



Barber Health: Our Collection, Your Wellbeing

The Barber Institute of Fine Arts launches innovative 'Nurse in Residence' scheme

As the Covid-19 crisis continues to unfold, its very duration means that imaginative and purposeful actions to mitigate its harms gather strength and purpose. Barber Health is one museum's response to the pandemic.

Thanks to a major grant of £40,000 from the Art Fund's Respond & Reimagine scheme, the Barber Institute of Fine Arts at the University of Birmingham is launching a major health and wellbeing initiative for 2021. The project builds on the organisation's previous experience of working in this area, but takes it to new levels and areas by using multi-disciplinary professionalism and community engagement.

The year-long endeavour will see the Barber roll out a programme of innovative arts activity delivered in and with the communities on the museum's doorstep and with health and wellbeing as its aim and outcome. "We asked ourselves what is the role of a museum or gallery in a pandemic?" says the Barber Institute's Head of Public Engagement, Jen Ridding. "How can we contribute, even on a small scale, to processes of reconnecting and recovery in our local communities? We felt we had a responsibility - could we use our collection and our engagement programme to address some of the big issues Covid has created and ultimately make a positive difference to people's lives? The Art Fund have given us a unique opportunity to address these questions in real time over the next year."

This ambitious project has four interconnecting strands: a nurse in residence, death and dying community conversations, care-home outreach and a social prescribing pilot.

Central to Barber Health is the innovative nurse-in-residence programme.

"Many of us will be aware of an artist in residence in a medical setting, so we thought 'what if we switch this?'," explains Jen. "A nurse in residence at a museum offers a novel and powerful way for cultural organisations to work with medical sector colleagues. If we think about the museum of the future, then we absolutely need to be collaborating with colleagues from across sectors and disciplines. We're operating in a world where boundaries are blurring and finding new insights, new relevance and new applications for our collections and cultural institutions is essential. I think this is one way we can help museums thrive in the 21st century."

The project's inaugural nurse in residence is Jane Nicol, Senior Lecturer at the University of Birmingham's School of Nursing and a registered nurse who has specialised in palliative and end-of-life care. Over the next twelve months, Jane will be looking at the Barber's collection through her unique lens and developing ways of using these major works of art to inform community healthcare and enrich medical training.

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Jane said: "This unique and exciting residency provides an opportunity to rethink the role the arts have in the education of our future healthcare professionals and in promoting the sustainable health and wellbeing of our wider community. Utilising the Barber's world class art collection, we'll be developing tools which will be practically applied in a healthcare and community settings to address some of the pressing issues facing our communities in the midst of the pandemic."

With the Covid death toll in the UK now exceeding 95,000, society faces an epidemic of grief, and yet we are ill-equipped to talk about death and dying. The project's death and dying community conversations will use the Barber's art collection to facilitate digital and pop-up community conversations and explore creative responses around death, dying and bereavement in collaboration with relevant charities, University Hospitals Birmingham and GP practices across the city and student volunteers from the University of Birmingham's medical school.

Through outreach to local care homes, Barber Health will also engage with some of the most profoundly affected groups in our communities. Specially designed virtual gallery tours will be delivered to care homes, alongside live-streamed art workshops and Covid-safe tactile boxes for sharing

Jen said: "If we can make a small difference to someone's day through our activity, then we will have done something important and meaningful to support the mental and emotional wellbeing of residents, staff and carers."

The fourth strand, which will be informed by all the other concurrent elements as well as in-depth sector, academic and community enquiry, is action research to inform a Social Prescribing pilot for 2021. This will investigate how and where the Barber might help fill the gap left by the shrinking of provision previously offered by the hard-hit charitable sector.

Every part of this ambitious project draws on the Barber's situation as a public museum within a Russell Group university, a major higher education provider that trains thousands of medical students each year. Barber Health builds on earlier collaborative work across the university that demonstrated the huge potential inherent in the museum's academic location. To realise and extend this potential is now urgently required in way which simply could not have been imagined even a year ago, but the Barber and its partners are ready, thanks to the Art Fund, to move forward at a pace. Students from the University of Birmingham's College of Medical and Dental Sciences will contribute to all the different strands of Barber Health projects through placements and volunteering.

Nicola Kalinsky, Director of the Barber Institute, said: "Barber Health is our major organisational endeavour in response to Covid-19 for the year ahead. It builds on our long-standing commitment to exploring the relevance of our collections for our audiences and using this outstanding resource to bring benefit where we can to communities. This has never, in all my career as a museum professional, been more pressing as a need, and we are incredibly grateful to Art Fund for making the project possible."

Professor David Adams, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Medical and Dental Sciences at the University of Birmingham, said: "Placing health and wellbeing so centrally to the Barber's engagement programme with Barber Health is a ground-breaking, yet timely and relevant initiative. Appointing Jane Nicol as Nurse in Residence will undoubtedly enhance the programme through Jane's subject knowledge and extensive experience - as well as opening the door for some exciting future partnerships between the Barber as a world-class art gallery and health and care professionals."

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Sarah Philp, Director of Programme, Art Fund, said: “This year we have witnessed the extraordinary determination of museums in innovating in order to survive Covid-19 and continue to serve their local communities, and at the same time, understand better than ever the vital role art and culture plays in supporting our health and wellbeing as a nation under lockdown. We are hugely inspired by the Barber Institute of Fine Arts never-more-relevant project that will support those on their doorstep. At Art Fund we continue to help museums through this catastrophic period, but we have only been able to help a fraction of those who need it. We are asking everyone to join our Together for Museums campaign, to help us fund more ground-breaking projects like this, helping museums when they need it most.”

- For more information about Barber Health and the nurse in residence, visit barber.org.uk. Follow @barberinstitute on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook for regular updates, news and opportunities to engage with the Barber.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

The Barber Institute of Fine Arts is the art gallery, principal art collection and original concert hall for the University of Birmingham. It was founded in 1932 ‘*for the study and encouragement of art and music*’ by Lady Barber, who stipulated the acquisition of works ‘*of that standard of quality required by the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection*’. Housed in Birmingham’s most significant Art Deco building, designed by Robert Atkinson, the Barber Institute is home to a National Designated Collection, acquired and owned by the Henry Barber Trust and with holdings that now include some 160 paintings, dating from the early Renaissance through to the late 20th century, more than 800 works on paper, as well as sculpture, decorative arts and one of the most important caches of Roman, Byzantine and Medieval coins in the world. The collection features key works by Botticelli, Bellini, Rubens, Gainsborough, Reynolds, Turner, Whistler, Rossetti, Monet, Manet, Degas, Renoir, Rodin, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Bellows, Magritte and Auerbach. More at www.barber.org.uk, on Twitter @BarberInstitute, Instagram @barberinstitute and Facebook ‘The Barber Institute of Fine Arts’

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 www.artfund.org

IMAGES – HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGES CAN BE DOWNLOADED HERE

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