

PRESS RELEASE

Rare Joseph Wright of Derby painting acquired for the nation

'Self-Portrait at the Age of About Forty', and on the reverse a study for Wright's famous painting *'An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump'*, unveiled at Derby Museum and Art Gallery

Today, [16 May 2022], Derby Museum and Art Gallery is delighted to announce it will be the guardian of a major new acquisition for the nation when it unveils *Self-Portrait at the Age of About Forty* in its Joseph Wright Gallery. In what can only be described as an exceptional 'once in a lifetime' opportunity, this remarkable painting by world renowned artist Joseph Wright, who was born and lived in Derby, has been Accepted in lieu of Inheritance Tax by HM Government under a hybrid arrangement and allocated to Derby Museums, administered by Arts Council England. Further support has come from a range of funding bodies including a major donation of £2,271,621 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, support from Art Fund, and a number of private donations, including Robert. M. Kirkland one of Derby Museums' generous supporters.

The self-portrait captures a sense of the self-confidence and recognition of Wright's growing reputation for his so-called 'candlelight paintings.' It is also the only one of Wright's ten self-portraits in which he specifically depicts himself as an artist, and it is packed with references to his specialism as a master painter of light effects: the porte-crayon in his hand, with a white chalk in one end, and a black chalk in the other, and the play of warm fire – or candle – light on the folds of his exotic, and unusual, artistic costume.



Self-portrait at the age of about forty, by Joseph Wright, oil on canvas, c.1772 (L) and a study for "*An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump*", by Joseph Wright, oil on canvas, c. 1768 (R). Images c/o Omnia Art Ltd.

The painting also comes with an added bonus which further demonstrates the working process of Wright. The verso (or reverse of the painting) shows a study for Wright's famous painting *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump*. It was painted in or just prior to 1768 and sheds important light on the development of Wright's ideas for "The Air Pump"; a painting that is widely credited as

the artist's masterpiece and the first of his works to enter a British public collection when it was acquired by the National Gallery in 1863.

Owned as part of a private collection since it was completed in around 1772, the self-portrait has seldom been exhibited in public and now it will take pride of place at Derby Museum and Art Gallery, home of the largest collection of the work of Joseph Wright of Derby in the world. It will complement the existing collection as it represents what could be seen as a defining moment in Wright's career. By 1772, just one year prior to his influential tour of Italy, Wright had firmly established himself as what one fellow artist described as 'the most famous painter now living for candlelights', with the public exhibition of paintings such as *The Orrery*, *The Air Pump*, and *Alchemist*.

The painting, which is approximately 30 by 25 inches, is in its original elaborate frame and will be on permanent display in the Joseph Wright Gallery at Derby Museum and Art Gallery in a bespoke free-standing case which allow both sides of the painting to be viewed. The case will also be turned occasionally due to the different orientations of the two sides of the work (portrait and landscape). A high-resolution image of the side not currently shown in its correct format will also accompany the work on display to help visitors understand what they are looking at.

Lucy Bamford, Curator at Derby Museums and Art Gallery, and Joseph Wright expert said: 'We are extremely excited to be able to add this remarkable painting to our existing Joseph Wright collection. The way it depicts his growing confidence as an artist is wonderful, and the incredible verso is the icing on the cake as it tells us so much about his way of working.'

'We are delighted to have it on permanent public display where it can be enjoyed by local, national, and international followers of Wright's work. Not only is it a work of significant artistic quality, but it also adds greatly to the stories that we share around Wright and our visitors' understanding of the artist, helping us to cement Derby Museums as the go-to place for the study and appreciation of Wright's work on both a national and international level.'

Tony Butler, Director of Derby Museums said: 'The acquisition of this painting is a triumph for Derby Museums. The work has never been in public ownership having remained in private hands since it was executed in a studio not far from where Derby Museum and Art gallery is now. We feel a palpable sense of "bringing Joseph Wright of Derby back home.'

'It has been a remarkable achievement for a regional museum organisation like Derby Museums to secure the funding to save this wonderful painting for the nation. I thank Arts Council England for their support via the Acceptance in Lieu "hybrid offer" scheme, which then helped us unlock funding from the Art Fund, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, The Headley Trust, Omnia Art and a number of generous individuals and organisations. We have also been touched by Derby Museum supporters, many of whom have made incredibly generous donations.'

Edward Harley, OBE, Chairman, Acceptance in Lieu Panel, said: 'I am delighted that Derby Museums has been allocated this remarkable work which depicts on one side Wright's self-portrait, the only surviving version which shows him as a practicing artist, and on the other side a preliminary study for his famous *An Experiment on a Bird in the Air Pump*. It is fitting that the painting has been allocated to Derby where the artist was based for most of his career. The painting demonstrates the

close bond that Wright had with his patron, Thomas Coltman, to whom the artist gave this work. The portrait of Coltman and his wife Mary (National Gallery) counts among the artist's greatest achievements.'

Arts Minister Lord Parkinson said: 'It is wonderful that this rare self-portrait by Joseph Wright has been saved for the nation and acquired by Derby Museums. Thanks to the Government's Acceptance in Lieu scheme, this fantastic piece will be exhibited at Derby Museum and Art Gallery where it will take pride of place in the world's largest collection of his works.'

Dr Simon Thurley CBE, Chair, National Heritage Memorial Fund said: 'The National Heritage Memorial Fund is delighted to support Derby Museums with a major donation of £2.3million to ensure that this magnificent self-portrait joins their collection. This painting has been privately owned since the 1770s and rarely exhibited, so we are very proud that thanks to our grant this work by Joseph Wright, one of Britain's most brilliant and compelling eighteenth century painters, will be on display at Derby Museum and Art Gallery for all to enjoy.'

Jenny Waldman, Director of Art Fund, said, 'Art Fund is delighted that this remarkable painting, which has been in private hands for the past 250 years, will now be on public display at Derby Museum and Art Gallery for all to enjoy. It is very exciting that the work is joining the museum's exceptional Joseph Wright collection, enhancing audiences' understanding of the artist's career, with the verso giving a unique insight into his process. Thanks to the generosity of our members, Art Fund is able to support new acquisitions that build museums' collections for public benefit.'

Derby Museums is very grateful to Omnia Art Ltd, the independent art advisers, who took advantage of the Acceptance in Lieu Scheme to ensure the painting came to the museum. Omnia recognised that there was nowhere more appropriate to hang Joseph Wright's Self Portrait than at Derby, where it can now be displayed amongst his most famous paintings.

-Ends-

Available for interview

Lucy Bamford, **Curator at Derby Museums and Art Gallery**

Tony Butler, **Chief Executive, Derby Museums**

Media viewings

Media visits may be able to be arranged prior to the painting going on display. To arrange/register your interest, please contact the Culture Communications Collective:

- Adela Cragg: adela@culturecommscollective.com / 07532 685 614
- Morag Wood: morag@culturecommscollective.com / 07976 081 044
- Simon Oliver: simon@culturecommscollective.com / 07720 438007

Notes to editors

About Joseph Wright of Derby

Born in Derby in 1734, Wright is an internationally renowned artist, whose paintings and works on paper adorn the walls of major galleries the world over. Derby Museums is home to the world's largest collection of his work, and also houses the Joseph Wright Study Room which is home to over 300 drawings and sketches by Wright, as well as engravings, letters and a large library of related books.

About the display

The painting will be on permanent display, but due to its delicate nature, and to support its conservation, it will be on its special plinth for certain periods and then 'rested' from time to time to preserve it for future generations. When it is not on its double-sided plinth visitors will be able to view information about the verso on the interpretation panels that have been specially created to tell its wider story.

About Derby Museums

- Founded in 2012, Derby Museums is an independent charitable trust that manages three museums in the city, the Museum and Art Gallery, Pickford's House and the new Museum of Making and holds and curates all the art and collections within them, including the world's largest collection of paintings by Joseph Wright of Derby. www.derbymuseums.org
- Derby Museums inspires all generations to be makers, artists and thinkers. It aims to bring as many of the objects and treasures in the collections into the public domain as possible and to present them in ways that delight and inspire via education and learning programmes, events and exhibitions, in order to share knowledge and inspire creativity and making amongst the people of Derby.
- As a charitable trust, Derby Museums relies on funding and grants from organisations, as well as donations from businesses and the general public, all of which are gratefully received in order to ensure that admission to the museums remains free for all. It is also a National Portfolio Organisation supported by Arts Council England.

About the Acceptance in Lieu Hybrid model

The painting has been Accepted in lieu of Inheritance Tax by HM Government under a hybrid arrangement and allocated to Derby Museums. The amount of tax that could have been settled by the acceptance of this painting exceeded the actual liability payable by the offerors. The painting settled £779,619 and Derby Museums, to whom the painting has been permanently allocated in accordance with the condition attached to the offer, made good the difference of £2,720,380 with the assistance of grants from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Art Fund and a number of private donors and foundations.

Details of the work are as follows:

Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-97)

Self Portrait at the age of about 40 c.1772-73

On the reverse Study for 'The Air Pump'

30 x 25 ins

EXHIBITED

Graves 1901, no.27

National Gallery 1986, no.3, fig.2

Tate Gallery 1990, no.94

Tate Britain, 2014, BP Spotlight: Joseph Wright of Derby

LITERATURE

Benedict Nicholson, Wright of Derby, no.167, p.229; pp.38, 103, 108; Frontispieces and p.21, fig.6
Allan Braham, Wright of Derby: Mr & Mrs Coltman, National Gallery exhibition booklet, 1986, p.12

Judy Egerton, Wright of Derby, Tate Gallery exhibition catalogue, 1990, p. 156 Matthew Craske, Joseph Wright of Derby, Painter of Darkness, 2020, pp.204-5

The **Acceptance in Lieu scheme** is administered by the Arts Council. The Acceptance in Lieu Panel, chaired by Edward Harley OBE, advises on whether property offered in lieu is of suitable importance and offered at a value which is fair to both nation and taxpayer. AIL allows those who have a bill to Inheritance Tax to pay the tax by transferring important cultural, scientific or historic objects to the nation. Material accepted under the scheme is allocated to public collections and is available for all. In the last decade this important government initiative brought £461.2m worth of treasures into public ownership for the enjoyment of all - see more at: <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/tax-incentives/acceptance-lieu#section-1>

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. We have set out our strategic vision in *Let's Create* that by 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high quality cultural experiences. We invest public money from Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and to deliver this vision.
www.artscouncil.org.uk

Following the Covid-19 crisis, the Arts Council developed a £160 million **Emergency Response Package**, with nearly 90% coming from the National Lottery, for organisations and individuals needing support. We are also one of the bodies administering the Government's unprecedented £1.96 billion **Culture Recovery Funds**. Find out more at www.artscouncil.org.uk/covid19.

About Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. It provides millions of pounds every year to help museums to acquire and share works of art across the UK, further the professional development of their curators, and inspire more people to visit and enjoy their public programmes. In response to Covid-19 Art Fund made £3.6 million in urgent funding available to support museums through reopening and beyond, including Respond and Reimagine grants to help meet immediate need and reimagine future ways of working. A further £2million has been made available for the 2021 Reimagine grant programme. Art Fund is independently funded, supported by the 130,000 members who buy the National Art Pass, who enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and receive Art Quarterly magazine. Art Fund also supports museums through its annual prize, Art Fund Museum of the Year. The winner of Art Fund Museum of the Year 2021 is Firstsite in Colchester.

About the National Heritage Memorial Fund

The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) was set up in 1980 to save the most outstanding parts of our national heritage, in memory of those who have given their lives for the UK.
www.nhmf.org.uk @NationalHeritageMemorialFund.

The Headley Trust

The Headley Trust was established in 1973 by Sir Timothy Sainsbury, who remains the Chairman 48 years later. It became a registered charity in 1974. It is one of 16 Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts. The Headley Trust makes grants of around £5 million a year, largely in the Arts and Heritage field. Among its priority areas are museums and galleries, particularly those operating in the regions. The trustees particularly wish to support the professional development of curators, as well as the display, study and acquisition of British ceramics and the conservation of industrial, maritime and built heritage. See <http://www.sfct.org.uk/Headley.html> for information about the full range of the trust's interests.