

27 June 2018

Press Release

Staffages (2018), 22 June – 8 September, Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery

Photographic Artist Steffi Klenz Showcases the Museum Collection in Summer Exhibition



Last summer artist Steffi Klenz was given access to the collections and buildings of the Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery and Adult Education Centre and commissioned to develop a body of work exploring new correlations between the work of the museum, art gallery, library and Adult Education Centre. The result is an exhibition of new photographic works illuminating the connections between museum object, site and viewer. 'Staffages (2018)' runs from Friday 22 June until Sunday 8 September.

Suzie Plumb, Exhibition Curator explains, "At this exciting time of change and to celebrate the uniqueness of our collections and spaces we wanted to capture a snapshot of the collections, buildings and the people working in and using these spaces before the evolvement into the new Cultural Hub."

Klenz's photographic work, Staffages (2018) explores how the meaning of objects and images can change as they pass through the hands of artists and collectors and redisplay objects from the collection in new set ups, crossing time and sites. Removed from their previous context and redisplayed in different ways, objects and their meaning evolve into something new. The collection

is no longer static and by making new connections between object, site and viewer the artist suggests a conceptual as well as a physical space.

How we tell stories changes over time, reflecting changes in society and in our ethical beliefs. In Klenz's work the value and meaning of objects changes as she questions how they are displayed. The artist is interested in how the relationship between object and viewer shifts when the object is removed from its museum context. How do our perceptions of economic, cultural and historical value change when we alter the way museum objects are displayed?

For example, objects of local importance such as a 'Nest of blue tit with six eggs found in a whole in the wall at Rusthall in Kent, bird killed by cat' (8th May 1942) or 'Crude Asbestos' (17th November 1930) are given the same status by Klenz as objects of historical and monetary value such as a 'Large Bronze Medal of Kalman Tisza Premier of Hungary 1875' (11th November 1944).

Researching the collections catalogue ignited in the artist an interest in museum theory; the process of donation, selection of objects and how these processes change over time. She studied historic museum registers, documenting the objects taken into the museum collections, the transition of ownership of these objects and how they were identified. These old registers, together with current computer records, detail the museum collection in a methodical way, without attaching any perceived economic or cultural 'value' to individual objects. In museology, every object has equal status through registration, description, display and care and its value lies in the way it represents our shared stories.

The artist was interested in looking at the timeframe from when the collection was first established at the beginning of the 20th Century and using this as a starting point to consider the collection's historical significance and contemporary relevance.

From the late 19th to the early 20th century an archive or collection recorded data and knowledge, collated information and educated visitors, thereby tying the collection to a specific moment in time, with its history and significance reflected in its symbolism. In a similar way sculpture, whether monument, tombstone or bust, represented or commemorated an individual or event, thus also tying it to a specific place and moment in time. Commenting on the work of August Rodin and the shifts in the understanding of sculpture's potential, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke used 'homelessness' as a metaphor to describe an absence of permanence for sculpture.

Underlying the modernist ideal of the independence of sculpture in both form, function and location, Klenz creates flexible modular constructions - stacked and cantilevered geometric forms made from scrapped wood pieces, ply wood, chip board and OSB. Her constructions remind us of Wilhelm Wagenfeld Kubus Stacking Storage Containers from 1938 or the Bauhaus Bauspiel Construction Set from the Bauhaus School in Germany by Alma Siedhoff-Buscher in 1923.

In contrast to the professionalism and perfectionism evident in these Modernist examples of mass-produced objects, Klenz's sculptural plinths are deliberately improvised and unfinished-looking, this achieved through utilizing certain materials and, in their construction, highlighting rough edges and surfaces.



This exhibition is an exciting opportunity to see objects through Klenz's eyes and to consider alternative cultural and visual links. The artist's work illustrates new connections and shows how objects remain relevant, both culturally and visually, in different contexts.

Staffages 2018 previews on Thursday 21 June, 6pm – 8pm.

For further information please contact Will Cross, Marketing Assistant (Communications)

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Editors' Notes

Listings

Staffages (2018)

22 June - 8 September

Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery, Civic Centre, Mount Pleasant, Tunbridge Wells TN1 1NJ

Tuesday - Saturday 9.30am - 5pm, Sunday and Monday closed, closed Bank Holidays, Free

About Staffages

'Staffages' refers to the use, in the late 1700s and early 1800s, of human and animal figures in painting that were not regarded as the primary subject matter of the work. Staffage (Beiwerk) in German means "accessories" or "decoration" referring to the descriptive term for figures to whom no specific identity or story is attached which are included merely for compositional or decorative reasons. Staffages are accessories to the scene, yet add life to the work and reinforce the main subject.

About Steffi Klenz

Steffi Klenz completed a MA in photography at the Royal College of Art in 2005. Her work has been included in various group and solo exhibitions, nationally and internationally.

Steffi's work has been published and has been widely reviewed in the press. In 2015 she was one of several international photographers commissioned to participate in the publication "Rights of Passage" for the 56th Venice Biennale.

Education: MA Photography, Royal College of Art, London (2003-2005); BA (Hons) Photography, Kent Institute of Art and Design, Rochester (1999-2002).

Selected Solo Exhibitions: Settings, Resettings, Repeat, Kehrer Gallery, Berlin (2017); Stagings of a Room, London Gallery West (2017); Plotting Spaces, Museum St. Albans, St. Albans (2015); Nummianus, Street Level Photoworks, Glasgow (2010); La Posa, Goethe Institute, Glasgow (2010); Nummianus, New Art Museum Walsall, Walsall (2010); In Process, Pavillion, Leeds (2009); Nummianus, Wendt+Friedmann Gallery, Berlin (2007); Nonsuch, 2piR Gallery, Poznan, Poland (2007); Nonsuch, Andreas Wendt Gallery, Berlin (2006); Nonsuch, Photofusion, London (2006); A Scape, Focal Point Gallery, Southend-on-Sea (2006); A Scape, Andreas Wendt Gallery, Berlin (2005).

Selected Group Exhibitions: The Data Battlefield, FotoMuseum Antwerp, Belgium (2017); Gestures of Resistance, Romantso Cultural Centre, Athens, Greece (2017); Room with a View, Kehrer Galerie, Berlin (2016); Look-Light, Tate Liverpool (2015); International Juried Competition, LA

Centre for Digital Arts, USA (2015); Infocus, Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona (2014); 2014 Frames: Projecting International Photography, The 2014 Glasgow International Festival for Contemporary Art, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow (2014).

Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery

Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery showcases the special story of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells through a fantastic collection of art, natural history, archaeology, craft, toys and much more. This is a fascinating tale, beginning with the discovery of the spa waters in 1606 and the establishment of the notorious Georgian 'den of iniquity' which would later become the byword for everything counter to Victorian respectability.

The collection was established in 1885 when the Literary and Scientific Society began displaying collections on The Pantiles. It was not until the 1950s that the bespoke neo-Georgian building which currently houses the Museum & Art Gallery along with the local library was completed. The building remains largely original, save for an accessibility refurbishment in 2013 which added a lift and a few other minor improvements.

The Museum & Gallery collection is of both regional and national importance and includes the world's largest collection of Tunbridge Ware, a significant toy collection dating back to the 1700s and one of the best Georgian portrait collections outside London.

The story of Kent's spa town is featured throughout, contrasting the decadence of the manor house with the spartan lifestyle of the humble hop-picker.

All of this is complemented with a calendar of special exhibitions in the Art Gallery, ranging from classical and contemporary art exhibitions to history and science displays. Each exhibition aims to bring the best of the world to Tunbridge Wells and the best of Tunbridge Wells to the world.

Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery is owned and managed by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.