

PRESS RELEASE

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THE LAST OF ENGLAND IS A FIRST FOR THE BARBER



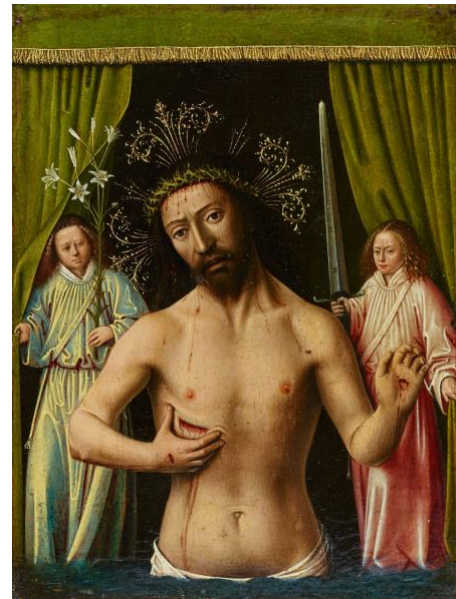
Visitors to the Barber Institute of Fine Arts this New Year will be greeted by three of the greatest paintings usually on display at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

The trio of internationally significant masterpieces have been lent by Birmingham Museums Trust for a two-year period to the Barber Institute – just a few miles down the road on the University of Birmingham’s Edgbaston campus – where they will hang among the gallery’s own outstanding collection.

The Last of England, painted in 1855 by the leading Pre-Raphaelite artist Ford Madox Brown, is one of Birmingham’s most iconic cultural treasures, and a masterwork of Victorian painting. A young family are huddling together on an open boat as they depart English shores – represented by the White Cliffs of Dover – for a new life abroad. The subject was inspired by the emigration of a fellow Pre-Raphaelite, the sculptor Thomas Woolner, who set out for Australia’s goldfields in 1852. The models for the main figures were the artist himself and his wife Emma, while tiny hand emerging from the woman’s shawl is that of their own baby. Circular in format, and painted with hallucinatory attention to detail, the effect is like staring through a telescope into a vividly observed moment of reality.

Following the second national lockdown in November 2020, it was announced that the museum and Council House complex needed completely rewiring – a project that is expected to continue through to 2023/4, with a partial reopening of the gallery planned for

April 2022. For the work to take place, over 36,000 items of Birmingham's collections have been moved into safe storage.



Curators at the city-centre museum generously suggested that a few of these works could be displayed at the Barber, often described as a miniature National Gallery for the Midlands. Alongside *The Last of England*, two other paintings – which together span 400 years of art history – were selected. The monumental ***Erminia and the Shepherd*** (above, left), painted around 1620 by leading Bolognese painter Guercino, imagines a dramatic encounter between a young princess and a ragged old shepherd, based on Italian poet Tasso's epic, *Jerusalem Delivered*. Contrasting in scale and style is ***The Man of Sorrows*** (above, right), a tiny panel by the Flemish painter Petrus Christus from around 1450. This visionary image of Christ displaying the wounds of his torture and crucifixion is as intense in its way as the Madox Brown, and would have been used for private prayer and devotion.

The Barber's Director, Nicola Kalinsky, said "We rather cheekily suggested three paintings that are among the most important in the amazing collection of Birmingham's premier museum. We were surprised but obviously delighted when we were told our Christmas wishes had been come true!

"We think these stellar loans look very much at home next to their new companions. We are extremely grateful to Birmingham Museums Trust for entrusting these superlative works to us, so they can be enjoyed by art-lovers in the city while their usual home is refurbished. Three more great reasons to visit the Barber in the new year."

Birmingham Museum Trust's Director of Collections, Toby Watley, added: "We're delighted to be working with the Barber Institute of Fine Arts to display several much-loved and globally important artworks from Birmingham's collections while Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery is closed for essential electrical work. During this temporary closure of BMAG other works from the city's collection will also travel across the UK and overseas for many more people to enjoy."

The Last of England and *Erminia and the Shepherd* are now on display, while *The Man of Sorrows* is due to be installed next week (week of 10 January).

The BMT paintings join other important temporary loans currently on display as swaps for Barber masterpieces featuring in exhibitions around the UK. *Portrait of Rosamund Sargent, née Chambers*, an exquisitely rendered work from 1749 by Scottish artist Allan Ramsay, comes from Bath's Holburne Museum while the Barber's own Pre-Raphaelite 'stunner', *The Blue Bower* by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, is a key exhibit in **Rossetti's Portraits**. Meanwhile, renowned animal painter George Stubbs's *Mares and Fools in a River Landscape*, a serene pastoral landscape of the 1760s, and the postcard-bright small canvas, *The Capella Nuova outside the Porta di Chiara*, 1782, by Welsh landscapist Thomas Jones, came in exchange for two Barber paintings lent to *Hogarth and Europe* at Tate Britain.

- For more information about the Barber Institute and its collection, including opening times, see the website at www.barber.org.uk.

For further information, images or interviews, contact Barber Communications and Marketing Manager Andrew Davies on 0121 414 2946, 07701 084526 or andrewdavies@barber.org.uk.

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 a Grade-I listed 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 most significant 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'