

# SACRED ILLUMINATIONS IN THE PRINT BAY

Your patronages and memberships of the Barber Association directly fund paid internships in our Collections, Learning, and Communications teams, giving practical experience to early-career graduates eager to work in the arts. These opportunities are even more valuable as the hard-hit culture sector wrestles with Covid-19.

Our most recent Collections Intern, April Armstrong-Bascombe, completed a Master of Studies Degree in Art History and Visual Culture (Oxford) and recently submitted her PhD in Modern Languages and Cultures (Durham).

April's forthcoming display *The Art of Devotion: Sacred Illuminations, Prints and Drawings* explores the materiality of Christian devotion as it changes through time (1408-1919). Each image will provide a visual insight into how European artists approached the depiction of religious subjects, and how different media and techniques provided new opportunities for innovation.

We caught up with April to find out more...

What inspired you to choose devotion as a subject?

The display complements my doctoral research into the visual culture of the medieval Western Mediterranean, which looks at the painted traditions of medieval Catalonia in Spain. However, because my PhD thesis is largely focused on much larger Christian images, such as monumental church altarpieces, the display offered an opportunity to explore smaller examples of devotion. For instance the miniature paintings found within hymn and prayer books. Images have always held a special (and often precarious) position in religious thought, and I find it intriguing to think about the variety of personal, public, and often very powerful functions they held to different people, including their makers.

What has been most rewarding about curating the show?

Everything about it has been brilliant, but, I have particularly enjoyed all the object research. Each article acts as a window into a world of sacred imagery and it has been wonderful to learn so much about these objects, how they were made, and their intended meanings. It has also been really enjoyable working alongside the collection team and the broader Barber family.

If you had to choose a favourite artwork/object in the display, which would it be and why?

That is difficult! They each offer something different but I can't resist the jewel-like colours and golden glow of Liberale da



*The Art of Devotion* is curated by Collections Intern, April Armstrong-Bascombe

Verona's *Christ in Glory*. It is simply superb, and I can easily understand how it was intended to attract its beholder's gaze to sing its adjacent hymns during a church service.

What would be your fantasy exhibition to curate?

I am fascinated by tactile devotion and understanding how the sense of touch could implore people into a moment of individual contemplation, particularly when interacting with highly emotional images such as the Crucifixion of Christ or paintings of the Virgin Mary in the medieval period. Touch is a critical part of our human development and I think an exhibition that explores tactility in art, perhaps through hand-held interactions with 3D replicas/models would be hugely rewarding.

How has your internship affected your ambitions for the future?

It has further confirmed my passion for the cultural sector and working closely with art objects. It has been immensely rewarding to gain and develop all the vital skills and training necessary to pursue a career in curation. It has also allowed me to apply my research to some of the objects in the collection and broaden the scope of my understanding. I am really looking forward to the next chapter.

*The Art of Devotion* will be on display in the Green Gallery Print Bay from 23 October to 21 February.

April will record an audio talk to accompany her display. This will be available on the Barber website from Tuesday 27 October. See page 6 for details.



*Christ in Glory* by Liberale da Verona (about 1445-1526) Siena, about 1467. Tempera, gold leaf, and ink on vellum.

## BARBER ASSOCIATION EVENTS

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2020

### EVENTS FOR ALL MEMBERS

#### For the 'Coinoisseurs'... Thursday 19 November, 11am

Join our hugely knowledgeable Coin Curator, Maria Vrij, for a special Zoom event to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the coin collection and take a closer look at some of her favourite objects.

This event will take place on Zoom.

Priority booking for Patrons until midnight on Monday 19 October. Remaining places will be allocated to Members on a first-come, first-served basis.

To register, please email [association@barber.org.uk](mailto:association@barber.org.uk) or call 0121 414 7598.

### KEY DATES IN THE GALLERIES

#### From today...

The Barber galleries are open to the public

*A Golden Jubilee: 50 Years of the Coin Collection* is open

Claude's *A Pastoral Landscape* has returned to the Red Gallery after a period of conservation

#### Friday 16 October

*Changing Shapes: The Subject of Metamorphosis in Art* opens in the Beige Gallery print bay

#### Friday 23 October

*The Art of Devotion* opens in the Green Gallery print bay

#### November (exact date TBC)

*The Reader* by Marguerite Gérard goes on display



Visit our website for more information about Barber Association events: [www.barber.org.uk/support](http://www.barber.org.uk/support)

## DON'T MISS OUR TUESDAY TALKS ON DEMAND

Did you know our weekly Tuesday Talks have moved online? You can still enjoy the same expert knowledge and fascinating insights as before but 'on demand' from wherever you are. New talks are released on our website each Tuesday and will remain available for you to listen to for the foreseeable future. Below you'll find a programme of what we can look forward to this autumn...

#### October

- 6: **Welcome Back to the Barber** with Barber Director, Nicola Kalinsky
- 13: **Ruysdael** with Head of Collections, Robert Wenley
- 20: **Changing Shapes** with Assistant Curator, Helen Cobby
- 27: **The Art of Devotion** with Collections Intern, April Armstrong-Bascombe

#### November

- 3: **Benin Ikegobo** Lightning Talk with UoB graduate, Adwoa Owusu-Barnieh
- 10: **Rodin** with Assistant Curator, Helen Cobby
- 17: **75th Anniversary of Barber Concerts** with University Music
- 24: **Pellegrini** Lightning Talk with UoB student, Evie Garret

#### December

- 1: **The Enigmatic Reader** with Assistant Curator, Helen Cobby
- 8: **Gainsborough's Harvest Wagon** with Barber Director, Nicola Kalinsky
- 15: **The Nativity** with Gallery Guide, Jennifer Young

Please note that the programme is correct at time of writing and subject to change.

And if you can't wait for the next episode, our summer series of Tuesday Talks is still available on our website too: [barber.org.uk/Tuesday-Talks](http://barber.org.uk/Tuesday-Talks)

THE  
BARBER  
INSTITUTE OF  
FINE ARTS

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UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

# IN THE PICTURE

THE NEWSLETTER FOR PATRONS AND MEMBERS

AUTUMN 2020

ISSUE 11

## WELCOME BACK TO THE BARBER

### Director's Notes:

I'm writing this on a very significant occasion in the history of the Barber: 23 September, the first day that we are open for visitors since 17 March. We are a museum again! It's been a long haul played out against the overwhelming backdrop of the dislocations and tragedies, personal and societal, wrought by the pandemic. We looked for, found, and created, silver linings in the darkness, whether that's been *Barber Home*, our new strand of virtual engagement, or the successful launch of our first-ever online exhibition, *Sights of Wonder* (with no closing date!). We've also ensured the continued safety of the building and the collections with daily checks rigorously maintained throughout the 27 weeks of closure. But we are a public gallery – we need to welcome back our visitors and share the collections again.

To experience the collection, particularly after a long absence, is profoundly restorative. One of the things that sustained me over these dreary months was the opportunity to lose myself for a few moments in the Monet, to track the impasto in the Auerbach, or be soothed by the protective love expressed in Gott's greyhound family. I'm very proud of the Barber team's long strides into the digital, a pathway we will sustain and develop, but it's no substitute for the visceral impact of a great artist's message on canvas, panel, paper or marble.

We have, of course, put in measures to provide a safe and comfortable environment, but the impact on the experience of enjoying art is minimal. Our galleries are spacious, lend themselves logically to a one-way chronological route, and there has been little need for intrusive signage

### ..AND CLAUDE HAS RETURNED!



Deputy Director and Head of Collections, Robert Wenley, inspects Claude Lorrain's *A Pastoral Landscape*, 1645, which looks resplendent in the Red Gallery after some conservation work

upstairs. One significant change is that everyone is now asked to book a free, timed Art Ticket online, a system provided for the museum community by the wonderful Art Fund. It is also a legal requirement that visitors, unless exempt, must wear face coverings. This applies to all staff too, so you will be greeted by our front of house team wearing Perspex face visors or masks.

Full details on how to visit the Barber are set out on our website and, if you have any queries or comments, please do get in touch – we'd love your feedback as we negotiate this transition. More than 30 of you took up the opportunity of our two exclusive Association previews and it was fantastic to welcome you back. Many of us felt quite tearful on hearing

comments such as 'this is balm to the soul' and 'I feel human again': equally, visitors return the vital spark to the Barber – art needs looking at!

Thank you all so much for your continuing commitment to the Barber. I hope you have stayed safe and well and I really look forward to sharing the collection with you again soon, whether that's on a Zoom screen or, better still, in person. And, please do book your free tickets for the Barber and spread the word; we are waiting for you!

Nicola Kalinsky,  
Director





# CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF THE COIN COLLECTION

In 2020 the Barber Institute of Fine Arts celebrates the golden anniversary of its extraordinary coin collection, one of the most important caches of Byzantine, Roman and medieval currency in the world.



Obverse of a gold solidus of Justinian II, second reign (705-711), struck at the mint of Constantinople

Philip Whitting (1903 – 1988) and Geoffrey Haines (1899 – 1981), two friends who shared a passion for numismatics (the name given to the study of coinage and currency) both believed passionately in the importance of coins as historical documents, and in their use as aids to the teaching of history. They deeply regretted the change in the late 1950s, which saw the price of coins rocket to serve the desires of investors who cared little for the historical value of the pieces they held so dear. They resolved to leave a legacy to future numismatists who might not have the means to acquire and enjoy historical coins.

The scholars gave their vast collections to the Barber, with the condition that the coins were used for 'educative purposes'. This magnificent gift, made between 1967 and 1970,

totalled 15,000 pieces and established the status of the Barber collection as world class. Since then, it has been augmented by other donations, such as Edgar Guest's (1930-2019) Hungarian coins, as well as acquisitions made by the Barber's coin curators since 1970.

This year we remember and continue to honour the foresight and generosity of

our founder donors with an exhibition that introduces the fascinating world of coins to modern audiences.

Showcasing the most visually striking and historically interesting examples in the collection, *A Golden Jubilee* seeks to answer some of the questions that many of us often have about the niche study of numismatics. The exhibition will suggest how much an historic coin might have bought, where and how it was made and what from, while also telling the remarkable story of how these coins came to be part of a museum collection in Birmingham.

*A Golden Jubilee* will also shine a spotlight on areas that have been overlooked by previous exhibitions and the Hunnic, Armenian and Chinese coins will all get a chance to shine for the first time.

*A Golden Jubilee: 50 Years of the Coin Collection* is on display in the Coin Gallery until June 2021.

Patrons and Members will be invited to join us for a special Zoom seminar with the Barber's Coin Curator Dr Maria Vrij, in November. See page 6.

## NEW FACES IN THE GALLERY



On display from November: *The Reader* by Marguerite Gérard, about 1817, oil on canvas, 32 x 24cm. Acquired March 2020.

We will see a couple of new faces in the galleries this autumn when the Barber Institute's latest acquisition goes on display. Assistant Curator, **Helen Cobby**, tells us more...

In the privacy of her tastefully uncluttered home, a young woman intently reads a book. Her delicately ringleted head cranes towards the pages, slightly disturbing her otherwise impeccably upright figure, which sports a fashionable late-18th-century empire waistline. A cat is settled on her lap, while her son stands listlessly at her side. This is the scene shown in the oil painting *The Reader* by French artist, Marguerite Gérard (1761 – 1837). The picture was made in about 1817 when Gérard was at the height of her successful career

After training with her famous brother-in-law, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, Gérard carved out her own style and subject-matter. Her greatest inspiration was

17th-century Dutch genre paintings, which she reinvented by focusing on female figures within intimate domestic settings.

In *The Reader*, Gérard references several details often found in Dutch genre paintings - the blue-and-white Delftware and an oriental rug used as a table covering – while permeating the scene with the playful ambiguity that characterised such masterpieces. The woman is distracted from her motherly duties by her book, possibly a sentimental novel with a romantic plot line, a genre highly popular in France at the time and coincided with a great surge of female readers. Such amorous themes are echoed by the inclusion of a bird cage and canary in the painting hanging on the wall. There is a long tradition of artists using birds as sexual symbols. With these details in mind, Gérard playfully reveals an ambiguous mixture of eroticism and moralism that characterises the sentimental construction of femininity.

# COMPETITION WINNERS

Thank you to everyone who entered our lockdown competition, we hope you all had fun taking part. The theme was **My View** with the idea that it could help us think about our surroundings, let our imaginations fly and record our thoughts during the unprecedented period.

Your entries didn't disappoint – and we're delighted to share some of our favourites...

## 1ST PRIZE



**John Davenport** cheered us up with his fabulous drawing, *Spanish Flu*.

John is a Professor Emeritus of Dentistry, retired 20 years, and painting and print making are now his main retirement activities. He's an RBSA member who exhibits work regularly.

Congratulations, John, you have won one of our brand new Monet umbrellas!



Tabuan Parakeet, 1832, by Edward Lear

## HIGHLY COMMENDED



We loved **Alex Jolly's** painting of home, capturing a scene familiar to all of us over the last few months!



**Carol Brotherton** completed a textile project that she undertook at Winterbourne back in March, when she studied a special archive of dried plants and flowers from the 1800s. The work is appliqué and embroidery.

We thoroughly enjoyed **Scotford Lawrence's** entry, *A Brush with a Matchstick Man*, which gave a magical account of his surprise encounter with LS Lowry in Harrogate back in the 1960s. Sadly we don't have the space to print it in full so here's a snippet. Please visit the Barber website at [barber.org.uk/support](http://barber.org.uk/support) to enjoy the full story.

*"Eventually I found myself next to him, in front of an Edward Poynter, and the old man commented in a flat Lancashire accent, "There's summat wrong wi' that" and proceeded to demonstrate to me that the proportions of one of the sitter's arms were, indeed, hopelessly wrong. "Now over 'ere," he continued, "e got it right", and, taking me by the arm, he led me to look at a Frederick Watts. From then on I was an art school student again, as the old man propelled me round the gallery demonstrating a detailed knowledge of draughtsmanship, the nude and Victorian painting..."*

**Jennifer Young** blew us away with her short work of fiction. Her imaginative tale *The Night of the Parrot* gave us an exhilarating avian view of the Barber inspired by our *The Parrot in Art* exhibition (2007) and *The Night of the Iguana* by Tennessee Williams. *The Parrot in Art* was curated by our then Director, Professor Richard Verdi, who even brought in his own parrots and displayed them in the foyer for an afternoon! Please visit the Barber website to read Jennifer's gripping tale, and take a tour of the Barber unlike any other...

## PAGE OF PUZZLES

This edition's crossword celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Barber's coin collection. Some clues might be a little tricky so you might find the wealth of resources on the Barber website handy. Email your answers to [association@barber.org.uk](mailto:association@barber.org.uk) by 5 November for your chance to win a mystery prize!

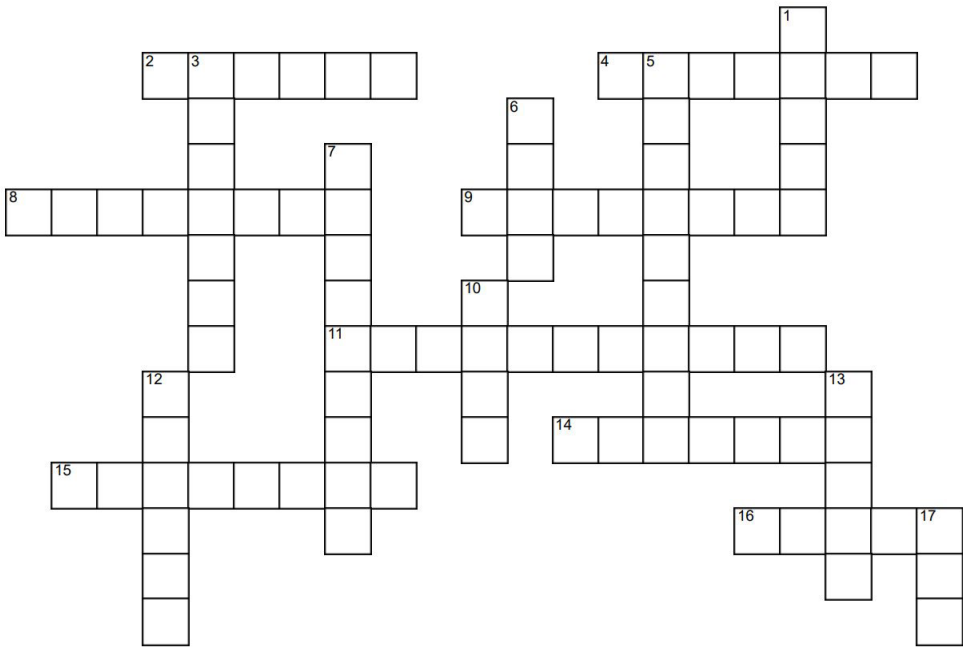
### Questions:

#### Across:

- 2:** Copper-based alloy with tin (6)
- 4:** Front side of a coin, 'heads' (7)
- 8:** System of money (8)
- 9:** Style of coin portraiture started in ancient Rome whose coins often show the Emperor's head crowned with a laurel wreath (8)
- 11:** The study of coins (11)
- 14:** Gold coin from the late Roman Empire (7)
- 15:** Scholar who donated more than 10,000 coins to the Barber (8)
- 16:** Buried treasure (5)

#### Down:

- 1:** Condition of a coin (5)
- 3:** Back side of a coin, 'tails' (7)
- 5:** Non-precious metal or alloy containing no gold or silver (4, 5)
- 6:** Round metal disc ready to be struck as a coin (4)
- 7:** Eastern Roman Empire that survived into the Medieval period (9)
- 10:** Industrial facility for the manufacture of coins (4)
- 12:** Accountant who donated his collection of Roman coins to the Barber (6)
- 13:** Test to determine the content or quality of metal (5)
- 17:** Metal piece engraved with a design used to imprint coins (3)



## CAPTION CONTEST



*The Visitation*, 1577, is an oil on canvas by Paulo Caliari, known as Veronese, painted for a church on the island of Murano in the Venetian lagoon. Veronese was known as a colourist and for his extremely large history paintings of religion and mythology. He was one of a trio of artists that dominated Venetian painting in the 16th century.

Caption this by emailing [association@barber.org.uk](mailto:association@barber.org.uk)

## Previous contest winner

Our previous contest was **Mr Briggs** *Contemplates a Day's Fishing* by John Leech, 1850.

We think Association Member, David Hoare, summed it up perfectly with: *"Well, we are in lockdown..."*

Thank you for all your lockdown caption suggestions.

Summer Crossword Answers

**ACROSS:** 3. Hagia Sophia; 7. St Jerome in the Desert; 8. Glass; 9. Ottoman; 11. Kennack Sands; 12. Tintoretto; 13. Christopher; 14. Alexandria. **DOWN:** 1. Francis Bedford; 2. Dix; 3. Horus; 4. Camel; 5. Jerusalem; 6. Grand Tour; 7. Solomon; 10. Sphinx.

**CONGRATULATIONS** to **Alex Jolly** who won a gift-bag of Cornwall as Crucible treats in our Summer Crossword Competition.