



WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

Art Film Series with Harrogate Film Society at the Odeon

Last autumn we joined forces with Harrogate Film Society (HFS) to show at the Odeon three films about female artists. Paula Russell from the Friends committee introduced each film to mixed audiences made up of HFS members and Mercer Friends. We had great feedback and will run another collaboration with HFS this year – **see Friends events coming up in 2026.**

Kusama: Infinity offered a compelling account of Yayoi Kusama's life and work, tracing her journey from Japan to the New York art scene of the 1950s/60s, and the persistence that underpinned her career.

Peggy Guggenheim: Art Addict examined the life of an influential and controversial collector operating beyond the usual social norms. She had immense cultural influence through her patronage, and the film reminded us that personal taste, privilege and power can be big factors in the making of artistic legacy.

The Artist is Present followed Marina Abramović during her landmark retrospective at MOMA in New York, giving a fascinating insight into the endurance, discipline and presence that are core elements of her work.

Sarah Pittaway

Christmas Party

This was my first Christmas party not as a member of staff (I worked at the Mercer between 2016 and 2020). I was delighted to find such a welcoming group of people gathered together to celebrate and support their local gallery. Much entertainment and joy was had with the raffle (organised by



Christmas party people



Our wonderful helpers at the Christmas party, Rosie (left) and Claudia Ogden

Friends committee member Emily Ogden), surprising participants with fabulous prizes including top notch wines and spirits from Simon Mercer, champagne from our committee chairman Tom, delicious offerings from The Cheeseboard, vouchers from Charles Hanson Hair and Champagne et Fromage, toiletries from H2K Botanicals, and a basket of preserves made by Friends committee member Clare Hunter. Excellent food and wine flowed throughout the evening which was warmly hosted by gallery and museum staff with the assistance of two teenage members of Emily's family – thank you Claudia and Rosie Ogden, you did a brilliant job!

Sarah Pittaway

Paint and Sip

One of the perks of being a Mercer Friend is getting a discount on gallery events. The studio space hosts workshops of different kinds, with Paint and Sip one of the most popular – prosecco and soft drinks materialise while you follow along as tutor Kristyna Baczynski guides you through the creation of a modestly-sized painting in acrylics. No painting experience necessary. Kristyna gives a page of instructions and a step by step demo, but she's happy for people to take the law into their own hands. At December's session we painted a winter scene with starry night skies, snow-covered trees and a house in the woods. If a couple of hours of relaxed daubing sounds like your sort of thing, look out for future Paint and Sips.

Marion Hancock

Art tour of Rudding Park

In January the owners of Rudding Park, Simon and Judi Mackaness, gave 25 lucky Friends a tour of the hotel's art collection, followed by lunch at the Clocktower restaurant.



Our hosts at Rudding Park, left to right: Claire Horsley, Simon and Judi Mackaness

The Mackaness family motto 'Omnia nobis curae' (we take an interest in everything) is vividly expressed in their eclectic collection of artworks, gathered in collaboration with interior designer Claire Horsley. Claire's ingenuity combined with Simon and Judi's sense of fun and eye for a bargain has resulted in an inventive, surprising mix that includes commissioned works from nationally acclaimed artists, tapestries found at auction sales, a winking digital leopard, and (much favoured by spa guests) installations of divers with neon swim hats.

Sarah Pittaway



Diver installation at Rudding Park Spa - note the hat, which has sometimes had to be remade after being worn by spa guests. Figure by Versmissen, hat by Valerie Hoyle.



FRIENDS' EVENTS COMING UP IN 2026

13 March

Artist and master etcher Nigel Oxley will speak at the Willow Beck gallery about his life in printmaking, during which he worked with artists including Elisabeth Frink, Victor Pasmore and John Piper. More details and booking information to follow soon.

12 May (to be confirmed)

A trip to Coxwold, Yorkshire, including visits to:

- Shandy Hall, the grade 1 listed home of Laurence Sterne, author of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. J B Priestley described Shandy Hall as 'The medieval house where the modern novel was born'.
- Newburgh Priory (also grade 1 listed), where medieval, Tudor, Jacobean and 18th century architecture jostle. Reputed to house Cromwell's tomb, minus his head. Cromwell's daughter was Lady Fauconberg.
- Lunch at the Fauconberg Arms.

5 June

Summer Party

Our Summer Party will be held on the evening of Friday 5 June at the Rectory at Bolton Priory, kindly hosted by the Reverend Nicholas Mercer. We can promise a fascinating insight into this beautiful and historic setting - the Grade 1 Priory Church has its origins in the twelfth century. We're planning music

and refreshments of an elegant nature on the Rectory lawn, with wonderful views along the Wharfe Valley. We are looking into providing transport to the venue. If you'd like to use transport arranged by us, please email tom.king54@icloud.com to confirm, so we have an idea of numbers.

16 September

Art Film Series with Harrogate Film Society at the Odeon.

29 September

7pm: AGM at the Mercer.

14 October

Art Film Series with Harrogate Film Society at the Odeon.

16 October

Talk and valuation event: antiques and fine art valuer Adam Schoon (you may know him from *Antiques Roadshow*) will give a short talk before offering his expert opinion on the value of selected items brought along by Friends and guests. Adam's special areas of interest are Chinese, Himalayan and Japanese works of art.

11 November

Art Film Series with Harrogate Film Society at the Odeon.

2 December

Christmas party at the gallery

This year we also hope to run talks on art hanging (by a professional art installer) and colour - look out for details by email.

Behind the scenes

We said a fond farewell to curator Karen Southworth, and a warm hello to Megan Hicke (exhibitions curator) and Emily Holmes (museum curator, Harrogate). Together with May Catt (senior manager, cultural venues), Megan will do forward planning for exhibitions across various sites run by the Council, while Emily looks after the collection - keeping documents in order, conservation, overseeing loans and acquisitions, managing on-site exhibitions that feature work from the collection, and the Mercer's team of volunteers.



FRIENDS' EVENTS PROPOSED FOR 2027

YOUR VIEWS PLEASE?

An escorted tour of Egypt

Please let us know if you'd be interested in the idea of a curated 15-day trip to Egypt in 2027. The trip would be facilitated by prominent Egyptologist Ken Griffin, allowing privileged access to sites in Cairo, Aswan, Luxor, the Valley of the Kings, Athribis, Amarna, West Giza and Sakkara. The price is potentially in the region of £9000 per person. That would include flights, accommodation, transport, entrance tickets, breakfasts, lunches and the services of a guide and tour manager. If interested, email tom.king54@icloud.com.

Tour in Warwickshire/ Oxfordshire

We're planning a small group tour that takes in Compton Verney, an evening at the RSC and either Blenheim Palace or the Ashmolean and Bodleian. We'd love to hear from you about this - with expressions of interest for the tour, and whether you'd prefer Blenheim or the Ashmolean? Email clasheradan@icloud.com.

Tour of the newly reopened Tate Liverpool and Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight

At planning stage. If interested, email clasheradan@icloud.com.

VIEW FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to our Spring newsletter. As I write this the snowdrops are in full bloom and memories of our very happy Christmas Party are beginning to fade. At the end of January I was able to catch up with several Friends when Simon and Judi Mackaness very generously gave up a morning to provide us with a fascinating insight into the history of the bringing into being of their beautiful hotel and spa. What was made clear to me is that there remains a considerable appetite among Friends for talks, trips and events and I hope you will see from this newsletter that the team of volunteers on the

Friends committee are working hard to provide an interesting and diverse programme. We are also getting to know the new curatorial set-up at the gallery and look forward to working with them to understand how we can further deliver our charitable objectives. I know that on the date of our next meeting Emily will be in London to discuss with the Contemporary Art Society the acquisition that the Society will be supporting the Gallery to make this year. It is with pleasure that the Friends sponsor the Gallery's membership of the Society.

Tom King



Tom King,
chair of the
Mercer Friends
committee

Dogs welcome on Sundays!

Remember, dogs are more than welcome to come into the gallery on Sundays.



Emily Ogden with
her dog Chicken

ON THE WALLS

Vision and Labour: Making Comics shows how today's illustration and graphic novels sit within a long tradition of artists responding to everyday life. By placing modern works beside historic pieces from the Harrogate collection, we could appreciate the continuity across time.

This show (running until 26 April) continues to bring a younger than average crowd to the gallery. My own teens were keen to attend and spent longer than the normal ten minutes reading about the artists and looking at the work. Our poodle was less interested in the artwork but behaved long enough for us to enjoy a family outing before lunch. He prefers the works from the gallery's core collection, but did enjoy seeing a few dogs featured in the graphic novels and hopes to see more canine-focused work in the future.

Sarah Pittaway

HOW TO JOIN THE FRIENDS

Scan the QR code to join online, or pick up a leaflet at the gallery.

Membership prices

Individual membership £15 per year. Joint membership £30 per year
Life membership £250. Corporate membership £50.



**FRIENDS
OF THE
MERCER ART GALLERY**

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