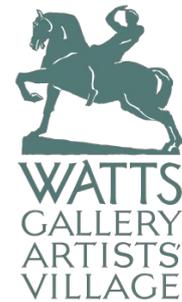


Press Release

Release: Immediate



LIMNERSLEASE: ARTISTS' HOUSE AT WATTS GALLERY-ARTISTS' VILLAGE TO REOPEN IN DECEMBER

Watts Gallery - Artists' Village

Watts Gallery Trust is pleased to announce that Limnerslease will reopen to the public on 6 December 2021.

The former Arts & Crafts home and studios of artists George Frederic Watts OM RA (1817-1904) and Mary Watts (1849-1938), designed by Ernest George (1839-1922) have been closed since March 2020 when the first UK lockdown was announced. They planned to reopen last Autumn, but following an electrical fire in September 2020, they have remained closed allowing for renovation and conservation to take place.

Previously only accessible through a pre-booked guided tour, domestic spaces in the artists' home will now be included as part of the admission.

From 6 December, visitors to Watts Gallery - Artists' Village will once again be able to visit Limnerslease, where they can experience the recreation of G F Watts's studio in which the internationally renowned artist painted a number of his most important works. Discover the story of Mary Watts, from her childhood in India and Scotland to the creation of Watts Chapel and the Potters' Arts Guild. Learn about the Wattses' life in Compton. Visit some of the domestic rooms with unique decorative features by Mary Watts, including ceiling tiles in which Mary evolved designs for Watts Chapel, ornate fire surrounds and the richly decorated alcove in which Mary regularly read to G F Watts

New, historically accurate colour schemes have been introduced throughout the house and studios following recent research.

For the reopening, a redisplay in G F Watts's studio returns pictures the artist is known to have created in Compton to this evocative space, including *Sunset on the Alps* (1888), the first work to be painted in this studio; the recently restored *The Good Samaritan* (1849-1904), *Sir Galahad* (c.1897-1902), a recent acquisition, and the monumental *Court of Death* (1871-1902, Tate), displayed on a reconstruction of the winching system G F Watts used to raise and lower his large-scale canvases.

Acclaimed ceramic artist Magdalene Odundo will co-curate a display of Compton Pottery in the Mary Watts Gallery.

A new digital tour drawing from Mary Watts's diaries will be available to explore the domestic and creative life of G F and Mary Watts.

Newly installed in the surrounding gardens is *Bench 1*, a woodland auditorium designed by Practice Architecture. The raised, douglas-fir amphitheatre creates a visual and acoustic environment that visitors are invited to experience.

Creative workshops for visitors, schools and community groups are once again available in the Clore Learning Studio, with the popular Make Space programme returning during the school holidays and a packed season of creativity for winter to be enjoyed by all ages and abilities.

Comments:

"It has been wonderful to welcome visitors back to Watts Gallery and Watts Chapel since May, and we cannot wait to reopen Limnerslease in time for Christmas."

"Although the fire in the lobby was localised, smoke filled the building leaving a residue which required the collection and contents to be removed and conserved, and the entire building cleaned and redecorated. Given the need to close temporarily, we were keen to use the opportunity to conduct further research into the lives of G F and Mary Watts in this very special place of domestic creativity and those of the villagers they worked with and the many well-known visitors who came to Compton."

"Now, we look forward to once again welcoming visitors to Limnerslease, to discover where our founders' extraordinary vision for Compton began. We are excited by the work to research, interpret and reimagine the artists' studio-home, gardens and grounds at Limnerslease and thrilled to introduce *Bench 1*, an outdoor space where people can come together to exchange ideas, reflect and be inspired - continuing the Art for All mission of G F and Mary Watts."

Alistair Burtenshaw, Brice Director & Chief Executive of Watts Gallery Trust

--Ends --

For further information:

www.wattsgallery.org.uk | [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#)

For high resolution photography:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/2briczf7l8fh382/AABTWRIND-yOZTcGUR8VytDUa?dl=0>

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Notes to Editors

Watts Gallery – Artists’ Village

Watts Gallery Trust is an independent charity. Our vision is to provide an inspiring and enriching visitor experience that celebrates artistic excellence and explores the art and ideas of G F and Mary Watts. We seek equality of opportunity through the arts and aim to transform lives through art, both inside and beyond Watts Gallery – Artists’ Village.

A leading figure in Victorian British art, George Frederic Watts OM, RA (1817 – 1904) gained recognition for his ambitious work, which embodied the most pressing ideas of the time earning him the title ‘England’s Michelangelo’. G F Watts was the first living artist to have a solo exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; and he contributed to the founding collections of Tate Britain and the National Portrait Gallery. G F Watts married the artist and designer Mary Watts (née Fraser Tytler) (1849-1938) in 1886. A renowned designer in her own right, Mary Watts founded both the Potters’ Arts Guild (1904) and Watts Chapel.

Together they commissioned a bespoke studio-home in 1891 in Compton, Surrey, which they named ‘Limnerslease’. Although this was initially intended as a Winter residence, they spent an increasing amount of time there. In 1904, they opened Watts Gallery, a purpose-built arts & crafts gallery dedicated to sharing G F Watts’s art with the public. An old man at the time, George only outlived the gallery opening by a few months. Mary however remained there until her death in 1938. Afterwards, the Gallery fell into disrepair and was placed on the English Heritage ‘At Risk’ Register. Thanks to support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and many generous donors, it has been rescued and restored. Today the Gallery, Studios, Chapel and Pottery buildings are known as ‘Watts Gallery – Artists’ Village’ and attract over 65,000 visitors every year.

wattsgallery.org.uk

Artist's Studio Museum Network

Initiated by Watts Gallery – Artists' Village to coincide with the opening of Watts Studios in 2016, the Artist's Studio Museum Network (ASMN) aims to promote and link artist's studio museums across Europe in all their variety, and to find points of commonality and ways they can support each other. ASMN seeks to facilitate projects and events to encourage research and information sharing around the history of the artist's studio and, by sharing these stories, inspire members of the public to visit.

ASMN is supported by the Tavolozza Foundation and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

For further information: artiststudiomuseum.org

Bench 1

Designed by Practice Architecture, the project has been made possible with generous support from the Department for Digital, Culture Media & Sport, Arts Council England and Compton Parish Council. For further information: wattsgallery.org.uk/visit/bench-1/

The Gardens at Limnerslease

Funded by the John Ellerman Foundation for two years, the role of Curator of Landscape was dedicated to the development of an enhanced sense of place across the 18-acres site at Watts Gallery – Artists' Village. Engaging with the historic collections and archive, the Curator of Landscape researched and implemented a programme of interpretation to explore the history of the site, the heritage of the landscape and the architectural significance of this unique campus of Arts & Crafts buildings. The work to revitalise the gardens and grounds is being led by Verey Head Gardener Chris Sharples and supported by our team of volunteers. Until 7 December 2021, visitors can enjoy Making Together: A Community Art Installation which is part of a season of displays, social enterprise and interpretation celebrating the creativity of community groups participating in our Art for All community learning programme over the past year.