

**PRESS RELEASE**

**08 June 2024**



## **The Barber's galleries to reopen after phase 1 of improvement works**

The galleries at the Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham, will reopen on Saturday 22 June following the completion of the first phase of a £10 million essential building improvement programme.

The Lady Barber Gallery – the principal exhibition space – has been completely refurbished, with the installation of new walls, floors, glass doors and state-of-the-art lighting. The air-handling system has also been completely replaced.

The galleries will reopen with no fewer than three new temporary exhibitions and displays: *Claudette Johnson: Darker Than Blue*, featuring brand-new and recent work by the Turner Prize-shortlisted artist; *The Hidden Lives of Plants: Botanical Illustrations from the V&A*, curated by University of Birmingham Art History and Curating Masters' students; and *Women in Power: Coins from the Barber Collection*. The Barber's Green Gallery, which contains the collection's oldest Western paintings and sculpture dating from 1280 to 1600, has also been the focus of a major thematic redisplay project.

The building 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 was prompted by the need to replace old air-handling and heating systems and install new building hardware. The refurbishment provides 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 have remained shut for just over eight months. Due to the scale of the work undertaken, all galleries have remained closed until the works are complete.

The Barber's fine art collection – owned by the Henry Barber Trust – has been safely stored during the refurbishment, while agreed loans of masterpieces from the collection to exhibitions across the UK and Europe were 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 – have remained open from Monday to Friday, but have been closed at weekends. The Barber Concert Hall has also remained closed.

The galleries – originally due to reopen in April 2024 – are now set to reopen on 22 June 2024, due to a slight delay with the building programme caused by unforeseen circumstances. Visitors will then 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 had had to close 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 have been able to upgrade our exhibition gallery space and building controls and, crucially, in the future, to 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."*

**[HIGH RESOLUTION IMAGES CAN BE DOWNLOADED BY CLICKING ON THIS LINK](#)**

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