

**PRESS RELEASE**

**16 February 2024**



## **£10m improvement works at the Barber Institute begins autumn 2024**

The first phase of a £10 million essential building improvement programme has begun at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham with the refurbishment of its exhibition gallery.

The refit of the Lady Barber Gallery will include the installation of new walls, floors, glass doors and state-of-the-art lighting. The air-handling system will also be completely replaced.

The work is the first instalment of a two-part scheme funded entirely by the University of Birmingham, which owns the Barber's building.

The project has been prompted by the need to replace old air-handling and heating systems and install new building hardware. The refurbishment will provide an enhanced experience that befits a national arts institution and meets the expectations of 21st-century visitors.

### **Phase One**

The Lady Barber Gallery, along with the four principal collection galleries, print bays and coin gallery, closed on 2 October 2023 and will remain shut for just over eight months. Due to the scale of the work being undertaken, all galleries will remain closed until the works are complete.

The Barber's red collection gallery – most recently the venue for the critically acclaimed temporary exhibition, *Mastering the Market: Dutch and Flemish Paintings from Woburn Abbey* – closed to the public on Sunday 24 September, the planned end-date of the show.

The Barber's fine art collection – owned by the Henry Barber Trust – is being safely stored during the refurbishment, while agreed loans of masterpieces from the collection to exhibitions across the UK and Europe are being honoured.

The remainder of the building's public spaces – including the reception and shop, fine art library, lecture theatre, teaching spaces, art history department and offices – remain open from Monday to Friday, but are closed at weekends. The Barber Concert Hall also remains closed.

The galleries – originally due to reopen in April 2024 – are now set to reopen in June 2024, due to a slight delay with the building programme caused by unforeseen circumstances. Visitors will be able to enjoy an eight-month programme that features major temporary loan exhibitions and some changes to collection displays.

## **Phase Two**

The Barber Institute's building will close to the public for seven months in February 2025, reopening in late autumn 2025.

The Concert Hall, with its unique Art Deco auditorium, located at the heart of the Grade-1 listed building, will be retro-fitted with a new fresh-air circulation system. This will enable the prestigious Barber Concert series, funded by the Henry Barber Trust and currently based in the University's Elgar Concert Hall, to return to the Barber.

A new, public, level-access entrance will also be created via the terrace at the north side of the building alongside a new ground-floor accessible lavatory and baby-changing facility.

The Director of the Barber Institute, Professor Jennifer Powell, said that, while it was regrettable that the Barber's galleries would be closed for several months, the essential repairs would enable more visitors to enjoy the collections, exhibitions, and music programmes in the future.

Professor Powell said: *"We are delighted that, with the University's funding support, we can upgrade our exhibition gallery space and building controls and, crucially, welcome more visitors with mobility aids, prams or buggies, and other additional access needs, directly into the building's reception space. This building repair work will also enable us to stage live music in the concert hall again, bringing art and music back together at the core of our building, which was key to the vision of our founder, Lady Barber."*

The University's Vice Chancellor, Professor Adam Tickell, said: *"The Barber Institute is the jewel in the University's cultural crown. We are very proud to have this world-class collection – housed in the University's only Grade-1 listed building – on campus. This refurbishment programme demonstrates our commitment to the Barber as a crucial centre of research and learning in the arts, as well as a public gallery that is much loved by art- and music-lovers in Birmingham, the UK and around the world. Its repaired and restored facilities will ensure the Barber's pre-eminence as a university arts centre for years to come."*

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### **FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO ARRANGE INTERVIEWS WITH PROFESSOR JENNIFER POWELL, DIRECTOR OF THE BARBER INSTITUTE OF FINE ARTS, CONTACT**

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### **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 (among others) Giovanni Bellini, Sandro Botticelli, Rosalba Carriera, Edgas Degas, Thomas Gainsborough, Gwen John, Käthe Kollwitz, René Magritte, Edouard Manet, Claude Monet, Auguste Rodin, Peter Paul Rubens, JMW Turner, Vincent van Gogh, Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun and James McNeill Whistler.

For more information, visit [barber.org.uk](http://barber.org.uk) and follow @barberinstitute on [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) for regular updates, news and opportunities to engage with the Barber.