

Press Release

Laura Ford: Seen and Unseen

Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal

11 March - 25 June 2016

Blackwell, The Arts & Crafts House, Bowness-on-Windermere

11 March - 4 September 2016

Laura Ford is one of Britain's most original sculptors and is well-known for her portrayals of animals, through which she explores aspects of the human condition – although, in fact, Ford describes her own work as sculptures dressed as people who are dressed as animals. Deploying a nightmarish imagination she uses humour and acute observation to engage with social and political issues. This exhibition was originally conceived by Stephen Feeke, Director of the New Art Centre, Roche Court, for Strawberry Hill House, and has been reconfigured with additional content selected by Lakeland Arts in close collaboration with the artist.

Ford's work sits particularly well in domestic interiors, as witnessed in this show's previous incarnation in Strawberry Hill's fabulously atmospheric Gothic spaces. Blackwell's warm, richly-carved Arts & Crafts rooms and Abbot Hall's classically-proportioned Georgian galleries will provide a similarly perfect foil for Ford's startling creations: works, such as the fur-clad *Medieval Cloud Girls* skulk in Abbot Hall's opulent silk-lined Saloon, creating a somewhat less jubilant counterpoint to the dancing children in Romney's *The Gower Family*, while the tragic child soldiers, *Armour Boys*, lie crumpled in Blackwell's baronial Main Hall and a shaggy bronze beast, *Old Nick*, plays a devilish tune by the fireplace in the Dining Room.

Expanding on the work from Strawberry Hill House, Ford will be showing a new series of sculptures that explore the dynamics of couples - their strengths, their weaknesses, their glory and their madness. The works are personal and particular but, at the same time, reference the historical couples represented in the sculpture and painting of ancient Greece and Rome, the Renaissance and the early twentieth century.

Outside, a series of recent bronze sculptures, *Days of Judgement*, take an early-Renaissance fresco, *The Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* by Masaccio, as their starting point. In Ford's postlapsarian vision, however, the characters of Adam and Eve are reconfigured as a group of very tall, skinny cats. Pacing on the south lawn at Blackwell in various states of deep thought, these cats appear like a group of existential poets gripped by their own inner anxieties. The cats, prowling in the grounds against the spectacular backdrop of the Coniston fells, generate an atmosphere of courtliness but their featureless faces convey an uncanny blankness onto which we are able to project our own concerns. Elsewhere, it might appear that Beatrix Potter's much-loved Lakeland

characters have fallen on hard times, with a Mrs Tiggy-Winkle-like hedgehog transformed into a bronze bag lady, and a badger who has resorted to foraging in dustbins.

The exhibition will also highlight other aspects of Laura Ford's practice such as her ceramic works, including *Bear*, *In Remembrance* and *Needy Greedy*, along with new ceramics made in direct response to Blackwell which fit brilliantly with Lakeland Arts' collection of historic and contemporary pottery. This association is taken a step further through the artist's series of prints inspired by the most celebrated of the Arts & Crafts ceramicists, William De Morgan, whose lustrous tiles adorn many of Blackwell's fireplaces. This show will present other graphic works, in which Ford not only explores ideas and variations relating to her sculpture but also allows her imagination to run free, creating delicate line drawings and vivid watercolours that exist as finished artworks in their own right.

-ENDS-

Press Images

High resolution copies of the following images are available to download on Dropbox:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6xbjee8z132qllp/AAC97EwQPFwLnCMrKv-eylWha?dl=0>

All images are available at 300 dpi and approx. 15cm along the longest edge. Please contact us if you require a larger image.



**Laura Ford
Armour Boys (detail)**
© the artist



**Laura Ford
Bedtime Boy III**
© the artist



**Laura Ford
Days of Judgement
(Cat II, V and VI)**
© the artist



**Laura Ford
Medieval Cloud Girls**
© the artist



**Laura Ford
Rag and Bone with
Bags**
© the artist



**Laura Ford
Weeping Girl III**
© the artist

Editors Notes

Laura Ford

Laura Ford studied at Bath Academy of Art from 1978–82 which included a term at the Cooper Union School of Art, New York completing her studies with a masters degree at Chelsea School of Art at the age of 21. She was included in The New Contemporaries in 1982 and The Sculpture Show at the Hayward and Serpentine Galleries the following year while she was still a student. She participated in The British Art Show 5 and in 2005 represented Wales in the Venice Biennale. She has work in major collections around the world including Tate; National Museums and Galleries of Wales; Museum of Modern Art, University of Iowa; the Arts Council, The Victoria and Albert Museum and the Frederik Meijer Sculpture Park in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She has recently completed two major public commissions for Southmeads Hospital, Bristol, and the University Hospital, Heidelberg.

Exhibition Catalogue

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with specially commissioned essays by Dr Judy Collins and Stephen Feeke. The exhibition has been supported by Lord and Lady Cholmondeley, Houghton Hall; the New Art Centre, Roche Court; Lakeland Arts and Arts Council England.

Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, Cumbria LA9 5AL

www.abbothall.org.uk

Open Monday - Saturday, 10.30am - 5pm (4pm November - February)

Adult admission £7 (without donation £6.35), free entry for students and children

Abbot Hall Art Gallery, along with Museum of Lakeland Life & Industry, Blackwell, The Arts & Crafts House and Windermere Jetty are managed by Lakeland Arts. (Registered charity no. 1153001).

Lakeland Arts Press Office

Press visits, images and interviews contact:

Jeanette Edgar - jedgar@lakelandarts.org.uk

Chris Greenbank - cgreenbank@lakelandarts.org.uk

Telephone - 015394 46191