

PRESS RELEASE

***Radical Landscapes***  
**21 October 2023 – 18 February 2024**



William Morris Gallery is pleased to announce ***Radical Landscapes***, an exhibition that will explore the natural world as a space for artistic inspiration, social connection, and political and cultural protest through the lens of William Morris, one of Britain's earliest and most influential environmental thinkers. Organised in collaboration with Tate Liverpool, the exhibition will display work spanning two centuries and feature more than 60 works by artists including JMW Turner, Claude Cahun, Hurvin Anderson, Derek Jarman, Jeremy Deller and Veronica Ryan. Delving into ideas of

freedom, exploitation and trespass, the exhibition will reflect on how British landscapes have been read, accessed and used across social, class and racial lines, as well as the current global climate emergency, starting from Morris' own relationship to and love for the land. Through the works on display and an expansive public programme, visitors will be encouraged to engage with the Gallery's surrounding borough of Waltham Forest, once a rural outpost and now an urban London borough, where Morris was born and which shaped his environmental and political views.

The exhibition will start by mining the connection to the land as seen through historical paintings and prints by Thomas Gainsborough and John Constable. Reflecting 18th and 19th-century perspectives, these works portray green spaces as places of timeless leisure, bucolic life and, concurrently, strenuous labour and rural identity. JMW Turner's *The Lake, Petworth, Sunset* (c.1827-8) will be shown alongside *Sunset at Herne Hill through the Smoke of London* (1876) by John Ruskin, a great admirer of Turner's ability to capture the natural world. In turn, Ruskin's artistic and political views played an important role in William Morris's own life and work. All three artists responded to the volatile and rapidly modernising times that they lived through, a period of environmental destruction comparable to the deterioration of the natural world today. Anthea Hamilton's *British Grasses Kimono* (2015), which will be displayed nearby, similarly explores overlapping ideas of nature, beauty and culture in our society, further illustrating the parallels between past and present ways to approach the land.

A second section will delve into the act of trespass, themes of geographical identity and belonging, and the ways in which communal rights to the land have been encroached upon by the enclosure, privatisation and commodification of green spaces. With roots as far back as the 17th century, this process is the subject of Hurvin Anderson's *Double Grille* (2008), a

painting that foregrounds the physical as well as symbolic role of taking land within British imperialist expansionism. Five sculptures by Turner Prize winner Veronica Ryan reflect her interest in organic forms such as fruits, seeds and vegetables, and their potential for recording histories of migration, intergenerational exchange and embedded memories. Jo Spence and Claude Cahun's photographs place the body within diverse landscapes, which will allow visitors to draw parallels between the socially encoded, gendered boundaries imposed on self-expression and identity, and the physical as well as psychological limits constructed around natural spaces.

*Radical Landscapes* will then explore the overlap between art and environmental protest with works including photographs by The Format Photographers Agency. This group of women, who sought to capture people and issues under-represented in mainstream media, chronicled the Greenham Common Women's Peace camps, a series of protests and sit-ins staged between 1981 and 2000 that responded to the British government's use of the RAF base for the storage of nuclear missiles. Shedding light on the subcultures and communities that protested the increasingly politicised and militarised treatment of land in the second half of the 20th century, the exhibition will draw parallels with more recent climate protests and political conflicts. Chris Killip's photographs of Lynemouth's Seacoal camp will highlight tensions between community, landscape and economic exploitation, while works by photographer Andrew Testa will document the 1996 Newbury bypass protests, highlighting the social turmoil and environmental cost of the felling of nearly 10,000 mature trees in Berkshire.

The final section of *Radical Landscapes* will draw directly from Morris's utopian novel *News from Nowhere* and the collection of the William Morris Gallery to evidence the parallels between today's environmental movements worldwide, and Morris's own stance on sustainability and critique of industrial capitalism. Works such as his *Lea* fabric design, made as part of a series of textiles extolling the beauty of British rivers, will illustrate Morris's commitment to the memory of the places of his childhood, such as the River Lea and Epping Forest, and his condemnation of progressive urbanisation he saw taking over them.

An expansive public programme, organised in collaboration with local artists, campaigners, foodbanks and allotments, will run alongside the exhibition, and expand beyond the Gallery's walls into the wetlands, forests and green spaces of Waltham Forest. The programme will invite participants to reassess their relationship with local landscapes and respond to the climate crisis.

*Radical Landscapes* is organised in collaboration with Tate Liverpool where a first version of the exhibition was shown from 5 May to 4 September 2022.

The exhibition is curated by Darren Pih, Chief Curator and Artistic Director, Harewood House; Laura Bruni, Curator of Exhibitions, Henry Moore Foundation; Matthew Watts, Assistant Curator, Tate; Hadrian Garrard, Director, William Morris Gallery; and Rowan Bain, Principal Curator, William Morris Gallery.

**ENDS**



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The exhibition will be on view from 21 October 2023 – 18 February 2024.  
Gallery opening hours are Tuesday to Sunday, 10am – 5pm; Admission free (suggested £5 donation).

Image credit: Chris Killip, *Helen and her Hula-hoop, Seacoal Camp, Lynemouth, Northumberland*, 1984 © Chris Killip Photography Trust/Magnum Photos, courtesy Martin Parr Foundation

### **About the William Morris Gallery**

Owned and run by Waltham Forest Council, the William Morris Gallery is the only public Gallery devoted to William Morris: designer, craftsman and radical socialist. Housed in the Grade II\* listed building that was Morris's family home from 1848 to 1856, it displays the world's largest collection of his work. In recent years the Gallery has developed an ambitious programme of contemporary and historical exhibitions by artists including Kehinde Wiley, Jeremy Deller, Yinka Shonibare CBE, Althea McNish and May Morris. Other special exhibitions have explored 20th-century political posters and African textiles. The Gallery was awarded the Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year in 2013 and was nominated for the European Museum of the Year Award in 2014.

William Morris Gallery,  
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[www.wmgallery.org.uk](http://www.wmgallery.org.uk)

### **About Tate Liverpool**

Envisaged as a flagship for decentralising culture, Tate Liverpool is as relevant now as at its conception; exchanging ideas, embedded in the city and facing both home-grown and global communities. The gallery is developing a clear identity that enables it to tell a story of modern and contemporary art through the lens of Liverpool and the North.

It has established a reputation for bold blockbuster exhibitions and bringing new perspectives to bear on the collection and the way it can be used to excite regular visitors and attract new ones from all over the world. Alongside the inspiring exhibitions programme the gallery has an established reputation for delivering high quality work within the city's neighbourhoods which reinforce the social purpose on which it was founded.

As a sector pioneer and artistic powerhouse Tate Liverpool has been a major contributor to the city and regional economy and, in the process, helped establish a blueprint for a wave of new regional galleries, redefining the role of the museum in the life of a city. The gallery has mirrored Liverpool's global connections as a port, using its international standing and outstanding collection to place the city at the centre of an outward looking, international artistic programme.