Making Dorset at Kingston Lacy

Dorset Visual Arts is delighted to announce an exciting new collaboration with the National Trust, launching a flagship Making Dorset exhibition at Kingston Lacy House near Wimborne.

Formed in 2017, Making Dorset honours the region's vibrant heritage of craft, making and design, highlighting exceptional works across ceramics, furniture, silversmithing, printmaking, glass, and textiles. The initiative investigates the deep connections linking regional environment, historic heritage, and fine creative practice.

Throughout Dorset, isolated makers' studios serve as spaces of focused investigation and dedicated craft. Here, practitioners are united by a commitment to narrative, form, function, and the interplay between heritage and innovation.

In this showcase exhibition, dynamic contemporary pieces by Making Dorset members will directly engage with Kingston Lacy's historic collection of fine design and decorative arts. By offering a platform for distinguished regional talent, this dialogue between modern and historic craft will enrich the experience of visitors between April-October 2027.

Representing over 30 makers, this landmark exhibition forms an integral part of Dorset Visual Arts' expanding cultural programme.

Kingston Lacy

The theme embedded in all of Kingston Lacy's programming is Creativity and Craftsmanship. This essential motto is inspired by the pioneering and experimental creativity of William John Bankes (1786-1855). Driven by an intense desire to beautify his Dorset home while in self-imposed exile in Europe after fleeing prosecution for homosexuality, William John became engrossed in a world of expert craftsmanship and a variety of materials from stone to marble to fruitwood. He was not content to buy off the shelf and instead began a remarkable campaign of collaboration with a series of talented and emerging makers including wood and stone carvers, carpenters, painters and sculptors.

The archive at the Dorset History Centre holds the many designs and letters that attest to these intensive collaborations where makers were often working from his designs and where creative debate was the norm. William John developed a sophisticated understanding of the qualities of natural materials and a reputation for fostering creative talent. He continually challenged and brought out the best in his artist-collaborators as well as the precious materials of their craft.

This dynamic relationship with art, craft and materials is one that Kingston Lacy continues to celebrate today. The National Trust's mission is to follow in William John's footprints by providing local and international makers a space to not only display their work, but also to inspire creativity.

Aims of the Collaboration

A collaboration with Dorset Makers will continue work in this area which has so far included commissions in sound art and painting inspired by the skill of 18th-century Indian craftspeople through responses to a cabinet made in Visakhapatnam.

The high-quality craftsmanship of Dorset Makers and the range of materials and techniques utilised by these practitioners perfectly reflect William John's passions and artistic interests. Collaborating with and hosting Dorset Makers at Kingston Lacy is a contemporary way to reinvigorate the creative spirit of Kingston Lacy. The Makers' works - whether inspired by, or juxtaposed deliberately with - William John's co-creations will reinterpret the collection and interiors through the eyes of contemporary craftspeople. The aim of the exhibition is that the Makers' works will act as a lens through which visitors can focus and appreciate and see anew the works of their 19th century counterparts defining the continuity that creative practice weaves across time and stressing the contemporary nature of William John's interventions.

The exhibition and related programming aim to develop Kingston Lacy as a place where people will feel free to explore the creativity of others and their own; it will become a historic house with a contemporary purpose, inspired by its own past.

The exhibition will contribute to a dynamic annual visit driving programme, giving audiences reasons to visit and return. The partnership will open up Kingston Lacy to new and diverse audiences including those who may regularly visit the gardens, but not the house, and those who visit the house less frequently.

Public benefit

- Offers opportunities for visitors to engage with contemporary craftsmanship
- Provides a fresh perspective on heritage collections
- Explores connections between historic and contemporary creative practice
- Encourages visitors to engage with their own creativity
- Contributes to the contemporary relevance of Kingston Lacy
- Creates opportunities for contemporary Dorset makers
- Builds on previous artistic collaborations at the property
- New partnership opportunity that can form the basis of a lasting collaboration via Makers Markets and other opportunities
- Connecting audiences with KL's core narrative and Spirit of Place

Making Dorset

Making Dorset celebrates the best of contemporary craft, design and making from the county. The initiative features a vast array of works with a variety of approach, response and use of materials, including award winning international furniture makers such as John Makepeace OBE, Simon Thomas Pirie and Petter Southall.

At its inception, Making Dorset was open to professionally and, or academically trained designers and makers who had established their practice in Dorset, including trained or apprenticed emergent designers and makers. The group sought to share ideas and experiences, undertake critical reviews to explore the content as well as the processes associated with individual's practice.

'Once they get to Dorset (or return) place holds them fast. The work, whatever the medium, sings of Dorset's holloways, chalk and faltering edges, whimbreled cloudscapes and its brilled and dabbled seas.'

Professor Simon Olding, Foreword to Fifty Dorset Makers, 2017

APPLICATION PROCESS

Participation is invited from current Making Dorset members, prior to the end of October, securing an initial foundation of core participants.

From mid-November, applications open to prospective new members, who will undergo selection, with selection decisions finalised ahead of Christmas. An experienced Advisory Panel will review candidates based on selection criteria:

Please view the selection criteria and application process details here

Selection will include evidence of a dedicated professional practice, including an established studio discipline, and active engagement in representing their discipline regionally or nationally via exhibitions, teaching, or publication.

Applications can be made up until Tuesday 15th December, 5pm, with decisions made by Tuesday 12th January 2027. Adhering to this timeline is vital, as makers crafting site-specific work for Kingston Lacy require adequate research and preparation time, though thoughtful curation will also allow for the inclusion of selected existing pieces.

To champion emerging and early-career talent, the open call will incorporate outreach to Bournemouth University and Heritage Crafts. Building on a recent initiative supported by Lord Lieutenant Michael Dooley, this collaboration aims to energise new creative voices alongside a renewed appreciation for 'red-list' heritage crafts.

Maker Benefit

Participants will need to be a DVA Member and a submission fee will be administered to successful applicants to take part. Their work will be on show at Kingston Lacy throughout from April through to October with the following support and benefits:

- Representation at regional level in a significant cultural venue with excellent footfall
- Benefit of partnership with National Trust experience as well as curatorial support, as well as promotion across National Trust media channels
- Heritage audience
- Inclusion in Dorset Visual Arts promotion around the exhibition including a full page advert/venue listing in the **Dorset Art Weeks 2027** Guide, press releases, social media, website and other bespoke editorial features tbc including Visit

Dorset, Dorset Magazine, Evolver, Sherborne Times, as well as some national press

- Opportunity to take part in a ‘wraparound’ programme: Talks, workshops, demonstrations
- Sales opportunities - each Maker will have an accompanying panel to explain their work and process, with a QR code to direct interested visitors to their website/contact details
- As well as items curated around the House, in dialogue with the collection, there will be a small room dedicated to smaller items, tools and materials as well as the opportunity for some selected merchandise in the retail offer

Exhibition Dates:

mid-April until end October 2027





Images: Yo Thom, Charlie McPherson