

The Fallen Woman

25 September 2015 - 3 January 2016

An exhibition exploring the myth and reality of the ‘fallen woman’, revealing the untold stories of the women who gave up their babies to the Foundling Hospital



The Fallen Woman places the stories of Victorian women who petitioned the Foundling Hospital to take their illegitimate babies into care, alongside images of ‘fallen’ women from paintings, drawings and newspaper illustrations, giving a voice to those

popularly portrayed in art and the media. The Art Fund helped the Museum raise £25,382 towards the cost of realising the exhibition through its crowdfunding platform Art Happens. In total 198 individuals donated to the campaign, raising over 100% of its target.

The exhibition includes paintings by major nineteenth-century artists such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Richard Redgrave, George Frederic Watts and Thomas Faed, including works that have not been seen in the UK for generations. Alongside these pieces we hear the real stories of nineteenth-century fallen women through the petitions of those applying to give up their babies to London’s Foundling Hospital. These are brought to life by a specially-commissioned sound installation from musician and composer, Steve Lewinson.

In the nineteenth century, an age when sexual respectability was highly valued, the loss of chastity for an unwed woman had multiple repercussions: homelessness, unemployment, prostitution and even suicide were fates awaiting those who fell below the standards of mainstream society. The ‘fallen’ woman became a popular figure in Victorian culture and was mythologised through art and literature as warnings against the consequences of losing one’s virtue.

During this time the Foundling Hospital changed its admission process to focus on restoring respectability to the mother, and only the petitions of previously respectable women bearing their first illegitimate child were considered. The reality of the nineteenth-century fallen woman is reflected, in part, by the thousands of petitions from women whose circumstances meant they were forced to give up their babies.

Image above:

G F Watts, *Found Drowned*, c.1848-1850, © Watts Gallery

The works will be displayed in the Museum's dedicated exhibition space as well as in the Committee Room, a space in the original Hospital where women are said to have been interviewed to determine their suitability for their child's admission. The display will also include Victorian prints, illustrations and stereoscopic images depicting contemporary ideas of a woman's ideal role within society, as well as images of women who deviated from these norms.



However, it is through the petitions from the Foundling Hospital's archives and the documents that reveal the Hospital's thorough investigations into their backgrounds, that the exhibition gives a voice to these previously unheard women. A sound installation by Steve Lewinson will offer a new and engaging interpretation of these archive materials, bringing the women's voices to life.

The Foundling Museum's Director, Caro Howell said: *"This exhibition will enable real 'fallen women' to tell their stories for the first time, giving us the opportunity to see their fictional counterparts afresh and to hear a familiar tale made unfamiliar in the telling"*.

The Fallen Woman is curated by Professor Lynda Nead in collaboration with the Foundling Museum's curatorial team.

Funded through

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The exhibition has also been supported by The London Community Foundation, Cockayne – Grants for the Arts, The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, The Idlewild Trust and *The Fallen Woman* Exhibition Supporters' Circle.

Press Enquiries

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Visitor Information

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foundlingmuseum.org.uk

Image above:

Henry Nelson O'Neil, *A Mother Depositing Her Child at the Foundling Hospital in Paris* (detail), 1855 © The Foundling Museum

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

Admission: £8.25 (including Gift Aid), concession £5.50 (including Gift Aid)
Children, Foundling Friends and Art Fund members go free
Half-price admission for National Trust members

Tube and train: Russell Square, King's Cross St Pancras and Euston

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 regular programme of events and exhibitions 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 all the leading artists of the day to donate work, and the composer George Frideric Handel, who gave annual benefit concerts of the *Messiah*. In doing so, they created London's first public art gallery and set the template for the way that the arts could 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.

www.coram.org.uk

Lynda Nead is Pevsner Professor of History of Art at Birkbeck, University of London. She has published many books and articles on Victorian culture including *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain* (Blackwell) and *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (Yale University Press). She is a fellow of the European Academy and is currently a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellow.

Steve Lewinson is a musician, producer, songwriter, composer and musical director, who is most popularly known for his recording and performing work with some of the world's most successful artists, including Simply Red, George Michael and Kylie. More recently Steve has been working with the Welsh National Opera and the Paralympic Games Opening Ceremony composer Errollyn Wallen on *Anon*, a new opera which explores the modern exploitation and abuse of women.

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art, driven by the belief that everyone should have access to great art. In the past 5 years the Art Fund has given £34m to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections. The Art Fund also helps museums share their collections with wider audiences by supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, including ARTIST ROOMS and the 2013–18 Aspire tour of Tate’s Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows by John Constable, and makes additional grants to support the training and professional development of curators.

The Art Fund is independently funded, with the core of its income provided by 117,000 members who receive the National Art Pass and enjoy free entry to over 230 museums, galleries and historic places across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions. In addition to grant-giving, the Art Fund’s support for museums includes the annual Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year (won by the Whitworth in 2015), a publications programme and a range of digital platforms including a website and the Art Guide app, promoting a network of over 650 museums and galleries across the country.

Find out more about the Art Fund, Art Happens and the National Art Pass at www.artfund.org. Please contact Madeline Adeane, the Press Relations Manager, on 020 7225 4804 or madeane@artfund.org

Art Happens is the UK’s only crowdfunding platform for the museum sector, hosted by the Art Fund, the national fundraising charity for art.

Heritage Lottery Fund, thanks to National Lottery players, invests money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about - from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. HLF has provided a grant of £9,700 towards the Foundling Museum’s *The Fallen Woman* exhibition. www.hlf.org.uk @heritagelottery
