

Discover More

Welcome to our Spring term 2017 newsletter. In our last edition, I mentioned we were developing a new ten year strategy and I'm pleased to give you, as a friend and supporter of West Dean College, a few headlines about what the future holds in advance of a more formal announcement later this year.

We at the College have spent much of the last year assessing what we must do to achieve long-term sustainability for our academic programmes and for the wider West Dean community. We've listened to the views of staff, students, funders, partners and employers and we've considered recent changes in education regulations, the industries we prepare students for and the political developments that are shaping the world around us in unprecedented ways.

At the heart of our strategic ambition is to continue to deliver the highest quality education in the creative and applied arts and also to make a lasting contribution to artistic and cultural heritage, nationally and internationally.

To achieve this, we will develop a fully integrated education portfolio combining the strengths of our short course programme and our internationally renowned higher education provision.

We will expand and modernise facilities, creating new, flexible student workshops; a new library which will house the Edward James archive and more accommodation.

We will also link our gardens visitor attraction more closely to our core educational purpose in a number of ways, including the creation of a new permanent exhibition where we will tell the story of Edward James' cultural contribution and how it led to the work we do today.



Martina Salvin, MFA Visual Arts, 2016

The funding that these changes will require is significant, but ensures that students continue to gain the best possible experience and that we are financially sustainable for the future.

But we cannot do it alone and we will need your help and support if we are to achieve everything we've set out to. I hope I can inspire you to join us on this exciting journey for the benefit of future generations of artists, craftspeople and conservators and I thank you for all the support that you have already shown us.

With best wishes,
Alex Barron
Chief Executive



Peter Sarginson

It is with great sadness, that we report that former West Dean College Principal, Peter Sarginson, died at his home in Yorkshire in March 2017. Peter was Principal of the College for 17 years from 1978 to 1996 and oversaw many important developments during that time including the launch of new programmes in conservation of ceramics, books and metalwork and making musical instruments. He also instigated the College's formal relationship with the University of Sussex in order to deliver our first validated postgraduate diploma study programmes.

In recent years, Peter was a Trustee of the Sidney Sanders Charitable Trust, which has funded scholarships for West Dean students since 1986. We are indebted to Peter for his enormous contribution to West Dean College.

Spotlight on...

Merna Liddawi (Master of Fine Arts)

In 2007, current MFA student Merna Liddawi decided to change her career path to pursue her love of art. She was recently selected to exhibit at the Malamegi LAB.7, an international competition and exhibition in Venice, Italy. This provided an exciting opportunity for professional practice development and networking. We caught up with her to find out more about her work, inspiration and plans for the future.

How would you describe your work?

Art is a journey that I use to discover the hidden beauty at the heart of the universe in and around us. I want my paintings to touch upon something timeless in us all. I want people to experience them, not just to observe.

What inspires your work?

I grew up in Jordan under the Orthodox Church and was surrounded by a rich history and archeology. One of my favourite games was to bury items in the garden and dig them out, as if discovering treasure.

I'm inspired by repetition in nature, creation narratives, Arabic script and iconography techniques. The process of creating art was a form of worship for the medieval artist, a prayer in itself, as it can be for the modern artist too.

What methods do you use in your artwork?

I use fifteenth century processes, creating imagery in an egg tempera made of ground minerals and earth pigments mixed with egg yolk and distilled water. The tempera is painted on gesso panels of birch plywood. After sanding them to create a smooth finish, I use a medieval technique to water-gild the panels with 23.5ct gold leaf, lemon gold and white gold. Several layers of glaze create transparency and luminosity.

Can you describe your creative process?

My art is an alchemical journey to discover the hidden beauty of the universe. The tempera medium lends itself to slow building of layers, being at once meditative and repetitive. The repetitive randomness of calligraphic marks are unified by the transparent layering. In my recent work, the whole painting is covered with gesso then sanded back at random places revealing the layer underneath. It's always a surprise what comes out.



105 Genesis 430, Merna Liddawi

How is your time at West Dean College helping your artistic development?

I have been able to develop my painting language. The course has given me the space physically and mentally to experiment with new techniques whilst the tutors challenge my practice. The beautiful landscape has helped my meditative approach.

What are your plans for the future?

The immediate future is dedicated to preparing work for the prestigious Florence Biennale 2017 in Italy in October, for which I have been accepted to exhibit. I am also developing connections with artists in Jordan as I hope to exhibit in Dubai in the future and return to my artistic roots.



Scholarships and bursaries



We recently welcomed funders of student scholarships and bursaries to join us at a celebratory lunch alongside their scholar, followed by a tour of the workshops and studios.

During lunch, Francesca Levey (MA Metalwork Conservation Studies) spoke about the value of her scholarship. Francesca discovered a passion for armour at an early age and was working as a research assistant on oriental arms and armour for The Wallace Collection before she came to West Dean College to gain the necessary qualifications to pursue a career as a conservation specialist. Francesca highlighted that for her, it was the strong emphasis that the College places on both practical skills and on an understanding of materials and ethics which set it apart from other institutions. There is increasingly a shortage of skilled conservators in the heritage sector, and most are expected to gain a specialist postgraduate qualification before finding employment. Scholarship and bursary support is vital for students who demonstrate skill and passion but would otherwise be unable to fund the cost of these essential studies.

Francesca has been awarded a scholarship from The South Square Trust and QEST to complete her MA and has previously received support from the Anna Plowden Trust and The Worshipful Company of Art Scholars. Like many of our students, Francesca would not be able to complete her training without significant support, and we are grateful to everyone who has funded a scholarship to launch the career of a burgeoning conservator or artist at West Dean College.

To learn more about the scholarship programme, please contact any member of the team. Our details are overleaf.

From the British Museum to the Royal Collection

Every year students studying towards a postgraduate diploma in conservation undertake 6-8 week placements working for leading museums and conservators. This year, students were invited to complete placements at prestigious institutions including the Royal Collection, the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Imperial War Museum.



21 work-based learning placements took place in 2016-17 and they are an integral part of the educational journey at West Dean College; the first concrete step students make towards employment. The placement programme enables students to widen their skills, grow in confidence and develop their professional network. Working on 'live' objects of museum quality both in the college and during their placement is also extremely satisfying.

“The placement has been an invaluable experience for me both personally and professionally, as, above all else, I wanted to use it as an opportunity to improve my understanding of how conservation functions within a professional, institutional context and experience first-hand how everything I'm learning at West Dean will transfer over into the workplace.”

We are very grateful to the Barbara Whatmore Trust for providing work placement bursaries.

Study Visit to Amsterdam March 2017

The sun was shining as 50 conservation and visual art students set off for a week-long study visit to Amsterdam. Enroute they broke the journey at Ghent to visit the famous Gravensteen Castle and St Bavo's Cathedral.

The highlight of the trip was the midweek visit to the exhibition at the Boijman's museum "Mad About Surrealism" which included objects from the Edward James Collection. It was especially rewarding for conservation students to see objects that they had worked on at West Dean on public display. It was also a great experience for our visual arts students who work closely with the Edward James Archive during their studies at West Dean. They were able to see familiar paintings from this collection in the context of a wider exhibition of surrealist art. The College also has close ties with the University of Amsterdam and the conservation studios at Rijksmuseum and these were key destinations during the week.

In addition, each programme followed individual itineraries including: a visit by books students to the National Library in The Hague and a paper mill in Zaanse Schans near Zaandam. Furniture and metalwork students visited Paleis Het Loo in Apeldoorn



for a behind the scenes tour from the curator. Clock students visited Utrecht cathedral and Speelklok museum plus the Zaandam clock museum. Ceramic students toured the Royal Delft factory and museum and visual arts students saw a range of galleries and art museums including Mediamatic and Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art.

“This was an invaluable, educational experience for students who benefitted from special access to a range of museums, galleries, conservation workshops and other related institutions, enhancing their knowledge and helping them establish professional networks for the future.”

Francine Norris, Director of Education.



Alumni: Where are they now?

Catherine Silverman

Graduated in 2016 (MA Conservation of Furniture and Related Objects). Since completing her MA Catherine has begun a prestigious fellowship in furniture conservation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Martin Cuffe (pictured)

Graduated in 2014 (Making Stringed Musical Instruments Diploma). Builder turned craftsman, Martin now works for J.P. Guivier in London as an instrument restorer. He works on a wide range of instruments from student pieces to original 17th century violins, violas and cellos.

Jessica Hyslop

Graduated in 2016 (MA Conservation of Books and Library Materials). Jessica is the Project Conservator for the Minton Archive conservation project at Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service. Her work involves conserving items from the records of the famed Minton ceramics company particularly the earliest Minton pattern books and watercolour artworks on paper.

Rachael Potter

Graduated in 2015 (Foundation Diploma in Art and Design). Rachael started an apprenticeship with leading ceramicists Chris Keenan and Carina Ciscato in their studio shortly after graduating. She is now Studio Assistant to Dr Julian Stair, one of the UK's leading potters. Her work focuses on functional Limoges porcelain and constructing porcelain boxes influenced by her fascination with line and its impact on form.

Artists meet their Makers – Contemporary art re-invented by the West Dean Tapestry Studio

The West Dean Tapestry Studio was established in 1974 and has worked with many leading modern and contemporary artists including Henry Moore, John Piper, Basil Beattie, Michael Brennan-Wood and Tracey Emin. This year, the studio is delighted to host a new exhibition at the Craft Study Centre in Farnham which will shine a light on both artist and Master Weaver with equal intensity to explore how a dialogue and language is established between both parties.

Artists Meet Their Makers is a celebration of the skill and imagination of West Dean Tapestry Studio's Master Weavers and a number of new commissions will be unveiled at the exhibition, including Master Weaver Philip Sanderson's design based on ink drawings by Rebecca Salter. Philip's fellow Master Weaver Katharine Swailes is

developing an interpretation of a larger scale Emma Biggs & Matthew Collings painting.

The exhibition is organised by curator Liz Cooper and will include new works from previous projects, including 'House of Tunnels' woven by Katharine Swailes from a painting by Basil Beattie and 'Transformer' created by Philip Sanderson from a design by Michael Brennan-Wood.

“ At a certain stage, I handed the image over to Philip the weaver. I keep thinking it's like handing over the master tapes to be re-mixed. It was really exciting to see how the imagery is interpreted once the weaving begins. ”

Michael Brennan-Wood



Uncovered by Biggs and Collings

This free exhibition runs from 4 April to 1 July 2017 at the Crafts Study Centre, University for the Creative Arts, Farnham

West Dean Arts & Craft Festival 2-4 June 2017



This year, the new Arts & Craft Festival will bring arts and craft into West Dean Gardens on an unprecedented scale. Over three days, 200 artists, makers, writers and performers will gather together across the gardens to showcase a theatre of live demonstrations, hands-on taster workshops, and drop in and have-a-go sessions on a craft hut trail across the grounds. There will be opportunities to try new craft skills from throwing pots to portrait painting and willow weaving to woodcut print making. We hope they'll awaken or deepen your interest in making. During the festival, West Dean House will be open so that visitors can tap into the College's rich history of arts and craft, discover works from the collection and enjoy tours, talks and screenings from artists and tutors.

Literary Links at West Dean College

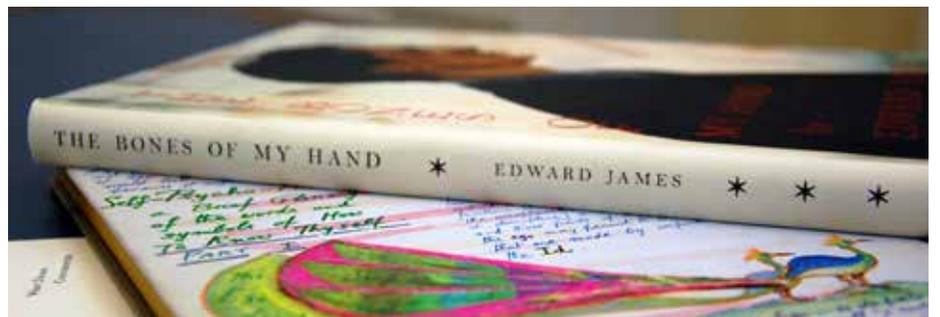
West Dean College has a strong tradition of writing dating back to the 1930s when our founder Edward James, poet and supporter of the surrealists, published fellow Oxford student John Betjeman's first collection of poems, Mount Zion.

For spring 2017 the Creative Writing Department launched a series of Literary Salons with acclaimed authors and writers, who are also guest tutors for the Creative Writing MA. These enrich the educational programme for students and also provide a setting to enable the wider community to engage with this creative environment.

Author Joanna Moorhead joined the April salon. An award-winning freelance journalist, Moorhead recently published a biography of her father's cousin and renowned surrealist artist, Leonora Carrington. Carrington's story is colourful, including a romance with the older artist Max Ernst, escape from the Nazis during World War II, mental illness and finally, a reclusive life in Mexico.

Edward James was a long term friend and patron of Leonora who established herself as a key figure in the Surrealist movement and an artist of remarkable individuality. Moorhead examined materials from The Edward James archive to inform her writing.

The Surreal Life of Leonora Carrington by Joanna Moorhead is published by Virago in April 2017.



For further information contact the Development Office:

Helen Saelensminde, Group Head of Fundraising - helen.saelensminde@westdean.org.uk

Caroline Gambetta, Development Manager – caroline.gambetta@westdean.org.uk

Lisa Oeder, Individual Giving Manager – lisa.oeder@westdean.org.uk

Caitlin MacGeorge, Fundraising Officer – caitlin.macgeorge@westdean.org.uk

West Dean College, The Edward James Foundation, West Dean, Chichester, PO18 0QZ. T. 01243 818265

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