

The Covid Letters

A Vital Update

24 October 2020 - 11 April 2021



The Foundling Museum stages first ever exhibition by fashion provocateur Jonny Banger

This autumn Foundling Museum Trustee and Turner Prize-winning artist, Jeremy Deller, invites Jonny Banger, designer and owner of subversive fashion label Sports Banger, to show the work he gathered from the nation's children during lockdown. A selection of over 200 works from *The Covid Letters* will go on display at the Foundling Museum from Saturday 24 October.

As the country went into lockdown, Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, wrote a letter intended for every household in the UK, urging residents to stay at home, protect the NHS and save lives. In response, Banger invited young people, under the age of 16, to customise the letter, as a way of articulating their feelings – including about the Government's handling of the coronavirus crisis, and the NHS. The social media call out was straightforward: 'if you've received a letter, design a poster'. The rules too were simple: you must be under 16 years of age, draw straight onto the letter itself and 'no digital'.

Banger received entries from across the UK, from toddlers to teenagers,

which ranged from a simple scribble and calls to support the NHS with more PPE, to anti-government graffiti. Using pens, pencils, paint and collage, children took the opportunity to make their voices heard. Banger shared images of these ‘defaced’ letters on his Instagram feed, giving children a platform on which to share their views. All of the children who entered received a certificate (making them an honorary pirate of the ‘Banger Fleet’), a bootleg Blue Peter badge, and a couple of t-shirts. For a lot of children this was the first piece of post they had ever received.

Sports Banger started as an underground clothing company. Arguably one of the most sought after clothing lines right now, a label that would define bootlegging for the modern age, Sports Banger is known for its appropriation of classic sports brands, political messaging and sharp humour. The idea for *The Covid Letters* came to Banger when someone, on receiving their Sports Banger t-shirt the same day as receiving the Prime Minister’s letter said on social media, ‘One of these is going in the bin’. The re-appropriation of Johnson’s letter is similar to the bootlegging style of Sports Banger – by offering children the opportunity to react so directly, the letter is transformed into a tool for protest, dialogue and debate. A book containing all of the entries is due to be published in October.

Speaking about the project, Banger said: ‘I couldn’t be happier using my platform to give kids a voice. Little anarchists spreading joy. The Foundling Museum is an important part of the social history of London and the UK, it’s story more relevant than ever. I’m so happy the exhibition is showing here, it actually means something.’

Speaking about his invitation to Jonny Banger, Jeremy Deller said: ‘*The Covid Letters* are the best art to come out of lockdown, I am very jealous. They are funny, naughty and angry in equal measure. I can’t wait to see all the rudeness and righteousness in the same place, and in the same spaces as paintings by William Hogarth who I am sure would have loved this work.’

Speaking about the exhibition, Caro Howell, Director of the Foundling Museum, said: ‘*The Covid Letters* forms a vibrant, uncensored and emotional time capsule that captures the creative voices of children at a moment of huge national anxiety. While the Foundling Museum’s historic collections speak powerfully to the lives of children, it is wonderful to hear them speaking for themselves, through this exhibition.’

The Covid Letters will go on display in the Museum’s exhibition gallery, with letters also interspersed throughout its historic collections. Shown

THE FOUNDLING MUSEUM

in the context of the Foundling Museum, this exhibition brings to life the museum's 300-year-old story of creative campaigning and social justice. Visitors to the exhibition will have the opportunity to support the Christmas food bank run by Sports Banger & Friends and the museum's pioneering work with disadvantaged young people, through the purchase of Sports Banger merchandise and a limited-edition print.

The exhibition is supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.



Press enquiries

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Notes for Editors

The Foundling Museum works to transform the lives of disadvantaged children through the arts and to inspire people to make the world a better place. The Museum's displays explore 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 Frederic 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

Jonny Banger is an artist, raver and founder of UK-based clothing brand Sports Banger. Sports Banger's studio and shop is located on Seven Sisters Road in London and was established in 2013. His first t-shirt design was FREE TULISA - in support of the British icon while she was being dragged through the mud by the tabloid media. This was followed by other hugely iconic t-shirts and designs earning the brand a cult following.

Banger's work interrogates British pop culture, class and politics through the subversion and appropriation of branding. One of Sports Banger's most infamous designs is the 2015 'NHS Nike' in support of junior doctors. The t-shirt could be seen around London and had a viral response online, despite legal threats from the government.

The bootleg 'NHS Nike' design was re-released in 2020 amidst the Covid-19 lockdown measures. All sales profits were channeled into a programme feeding healthcare workers across London and a 6-month food bank at a North London primary school for families on free meal vouchers. This was co-ordinated by Jonny Banger and his team after receiving messages from teachers and nurses asking for help.

In 2019, Sports Banger staged two fashion shows away from the official London Fashion Week schedule. In review of the Spring/Summer '20 show, Vogue International called it, 'arguably the most exciting show of London Fashion Week'. Sports Banger is worn by ravers, rude boys, workers, kids and nurses. It's a fast-growing rag-tag collective and everyone is invited.

Lifestyles of the poor, rich and famous.

'Start where you are, use what you've got, do what you can' - Jonny Banger

Jeremy Deller is a British artist. He won the Turner Prize in 2004 and represented the UK at the Venice Biennale in 2013. Jeremy is known for his public artworks, including, The Battle of Orgreave, We're here because we're here (a national performance to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first day of the battle of the Somme) and Sacrilege a life size inflatable Stonehenge.

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we inspire, lead and resource the UK's heritage to create positive change for people and communities, now and in the future. www.heritagefund.org.uk #NationalLotteryHeritageFund

The Heritage Emergency Fund is now closed for applications. Extra advice and support and longer-term skills and capacity building initiatives has also been made available for the heritage sector. Read more about The National Lottery Heritage Fund's response to the Covid-19 emergency.

About the National Lottery

- Since The National Lottery's first draw took place on 19 November 1994, more than £40 billion has been raised for good causes in the areas of arts, sport, heritage and community.
- National Lottery players contribute around £30 million to good causes every week.
- The National Lottery has made more than 5,500 millionaires but its primary purpose is giving to good causes - over 565,000 individual grants have been awarded across the UK, that's the equivalent of 200 life-changing projects in every UK postcode district.

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Visitor Information

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

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Admission: Adults £10.50 with donation, Concessions £8.25 with donation.