



Discover More

Emma Nicole Straw, MA Visual Art 2019

This is not a normal introduction from me. These are not normal times. I write as the Government has just announced a national emergency. By the time you read this, the situation will undoubtedly have moved on again. What I do know with certainty, is that I am immensely proud of a workforce who have moved immediately to protect the safety of our students, their colleagues, and our visitors. Though we have had to close the College and Gardens, our academic teams are working incredibly hard to provide continuing content for students to maintain their learning.

What sets us apart from many education institutions is our unwavering focus on practical hand skills. We recognise the significant challenge that this period of isolation presents for students who can no longer gain access to their workshop and bench tools, but West Dean's strength is in its creativity. We are developing new content to put online, not just to support our students, but to support everyone who can draw on the power of creativity to support their own well-being during these challenging times. We will be uploading new content on our social media channels regularly so that we can all learn new skills while we are at home. Please get involved. #WestDeanTogether

We are also planning for what comes next. There will be even greater financial pressures for many of our students, as well as for many of our recent alumni who work in sectors that are in danger of being significantly under-resourced as the economy gears back up again. This is a time for us to come together to celebrate the collective power of creativity and support the artists and conservators who add so much value to the world around us. Thank you for all your support.

Be safe, be well, be creative.
Best wishes.

Alex Barron
Chief Executive

Spotlight on...

Jess Shead, Short Course Student



Jess, a recent Fine Art graduate from Central Saint Martins received a bursary to attend John Robert's "Carve a Simple Wooden String Puppet" course.

"My multimedia practice is often figurative or relates to the body and movement in some shape or form. I am also interested in theory on the autonomous inanimate object and the

potency of human replicas such as sculptural monuments, dolls and effigies.

Soon after graduating, I completed a 2 month traineeship on The Puppet Theatre Barge, a rare cultural gem of London, I became involved in the special world of traditional Victorian marionettes and my passion for puppetry was truly realised. Having gained experience operating a range of puppets and performing to an audience, I wanted to use my sculptural abilities to create my own. Because I no longer have a studio and workshop, I was rather limited with my effort, especially when it came to wood-working and carpentry.

Many of my fellow puppeteers had recommended that I learn from John Roberts, a master of marionettes and a fellow puppeteer alerted me to the beginner's course, "Carve a Simple Wooden String Puppet", he was teaching at West Dean. I'm a recent graduate and work part-time while trying to continue my creative practice, so I couldn't afford the full course fees but I saw the option to apply for a bursary and called up the College. It

was this bursary offer which was the vital deciding factor as to whether or not I could participate. I had to explain how the course would benefit my creative practice, and as a result, was given the funding.

Without the bursary the College offered me, and the wonderful facilities and freedom given to those who participate I would not have been able to create my first marionette nearly as soon or to such a technical and functional quality.

John Roberts is an excellent tutor who has taught this at West Dean multiple times. I am already spreading the word about West Dean among my peers and I also hope to attend more short courses again in future. It would be difficult not to, having had such a positive experience on this occasion!"

Bursaries make a huge difference for artists trying to develop their practice. Your gift will help someone develop their skills. A gift of any size to the bursary fund makes a difference.

DONATE NOW

Alumni News

In February 2020 we welcomed back alumni who gave presentations to Trustees of The Zibby Garnett Travel Fellowship who helped sponsor trips they had taken to continue their professional development.

FdA Historic Craft Practice Furniture alumnus **Harry T Morris**, recounted his experiences learning and working with craft makers in Japan and Australia last year. You can read more about his learnings in **this blogpost** he wrote while artist in



Harry T Morris (right) with Furniture Subject Leader Norbert Gutowski

residence at The Bower, a not-for-profit environmental charity in Sydney, Australia, dedicated to reducing useful waste heading to landfill.

Harry received funding from the York Foundation for Conservation and Craftsmanship in 2017/18 and from both the PF Charitable Trust and the Skinners' Company in 2017/18 and 2018/19. His travels were also funded by the Harriet's Trust Continuing Professional Development bursary.

Charlotte Grimsdell (MA, Conservation of Books and Library Materials, 2017), now a Book Conservator working on the Jewish Collection at the City of London Corporation gave a presentation about her time in Italy studying stiff-board bookbinding with The Montefiascone Conservation Project. The project holds annual study sessions offering volunteer experience and training for librarians, conservators, cataloguers, bibliographers and those interested in the history and conservation of books.

Charlotte was a recipient of the Dr Robin Barnard Scholarship in 2016/17.



Alex Foster cleaning a war memorial from a church in Wick, during her time as Collections & Exhibitions Officer at Littlehampton Museum

Alex Foster (MA Collections Care and Conservation Management, 2018) has recently joined the Collections Team at West Dean College as Assistant House Steward. Alex comes with a great deal of experience and knowledge, having worked on placement with The National Trust, Sussex Archaeological Society, and at The Novium Museum in Chichester throughout her studies. Since graduating she has also been employed as Collections and Exhibitions Officer at Littlehampton Museum before now returning to the College as a member of staff.

Celebrating our Scholars

On Friday 7th February, West Dean College Trustees, senior staff and scholars welcomed representatives from more than 20 charitable trusts, foundations, Livery Companies and other organisations who support the College and its students.

Over lunch in The Old Library, guests heard speeches from Director of Education, Francine Norris and three scholars; Robert Mitchell (MA, Conservation of Metalwork), Eunjo Lee, (FdA Historic Craft Practices, Musical Instruments) and Katerina Williams (GD, Conservation of Books).

They spoke on the theme of diminishing art and craft education and the loss of creativity and hand skills, and what West Dean is doing to keep these important skills alive and thriving.

You can read the speeches in full on our **website**.

*This event celebrated the achievements of students who can work towards a career in the arts or conservation thanks to scholarship and bursary support which enabled them to accept a place to study. If you can make the difference for someone, **please email us today**.*

Tell us what you think

Discover More was created to keep you, our valued supporters, in the know about the latest news from West Dean College and Gardens. We hope to provide you with insightful and interesting content each term to help you feel connected to West Dean, its students and our plans for the future.

If you have 5 minutes to answer just a few questions about Discover More, we would really appreciate it. With your feedback we can ensure that we can keep giving you relevant and exciting content and continue to show the importance of the projects you support.

Please click on the link here to provide us with your feedback.

www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/S33RJ55



Meet New Collections Manager, Hugh Morrison



What is the job of the Collections Manager at West Dean?

Being a 400-year-old house, West Dean is filled with objects that Edward James and his family amassed -- a huge collection of furniture, artworks, books and other artifacts of international importance. It all must be looked after to keep it safe and sound. I work to understand what we have, take decisions on how best to look after it, and develop the collections as a resource for learning and inspiration to benefit students, researchers and our visitors.

What interested you in the Collections Manager role at West Dean?

While working for Historic Scotland I became involved with caring for famous tapestries within Stirling Palace. Inspired by that experience, joining West Dean was a new opportunity to engage with a collection of international significance. To be in such beautiful surroundings and also able to indulge my interest in throwing pots at evening classes seemed too good to be true! It ticked all the boxes for me.

Can you give us some behind-the-scenes insight of what you have discovered about the Collections that you didn't know before?

I had not appreciated the rich archive of Edward James's own writings and lifelong correspondence. He communicated regularly with over 70 leading artists and literary figures of the 20th century, including Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, Leonora Carrington, Edith Sitwell, Pavel Tchelitchew, and Leonor Fini. It is amazing to discover original sketches by Carrington, Dalí and Magritte, a complete ballet score commissioned by Edward in 1933 by Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht and audio recordings relating to Salvador Dalí's Dream of Venus Pavilion that featured in the New York World's Fair in 1939, to name just a few.

What are your plans for the Collection?

The Collections team are busy working towards launching a new website that will showcase digital reproductions of the collections' documents and objects, emerging research -- and we hope sound recordings too! It will be available to everyone later this year, directly from the West Dean website.

What contribution does the West Dean Collection make to students?

Just a few weeks ago we lent Dalí's Lobster Telephone, which is an internationally acclaimed icon of Surrealist interior design,

to the Arp Museum in Germany. Our West Dean conservation students participated in its condition checking as part of their studies before it went out on loan. Because our students live and work amongst such valuable artifacts, they gain a unique level of hands-on experience rarely available to students.

Ben Hall, Collection Intern

Ben (FdA Historic Craft Practices, Clocks, 2018), has joined the Collections team for a year's internship to gain valuable experience as part of the team managing a working historic house. Ben has been applying his technical skills and experience to working on three significant clocks from the collection. So far, he has been researching, assessing and conserving a George III longcase clock, a Louis XV ormolu cartel clock and a 19th century yacht clock from the Lancashire Witch, a boat used by William and Frank James on their far-reaching expeditions around the world. His work will ensure that these clocks can be safeguarded and appreciated well into the future. The smooth operation of these timepieces with their distinctive chimes around the house are so important to the spirit of this place.

Internships are an important way for recent graduates to develop their core skills within a dynamic team. We are grateful to The Clothworkers' Company for funding this internship.

News from the Gardens



In November 2019, West Dean Gardens' Head Gardener, Tom Brown was awarded the Alan Titchmarsh New Talent Award at the prestigious Garden Media Guild Awards held at the Savoy Hotel in London. The Judges' comments included "Tom Brown's quiet passion and wide-ranging horticultural skills are evident in both his

writing and presenting examples and he has a subtle yet extremely engaging style. He's an experienced, passionate plantsman and gardener."

The Gardens Team have been busy over the winter developing the Gardens, preparing and planting exciting projects for spring and summer 2020. One hundred trees have been planted across the Garden, Park and Arboretum, along with thirty new fruit trees to reinvigorate the fruit collection.

In the newly-renovated glasshouses you can see a comprehensive fern display, spring and summer displays of primulas, standard fuchsias, pelargoniums and heliotropes, and the beautiful colour and fragrance of 2,000 hyacinth bulbs. These will be followed by sweet potatoes, apricots, peaches, sweet peppers, basket tomatoes and strawberries.

In the Wild Garden a new tree fern glade will create a tranquil corner: 1,500 foxgloves, including many unusual species and cultivars from around the world, will give a floral spectacle on the north Lawn, in front of the Pergola. While it is no longer possible to visit the gardens during this period of isolation, we will be bringing them to you via social media. Do follow us @westdeancollege and @westdeangardens.



The vital role of Academic Research

West Dean College of Arts and Conservation has an international reputation as a centre of excellence for the Creative Arts and Conservation. Across both Schools, the role of research is essential in underpinning the college's academic ambitions, helping West Dean to be at the forefront of the specialisms it supports, positively impacting it as a teaching and learning environment.

The College is privileged to be on a site of historic significance, both in relation to the heritage of the West Dean Estate and its more recent associations with the life and work of its founder Edward James. Two projects have recently received seed-funding from the small West Dean Research budget to explore the impact of this history in more detail.

Whose Heritage?

In order to ensure that West Dean provides an inclusive, socially-engaged space that contributes to positive change, the Collections Team are currently working on a project that explores the cultural legacy of colonialism at West Dean.

Working with staff, students, and external subject specialists, the project discusses ethical curation, challenges existing and embedded curatorial practices, and aims to lay the framework for a new approach to collections interpretation and display.

The first stage of the project has included a systematic review of the African collection,



Emma Hurst (Master of Fine Art 2018-19): Painted Paces.

which comprises a fascinating range of ethnographic objects, natural history, and archival documents. Our research has already revealed hidden narratives that cover a period of colonial expansion in Africa, particularly in Sudan, and has enabled us to develop new partnerships with leading UK institutions.

The Whose Heritage? project is working across the College with students and staff from the Schools of Arts and Conservation, at Foundation level through to MFA. In addition, West Dean has partnered with Outside In and New Writing South to provide residency opportunities for BAME artists and writers.

We are very keen to invite a range of voices to contribute to this project. If you would like to know more or get involved, please contact Curatorial Assistant, Sarah Hughes. We are particularly keen to hear from BAME communities and Africans in diaspora. (sarah.hughes@westdean.org.uk)

Back To The Future: Rethinking Education Through The Rural

Sarah Hughes is also leading a research group who are rethinking the West Dean Estate as a laboratory for progressive arts practice



The project is rooted in the correspondence between Edward James and Aldous Huxley (held in the College's Archives) which provides the earliest evidence of James's intention to hand West Dean over to an educational foundation. Huxley's advice focusses on the development of a sustainable community and responsible use of the land. This research project treats Huxley's suggestions as an opportunity to reactivate some of the early, radical, ideas for West Dean that explore the intersection of art, ecology, land use and the environment.

This project has engaged postgraduate Fine Art students who explored the parish boundary with Archaeologist Mark Roberts (UCL), in order to reveal the hidden history of the local landscape and bring to life 500,000 years of change on the West Dean estate. By reconsidering the landscape of West Dean as a site for innovative teaching and learning we hope to engage a new generation of artists, makers and conservators who are passionate about social change, experimentation, and progressive futures.

Our research ambitions are larger than our research budget. If you would like to know more about supporting research at West Dean College, please get in touch with us.

For further information contact the Development Office:

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