoing critique of the museum and notions of cultural certainty.
- Film works by **Uriel Orlow** and **Grace Ndiritu**, a reclamation of colonial histories and a reminder of Bluecoat's philanthropic origins supported from maritime trade.
- **Janet Hodgson's** film works exploring Bluecoat and the passing of time, shown with other printed, photographed and imagined representations of the building's architecture by **John Davies, Edmund Tan** and others.

The exhibition title is taken from William Roscoe's 1770 poem *Mount Pleasant*, written when Bluecoat was a school providing succor in its 'peaceful dome':

*- Yon calm retreat, where screened from every ill,
The helpless orphan's throbbing heart lies still;
And finds delighted, in the peaceful dome,
A better parent, and a happier home.*

The exhibition sets out to highlight the dichotomy of arts institutions as accessible and welcoming - 'happier homes' - but also as places that challenge and problematise.

With Bluecoat's own history marked by an uneven engagement with Modernism, and an improvisatory approach to arts programming, the exhibition also aims to provoke thinking about contemporary exhibition-making and its relationship to time, place and history.

Liverpool's fortunes have changed dramatically over the past three centuries, and the Bluecoat building, undergoing profound change itself, has had a symbiotic relationship to the port: reflecting its economic fortunes and cultural shifts, connecting the local and global, and developing a dynamic relationship with audiences through art. *In the Peaceful Dome* will continue Bluecoat's reflection, through its heritage and exhibitions, on both this local history and the wider world.

As well as including artists' and curator's talks, an events programme accompanying *In the Peaceful Dome* will interrogate the future function of arts centres and their civic role, legacies of Transatlantic slave trade and Bluecoat's historical relationship to these.

Bluecoat Artistic Director Bryan Biggs, who has curated the exhibition, said: "*In the Peaceful Dome* aims to give an insight into Bluecoat's extensive history, its connection to Liverpool and the wider world, and the way it has reflected this connection in its artistic programme.

"Visitors will be able to see a wide range of work, some of which they may recognise from previous Bluecoat exhibitions, as well as discovering exciting new commissions for the first time. We are especially pleased to be bringing Jacob Epstein's *Genesis* back to Bluecoat during our 300th anniversary year, and presenting the sculpture to new audiences, and showing newly discovered and significant paintings from the first half of the twentieth century by artists connected with the building".

Bluecoat Chief Executive Mary Cloake said: "*In the Peaceful Dome* provides the perfect opportunity for us to reflect on our history as the UK's first arts centre, while also provoking thinking about our future role as a vital focus for Liverpool culture. The exhibition highlights

how Bluecoat has brought together the local, national and international, and reflects our continuing commitment to showcasing ambitious programmes of art that reach the widest possible audience.

"We have been delighted by with the public's response to our 300th anniversary programme so far, and are sure that *In the Peaceful Dome* will provide the perfect finale to our celebrations as we come to the end of 2017."

[ENDS]

Editors' notes

About Bluecoat

The Bluecoat building, a fine example of Queen Anne style architecture, began life as a charity school in 1717, before housing an arts community in 1907 and formally becoming an arts centre in 1927, making it the oldest of its kind in the UK. It is now Liverpool's centre for the contemporary arts, supporting and presenting visual art, music, dance, live art and literature, as well as practices that fall in between these categories.

In the past few years its gallery programme has shown some of the best UK and international artists, with significant solo shows by William Kentridge, Niamh O'Malley, Keith Piper and Larissa Sansour, collaborations on large touring shows with artist/curators Mark Leckey and Common Culture, and exhibitions presenting emerging artists such as *Bloomberg New Contemporaries* and solo projects with, amongst others, Melissa Gordon and Adham Faraway.

At the same time, Bluecoat engages with audiences from the most vulnerable communities, from those with dementia to families facing disadvantage, through its participation programme. With artists central to these, the results are presented in occasional exhibitions alongside our gallery programme.

Bluecoat's 2017 anniversary programme has seen 300 days of celebration, from 4 February - 30 November, comprising exhibitions, performances of music, dance and live art, literature events, commissions, a sociologist in residence, and a major heritage participation project, *My Bluecoat*.

For further information please contact:

Carly Townsend
Media and Marketing Manager, Bluecoat
carly.t@thebluecoat.org.uk
0151 702 7770

Funders & Supporters:



Supported by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



it's liverpool

