

# Annual

# Review

# 2024-25

The  
Fitzwilliam  
Museum  
CAMBRIDGE

 UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE

# Addressing complex histories and contemporary questions

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It is a great pleasure, as Chair of the Fitzwilliam Museum Syndicate, to introduce this Annual Review. It describes a year in which the Museum has continued to combine academic innovation with thoughtful public engagement. Museums, as places for learning, community and creativity, have never been more valuable or more needed. In recent years, polarisation in debate seems to happen ever more quickly and more often, with positions becoming simplified and entrenched. In that context, as one of the greatest university museums, the Fitzwilliam has a distinctive role to play. It offers a programme grounded in scholarship and academic freedom, and drawing on solid evidence. In this way the Museum facilitates unconstrained conversations that are informed by experiences and different perspectives.

What continues to impress me about the Fitzwilliam is the confidence and care with which it embraces this role. At the heart of one of the world's leading universities, it is brilliantly placed to draw upon the academic rigour and inter-disciplinary research that make Cambridge remarkable. At the same time, the Museum looks outward. It engages closely with the civic life of Cambridgeshire and far beyond. It operates locally, nationally and internationally. This distinctive positioning has allowed the Museum to address complex histories and contemporary questions calmly but profoundly, with a wide range of different audiences welcomed, entertained and stimulated. Through its exhibitions, displays

and other public programmes, the Fitzwilliam has encouraged visitors to slow down, to explore, to learn, and to reflect that there is often more than one way of looking at something.

On behalf of the Syndics, I would like to thank the Director, staff, volunteers, partners and supporters who make all this work possible. Their expertise, care, and commitment underpin everything the Museum achieves. It is a privilege to support an institution that continues to play such a vital role, not only as a guardian of a remarkable collection, but as a place for learning, discussion and exchange.

*Sir Richard Heaton, KCB*

**Chair of the Fitzwilliam Museum Syndicate**

# Unlocking the past to transform our futures

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In 2024, bucking national trends, we welcomed over half a million visitors to the Fitzwilliam — our largest audience ever and a substantive increase on the year before. We very nearly matched that figure in 2025. So, we have something to celebrate — and people to celebrate with!

However gratifying, looking at numbers alone is a blunt tool for measuring success, even as we set ourselves more ambitious targets. Much more important is understanding why more people are coming, what we hope to achieve with and for our visitors and communities, and the feedback we receive.

This year, our story and the conversations we engage in have become larger, more representative and more equitable than those the Museum has been used to, ensuring that a sense of belonging is not the preserve of just some of our visitors.

Through our exhibition *Paris 1924: Sport, Art and the Body*, our audience came to understand better how the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, with its sporting harmony and occasional political tensions, has a precedent in the Games held in 1924, where attitudes to gender and race, fashion and commerce, and international relations were changing.

With *Glenn Ligon: All Over The Place*, the artist boldly placed his works in several media across the Museum — and indeed across our facade — choosing art and objects from the past to explore themes of marginalisation, repair, exchange and extraction, beauty and trouble. He reinvented the Museum in doing so.

In *Rise Up: Resistance, Revolution, Abolition*, we looked at how figures with local histories, such as Olaudah Equiano, his wife Susannah Cullen, and their colleague Thomas Clarkson, made their powerful arguments for Abolition in a global context that embraced Caribbean resistance and African and American performance.

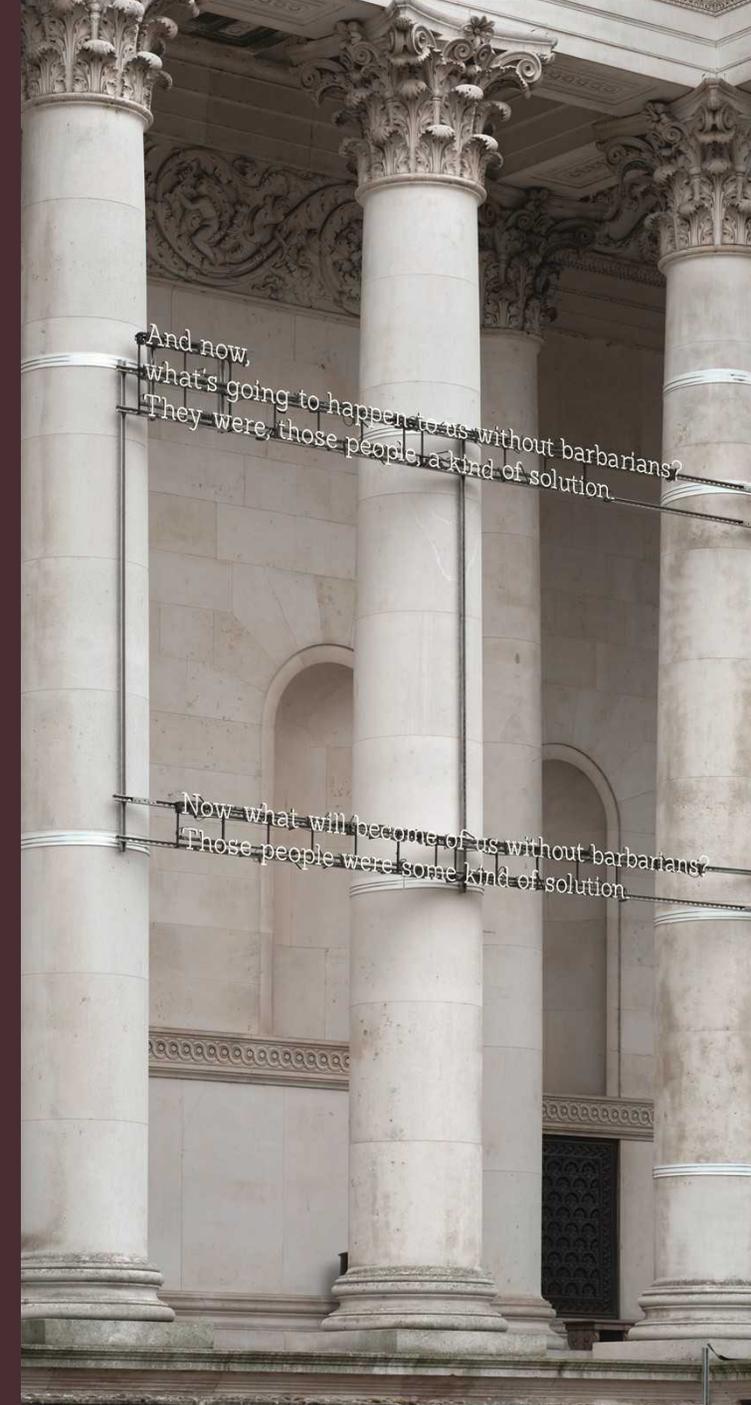
Dialogues between historic and contemporary art have become a distinct feature of what we do, and the display of many of our new acquisitions in considered combination with our existing strengths continues to enrich conversation.

That these are challenging times is now something of a cliché, and these challenges are not restricted to areas of cultural stand-off or misunderstanding. They are also financial and economic, so we have been working on a new business plan to develop our income streams, or introduce new ones, to ensure the Museum's long-term sustainability. There is no contradiction, we believe, between an entrepreneurial spirit and an inclusive or progressive agenda.

Unlocking the past to transform our futures and connecting the local to the global are efforts that are central to our vision as we continue to build a Museum that is confident in its purpose and responsive to the world around it.

*Luke Syson*

**Director and Marlay Curator**



## Exhibitions and displays

Engaging with our collection in innovative ways, our programme explored subjects with deep contemporary resonances — from attitudes to the body in sport, to the legacies of enslavement and our current constructions of race.

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Placing historic images and objects alongside contemporary art, this year's exhibitions and displays created opportunities for audiences to make fresh connections across the ages and continents.

On the centenary of the 1924 Olympics, in which Cambridge athletes competed with great success, *Paris 1924: Sport, Art and the Body* (19 July — 3 November 2024) featured depictions of the sporting body by international artists — placing their paintings and sculpture in dialogue with archival material, memorabilia, photography, equipment, fashion and film to demonstrate how this event was a turning point in attitudes to celebrity, body image, class, race and gender.



**‘I loved how immersive the experience was; it felt like stepping back in time’**

Visitor to *Paris 1924*

**‘A revelation from first to last’**

Review of *Paris 1924*, *Guardian*



ABOVE: Glenn Ligon: *All Over The Place*. Photo: Thomas Adank

LEFT: *Paris 1924: Sport, Art and the Body*. Photo: Rosie Powell

From the UK debut of a nine-part neon sculpture that shone out on our magnificent portico, to thoughtfully curated, site-specific interventions threaded throughout our galleries, leading contemporary artist Glenn Ligon took over the Museum for *Glenn Ligon: All Over The Place* (20 September 2024 — 2 March 2025), shedding new light on both the Fitzwilliam's historic collection and his own practice. Works of art in a wide range of media, spanning his thirty-five-year career, occupied our spaces, and visitors were invited to consider questions of cultural hybridity, marginalisation, repair and legibility. The exhibition was generously funded by the De Ying Foundation, with additional support from The Ampersand Foundation, the Marlay Group and the Fitzwilliam Museum Development Trust.

**Highly Commended:** Temporary Exhibition of the Year, Museum and Heritage Awards

**‘This exhibition is a defining example of how to bring new relevance to historic collections’**

Review of Glenn Ligon, *The Telegraph*

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## ‘Contains exhibits that skewer the heart’

Review of *Rise Up*, *The Telegraph*

# 489,197

## People visited the Museum in 2024-25

The second in a series of exhibitions examining the impact of transatlantic slavery, *Rise Up: Resistance, Revolution, Abolition* (21 February – 1 June 2025) told the story of the individuals and communities across the Caribbean, Europe and Americas who fought to end the transatlantic slave trade. Spotlighting the work of women and the overlooked roles of Black Georgians and Victorians in Britain, the exhibition featured over 100 works, placing historic works in powerful conversation with contemporary art.

*Rise Up: Resistance, Revolution, Abolition*

Photo (LEFT): Thomas Adank

Photo (ABOVE): Rosie Powell

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ABOVE: *Women in Japanese Prints*.

Photo: Rosie Powell

RIGHT: Jan Davidsz de Heem, *A banquet still life*, Frederick Iseman Art Trust LLC

FAR RIGHT: *Essence and Presence*.  
Photo: Rob Hill



## Displays

Showcasing a rarely-seen selection of works from the Museum's collection, *Women in Japanese Prints* (20 August — 8 December 2024) explored how artists' representation of women changed in a series of prints produced under government censorship in the late 1700s, capturing a shift from the fashionable and erotic to deliberately wholesome, more everyday scenes.

*Picturing Excess: Jan Davidsz de Heem* (3 December 2024 — 13 April 2025) saw the four most monumental still life paintings by the brilliant Dutch artist Jan Davidsz de Heem, painted in the 1600s at the height of the Dutch colonial trade, displayed together for the first time — and used state-of-the-art technology to uncover the dazzling techniques used to create them.

Continuing to celebrate acquisitions for the Museum's evolving collection, this year's edition of *What's New* (17 December 2024 — 23 March 2025) included works by John Varley and Eugène Delacroix given in honour of Jane Munro, the former Keeper of European Paintings, Drawings and Prints who left the Museum in July 2024. *What's New XXL* (16 May — 17 August 2025) followed, bringing together a selection of recently acquired, supersized works on paper by modern and contemporary artists including Lucian Freud, Maggi Hambling, Lubaina Himid and Grayson Perry, exploring their visual roots and influences, and contrasting urban and rural, organic and human-made, old and new.

This year also saw us present *Essence and Presence*, a rehang of our Upper Marlay Gallery designed to create cross-period dialogue between the Museum's collection and newer works. Juxtaposing Renaissance pieces with key 20th-century works, the display demonstrates how Renaissance principles continue to inspire six centuries later, inviting audiences to consider art history not as a linear progression, but as a continuum where past masters still inform bold new visions.

# Research and teaching

Our research continues to evolve by launching ambitious new initiatives and capitalising on developing technologies — as well as embracing interdisciplinary methods and shaping partnerships within the University of Cambridge and beyond.

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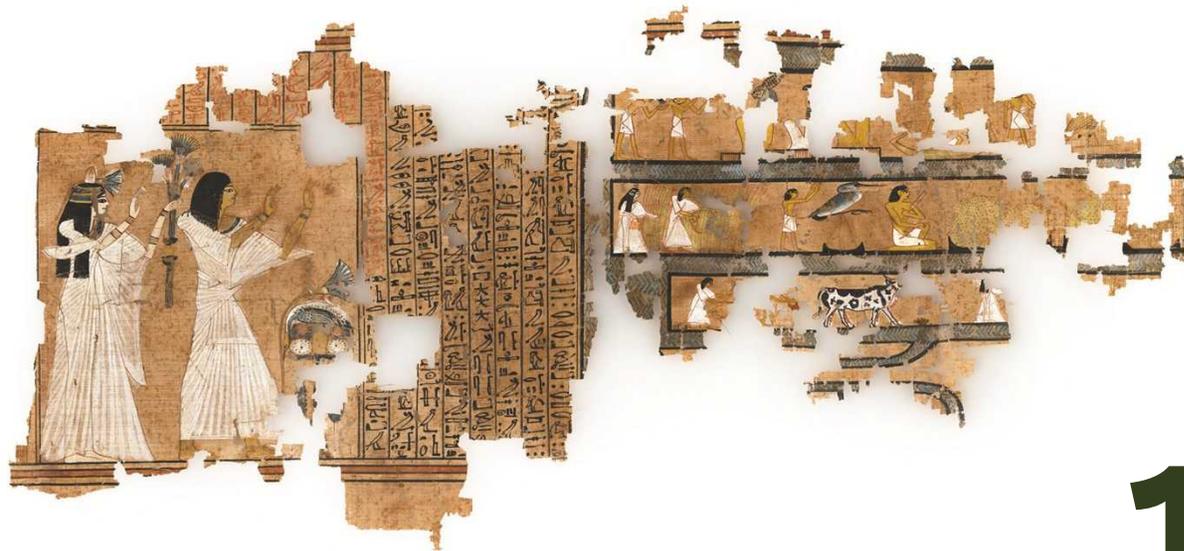
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The Museum's research programme supports the conception and design of our galleries, exhibitions and displays, and collection development. Exploring modes of making, it also embraces practice-based participatory research. From international collaborations that have opened up nuanced conversations across disciplines, to our co-research with communities in and around Cambridge, we are increasing understanding of our collection, surfacing sometimes unheard voices, and developing an understanding of the role objects and art make in shaping our sense of creativity, identity and place.

This year, we have launched new initiatives to address the needs of our communities — including older adults experiencing isolation and families with very young children.

We have played a leadership role in major cross-Cambridge initiatives, notably the

University's Collections-Connections-Communities (CCC) Strategic Research Initiative, which catalyses research in multiple disciplines on our remarkable collections.

The Fitzwilliam was one of six case studies used to develop the AI for Cultural Heritage Hub (ArCH). Led by the Cambridge University Research Library Institute and funded by AI@Cam, this new project is prototyping AI solutions to enhance understanding of, and access to, our collections data, including testing of the potential of AI tools in reconstructing Egyptian *Book of the Dead* papyrus fragments.

Spell for the 'Field of Reeds', Papyrus of Ramose 1290–1278 BCE

**74** Research collaborations

**1,839** Research enquiries about our collection

**49** Higher Education courses supported

**23** Publications

**2,185** Research visits

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## Research

### MATERIALITY

A Cambridge Humanities Research Grant is enabling a partnership between the Fitzwilliam, the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, and museums in Romania to research copper-alloy cast coin copies. The project explores a virtually unknown group of objects — previously misunderstood as forgeries — to understand how communities at the very edge of the Roman Empire introduced monetary innovations to cope with seismic change.

Collaborating with the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Doerner Institute and Alte Pinakothek in Munich and the Toledo Museum of Art, we continued our research into the painting techniques of the brilliant 17th-century Dutch painter, Rachel Ruysch, alongside several other women flower painters from our collection.

Meanwhile, insights drawn from our MA-XRF scanning and technical analysis of still lifes — or 'pronkstillevens' — by Jan Davidsz de Heem were central to our *Picturing Excess* display.

Drawing these research strands together, Professor Erma Hermens, Director of the Hamilton Kerr Institute, was the inaugural Hans Brennikmeyer Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the new Centre for Netherlandish Art at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston in spring 2024.

### GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

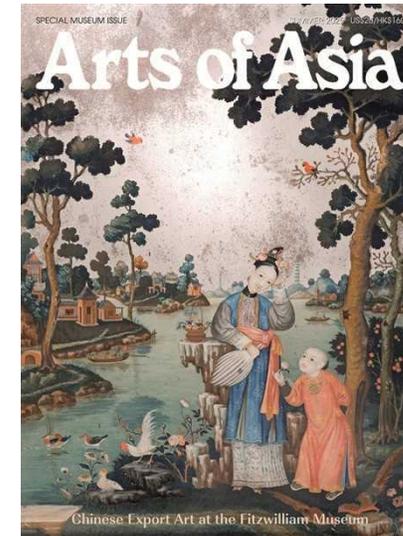
We convened our new Research Advisory Group for the first time in December 2024. We are very grateful to thought-leaders from across museums and universities for advising

on our research programme. The group brings together esteemed colleagues from the School of Advanced Studies, Tate and the University of Leicester in the UK, with those from Harvard University in the United States and Jawaharlal Nehru University in India.

In April 2025, we were thrilled to announce that Dr Marsha Pearce would be joining the Museum for four years, after winning a prestigious British Academy Global Professorship. This is a highly competitive award with only eight positions appointed each year. Exploring how historic museums can be a home — not a house — for Global Majority artists, Dr Pearce's research will support exciting new creative and academic connections between the UK and the Caribbean.

Contributing to the University's Islamic Art at Cambridge project, hosted by Cambridge Visual Culture (CVC) and funded by the Barakat Trust, our Islamic Works on Paper conference and incubation workshop in November 2024 convened students, community partners and researchers from across the UK to investigate the Islamic manuscript collections at the Fitzwilliam Museum and University Library.

This year also saw several milestones in our research into Chinese Export Art, including the publication of a special issue of *Arts of Asia* exploring the material, stylistic and technological exchanges embodied in ceramics, paintings and other art objects produced in the Guangzhou area during the 18th and 19th centuries for export to the wider world.



Finally, the CCC's Palestinian Collections Research Group, founded within the Fitzwilliam, has published blog posts and articles to draw attention to the extensive and under-researched collections from Palestine held across Cambridge and create opportunities for academics and community members to take any findings further.



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Glenn Ligon: *All Over The Place*. Photo: Lewis Ronald

## PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

Our participatory research places lived experience at the heart of our practice. We collaborate with our communities to help shape our programmes, spaces and ways of working across the Museum.

Co-created with local residents, our practitioner research team hosted a family fun day called *The Science of Art*, featuring a pop-up conservation studio, a quiz sheet that hunted out clouds in paintings and the chance to create home-made helmets.

For *Happy Place*, we collaborated with nearly fifty young adults with diverse backgrounds to explore and test a range of museum-based wellbeing interventions.

This pilot project responded to research indicating that one in three young adults in Cambridge are suffering from anxiety or depression — and led to the creation of an 'Overgrown Garden', featuring soft lighting and creative activities. The garden was visited by over 400 people across four days, with all of them reporting improved mood and even joy.

**'It was so relaxing just to stop and sit and focus on one beautiful painting for the full ten minutes. I could actually feel my heart rate slowing down'**

Happy Place participant



Happy Place installation

Working with fifteen families over a six-month period, our Family Welcome Project looked at how to achieve inclusive museum experiences for families with children under three. Findings informed the development of a new guide for making the most of the unique characteristics of the Museum experience for this age group, which is now being adopted by other museums and galleries in the UK and beyond.

Our *Take a Walk in My Shoes* research project with older adults living with non-visible disabilities was re-named *The People's Museum* by its participants, resulting in the co-production of an awareness-raising blog series, an exclusion audit of the Museum, training workshops for colleagues, and an update to our accessibility web page.

Recruiting from traditionally excluded groups through our existing community research partnerships, we formed an Action Forum in the early part of 2025, creating a discussion space for community members to actively shape the future direction of the Museum.

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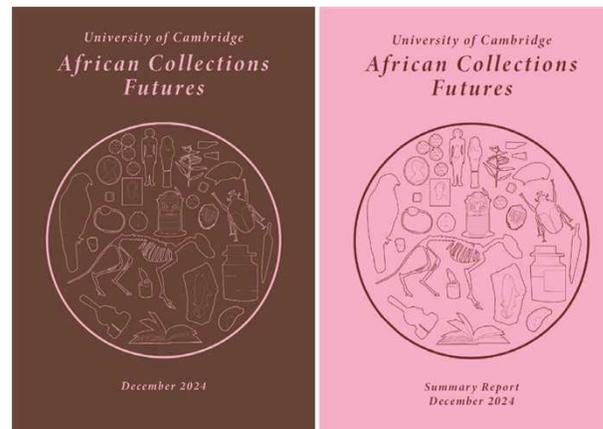
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Hamilton Kerr Institute. Photo: David Valinsky



## IMPACTFUL PARTNERSHIPS

Released in early December 2024, the CCC's pioneering African Collections Futures report gained widespread media coverage, including by the BBC. This report revealed, for the first time, connections across Cambridge's art, anthropology, library, archive, archaeology and natural history collections, exploring collecting practices in the colonial era and the key role played by African experts in their acquisition. The project has been extended following generous support from Research England (HEMG) and the University of Cambridge's Smuts Fund.

Over the course of the year, we hosted four CVC Visiting Research Fellows, who engaged Museum staff, students and our audiences with their work — from a public seminar exploring the ways in which multisensory and social exhibition strategies can restore the agency of audiences, to two talks about creating collaborative books and images.

Our curators have worked with Cambridge historians to contribute to the Arts and

Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded ItalianROSE (Renaissance Objects and Spaces of Encounter) project, co-hosting an ideas-incubation workshop and working on objects and stories to bring global perspectives to the planned redisplay of our Courtauld Gallery with its outstanding Italian Renaissance works of art.

In May 2025, research in Cambridge into camouflage was substantially progressed by the three-day Disguise and Deception: New Perspectives on Human and Non-Human Animal Camouflage and Mimicry workshop, a collaboration between the Cultures of Camouflage research group and CVC.

## Teaching

Our AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Programme Collections and Communities in the East of England, one of the major initiatives of CCC, welcomed its first four students in October 2024 — with six more doctoral projects due to start in October 2025. The projects range from contextualising Roman coinage from Camulodunum to an examination of changing coastal livelihoods, with key partners including the University of Edinburgh, the University of Leeds and Anglia Ruskin University.

The Hamilton Kerr Institute (HKI) launched its inaugural Masters in Easel Painting Conservation programme this year, welcoming three new students to the first cohort. The conservation and science teams from the HKI and the Fitzwilliam delivered an ambitious theoretical curriculum, alongside hands-on reconstructions and preventive conservation workshops, all of which earned enthusiastic feedback from our students. The cohort has now embarked on their second year: conserving a curated selection of paintings from the Fitzwilliam Museum's collection.

# Our collection

Our collection is evolving in exciting ways. Vital cataloguing and conservation ensures the future of the Museum's collection of over half a million artworks — with strategic acquisitions and loans extending its range and reach.

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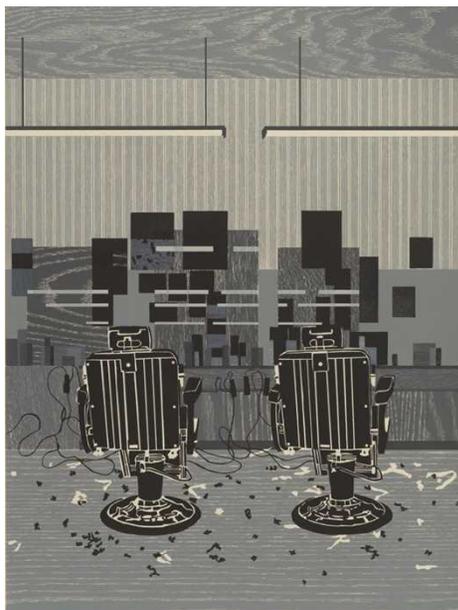
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Whether taking place behind scenes or gaining our audience's attention in our exhibitions and displays, conservation represents a crucial strand of activity at the Fitzwilliam, preserving historic works and uncovering new insights into artistic techniques through the use of science and technology.

By conserving and cataloguing the art and objects we care for, we are able both to ensure their future and to open up new avenues for research. And by acquiring new works that highlight overlooked narratives, we are telling a larger and truer story of the past than ever before.



## New acquisitions

Over the past year, we have continued with the thoughtful expansion of our collection, building on areas of strength, acquiring works by previously under-represented artists, and placing contemporary pieces in dialogue with our historic art and artefacts.

By seeking out works, old and new, that complement what we already have, we have delved deeper into artists' practices. Through the acquisition of Hurvin Anderson's woodcut screenprint *Barbershop*, for example, now paired with the artist's *Paradise* print acquired in 2016, we are better able to understand his continuing exploration of this crucial setting.

The acquisition of a group of nine maquettes by Atta Kwami added to our group of prints by this leading Ghanaian artist. *The Storm is What We Call Progress 1 and 2*, figurative frescoes by Hannah Quinlan and Rosie Hastings, widen the Museum's representation of queer and women artists, and Adham Faramawy's *Martha*, a painting of the last passenger pigeon in the world, brought the first work by a living Egyptian artist to our collection.

RIGHT: Atta Kwami, *Dusiadu (Everytown) Maquettes*, 2020  
© 2025 Estate of Atta Kwami.  
All Rights Reserved, DACS

ABOVE, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Hurvin Anderson, *Barbershop*, 2010 © Hurvin Anderson.  
All Rights Reserved, DACS

Hannah Quinlan & Rosie Hastings, *The Storm is what we call progress 1 and 2*, 2024  
© Courtesy of the Artists and Arcadia Missa, London

Adham Faramawy, *Martha*, 2023. © Adham Faramawy



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ABOVE: Edme-Adolphe Fontaine, *Studio Interior*, 1878

RIGHT: Balraj Khanna, *A grasshopper's eye view*, 1966 © Estate of Balraj Khanna. All rights reserved, DACS/DACS Images

We always look to shed new light on the historic works we present and care for. A watercolour 'portrait' by Ali Kazim, featuring his exquisite brushwork, connects contemporary Pakistani art with our historic miniature paintings from the Indian subcontinent. Made possible through the generous support of Michael Barclay, *Studio Interior* by Edme-Adolphe Fontaine joined a rich group of Fitzwilliam Museum paintings that depict artists at work, deepening our exploration of creative techniques and processes.



*A Grasshopper's Eye View* by Balraj Khanna, an image of the Lake District, one of the last available early works by the artist, expands our great collection of European landscapes — adding, literally and figuratively, a new point of view.

This year's acquisitions were also shaped by our research and exhibition programmes, helping us tell urgent, wide-ranging stories. For *Rise Up*, we acquired two Jamaican banknotes featuring imagined portraits of key Jamaican revolutionaries who died in the fight for freedom — Nanny of the Maroons, who led the Jamaican Windward Maroons in the 1700s, and Sam Sharpe, an enslaved Baptist leader whose peaceful protest against working conditions on British colonial plantations resulted in his capture and hanging.

And we are deeply proud that our growing reputation for collecting the contemporary has grown to the point where we are beginning to receive philanthropic support for acquisitions. *Chrysanthemums*, a striking work by the internationally acclaimed artist Jennifer Packer, is now displayed to dazzling effect in our Flowers Gallery thanks to the support of Kemal Has and Tala Cingillioglu.

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Photo: Lewis Ronald

## Treatments

- A permanent, salon-style hang in the Flowers Gallery for *Glenn Ligon* was made possible by treatments to seventy-three flower paintings
- We conserved several new acquisitions to the Museum's collection — including works by Henry Moore, Lucian Freud and Claudette Johnson
- Our conservation of seventy-six German Master prints and ninety-three Martin Schongauer engravings addressed a backlog of items urgently needing treatment
- In collaboration with researchers from the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, we used kosher materials to repair a damaged Hebrew *Book of Esther* scroll housed in a beautiful silver tube

## Conservation and heritage science

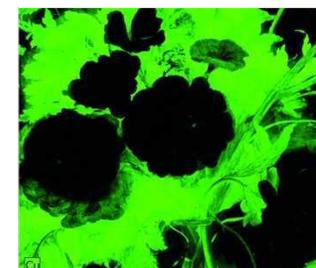
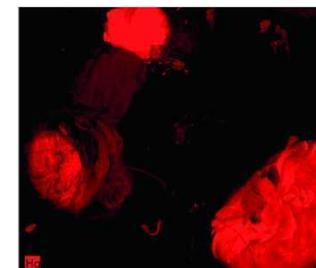
Crucial work by our conservation and heritage science teams takes place behind the scenes. However, *Picturing Excess* presented new findings from the MA-XRF scanning and technical analysis of two magnificent paintings by Jan Davidsz de Heem. Preparation for our 2025-26 *Made in Ancient Egypt* exhibition included conservation and analysis of a number of complex objects such as a Ptah Osiris miniature painted wooden coffin, building on years of research by the Fitzwilliam team.

In preparation for a major exhibition in 2027, we further developed our Constable-Lucas Project, an exploration of the working relationship between John Constable and his engraver David Lucas, generously funded by David Thomson: 164 prints were condition-assessed, twenty-eight conserved and thirty-two fully documented.

## Cataloguing projects and documentation

Colleagues across the collections department worked to catalogue works that form part of the major Watercolour World digitisation project — including photography of over 4,600 British drawings and more than 1,100 topographical drawings from the Netherlands.

In January 2025, we digitised part of the Colourmen archive, producing nearly 14,000 images and fully documenting thirty-six complete volumes. Significant progress was also made on cataloguing the Museum's 18th- and 19th-century literary and artistic archives, including the completion of one of our most extensive and miscellaneous archival collections, the Perceval Bequest.



These scans of De Heem's *Flowers in a Glass Vase* reveal the systematic painting technique that enabled such meticulous realism

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Virgin and Child with Saints and the Annunciation. C.1345-1350

## The library

This year saw the Museum's reference library relocated to the historic Founders Library, giving our public access to one of the Museum's most inspiring spaces for the first time. As we work towards a revitalised library service, the library team hosted two user workshops, the outcomes of which will inform our new vision.

## Major loans

Our major loans extend the reach of our collection beyond the Museum, connecting global audiences with exceptional objects through high-profile exhibitions.

A rare and fragile 14th-century Sieneese glass painted panel became a key object in *Siena: The Rise of Painting, 1300-1350* at the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the National Gallery, London in one of our most significant loans of 2024-25. Other major international exhibitions that we supported included *Lucie Rie: The Adventure of Pottery* at the CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art Denmark, Middelfart, *Leonardo — Dürer* at the Albertina Museum, Vienna, and *Veronica Ryan: Unruly Objects* at the Pulitzer Art Foundation, St Louis.

We also made other major loans to UK exhibitions, including *The Great Mughals: Art, Architecture and Opulence* at the V&A, London, *Vanessa Bell: A World of Form and Colour* at MK Gallery, Milton Keynes, *Barbara Walker: Being Here* at the Whitworth, Manchester and the Arnolfini, Bristol, and *Can the Seas Survive Us?* at the Sainsbury Centre, Norwich.

# 74

objects loaned through

# 33

loan agreements with

# 29

institutions in

# 9

countries

# Public programmes

A marked evolution in the Museum's approach to public programming saw us move away from the traditional formats we have previously used, towards collaborative, community-centered experiences.

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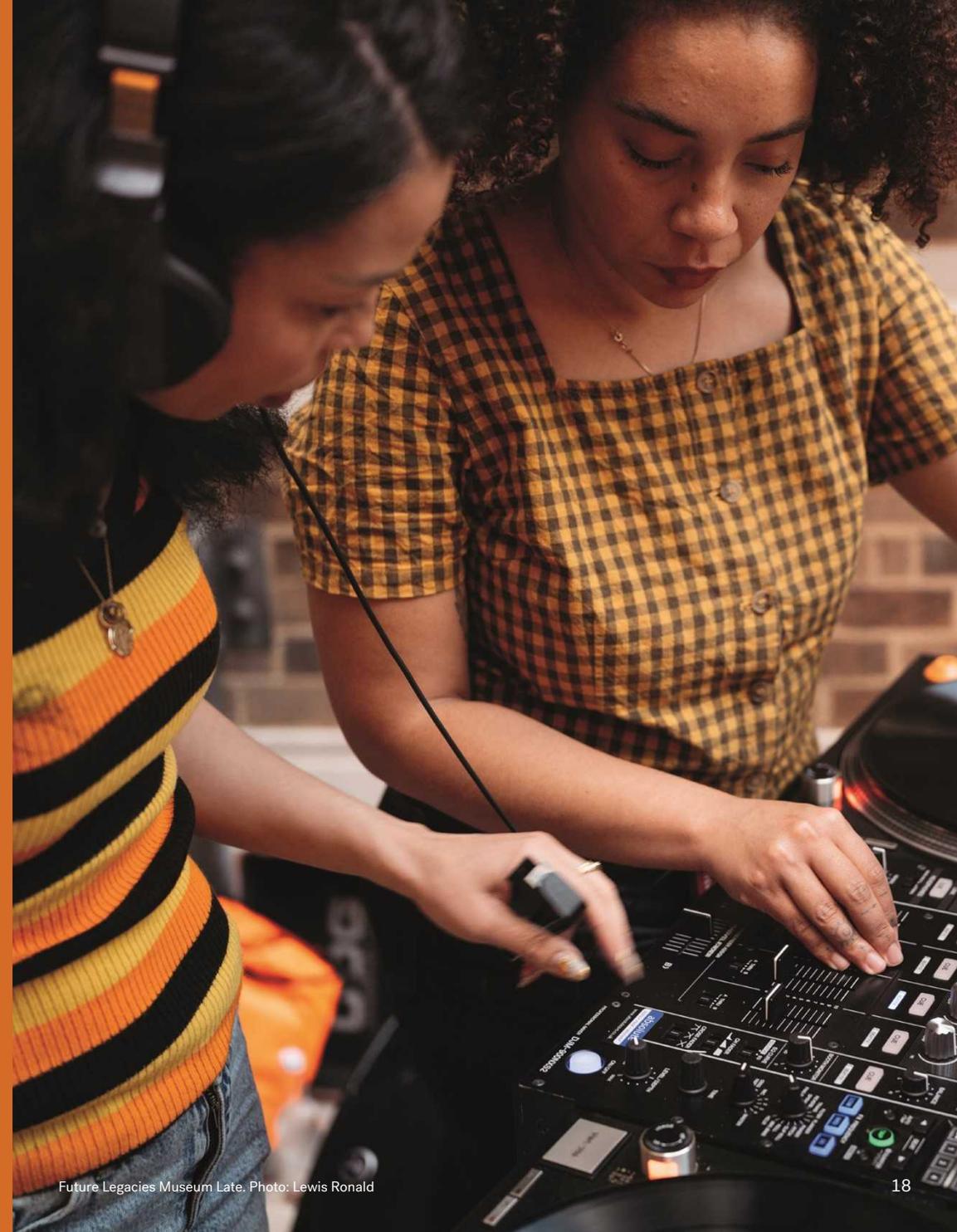
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Museum Late entrance. Photo: Lewis Ronald

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### This year, we delivered

**37** public events,  
including

**15** talks and  
tours

**8** workshops and  
experiential days and

**3** charity  
partnership events

---

### And we welcomed

**1,625**

visitors to our Museum Lates

---

Cementing the Fitzwilliam's role as an open, responsive and relevant space for our whole community, we have significantly expanded our programme of Museum Lates, workshops, talks and collaborative projects. Bringing together art, performance, music, digital technology and discussion, this year's public programme embraced more participatory and socially-engaged approaches — acting as an experimental laboratory for inclusive cultural engagement.

### Museum Lates

Now becoming firmly established as a fixture on the social calendar, our Museum Lates embraced ever more creative approaches to inviting people to the Fitzwilliam. Exploring ideas of the body, sport, gender and representation, our Paris 1924 Late saw 590 visitors racing to victory on exercise bikes, taking part in VR and motion-capture workshops, and sketching javelin-bearing models for Olympic-themed life drawing.

Our Glenn Ligon Late, co-curated with the Cambridge School of Visual and Performing Arts and the Cambridge Antiracism Forum, foregrounded Black feminist and LGBTQ+ voices, with students, designers, artists and thinkers taking inspiration from the exhibition to present a fashion runway, participatory workshops and the Museum's first ever sound bath. Attended by over 700 people, the event also saw a huge, collaborative collage being created throughout the evening.

Offering an interdisciplinary platform for Black artists, writers and thinkers, the programme for our Future Legacies Late was inspired by *Rise Up: Resistance, Revolution, Abolition* — bringing together an ambient soundscape performance by afroterm, a film screening and discussion, wide-ranging conversation and more.

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### Expanding on our exhibitions

Each year, our public programme gives audiences new and varied insights into the subjects and themes of our main exhibitions. For *Glenn Ligon*, highlights included a curator-led discussion exploring fresh perspectives on the Museum's collection, a creative writing workshop giving visitors the chance to write their own museum texts and a digital workshop that highlighted issues surrounding gender, race and power.

For *Rise Up*, we organised events ranging from a series of Listening Salons examining themes of resistance and the legacies of transatlantic enslavement, to our Meet the Artist series, which gave audiences an opportunity to hear directly from some of the artists featured.

### New initiatives

This year saw the launch of Critical Co-Labs, a series of conversations between the Fitzwilliam's staff and invited guests — offering new perspectives on the Museum's collection through timely, cross-disciplinary dialogue. Highlights included an evening with acclaimed writers Philip Hoare and Olivia Laing, exploring William Blake and his artistic legacy through a contemporary lens.

Museums for Life: Connecting Nature and Heritage piloted two eight-week creative programmes for older adults living with chronic health conditions, loneliness, or people who had not previously felt at home in the Museum. Emphasising social connectedness through collection-inspired creative activities, participants created collaborative artworks and formed independent WhatsApp groups for networking that will continue.

### 'The best art course I've ever been on. For me it has been life-changing'

Museums for Life: Connecting Nature and Heritage participant

In July 2025, we launched Future Legacies, an online platform bringing together conversations, films and creative responses from artists, thinkers, and community partners exploring the idea of the Black Atlantic and its contemporary resonances — designed to continue the discussions sparked by our *Black Atlantic* and *Rise Up* exhibitions.

### Other highlights

Our team supported University of Cambridge Museums in delivering wellbeing workshops for Romsey Mill's Young Parents Programme, culminating in a display of participants' work and a celebratory launch event at the Museum.

Six young artists joined us to exhibit work and respond to the Museum's collection as part of a new collaboration with Cambridge Open Studios — welcoming over 400 visitors to our Creative Studio across two weekends.

We have shifted our approach to live music, now curating performances in dialogue with our collections and exhibitions. This new approach saw, for example, excerpts from Benjamin Britten's opera *Death in Venice* set in front of the Museum's Venetian art collection — part of an evening looking at the consequences of climate change on this extraordinary, historic city.



# Learning programmes

By launching a new Play Pavilion alongside a packed roster of schools, family and community collaborations, we introduced new ways to welcome local people to the Museum.

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In 2024-25,  
we engaged with

**12,016**

school children

**1,872**

teachers and

**6,469**

participants across our  
families and early-years  
programme

Designed to welcome everyone to the Museum, to create a wide range of learning opportunities and to share our research and expertise, our learning programmes encompass school visits, skills development, early-years and family activities, and work with and for our local communities. From providing support during the summer holidays to offering transport bursaries to schools, we set out to make a real difference to those who need it most.

### Schools

This year, we delivered 305 museum-led sessions and twenty-two outreach sessions in our busiest period for school engagements since the pandemic. Over the spring and summer terms, we awarded thirty-two transport bursaries to schools looking to visit the Museum, which proved transformative in supporting visits from pupils living in areas of deprivation.

**'Our favourite trip of the year. Children still talk about it after with joy in their eyes'**

Harriet French, Teacher, Woodhall Primary, Sudbury

A new, targeted collaboration between the Fitzwilliam and The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust saw us lending our expertise in work with very young children to two days of Continuing Professional Development at the Museum, focused on the Early Years Foundation Stage. Involving seven schools from Fenland and Peterborough, where there are significant barriers to engagement with arts and culture, this session was followed by four online seminars to support teachers in embedding their learning in the classroom.



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## Engaging with our collections

For Earthlings, we collaborated with Studio Futurall and Soham Village College to explore how the Museum's historic collections can be used to engage with concepts such as the 'polycrisis' (multiple, interconnected crises) when thinking about the climate emergency. Supported by the Marlay Group Fund, this project saw students working with curators and climate specialists to imagine future societies, with design agency Studio Futurall designing a digital toolkit to help museums and cultural spaces engage the public in complex conversations about the climate crisis and broader societal change.

## Families and early years

We saw a happy increase in visits from local families in August as a result of the Play Pavilion — our free, daily sensory play sessions taking place in a tent pitched on our front lawns. Inspired by our *Paris 1924* exhibition, and in collaboration with the Museum of Classical Archeology, the Play Pavilion featured sport- and art-led activities, with the overall concept coming from the artist and design collective Play Build Play.

Partnerships with Cambridge United FC, Active Play and Cambridge City Council saw us offer even more for families, supporting our dynamic public health and wellbeing agendas. We welcomed 3,412 visitors (1,601 adults and 1,766 children) throughout the month. Our evaluation established that the Play Pavilion encouraged repeat visits, creating a welcoming space for families, and fostering social connections.

Play Build Play also delivered monthly sessions for under-fives at the Museum — an important ingredient in our development of artist-led 'loose parts' approaches. Play Make Saturdays welcomed children of primary school age to discover art materials and techniques in our Creative Studio throughout the year. And, during the February half term, our annual Twilight at the Museum event used *Glenn Ligon: All Over The Place* as inspiration for a range of family activities, welcoming 1,100 visitors to the Museum.



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**'I see it as an opportunity to make a change in the world'**

Femi, @atlantic Xplorer



## Supporting our communities

Committed to strengthening our connections with young people in Cambridge and the region, we supported the @atlantic Xplorers youth collective from Soham Village College to develop a dedicated Reflection Space for our visitors to *Rise Up* — designed to support audiences with their intellectual and emotional responses to the themes and subject matter of this powerful but sometimes distressing exhibition. Building on our relationship with this cohort, first formed as part of our UKRI-funded Future/Power project in 2023, this was the first time that the Museum has worked with young people in this way.

Other activities included the return of our Holiday Activities and Food scheme during the Easter and Summer holidays. Welcoming children in receipt of school meals to take part in art activities, explore our galleries and enjoy nutritious meals provided by our Courtyard Café, this scheme is generously funded by Cambridge City Council.

We also worked with 570 students from the nearby towns of March and Wisbech as a crucial element in our AstraZeneca-funded pilot phase of Place to Place, a collaboration with artist Sa'adiyah Khan and three Fenland schools around the theme of migration.



ABOVE: Photo: Lewis Ronald  
LEFT AND FAR LEFT:  
Saturday social event with  
@atlantic Xplorers

# Audiences and engagement

High-profile campaigns, a successful Bloomberg Digital Accelerator Fund application and some significant social media milestones were the highlights of our audience-building activities this year.

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We have sought both to deepen our connections with our existing audiences and to engage those who we are new to the Fitzwilliam through targeted marketing and new creative collaborations — helping us to reach record-breaking visitor figures for the second year running. By prioritising partnerships, representation and accessibility in our approach to social media, we have sustained growth across all our platforms — with innovative content helping to put our incredible permanent collection into the spotlight.

And, as the Museum prepared to roll out paid entry to our major temporary exhibitions for the first time, our team worked behind the scenes to build audience awareness — from stakeholder engagement, campaign development, and substantial website enhancements, to the relaunch of our long-established Friends scheme and launch of Fitz List, our new free digital scheme for young people and students.

## Marketing and communications

Our comprehensive marketing campaign drew 56,807 visitors over the fifteen weeks of *Paris 1924*. We also secured excellent press coverage, with a five-star rating in *The Observer* featuring among many positive reviews in national publications. Our billboards targeted commuters and strategically placed lamppost banners across the city attracted a local audience. We were among the first advertisers to place perimeter ads on Cambridge United Football Club's new pitch-side LED screens, promoting awareness of the exhibition to people already engaged and interested in sport, but not necessarily with art.

For *Glenn Ligon*, we generated extensive coverage, with critical acclaim in the *Guardian*,

*The Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The Financial Times*, *Frieze*, BBC Front Row and many more. Among the most impactful of our targeted marketing placements were adverts in *ArtReview* (reaching 210,000 readers) and the *Guardian's Saturday* magazine (reaching 182,586 readers), while our digital advertising through external channels reached over 1,400,000 people.



Photos:  
Thomas Adank

To promote *Rise Up*, our multi-channel campaign prioritised strong visibility in London and across prominent sites in Cambridge, while achieving impactful press placements in national publications, including the *Guardian* and *The Voice*. Our audience evaluation saw visitors to the exhibition reporting meaningful connections to its themes and an enhanced understanding of the Museum's role in addressing historic legacies. We will use these outcomes to shape our future exhibitions and to enhance audience engagement.

We were delighted to be shortlisted for Marketing and Communications Campaign of the Year at the Museums + Heritage Awards in recognition of this work and even more to have helped generate a record-breaking 489,197 visitors to the Museum.



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LEFT: Alayo Akinkugbe.  
Photo: Rosie Powell

ABOVE: Jake Wood for  
*Paris 1924*. Photo: Storya



## Digital partnerships and content commissions

Our following on social media continues to grow, and in July 2025 we surpassed 60,000 followers on Instagram. This period also saw remarkable growth on our TikTok channel, following its launch in June 2024, with a mixture of bespoke content and videos repurposed from format-compatible channels.

Carefully chosen collaborations and partnerships underpinned our digital content strategy this year, yielding gratifying results. Our commission of a filmed performance from queer artist and bodybuilder Jake Wood in response to *Paris 1924* was selected for screening at the Aesthetica Short Film Festival 2025 and shown at the Bradford Queer Film Festival — significantly raising the Museum's profile.

Our most successful Instagram post was writer, curator and art historian Alayo Akinkugbe's video tour of *Glenn Ligon*, posted collaboratively on Akinkugbe's hugely successful @ABlackHistoryOfArt channel, which received 25,000 views. We also spotted an up-and-coming name in the writer, cook and *Vogue* contributing editor Slutty Cheff. Since our collaboration on three short films exploring artworks within our *Picturing Excess* display, Slutty Cheff has launched a *Sunday Times*

bestselling book, been profiled by the *Financial Times*, and worked with a number of high-profile brands.

In March, we drew upon creative duo Adwoa and Solomon's following of nearly 300,000 people through their @adeche.atelier account for a collaborative campaign to promote *Rise Up*. Informed by their knowledge of African mythology, folklore, culture and art, the content series saw one carousel alone attracting over 6,000 likes and more than sixty comments.

We used a series of animations commissioned from motion design studio Tomfoolery to highlight works in our permanent collection — they ranged from the story of The Three Living and the Three Dead from the *Book of Hours* at Halloween to a newly acquired drawing of Sylvia Pankhurst on International Women's Day.

## Website developments

Our most significant web development activity took place in preparation for the launch of paid tickets for our 2025-26 *Made in Ancient Egypt* exhibition. A redesign of key pages across the site was central to this crucial commercial moment for the Museum, achieving a streamlined user experience, enhanced discoverability as well as the optimisation of ticket booking and membership pathways.

Building on our work around improving accessibility across the Museum's website, we completed a second accessibility audit, working with Zoonou for testing, and with Studio 24 for the completion of work to meet the latest accessibility regulations.

Looking ahead, our submission of a successful final project proposal to the Bloomberg Digital Accelerator Fund is set to unlock further website improvements through a transformational donation that we will use to maximise the power of the website.

# Masterplan

The Museum's Masterplan team has delivered the relocation of the Hamilton Kerr Institute and developed a refreshed framework for improving our building that will guide prioritisation.

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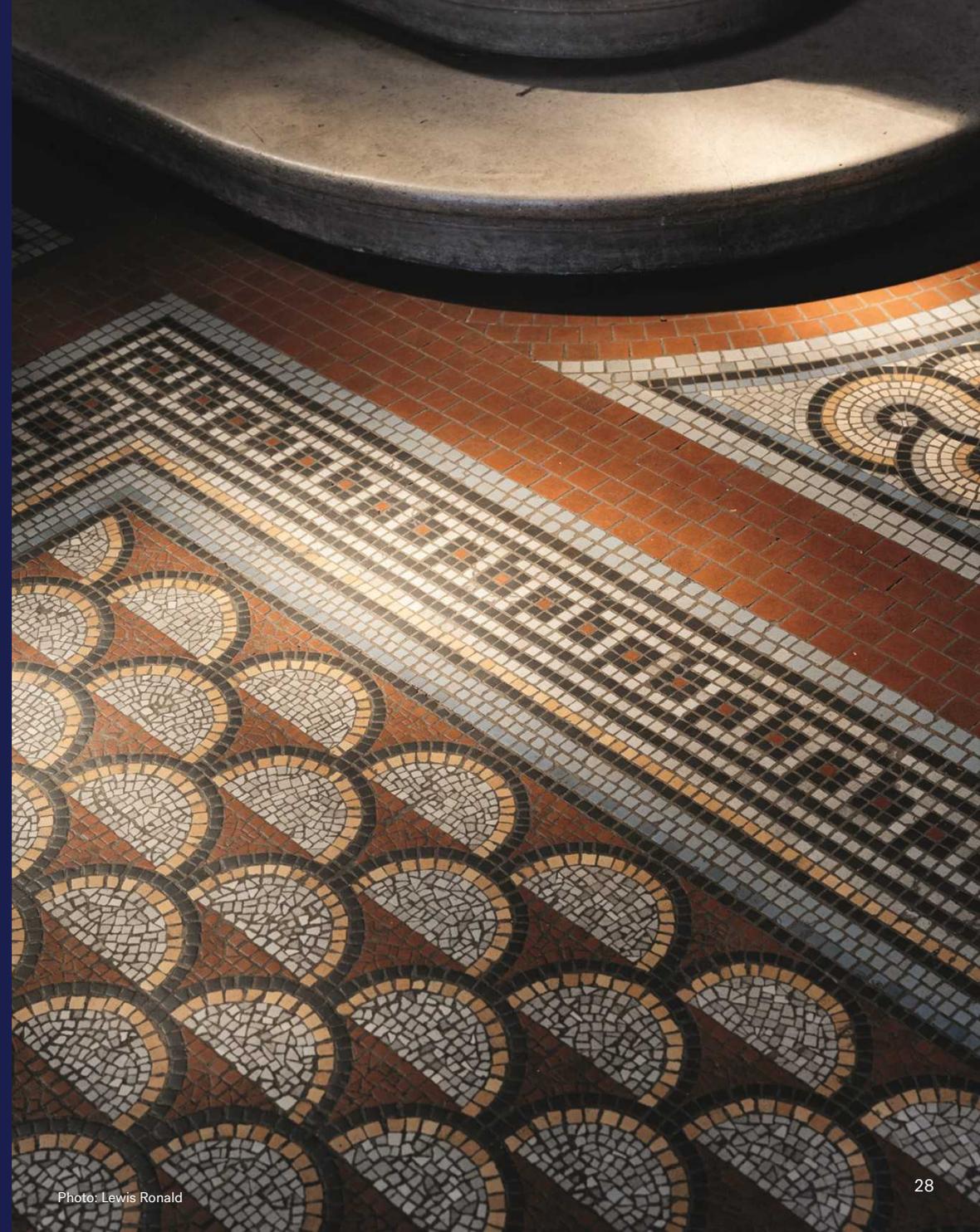
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Our vision for 'a Fitz for the future' will open up access to the Museum for new audiences, reimagine our spaces for visitors, and transform the ways our collections and programme are experienced.

This year, we have reached a significant milestone in the relocation of the Hamilton Kerr Institute (HKI) from the outlying village of Whittlesford to the former Cambridge University Press and Assessment (CUPA) building in central Cambridge. The first phase of this move gave the new HKI Master's programme in painting conservation an exciting new location.

### A refreshed framework

Sustainability has been a guiding light for our Masterplan — from reducing waste and emissions to protecting the environment. Our refreshed Masterplan framework follows the principle of 'using what we have better', and we have reviewed our spaces to rethink the ways we will use them in the future, whether by creating new galleries or new community and learning spaces.



### Reuse in action

In line with our refreshed Masterplan framework and ongoing ambition to create new and improved spaces for visitors, we co-created a public Reflection Space for our *Rise Up: Resistance, Revolution, Abolition* exhibition with our @atlantic Xplorers youth collective — repurposing the Museum's former Reference Library.



ABOVE: HKI University Printing House. Photo: David Valinsky

RIGHT: *Rise Up* Reflection Space. Photo: Thomas Adank

# Commercial activity

We have introduced new initiatives and reinforced successful income streams to safeguard the future of the Museum.

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Over the past twelve months, our focus has been on the transition to being fully financially sustainable to ensure the Fitzwilliam's transformative work for years to come. Our successful application to the Fidelity Foundation brought in significant and generous investment, which will underpin key initiatives within our new Business Plan — from implementing ticketing at the Museum, to a newly-created Head of Commercial role.

Building on work over the past year to refresh and revitalise our Friends scheme, we will next focus on managing the Museum's portfolio of existing and prospective Patrons, who play such a vital role in the growth of philanthropic support for the Fitzwilliam. We will also be developing new tiers to sit within our existing patron scheme, the Marlay Group. With the support of the University of Cambridge, we will refresh the Museum's shop and further enhance the courtyard atrium to use for events. In all these ways, we have taken huge steps towards a financially secure future.

### New paid-for exhibitions

As part of this new commercial income strategy, we worked towards charging for entry to our exhibitions for the first time — introducing another vital income stream and bringing the Museum in line with most other cultural organisations. This change was underpinned by careful research, as well as by sector and local benchmarking, and we have been able to include significant concessions into the pricing structure.

Allowing us to continue staging exhibitions of both scale and importance, while keeping access to our permanent galleries, displays and collection free, this development coincided with the launch of a refreshed membership package — giving Friends the

# 41

events

# £200,000

in revenue

# 2,226

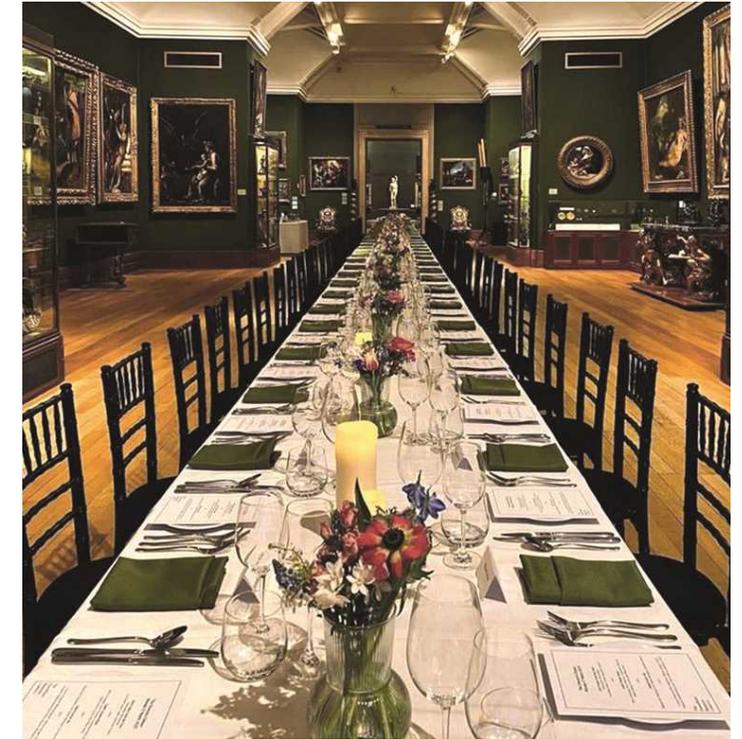
guests

ability to visit paid-for exhibitions for free as often as they like — and the debut of Fitz List, our new digital scheme providing young people and students free and discounted tickets as well as access to exclusive digital content.

This year also saw the implementation of a charge for general admission groups of over ten people, a new income stream that generated over £50,000 within the year, and an initiative that has since been widely adopted across the University of Cambridge Museums.

### Venue hire

From opening the Museum early for a marriage proposal in our Gallery 5 with the Fitzwilliam's first ever engagement package, to AstraZeneca's International Regulatory Summit Gala Dinner in the Courtyard, complete with singing waiters, events and gallery hires remained a significant source of income across the course of the year — and the source of consistently positive feedback from clients.



**‘From start to finish,  
the Fitzwilliam  
Museum was simply  
the perfect setting  
for our event’**

AstraZeneca,  
International Regulatory Summit Gala Dinner

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Photo: Lewis Ronald

## Conservation revenue

Our Shared Conservation Service completed its second year of trading, achieving our target of supporting the full cost of 1.4FTE conservator salaries. We established the first permanent location for conservation work at the newly relocated Hamilton Kerr Institute in the former Cambridge University Press and Assessment building.

Income generated through paintings conservation, scientific analytical services, the Shared Conservation Services and our ongoing contract with Trinity College for manuscripts conservation supports the work of the whole Conservation and Science Division, including research, teaching and care for the Museum's globally significant collections.

## Shop

A run of thirty limited edition Glenn Ligon prints, signed by the artist, sold out in the shop — proving a successful initiative for the Museum in celebrating *Glenn Ligon: All Over The Place*. We also developed a *Rise Up* product range of souvenirs and gifts using contemporary art from the exhibition — including cushion covers made for us exclusively by textile designer and weaver Leonie Edmead. Our product development increasingly focused on working with artists and artisans to create bespoke products that are inspired by the permanent collection.



Limited edition print, *Untitled*.  
© Glenn Ligon. Courtesy the artist, Hauser & Wirth, New York, Regen Projects, Los Angeles, Thomas Dane Gallery, London, and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

# People and culture

This year, our focus has been on embedding a workplace culture that supports our staff and our strategic priorities.

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Photo: Thomas Adank

## ‘Our highlight was an incredible young man working at the museum with such passion, talent and knowledge’

Visitor to the Fitzwilliam Museum

Our Museum-wide Working Together Agreement, co-produced with staff from across the Museum, identified the set of internal values, behaviours and professional expectations that now guide the ways in which we want to work together. Supported by the community consultancy taproot, the agreement was launched in August 2024.

Over the past twelve months, we have introduced initiatives to embed this agreement, seeking ways to strengthen collaboration, support inclusive and value-led behaviours, and foster a working environment that enables staff to thrive and contribute to our strategic priorities.

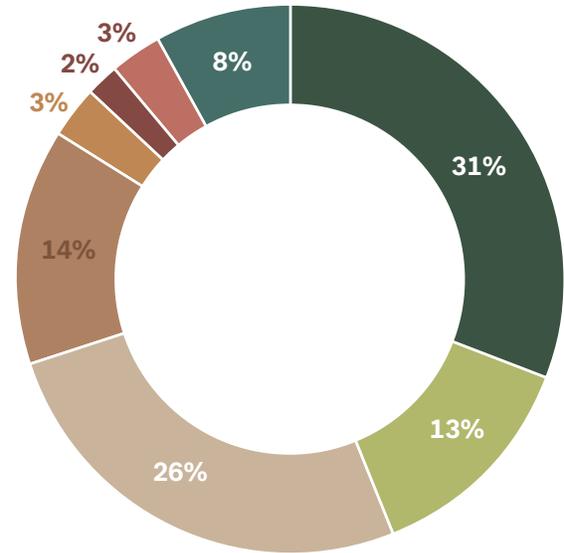
These have included workshops to support implementation, a refreshed Staff Review and Development (SRD) process based on the agreement's recommendations, and a new internally-delivered SRD workshop, offering tools to help managers and staff get the most from our annual reviews. We also re-ran our employee engagement survey, the results of which will inform next steps and serve as a review framework for the Working Together Agreement.

Alongside this work, and in preparation for the opening of *Rise Up: Resistance, Revolution, Abolition*, all staff were invited to attend an anti-racist practice training and reflection session led by EDI specialist Jenny Williams of the Take the Space consultancy. Supporting our teams to embed Equity, Belonging and Representation activities and KPIs into our business plan, Williams is using feedback and reflections from these sessions to shape long-term practice at the Museum.

# Income and expenditure

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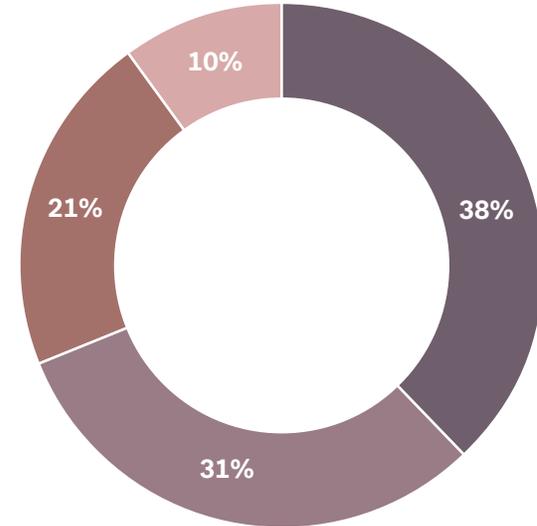
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### 2024-25 Income

### % of total income

	University of Cambridge	£3.7m	31%
	Research England HEMG	£1.5m	13%
	Investment income	£3.1m	26%
	Philanthropy and sponsorship	£1.7m	14%
	Research grants	£0.3m	3%
	Membership, friends and Marlay Group	£0.2m	2%
	Other, incl. M&G Tax Relief	£0.4m	3%
	Earned income	£1.0m	8%



### 2024-25 Expenditure

	Inspiring through learning, engagement, exhibitions and visitor experience
	Care of collections and convening and conducting world-class research projects
	Infrastructure and income generation
	Reimagining our historic community spaces and diversifying our collections

# Supporters and thanks

Thank you to the individuals, trusts, foundations and organisations whose generous support in 2024–25 made our work possible. Our host organisation, the extraordinary University of Cambridge of which we are such a proud constituent, provides vital contributions to the funding of our buildings, programmes and staff salaries. We remain enormously grateful to our main funding partner UKRI Research England through their Higher Education Museums and Galleries and Collections Fund. The contributions of the Marlay Group and the Friends of the Fitzwilliam Museum support our core activities.

Donations of £1,000 and above, not including works of art, are listed alphabetically below and we also thank those who wish to remain anonymous:

The Ann D Foundation  
AstraZeneca  
Mr Michael Barclay  
Mr John Beerbower  
Cambridge Humanities Research Grants  
Charlotte Bonham-Carter Charitable Trust  
David and Molly Lowell Borthwick  
The Deborah Loeb Brice Foundation  
Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties  
Conal Shields Fund  
Peter and Christina Dawson  
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Adam Glinsman  
Nicholas and Judith Goodison's Charitable Settlement  
Lady Goodison  
Kemal Has and Tala Cingillioglu  
Hauser & Wirth  
Legacy gift of Rosslyn Hill  
Isaac Newton Trust  
The James and Lucilla Joll Charitable Trust  
Mr Christopher H Jeeps  
Mr Roger and Mrs Jill Jenyns  
The John R. Murray Charitable Trust  
The Leche Trust  
Marie-Louise von Motesiczky Charitable Trust  
James Marrow and Emily Rose

Mindsets + Missions from the Museums Association  
Mrs Haris Moundrea  
Mrs Nigel Pye  
Research England Participatory Research Fund  
Research England Enhancing Research Culture Fund  
Research England Higher Education Innovation Funding  
De Reus Foundation  
The Rick Mather David Scrase Foundation  
Rothschild Foundation  
Tauck Ritzau Innovative Philanthropy  
Thomas Dane Gallery  
Trinity College Cambridge

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Mr Ian and Mrs Phyllida Barby

Mr Nicholas Baring

Mr Timothy and Mrs Philippa Barker

Mr Thomas and Mrs Gabriel Bartlam

Mr William Bevan

Mr Charles and Mrs Leonie Booth-Clibborn

Mr Robert and Mrs Sarah Bradfield

Mr James and Mrs Deborah Loeb Brice

Mrs Annabel Bridgewater

Mr Shaun and Mrs Elizabeth Browne

Mrs Angela Busch

Professor Paul Cartledge and

Ms Judith Portrait OBE

Mr Robert and Mrs Charlotte Carter

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Ruth Cornett

Mr John and Mrs Jennifer Crompton

Mr William and Mrs Jeannie Dawkins

Mr Peter and Mrs Christina Dawson

Mrs Emilie De Pauw and Mr Nicolas

D'leteren

Ms Samantha de Reus and Mr Felix  
Zhang

Lady de Rothschild

Sir Richard and Lady Dearlove

Ms Shawn M Donnelley and Professor  
Christopher M Kelly

Sir Hugh and Lady Duberly

Mr David and Mrs Sarah Eastwood

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## **The Fitzwilliam Museum Annual Review 2024-25**

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