



Aberdeen Archives, Gallery and Museums

Annual review • 1 June 2022 – 31 May 2023

Aberdeen
Archives,
Gallery &
Museums



Guthrie's Goslings



Leslie Benzies
Born 17 January 1971




Video game producer and designer

Aberdeen-born Leslie Benzies first discovered his skill for computer programming when he was 11 years old. Using his father's Dragon 32 computer, he taught himself programming and wrote his first computer game. Fast forward 15 years to find Leslie as the lead brain behind *Grand Theft Auto* or *GTA*. His fifth, and last, version of the game *GTA V* remains one of the best-selling video games of all time with over 100 million copies sold.

"Having a clear idea of the big picture was very useful when designing. I enjoyed the challenge of making many complicated parts fit neatly together. There is a lot of psychology in design. Everything I did ultimately focused on how players would feel or react to a mechanic in the game."

Leslie Benzies on designing Grand Theft Auto




Provost Skene's House

Game on!

Leslie Benzies can claim much credit for taking gaming design to new heights. From his very first job, he displayed a phenomenal work ethic, putting his designs to the limits in pursuit of his dream. His first project was producing a game called *Spore Station Silicon Valley*. He recalls, "We'd go to work at 8am... and we'd work till about eight or nine at night. Then we'd go home and eat it... The next day we'd go in and fix it." But he says, "It was brilliant. My dream had been to make a video game that people would go out and buy."

As the lead developer on the *Grand Theft Auto* video game series, he catapulted his company to fame and was instrumental in spawning a multi-million-pound franchise. Although the series was controversial for its adult nature and violent themes, it has been critically acclaimed, and today ranks as one of the UK's most successful exports. Leslie's work continues to push the boundaries. In his personal quest to produce ever more innovative and groundbreaking games.



...we were looking and 'leslie' was helping to... The ability to get straight... a quote and see what... as gets the job done quicker."

...on people... ideas."

...and *GTA III* gave the most satisfaction as we were taking so many risks and therefore the development of it was very exciting. To then achieve the success that *V* did made the whole experience sweeter."

ABERDEEN ARCHIVES, GALLERY & MUSEUMS

Who we are: The city's collection has grown over centuries, and has been shared with the public since 1885, first through the Aberdeen Art Gallery, then the wider museums and archives services at Aberdeen City & Aberdeenshire Archives, Maritime Museum, Treasure Hub, Provost Skene's House and Tolbooth Museum. Exploring, re-interpreting and using the collection can help all of us explore our past, share our present and inspire our future, showing the best of Aberdeen to the world.

Aberdeen Archives, Gallery and Museums is a public sector organisation and forms part of Aberdeen City Council. The team also provide care of and access to the Aberdeenshire Council's accumulated archive and strives to achieve the same ambitions for that collection as it does on behalf of Aberdeen City Council.

Our purpose is to share the city's collection in engaging ways.

To do this we need to care for and understand the collection, create opportunities for people to access the collection and venues, promote and enhance what's on offer, become more resilient and sustainable, and ensure we are relevant and accessible to all.

Our vision is to be a place for people to explore Aberdeen's identity and culture, and its connections to the world – making Aberdeen a better place to live, work and visit.

We want to collect contemporary art and craft, objects with meaning and connection, and new and old stories about the city to reflect our city's culture in its many forms - creating a record of our city and its place in the world for future generations. We aim to contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous city. We want to open the doors to curiosity, enquiry and discovery, and look after the wonderful cultural collection and historic buildings we have been entrusted with.

Audience statistics:



298,589
physical visitors



218,590
total admissions to
Aberdeen Art Gallery



50,364
total admissions to
Aberdeen Maritime
Museum



29,264
total admissions to
Provost Skene's House



371
Treasure Hub visitors



1,036,542
virtual visits (including social media)



80,983
social media followers



56.8k

13.6k

9.2k

33.5% male, 66.5% female



432,685
web page visits



Global Link clicks Top 10

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------|
| 1. United Kingdom | 6. Belgium |
| 2. United States | 7. Germany |
| 3. Ireland | 8. France |
| 4. South Korea | 9. Italy |
| 5. Netherlands | 10. Finland |

CARING AND SHARING

Scottish Ballad

Robert Motherwell, born in the USA to Scottish and Irish parents, was a leading American Abstract Expressionist painter. He retained links with Scotland throughout his career.

Motherwell believed that abstract art depended, like music, on pure form to arouse people's feelings.

'To create is not to repeat, but to discover, critically, radically and freshly.'

Robert Motherwell

He explained: "What I hope is that someday in the future there will be more people who can see [abstract art] the way most people can hear music... that it won't be necessary to explain. People could just listen or see, and immediately dig it, the way Mozart or the Beatles."

Roderick Williams performs
The Old Fisherman
by Francis George Scott



Archives, Gallery and Museum Collection statistics:



800+

New acquisitions



£48,031

raised from external funding bodies to support new acquisitions



284

collection enquiries (excluding offers of gifts and purchases)



4,700

entries have been added to the Archives' online catalogue



34

museum research visits



9

objects conserved



147

collection objects go on display



6

new collection exhibitions



26

collection objects loaned out - displayed in 12 venues - seen by 810,855 visitors



98,000

digital records published



149,866

museum object records can now be searched online



20,000

views per month via eMuseum



400

collection images added to Wikimedia



3,113

Aberdeen Built Ships records migrated to eMuseum

Developing Museum and Gallery collections

The city's collection is always growing. Thanks to donations, bequests, gifts and securing external funding, in excess of 800 individual objects have joined this collection this year. Highlights include:

- the **Sandy Dunbar Studio Ceramics** collection containing over **500 high-quality hand-made ceramics**. It was gifted to the gallery by his family. It will become an important resource for researchers, students, professional ceramicists and visitors, ensuring the city is seen as a **centre of excellence** in this field in Scotland.
- the portrait of 7-year-old called **Vessie Owens, painted by James McBey** in 1940. It was acquired with funding support from the National Fund for Acquisitions and the Mrs McBey Trust. This arresting portrait of the 7 year old black American sitter is a unique addition to the city's **extensive and renowned** McBey collection.



Vessie Owens © Aberdeen City Council (McBey Collection)

- a transfer from Glasgow Life of **nationally significant** half hull models by Alexander Hall, shipbuilders representing important stages in development of shipping in UK in the early to 1800s. All but one were blue riband vessels – the **fastest ships of their time**. All the models were part of an international exhibition held at Glasgow in 1880s which **showcased the industry to the world**.
- round 3 of the **micro-commissions programme**. The programme supports **artists local** to Aberdeen. This year's work has focussed on themes of climate change and the environment, and the future of Aberdeen. These micro-commissions were fully funded by the **Friends of Aberdeen Art Gallery and Museums**.

The **Aberdeen Art Gallery Trusts** have supported the purchase of new objects for the collection, including three pieces by **Jerwood Art Fund Makers Open** artist Vicky Higginson, and images from the series *Aberdeen at Leisure* by photographer **Martin Parr**.



Coping Mechanism: to test emotional responses © Vicky Higginson

Conservation

We following a rolling programme checking the condition of individual objects and monitoring storage and display locations. This enables us to identify when an object requires conservation treatment.

Objects receiving treatment include:

- the **Holburn Ice-Cream automaton**. The automaton is now fully functioning and delights visitor to the Art Gallery where it is switched on weekly.



I Like Holburn Ice Cream automaton, 1970s - View of Aberdeen

- the sculpture **Embrace**, by John Connolly, a star object in the Art Gallery exhibition **Look of Love**.
- **Herakles the Archer**, by Emile Antoine Bourdelle, on display in the Art Gallery exhibition **French Impressions**.

All work was funded by the Friends of Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums.

Archives, Gallery and Museum exhibitions

Collection exhibitions enable us to share many of the remarkable objects in the city's care and the fascinating stories they hold with visitors to our venues. This year we have opened 5 new collection exhibitions in the Art Gallery, highlights include:

- **James McBey: Shadows and Light** - this co-curated exhibition between author and journalist Alistair Soussi and Aberdeen Art Gallery marked the **publication** of the first ever biography of the **celebrated Aberdonian artist**.
- **The Last Testament of Alexander Jaffray** (1614-1673) – showcased the **acquisition** by the Archive of this **significant manuscript** by the twice Provost of Aberdeen and subsequently a prominent Quaker who was **persecuted for his faith**. It was purchased with assistance from the National Fund for Acquisitions and the Friends of the National Libraries.

These opened alongside **Imagined Landscapes in Gallery 4** exploring how contemporary artists respond to the natural world, the **Look of Love in the Sculpture Court** with works that have obvious or more subtle connections to love, sentimental feelings and human emotions and **View of Aberdeen in Gallery 15** which considers what it is like to live and work in the city and invites the public to contribute their views of Aberdeen. And in the **Maritime Museum** we introduced a display of **ship plans and tools and equipment** used in Aberdeen Shipyard drawing offices.



Embrace, John Connolly (Scotland)

Loans

Loans to other organisations allow art or objects from the collection to be seen nationally and internationally. This year we have loaned objects to exhibitions in 12 venues with a combined 810,855 visits. Highlights include:

- Claude **Monet's** *La Falaise a Fecamp* featured at **National Galleries of Scotland's** A Taste for Impressionism.
- **John Singer Sargent's** *Blind Musicians* and *The Loggia* travelled across the **USA** (National Gallery of Art, Washington & Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco).
- three works by **Rosa Bonheur** were displayed at the Musee des Beaux-Arts, **Bordeaux**, and the Musee d'Orsay, **Paris**.



La Falaise à Fécamp, Claude Monet, 1881

Online access

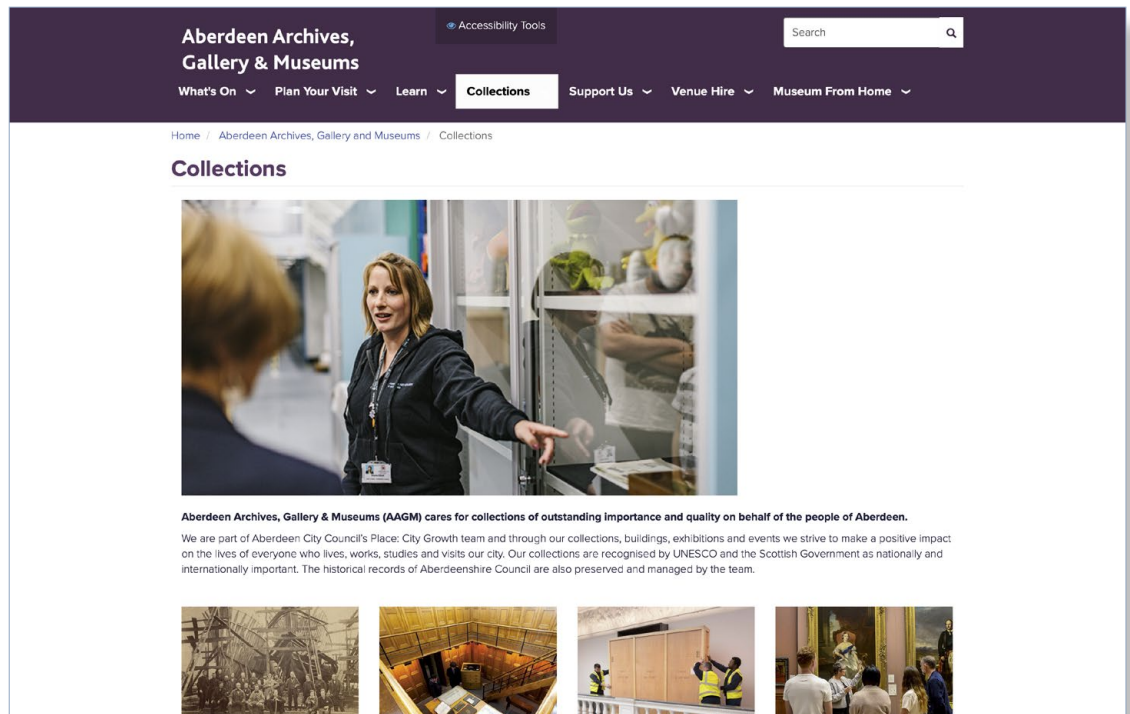
Providing access to our collections online increases our reach and means we can support engagement and make significant contributions to research on both national and international levels.

Online visitors to the Archive can now access material relating to:

- the Aberdeen **Steam Fishers' Provident Society** and Aberdeen **Steam Fishing Vessels Owners' Association Ltd.**
- the jewellery designer **Norman Grant.**
- the Peterhead, Macduff and Stonehaven **burgh collections**, including material dating back to the early 17th century.
- papers relating to the **State Funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II**, passed to the archive by the Lord Provost.

Online visitors to the museum collections can now access:

- **all object records** from our Museum and Gallery database TMS (The Museum System). Many records include photographs and in depth information about the objects. Updates to the records made by curators **are available within 24 hours** in the "eMuseum" portal.
- An additional **400 images of our collection on Wikimedia**, bringing the current total to over 4,600. Between June 2022 and May 2023 there were 27,055,937 total views of the gallery and museums' objects on Wiki pages, with a significant peak in views in September 2022 and May 2023 (the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II and the coronation of HM King Charles III). The goal is to drive people to visit in person or purchase high resolution versions of the images for reproduction.
- 3,113 detailed records of **ships built in Aberdeen on eMuseum**. This allows a more immediate connection to the related objects, ship plans, films and photographs cared for by Aberdeen Archives, Gallery & Museums.



CULTURAL LIFE
IN THE CITY



Spectra 2023 © Ian Georgeson

Gallery Maps



746
Lunchtime talk attendees



4,500
concert attendees



268
Gallery Late Medieval Mayhem attendees



Through the many activities we programme and a **vibrant mix** of festivals and events our **venues host** the Archive, Gallery & Museum service has continued to make a significant contribution to cultural life in Aberdeen. This year's highlights include:

A Medieval summer – Aberdeen Art Gallery brought some of Scotland's rare and early treasures to the city for the first time in a double-bill of exhibitions in summer 2022:

- The 10th-century **Book of Deer** illuminated manuscript returned to the North-East for the first time in a millennium, on loan from **Cambridge University Library**. Working with Aberdeenshire based, *The Book of Deer Project*, we celebrated the temporary return of the Book of Deer with a varied programme of events and activities for all ages, including an archaeological dig, expert talks, original music, storytelling, Gaelic language cafe, and creative workshops.



Book of Deer

- In partnership with National Museums Scotland we hosted **The Galloway Hoard: Viking-Age Treasure**, an exhibition featuring the richest collection of rare and unique Viking-age objects ever found in Britain or Ireland. Buried around AD900, the Hoard is of **international significance**, features silver, gold, jewelled, treasures and textiles and has transformed our understanding of this period of Scottish history. This exhibition had a rich complementary programme of events and activities. The exhibition engaged our school community with visits including exhibition introductions and object handling using the National Museums Scotland Galloway Hoard Handling Kits. These featured a range of replica hoard items including a 3D printed vessel, silver and gold jewellery and information sheets with activity and discussion suggestions. **Aberdeen Art Gallery offered bursaries** for schools to visit the exhibition from August to October 2022. Seven local schools had transport costs covered, with many more visiting The Galloway Hoard without the need for this support.

New art, contemporary craft, exciting performances and partnerships

- Our exhibitions programme in November 2022 featured the biennial **Jerwood Art Fund Makers Open**, showcasing the most exciting new work by early-career artists and makers based in the UK. Aberdeen Art Gallery was the project lead partner which gave us the opportunity to appoint a member of the team to the selection panel and establish a project curator from the team to work with and support the specially selected makers, curate the exhibition and organise the UK tour – **developing our skills and knowledge**.

Discover our venues and collections

- **“Discover Aberdeen Art Gallery” tours** were launched in April. This 45-minute ‘first come first served’ tour of the highlights of the gallery takes place fortnightly on a Saturday at 11am and is led by our front of house team. The tour will be offered weekly from July 2023.
- **Aberdeen Treasure Hub Open Days** were re-launched in November 2022. Scheduled to take place 3 times per year the full-day event offers free behind the scenes tours and opportunities to find out about projects and meet the team of specialist staff and volunteers who work with the collection. The open days have attracted **151 visitors** to the Northfield based collection store.



Open day at Treasure hub

- **Guthrie's Goslings** – monthly fun and interactive sessions designed to introduce 2-5 year olds to artworks in the collection. Sessions can include a mixture of music, dance, crafts and games. The sessions have been attended by **288 adults and children**.

A love of music

- The 2022/23 **Lunchbreak Concert series** offered 31 paid performance opportunities to amateur, emerging and professional musicians. Across the series, we engaged 10 schools and community performance groups, 12 concerts with local professionals and 9 featuring professional musicians from elsewhere in the country. In total, we engaged **55 professional** musicians and offered a platform for **147 amateur performers**. The weekly performances in the Cowdray Hall have built a dedicated following, reaching an audience of over 4,500 this season, averaging **an attendance of 150 per concert**. These concerts are offered to visitors on a 'pay what you feel basis' with the donations successfully covering the cost of programme delivery. Our last season included three concerts **recorded live** as part of BBC 3's broadcast series partnership performances developed with Aberdeen Jazz Festival and **soundfestival**.



Joseph Long lunchtime concert

- **Baby Boogie** sessions offer a daytime disco for **under 5s** to enjoy with their adults. Targeted at **Frontline Families F2** (younger families living in semi-urban areas of high unemployment). In 2022-23 we engaged with **840 participants** across six sell-out sessions.



Baby Boogie

- Intergenerational **Family Ceilidhs** are hosted in the Cowdray Hall. A live ceilidh band plays traditional music of Scottish and international origin while our experienced dance caller guides both experienced dancers and newcomers through the steps of popular Scottish dances. Sessions promote **dance, physical activity and intergenerational relationship** building.

Lecture and learn

- We hosted 4 public lectures per annum in the Cowdray Hall as part of **Guest @ Gray's** in partnership RGU. This series features key figures working today in the arts and creative sector, many of whom have a direct connection to the city, our collection and wider programme. Notable speakers have included Scottish Sculptor Kenny Hunter, Look Again commissioned artist **Morag Myerscough**, RSA President **Joyce Cairns** and CH4's The Great Pottery Throw Down winner and Gray's School of Art graduate, **AJ Simpson**. These lectures attract a wide range of audiences including students, regular gallery-goers and the local creative community. Attendance figures average at **160 per talk**.



Love at First Sight by Morag Myerscough © Grant Anderson



The Great Pottery Throw Down winner AJ Simpson



GUEST AT GRAYS



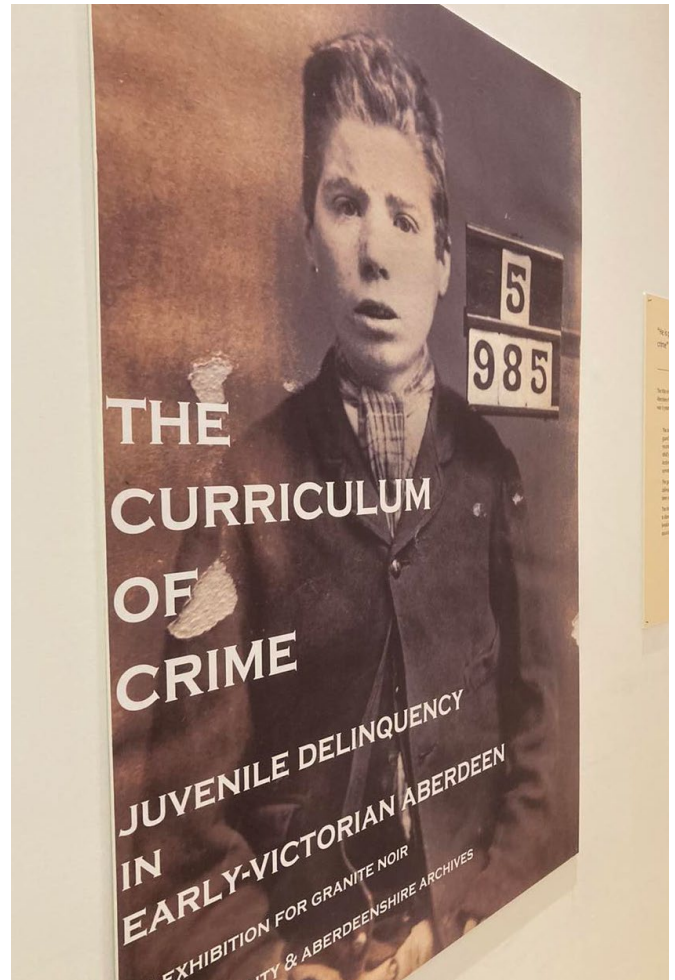
City festivals and events

- For the third year running **Aberdeen Art Gallery** was part of **Spectra, Scotland's Festival of Light**. Gallery opening hours were extended into the evening and festival audiences invited inside to enjoy the towering presence of *Fantastic Planet* by Australian artist Amanda Parer in the Sculpture court. The festival had a massive impact on visitor figures to the gallery, **28,693 visits** were recorded over the week, compared to 3,508 for the previous week and 16,745 for the same festival period in 2022. Planning for the 2024 festival is underway. In May the Gallery approached artists **Heinrich and Palmer to commission** a new work which will be premiered in the Sculpture Court. The work is funded by UKSPF.
- We worked in partnership with **SoundFestival** – Scotland's only contemporary music festival - in October to host concerts in the Cowdray Hall, pop-up music in the Art Gallery and a promenade concert at Aberdeen Maritime Museum.



- The **Aberdeen Jazz Festival** returned to Cowdray Hall as part of the Lunchbreak series in March 2023 and we worked with **Citymoves Dance Agency** in October 2022 to support DanceLive events and performances which included a visit from **Scottish Dance Theatre**.

- We were delighted to work with the **Scottish Ensemble** for the first time to host **Music for a Summer's Night** in the Gallery's Sculpture Court in June 2022 which was a sell-out evening. We will be repeating this successful new partnership again in summer 2023 and 2024.
- The ever-popular **Granite Noir** crime writing festival returned for a 7th year in 2023. The **Archive team** was, once again, asked to create an exhibition on display at the **Music Hall** and a talk at the Cowdray Hall, both on the subject of juvenile crime in Victorian Aberdeen. The talk at the **Cowdray Hall was sold out**, while Aberdeen Performing Arts estimated that the exhibition was seen by 3,500 visitors. The festival continues to go from strength-to-strength and will return in 2024.



FIND YOUR
OWN STORY!





Great seeing local kids
being encouraged to be
a part of arts.



Visitor comment from Northfield resident

1,731



pupils attended
the Art Gallery

427



pupils attended
the Maritime Museum
(impacted by our winter closure for
essential repairs and maintenance)

146



pupils attended
Provost Skene's
House

10



Internships

4



permanent employment
opportunities

FIND YOUR OWN STORY!

Our collections and venues offer **endless potential** to learners of all ages and backgrounds – we develop **formal and informal learning initiatives** and host educational and training projects designed to help everyone find their own story. This year's **highlights include:**

- using cultural projects to increase pupil voice, develop their confidence and raise attainment in literacy and communication as part of **This is Northfield**. Via a project called **What's Your Treasure?** the museum team supported **Northfield Academy pupils** to offer new perspectives on the collection. This culminated in an exhibition at Aberdeen Treasure Hub. During an associated the Open Day event, **pupils led behind-the-scenes tours** and informal activities, surprising themselves and impressing the team, with the ease in which they transitioned into these roles. Pupils devised and led a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony of the Open Day event, giving an **opening speech to members of the public**.

Comprehensive monitoring, data collection and documentation was used to capture the impact of this programme and showed a clear development of skills, experience and wellbeing for pupils. This programme is now informing the next steps for our service and the school.

- supporting **Grampian Regional Equality Council and 4Pillars** with their research activities into their **Prejudice and Solidarity Archived Throughout History Project (PATH)**, which is a community-led heritage project exploring ethnic minority and queer community history in Aberdeen and surrounding areas. Two members of AAGM staff sit on the steering group and attend quarterly project meetings. The collections and archives teams have provided training sessions for **14 volunteers** exploring and using the **collections as a research resource**. We have provided access and support to two project volunteers who been researching South Asian communities in Aberdeen and the LGBTQ+ history of the city. We have been supporting **raising public awareness** of the project through facilitating feedbacks sessions and talks from the project leaders.
- working with **Hanover Street Primary School** as part of the **Workforce of the Future** project funded and supported by Museums Galleries Scotland. This project gives learners insight into the type of jobs people have in the museum sector. **Pupils created a new trail** for other primary school learners introducing the weird and wonderful things they have discovered at Aberdeen Art Gallery. Learners explored what is like to be a curator, digital media officer and part of the visitor welcome team through researching the collection, interviewing staff and taking part in **practical activities**.



Workforce of the Future

- welcoming speakers and guests to the Cowdray Hall at Aberdeen Art Gallery to consider the **future of museum collections** for the first in a series of public discussions on how we develop our collection. The provocation was “**That belongs in a museum!**”, a classic line from an early scene in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. We were delighted to welcome a range of people and discussion and debate explored who is deciding what goes in a museum, what goes there, how museums use them and whether museums are the best place for everything.
- inviting members of the community to help us **re-interpret objects** in the collection that were linked directly or indirectly to **slavery, imperialism or people of colour**. Our workshop participants brought personal, unique insights and new perspectives to objects that either had hidden stories or used colonial or even racist language in their titles and descriptions. Creative responses, developed in these workshops, were displayed alongside the objects and acted as part of a thought-provoking exhibition: **Re-framing the Collection**.
- supporting **St Peter’s RC Primary School** in their 190th anniversary celebrations of the school. The **Archive team** organised for a class of primary 6 pupils to visit the archives’ search room and stores, **viewing records** relating to the history of the school such as admission registers, log books and plans. In the afternoon we hosted a drop-in session for 45 former pupils and teachers, along with the **Lord Provost**. The team are now planning future events with the school.
- creating **ten temporary roles** in the collections team through the Kickstart and Long-Term Unemployed **internship schemes**, and five undergraduate **student placements**. All participants **provided essential support** to staff to help with research, unpack hundreds of objects, audit over 4,400 objects, upload over 6,000 digital images, enhance over 4,000 catalogue records, catalogue and digitise over 600 index cards, install major exhibitions, create online content, develop audience research projects, and bench-mark digital engagement. Four of the interns are now **permanent members of staff**.



WELCOMING SPACES
OPEN TO ALL



“

Inclusive and
interactive, making
music fun for all –
love it!!

”

feedback from gallery visitor



385

Musical Memories
attendees



WELCOMING SPACES OPEN TO ALL

We are committed to ensuring all of our venues are **welcoming, inclusive, safe and free** to enter for all users. To help achieve this we:

- launched **Relaxed Mondays** in partnership with **WeToo!** - primarily for (but not limited to) children and adults that are neurodivergent or have accessibility needs.
- provided access on Mondays to a **Sensory den** specifically designed to combine a range of stimuli to help individuals develop and engage their senses.
- undertaken training to further **understand neurodivergence** and how best to assist with the sensory kits we have on site.
- produced an **Access guide** and a **Visual guide** to further support visitors and allow for pre-visit planning their visit to the Gallery.
- partnered with **Soundplay Projects** to bring their **Sound Play Dome** to the Art Gallery. This helps us engage families and children **affected by life-changing conditions**, disabilities and complex additional support needs.
- registered as a warm space** in November 2022, highlighting the gallery as a warm public place, open seven days a week as a place to meet amidst a cost-of-living crisis.
- encouraged staff to participate in **Mental Health Awareness week** – posting on social media their personal tips on how they cope with modern life – and **Pride Month** with clear messages in our visitor venues that all are safe and welcome to be themselves with us.
- became part of the **I Am Me, Keep Safe Scotland initiative**. The aim of the scheme is to support those with additional needs participate in community life, free from fear of harassment and abuse.
- helped to deliver Aberdeen City Council's **Gaelic Language Plan**, by producing our first English/Gaelic bilingual exhibition for the display of the Book of Deer, hosting a Gaelic café and the award-winning Aberdeen Gaelic choir.



Building on successful foundations:

- Our dementia-friendly, not dementia-exclusive activities for all have gone from strength to strength - including Our Aberdeen**, which brings people together to share stories, its sister programmes **Our Aberdeen Football Memories** and **Musical Memories**. All are free drop in session presented in partnership with **Alzheimer Scotland**.



- We've been exploring, devising and hosting a number of **British Sign Language** events since the Art Gallery reopening in 2019. We are revising and designing our future offer with colleagues at **North East Sensory Services** starting with a BSL café on 23 August, finding out how we can support the BSL community and introduce them to our collection and programmes.



- **Visual description talks** have been created for our blind or visually impaired visitors or anyone who would like a “closer look” at some of our most popular artworks on display in the Gallery. We have a programme of staff and volunteer training in place which has increased the confidence of those delivering these sessions and will allow us to increase the frequency of this offer in the next 12 months.



Madeline Nehring and Elaine Campbell (BSL Interpreter) pictured in Gallery 1, AAG, 2019

CELEBRATING OUR VOLUNTEERS





I love sharing my passion for art and the gallery, and really enjoy when that enthusiasm changes how people experience their gallery visits – especially during our many Friends events



Willem Boon von Ochssee,
Chair of Friends of AAGM



73
registered
volunteers



20
active volunteers
per month



2,358
hours contributed
by volunteers

CELEBRATING OUR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are a valued and **essential part of our workforce**. Collections care and research programmes, and our public events calendar rely on our amazing volunteers to offer the best to our audiences. This year, our volunteers have contributed to the **successful delivery of:**

- **Our Aberdeen**, one of the service's regular **dementia friendly** sessions.
- to bi-monthly **Musical Memories** sessions
- bi-annual **Friends' Weekends**. The **Friends' of Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museums**, is entirely volunteer-run charity that supports the activity of the service, has been working closely with officers over the past year to offer members and the wider public increased opportunities to **get creative, enjoy music and hear from distinguished guest speakers**.
- **Aberdeen Treasure Hub Open days** – volunteers have delivered behind the scenes tours and supported collection engagement activities
- the re-launch of the **McBey Library Programme** – working with the curatorial team, volunteers are reviewing and cataloguing this **specialist reference resource** in the Art Gallery to make it more accessible to the wider public.



- the **Aberdeen Built Ships** database and webpage – this database and webpage was brought into the main website structure this year to ensure it is fit for the future. The “ABS” volunteers continue to research and add data and images to this important resource which was the **inspiration for the Scottish national historic ship register**.

<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/AAGM/collections/aberdeen-built-ships>

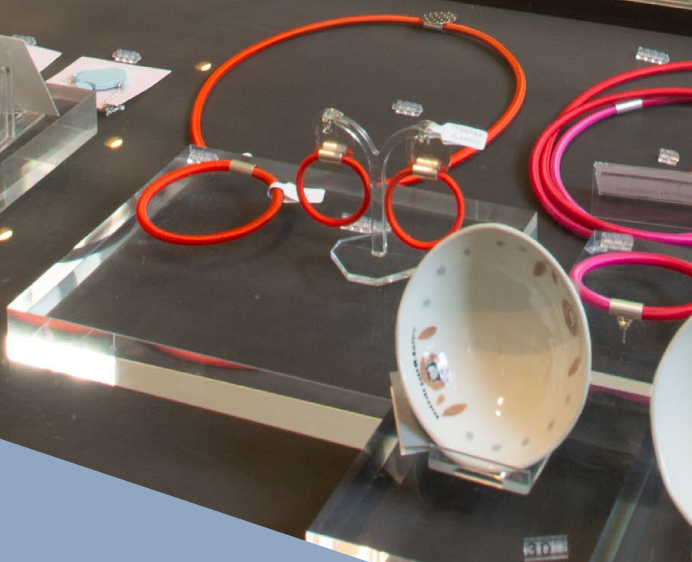
We have also participated in **Upskilling and Celebrating Volunteers** project funded by **Museums Galleries Scotland** to increase local participation and inclusivity in museums. Two volunteers were recruited who worked with staff members to successfully complete an **SVQ qualification** in Museums and Galleries Practices in 2022-23 and both have now become **permanent members of staff**.



McBey Library Programme volunteers



Lockers
Buggy Park



THE CITY'S ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The **venues** we open to the public and the activities we run offer **income generation opportunities that in turn support what we can do**. Additional income contributes to the **city's economy** and secures a more **sustainable** future for the archive, gallery and museum service.

Income generation highlights this year include:

- **Venue hire** – total turnover in this period was £135,380 an increase of £117,000 on prior year (which had been affected by Covid restrictions). Clients included major corporate companies, as well as third sector leaders, civic functions, launches for Tour of Britain and Spectra, and a live BBC broadcast of the flagship news programme Sunday with Laura Kuennsberg
- The Art Gallery **ground floor shop** area has been extended and rearranged to maximise sales opportunities. The retail footprint has grown by 25%, and added over 50sqft of prime horizontal retail space and 28sqft of vertical space. This was achieved by repurposing existing furniture
- The Art Gallery **Shop at the Top** re-opened in July 2022 after a full retail fit out supported by a post-Covid recovery grant was secured from the Scottish Government. The shop has significantly increased sales space and revenue potential, in particular allowing for a far greater offer to accompany the temporary exhibitions programme
- Alongside paid for ticketed events and activities we ask visitors to our venues, exhibitions and lunchtime talks and concert series to **'pay as they feel'**. People can donate cash or **'tap to give'** digitally

Tourist economy highlights this year include:

- working with **VisitScotland Connect** to showcase our venues and travel trade products like talks, tours and visit packages
- welcoming the **first cruise ships** to the south harbour with a bookable product. The team has also supported the development of the shuttle bus service into the city centre, volunteer welcomers directing visitors to the cultural venues and ensuring, where possible, that one of the key venues is opening early to suit cruise ship timetables
- working with VisitAberdeenshire and VisitScotland on a **marketing campaign** to raise deliver awareness of AAGM venues, with particular focus on the Galloway Hoard - Viking-age Treasure exhibition



Shop at the Top



98

hires of our bookable spaces

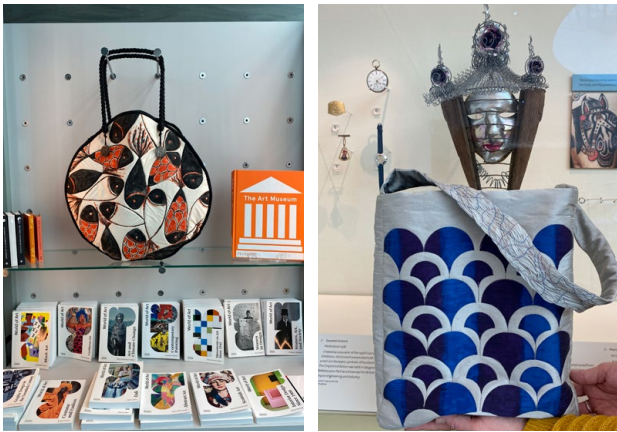


£244,103

retail revenue

Creative economy highlights this year include:

- The Art Gallery hosted the **Tea Green Makers Market**. Over 70 makers participated over two days in November 2022. The majority of the hand-picked selection of high-quality makers were based in the local area and product categories included everything from prints, jewellery and textiles to ceramics and artisan candles. The event was charged as a private hire so guaranteed income, but the Gallery shop also saw a sales increase of 43% compared to the previous weekend with a similar uplift in the cafés.



HND Textile students shopper bags on display in Aberdeen Art Gallery shop

Income Summary		
Donations	2022/23	£63,318
Venue hire	2022/23	£135,380
Shops	2022/23	£244,103
Grants	2022/23	£210,708



Mountain Vase by Sarah Koetsier © Sarah Koetsier – purchased for the Museum Collection at the Tea Green Makers Market

AND FINALLY....



“

**I couldn't have written
my biography of McBey
without access to AAGM's
treasure trove of an
archive...the collaboration
produced a terrific
public exhibition**

”

*Alistair Soussi, author of *Shadows and the Light -
The Extraordinary Life of James McBey**

Every year comes with its own unique mix of newsworthy stories, events and happenings – here are just a few of ours:

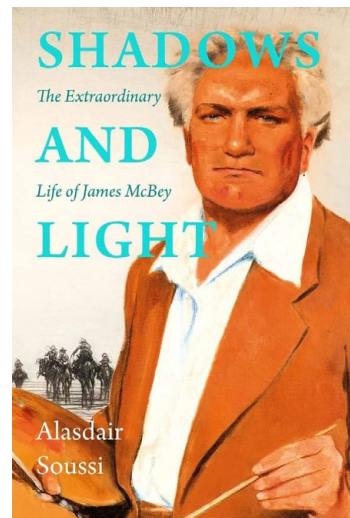
We hosted a **PhD student** researching Chinese objects in the **James Cromar Watt bequest**. We learned that a cinnabar carved lacquer bowl in our collection was once in the **Chinese Imperial Collection** and would have been made in an **imperial workshop** for display in one of the emperor's residences. It is decorated with nine dragons pursuing 'flaming pearls' above crested waves. The exterior of the base, of black lacquered ground, bears the incised and gilt marks of 大清乾隆年製, Da Qing Qianlong Nian Zhi, the Qianlong reign mark. He reigned from 1736-1795.



Red Lacquer Bowl and Cover

We published **The Written Record - 50 Treasures from Aberdeen City & Aberdeenshire Archives** in November 2022. The book contains images and articles on 50 highlights from the collections chosen, written and photographed by the team. So popular we had to reprint, and is still available in the gallery shop.

We collaborated with journalist and author Alisdair Soussi to support the publication of **Shadows and the Light – The Extraordinary Life of James McBey** the first ever **biography of James McBey**. Soussi's gripping re-telling of the life of one of the North East's most celebrated sons was made possible by extensive research of the McBey archive, a collection of thousands of objects including diaries, correspondence, and other paperwork cared for by the team.



We added **outdoor tables** and seating to the open-air West Terrace at the Art Gallery. This increased the capacity of the top floor café, and has proven popular with visitors (even in winter!). The enhanced outdoor space has also been an **added attraction for corporate hire** events – the use of this space for corporate hospitality was instrumental in winning high-level sponsorship for the **Tour of Britain event**.

We launched a podcast series **Gather Round** sharing stories about the collection, special exhibitions, the histories of our fascinating venues and tales of Aberdeen – sometimes they might be dark and dramatic, and hopefully always entertaining and informative.

<https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/AAGM/museum-home/podcast-gather-round>

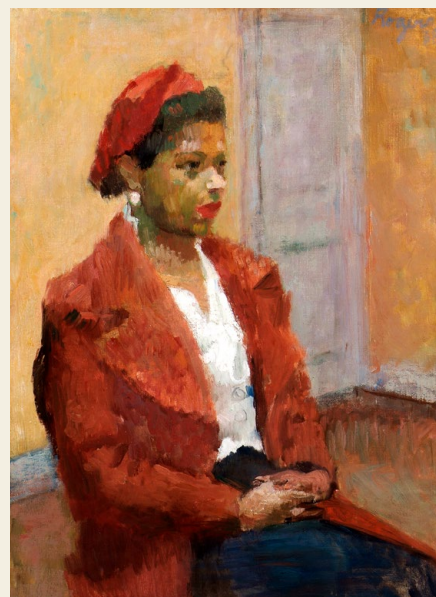
We identified **surplus art-work storage and transport crates** and contacted **Crates to Plates**, who arranged for the crates to be relocated to a local hotel used as temporary accommodation for **Ukrainian refugees**. Council gardeners re-purposed the crates and painted them in Ukrainian colours. Cfine organised a vegetable planting workshop for residents who planted calendula, kale, mustard plants, beetroot, carrots, radishes, parsnips, mixed salad leaves and lettuce.



Hazlehead Grove Nursery

Four crates were left with Hazlehead Grove Nursery – a council run, **social enterprise project** involving a number of groups that provide opportunities to develop life skills and learning opportunities for people across the city. One of the crates was used for a short course run by Healthy Minds, a council community learning mental health project. It was turned into a hügelkultur bed and filled with old logs, bark and vegetation and a top layer of soil.

We published a **Renaming Policy**, designed to address **racist and discriminatory language** within the collection. This policy updates language used in our object descriptions and artwork titles to ensure they are appropriate today rather than “preserved in aspic” or inflexible – with the intention of acknowledging the past but looking to a fairer future



Imogen by Claude Rogers, 1938 © Crispin Rogers
Purchased in 1991 with assistance from the National Fund for Acquisitions.

We went **live on the Bloomberg Connects App**:

You can explore Aberdeen Art Gallery and Aberdeen Maritime Museum with these **free digital guides**. Our guides take you deeper into the collection, buildings and exhibitions. In the Gallery guide staff, local school children and artists, makers and writers share their own highlights and responses to the incredible variety of artworks on display. While Maritime Museum guide take visitors on a voyage of thematic displays exploring the earliest days of trading, fishing and shipbuilding, offshore energy and life in the industry, and Aberdeen's place today as a leader in global energy transition. This year we have had over 17,000 users.



We received the **unexpected gift** of six-figure monetary bequest from **Miss Patricia Carr Martin**, an ex-school-teacher from Aberdeenshire who loved art. Miss Martin left her estate to a number of charities which meant something to her, including the Aberdeen Art Gallery Trusts – established to **buy or commission new works of art for the city's collection**.

The **Art Gallery** was shortlisted in 2022 for **Best Visitor Attraction and Tourism and Hospitality Hero**, and again in 2023 for **Best Visitor Attraction** and **Inclusive Tourism** in Aberdeen City & Shire Tourism Awards.

And finally, you never know who is going to drop by...this year we have been visited by a few famous people including Laura Kuenssberg, Nicola Sturgeon, Harry Hill, Janet Street Porter and Richard E Grant.

Bloomberg Connects guides to our venues:



17,000
subscribers



27
languages,
Bloomberg digital guide



The art gallery guide has been ranked by Bloomberg Connects as one of the top best guides on the app



What visitors said about us on TripAdvisor:

ART GALLERY

24 Jul 2022

Could've stayed all day

★★★★★

"What a super art gallery. The staff were so helpful and friendly upon arrival and gave loads of information. There was so much to see and the place itself was so easy to navigate it meant I could easily find exactly what I wanted to see and not end up wandering aimlessly and getting lost! I'd highly recommend a visit here if you've time."

2 Feb 2023

SURPRISE It's good- Go and its FREE!!!

★★★★★

"An amazing Gallery with events, great interesting art that starts discussion and debate, free entry, great cafe and shop. At last something positive to write about in dreadful Aberdeen."

PROVOST SKENE'S HOUSE

23 Jul 2022

Another great city centre attraction

★★★★★

"An amazing old house filled with so many unexpected things. Staff were so friendly, inviting and knowledgeable. Nothing was too much trouble and they happily gave their time to stop and answer questions and advise on the exhibits. Lots of interesting and interactive things for all age groups. I will definitely be back and wholeheartedly recommend a visit here."

6 Jan 2023

Great museum

★★★★★

"Popped in as we were passing and very glad we did. A great museum and a great addition to the city's tourist attractions. I've lived in Aberdeen for nearly 20 years and learned things about the city I didn't know. The guides were very friendly and knowledgeable without being overbearing. I'd highly recommend a visit and I'm sure I'll be back. Glad to see a much loved old building back in use and open to the public."

MARITIME MUSEUM

17 Apr 2022

Amazing museum – never thought I was interested in maritime things.

★★★★★

"This was a wonderful visit to the maritime museum in Aberdeen. You learn a lot about why Aberdeen is what it is today. You learn a lot more than ships and navigation. History of the oil industry and how it pertains to Aberdeen is greatly spelled out. Absolutely worth visiting."

12 Jun 2022

A must-see in Aberdeen

★★★★★

"My visit to the Maritime Museum in Aberdeen was unforgettable! I had never been to a similar museum before and I was stunned by what I saw. Amazing history of Aberdeen through the ages depicting the hard work at sea. A very impressive reconstruction of an oil platform with the tiniest detail on, I was very much impressed. I highly recommend it to anybody visiting Aberdeen."

Art Gallery Comment Cards

The stuff we saw was super ultra cool.
13/10/22, male, under 16

Best facility the council provides.
Keep it up please.
10/10/2022, 60+, Aberdeen

Absolutely perfect! My new favourite museum in Scotland! Such a welcoming staff! Have made us feel at home!
26/1/23, female,
26-40, Manhattan

What the papers say:

Lonely Planet Online Guide January 2022

Browse 700 years of creativity at Aberdeen Art Gallery

Transformed after a massive renovation between 2015 and 2019, the revitalized Aberdeen Art Gallery displays a remarkable collection of fine and decorative art, including paintings by acclaimed French Impressionists and Pre-Raphaelites such as Aberdonian William Dyce.

Begin your tour of the elegant neoclassical building in the central Sculpture Court, where eye-catching works dot a checkerboard floor amid sleek marble columns. Boldly designed art deco ceramics and glassware are one floor up, while the top-story South Terrace lets you sneak a peek of the city's rooftops.

The Scotsman, September 2022

Top museums in Scotland 2022: 3rd place



3. Aberdeen Maritime Museum

Celebrating Aberdeen's links with the sea - from fishing to oil - this is the Granite City's highest-ranking attraction and takes the bronze medal for Scottish museums. Terry wrote: "Amazing, free and great. We had a lovely day out and experience here, so much history to learn about. Everyone is so friendly and we are glad we came here." Photo: Canva/Getty Images

Photo Sales

Press and Journal, January 2023

The fact that the famous fashion designer Dame Zandra Rhodes chose to eat at the Aberdeen Art Gallery Cafes for four days in a row while she was visiting the city says it all really.

From freshly made scones and melt-in-the-mouth brownies to hearty soups and homemade quiches, it's no wonder that the designer - who has dressed the likes of Princess Diana and Barbra Streisand - clearly savoured the mouthwatering morsels on offer at the iconic local landmark.

Attracting a wonderfully eclectic crowd, just like the incredible art collections on display, the cafes - one on the ground floor and one upstairs - are at the beating heart of the bustling city.

What the papers say:

Press and Journal, January 2023

From stunning illustrations by Roald Dahl's frequent collaborator Sir Quentin Blake to a special exhibition dedicated to Aberdeenshire artist James McBey, Aberdeen Art Gallery 2023 exhibition calendar is already packed.

Scottish Field, January 2023

Home > News > Native trio plans show at Aberdeen Art Gallery

ALL SECTIONS SEARCH

NATIVE TRIO PLANS SHOW AT ABERDEEN ART GALLERY

By Peter Ranscombe - 2nd January 2023



WORKS by three local artists are visiting Aberdeen Art Gallery to **wow crowds in their home city.**

Lennox Dunbar, Ian Howard, and Arthur Watson all attended Aberdeen Grammar School, where art teacher Charles Hemingway introduced them to the collection at Aberdeen Art Gallery.

Fine Books Magazine, November 2022

A new exhibition focuses on the book covers produced by the illustrator Quentin Blake who has worked on titles by Roald Dahl, Sylvia Plath, and Dr. Seuss.

Blake started illustrating books six decades ago, initially working on paperback fiction. He has said that: "Drawing book covers is one of the most difficult things". Over his career he has written or illustrated more than 500 titles as well as covers for magazines.

Quentin Blake Book Covers, currently at The Baird Institute in Scotland's East Ayrshire, brings together 60 examples stretching from the 1960s, through his illustrated covers for children's books published by Jonathan Cape from the 1970s onwards, to the present and featuring mid-century Penguin paperbacks as well as finely-crafted special editions for The Folio Society. The exhibition includes first editions and reproductions of original artwork from Blake's archive.

'Quentin Blake: Book Covers' is a touring exhibition from the Quentin Blake Centre for Illustration in London.

The exhibition runs at The Baird Institute, Cumnock until January 7, 2023, then moves to Aberdeen Art Gallery from July 8 – September 17, 2023.

Quentin Blake Book Covers on Show



QUENTIN BLAKE CENTRE FOR ILLUSTRATION

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Book of Deer manuscript returns to Aberdeen after hundreds of years

© 9 July 2022



The Book of Deer is thought to be the oldest surviving Scottish manuscript

The historic Book of Deer - believed to be the oldest surviving Scottish manuscript - has returned to the north east for the first time in hundreds of years to go on show.

The 10th Century manuscript is noted for containing the earliest surviving Gaelic writing from Scotland.

It is normally held in the collections of Cambridge University.

The Book of Deer will be on public display at Aberdeen Art Gallery until Sunday 2 October.

Aberdeenshire heritage group The Book of Deer Project received £128,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to secure the loan from Cambridge University Library, where it has been since 1715.

• **Book of Deer monastery dig find 'exciting'**

The small book is believed to originate from the Monastery of Deer, near Aden Country Park in the Mintlaw area.

The Monastery of Deer had the historic book in its care by 1,000AD, before the building fell out of use when its monks moved.



The Book of Deer Project's Anne Simpson said it was a precious item

Grampian Online, July 2022



Book of Deer at Aberdeen Art Gallery

For the first time in hundreds of years, the 10th-century Book of Deer has returned to the north-east, where it may have originated.

The rare example of a pocket gospel will be on display at Aberdeen Art Gallery, on loan from Cambridge University Library.

The exhibition is supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and runs from Saturday, July 9 through to Sunday, October 2 and is free to visit.

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