

Ladies of Quality & Distinction

21 September 2018 - 20 January 2019



The Foundling Museum presents a landmark exhibition resetting the Foundling Hospital's 300-year story

This autumn, for the first time, visitors to the Foundling Museum will have an opportunity to discover portraits and stories of the remarkable women who supported the establishment and running of London's Foundling Hospital. Marking 100 years of female suffrage, *Ladies of Quality & Distinction* resets the focus of the Hospital's story, and radically re-hangs the Museum's Picture Gallery.

Despite its male face, women permeate every aspect of the Hospital story; as mothers, supporters, wet nurses, staff, apprentice masters, artists, musicians, craftsmen and foundlings. Yet for almost 300 years, history has placed these women as a footnote in the story. The Museum is redressing this balance by bringing these overlooked stories to the fore.

Following a successful campaign via Art Happens, the Art Fund's crowdfunding platform, the Museum brings together portraits of the 'ladies of quality and distinction' who signed Thomas Coram's original petition to King George II in 1735, calling for the establishment of a Foundling Hospital. Working closely with eighteenth-century specialist Elizabeth Einberg, the Museum has identified portraits of these duchesses in public and private collections across the UK. Hung together for the first

THE FOUNDLING MUSEUM

time, these paintings will temporarily replace the portraits of male governors that line the walls of the Museum's Picture Gallery, reuniting the Ladies on the site of the charity they helped establish, and highlighting their role in shaping British society today. Included are magnificent court portraits by leading eighteenth-century painters William Hogarth, Thomas Hudson and Godfrey Kneller. The majority of the portraits are in private collections, having remained within the family or ancestral home. Some paintings have not been on public display for many years.

Downstairs in the Museum's exhibition gallery, the lives of the women who supported the day-to-day running of the institution will be brought to life. Women worked in many different roles at the Hospital, from laundresses and scullery maids, to cooks and matrons. Beyond its walls the organisation was supported by a small army of wet nurses who fostered the children in their infancy, as well as inspectors who supervised them. It was not until the twentieth century that the first woman was appointed Governor. Nevertheless, many female supporters of similar social class to the Hospital Governors gave valued advice, particularly around the proper care of infants, girls and female staff.

Highlighted stories include: Mrs Prudence West, a female inspector and the only woman to run a branch Hospital; Miss Eleanor Barnes, one of the earliest female Governors of the Hospital; Mrs Elizabeth Leicester, an early matron of the Foundling Hospital who oversaw some of its most challenging years; and Jane Pett, a dry nurse highly acclaimed for her exceptional care.

Caro Howell, Director of the Foundling Museum said: 'Women of every social class permeate every aspect of the Foundling Hospital story. After centuries of omission, their revolutionary, catalytic and invaluable contributions can at last be celebrated. We are incredibly grateful to the 336 donors who supported our Art Happens campaign to make this important exhibition possible.'

This exhibition forms part of the Museum's year-long programme of exhibitions, displays and events to mark the centenary of female suffrage, by celebrating women's contribution to British society, culture and philanthropy from the 1720s to the present day. The Museum raised over £20,000 towards this exhibition through a successful Art Happens crowdfunding campaign. The Museum is incredibly grateful to all our exhibition donors, including the 336 donors who gave to our Art Happens campaign, our main corporate exhibition sponsor Saxton Bampfylde, and to Art Fund, whose support made conservation of paintings loaned for this exhibition possible.

Press enquiries

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Notes to editors

The Foundling Museum explores the history of the Foundling Hospital, the UK's first children's charity and first public art gallery, and through a dynamic programme of exhibitions and events celebrates the ways in which artists of all disciplines have helped improve children's lives for over 275 years. The Foundling Hospital, which continues today as the children's charity Coram, was established in 1739 by the philanthropist Captain Thomas Coram, as 'a hospital for the maintenance and education of exposed and deserted young children'. Instrumental in helping Coram realise his vision were the artist William Hogarth, who encouraged leading artists of the day to donate work, and the composer George Frideric Handel, who gave annual benefit concerts of his Messiah. In doing so, they created London's first public art gallery and set the template for the way in which the arts can support philanthropy.

Coram has been creating better chances for children since 1739. They help children and young people today through their pioneering work in adoption, parenting support, housing support, alcohol and drug education, creative therapies and championing legal rights in the UK and overseas. coram.org.uk

Art Happens is the UK's only crowdfunding platform for the museum sector, hosted by the Art Fund, the national fundraising charity for art. Art Happens was highly commended for 'Most Innovative Fundraising Campaign' in the Institute of Fundraising's National Fundraising Awards, announced 6 July 2015.

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. In the past five years alone Art Fund has given £34 million to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. It also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, and makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators. Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 123,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions and subscription to Art Quarterly magazine. In addition to grant-giving, Art Fund's support for museums includes Art Fund Museum of the Year (won by the The Hepworth Wakefield in 2017) and a range of digital platforms. Find out more about at artfund.org

Visitor Information

The Foundling Museum, 40 Brunswick Square, London WC1N 1AZ

+44 (0)20 7841 3600 / foundlingmuseum.org.uk

Open: Tuesday - Saturday 10:00-17:00, Sunday 11:00-17:00, Monday closed

Admission: Adults £11 with donation, Concessions £8.25 with donation. Free for children, Foundling Friends & National Art Pass holders

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