



ST. KATHARINE DOCKS
LONDON

SUGAR AND SPICE

An exhibition of Contemporary Art and Sculpture



Meet the artists for reflection and discussion

Tuesday 23rd August 6pm and Wednesday 31st August 6pm.

Presented and curated by

Plastic Propaganda

...one ethos

Devon House, St Katharine's Way, St Katharine Docks
21st August - 4th September 11.00 - 18.00 | Open Daily – All Welcome



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An exhibition of Contemporary Art and Sculpture

Trade and diaspora have historically defined the United Kingdom's cultural, social and economic identity. This exhibition explores the idea of trade, hybridization and inter-cultural exchange as narratives which encompass the UK's diverse and expansive visual culture. A range of contemporary artists such as Anish Kapoor, Chris Ofili, Kara Walker and Yinka Shonibare have mediated its divisive history through powerful iconography and commentary. The major collections of art held by the British Museum, V&A and the National Gallery and some of the benefactions which underpin them, are themselves the legacy of trade, some of it coercive and exploitative.

Given its rich mercantile history, St Katharine Docks is an apposite venue for *Sugar and Spice* providing as it does, a basis for reflecting upon some of these interconnections. The corollary of such a history is that *Sugar and Spice* contains work and subject matter which is also visceral and powerful. In recent weeks, the discourse around Brexit has largely dominated political consciousness. Argument and sometimes emotive rhetoric have been mobilised around issues of exclusion, cultural difference and perceptions of sovereignty. At consideration are polarised responses and experiences of globalisation and the associated free movement of labour and capital.

Cultural difference is axiomatic to the UK's identity. To be British, as Grant Poole notes in

his monograph, *Contemporary British Art* (2010), is indeed to be from somewhere else. *Sugar and Spice* reminds us, if such were needed, of the truth of Ockwui Enwezor's dictum of the "terrible nearness of distant places" and the implication of the past in our shared present and future.

Angus Pryor

Reader in Fine Art and
Head of School of Art and Design,
University of Gloucestershire,
July 2016.

Artwork on the front cover:

Sarah Needham, *Mr Equiano's Scales* (2016), cast iron scales, indigo, sugar, gold leaf, varnish, printed transparencies 37x20x20 cm

Sugar and Spice: From the Prerogative of Princes to Supermarket Standard

In the first century AD the Roman historian Tacitus wrote: "Londinium ...though undistinguished by the name of a colony, was much frequented by a number of merchants and trading vessels". Ironically, items which would have been relatively commonplace back home in Italy, in wet, cold and windy Britain were transformed into luxury goods. Wine from Gaul, olive oil from Spain, and, of course, spices and perfumes from Egypt, all found a ready market amongst the increasingly sophisticated upper class Romano-Britons; and so from its earliest days London became the nexus for the supply of rare and expensive goods.

After a period of inactivity following the collapse of the Roman Empire the Middle Ages saw London once again at the forefront of commercial activity. This time trade centred on the import of high status textiles; an emergent merchant class both serving and creating a market for luxury fabrics such as silk and cloth of gold. In a fit of social anxiety, sumptuary laws were passed proscribing fine fabrics for those below the rank of gentleman, a move which only served to enhance their desirability. By Elizabethan times the colonisation of the New World and discovery of alternative trade routes meant that the volume of imports was so great that they were becoming a threat to the general economy. A statute of 1574 states that "The excess of apparel and the superfluity of unnecessary foreign wares thereto belonging now ... is grown ... to such an extremity that the manifest decay of the whole realm generally is like to follow". This rather dramatically expressed scenario failed to materialise however, and aggressive British expansion abroad and a corresponding appetite for exotica at home continued unabated.

In 1828 St Katharine's docks were built to meet

the ever increasing volume of trade from the colonies, functioning as an adjunct to the newly established London Docks and specialising in the warehousing and onwards transmission of luxury items such as ivory, spices, coffee and cocoa. The Industrial Revolution had seen the rise of a new class of prosperous social aspirants, and with the failing fortunes of the landed gentry and nascent democratisation, that blurring of rank the sumptuary laws had sought to prevent was fast becoming a reality. An Industrialist's wife may not have been able to pass for a lady amongst "old money" but she could certainly dress and dine like one. Conspicuous consumption by all who could afford it and many that could not was the order of the day. The spirit of the age was epitomised by the Great Exhibition of 1851, a display of over 10,000 curiosities from home and abroad described by Karl Marx with some contempt as a "fetishisation of commodities".

Today there are signs that this fetishisation is in decline. In the distant past imported goods were luxuries because they were novel and rare, and could only be transported in typically small quantities at relatively high cost, but first colonisation and then globalisation, particularly cheap air flights and advances in mass transportation, have made the enjoyment of luxury goods subject to the law of diminishing returns. Spices that would once have seemed impossibly exotic to ordinary people are now among the basic staples of the supermarket; and sugar has been downgraded from a royal delicacy to a cheap bulk filler employed to make processed food more palatable to the masses. So where are we to find the pre-eminent status symbol of the twenty-first century? Not anything imported, not in fact transportable commodities of any kind, but location, location, location;

and in the lists of the most prestigious we find a new iteration of the old London dockyards. Where dusty brick warehouses stood, now we see shimmering sheets of plate glass reflect sky and water, earth red barge sails have given way to fleets of sparkling white yachts nudging each other companionably in the Marina.

It is as if by some arcane process of osmosis the docksides of London have been transformed from the nexus of luxury to luxury itself.

J.S.Harvatt

LLB (Hons) BA (Hons)
2016

SIMON BREWSTER

These works are from a series that mixes apparently contradictory visual languages and materials. They are set on found, distressed wood panels. They incorporate texts from bank leaflets and lottery forms, which have been transferred and reversed. Through these works I have sought to weave together elements of Gravesian sympathetic magic, corporate branding and commodification – a sort of whimsical 'sacred and profane'. Ironically, the artwork has become a commodity in itself.



Simon Brewster, *Sunspots HSBC* (2015), copper wire, copper sulphate, transferred printed text on distressed ply panel 21 x 32cm, £750

ROS BURGIN

The series *Thames Drawings* focuses on charting the 42-mile stretch of the River known as the Tidal Thames. This flows through central London from Teddington Lock in the west to the Thames Barrier in the east and experiences daily high and low tides. These drawings are based on the shape of the River as defined by Marine Charts and are enlarged accordingly.



Ros Burgin, *Thames Drawing #3* (2016), 24K Gold leaf, paper, 44cm x 80cm

RUSSELL COLEMAN

I wish that I could say that I make wondrous and diverse artworks for complicated and clever reasons. But in truth I am just trying to make sense of my life and experiences. At heart I am still the 8 year old boy wanting to show you what he has discovered outside in the yard. My years in the building and construction industry and the decades spent carving memorials feed into the processes that I use as a sculptor. These headstones are a distillation of many of those techniques. The letterforms have morphed with the geometry of the polished stones. The gilded glyph is replaced in favor of highlighting the historic collisions sustained by these boulders on their erratic odyssey. The young shoulders are of new concrete. The ingredients are similar but their genesis is billions of years apart.



Russell Coleman, *Anthropocene Erratic No 3 (Old Head on Young shoulders)*
(2016), Northumbrian schist and concrete 57cm x 30cm x 24cm

DEBORAH CROFTS

I am interested in how cultures and societies place commercial value on objects. Shells seem such simple and innocuous objects. Yet historically and culturally they had great value and significance. In trade they have been used for currency but also as desirable and collectable objects; attracting significant prices for those deemed worthy and precious. Like many self-confessed and ardent beachcombers, I place my own value on shells, seeking out interesting shapes and textures or the glint of pearly sheen enhanced by the sun or submerged underwater. Artistically, their beautiful curving organic shapes, rhythmic patterns and array of natural colours both inspire and calm me.



Deborah Crofts, *Oyster* (2010), acrylic on canvas, 100 x 100cm, £400

KAREN DOYLE

A collection of ceramic figurines, broken and remade, each named after David Bowie songs – a collection of glorious freaks, celebrating queerness, gender bending and difference. Ceramic figurines journey from being objects of wonder in childhood to objects of hate in adulthood and then back full circle to fond objects in old age, connecting us to our past, to our gran's best china, to sculpture in ordinary homes across the world. Broken and remade into queer, anthropomorphic beings they take on a new rebellious life. Not quite recognisable on first glance as different, they reveal themselves on closer inspection. Subtly conflating two worlds, a world of idealised perfection and aspiration with the glorious messy, broken reality of life. Victorian Whatnots and Dumb Waiters ground the figurines as domestic objects whose origins are from an era that gave birth to mass-produced ceramics and placed art within reach of the newly created middle classes.



Karen Doyle, *To my mother, my dog and clowns* (2016), sculpture, found ceramic, silicone, epoxy resin, Victorian Whatnots £200 each

JACKIE DUCKWORTH

In my practice, imagery is driven by narrative: this piece was inspired by an episode in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. I was struck by the way that ordinary people not only desired exotic spices, but understood the trade routes by which they reached Europe – on the ships of Arab merchants. The work encapsulates this long history of trade by portraying a dhow, a merchant vessel which has been in continuous use for at least 2000 years. As a printmaker I like to make the most of my medium by employing bold lines and blocks of colour. Here these lines convey the movement of the ship, while the rich reds and yellows emphasise the physical heat of the location and allude to the wealth generated by the trade in precious goods.



Jackie Duckworth (2013), *Merchants of Arabia*, 36 x 36 cm, £125

MARY B EIGHTEEN

My paintings are metaphors for change. They present an oceanic world devoid of tenacity or social concern. They present a sullied ecology sucked into an anoxic environment. For the *Sugar and Spice* exhibition, I have remained with the theme of water, but embraced the notion of the river as a vessel for trade and new beginnings. Responding to the era of the exotic, I have focused on the spice trade and its infusion into London life at the time. For this, a departure has been made from the oceanic dilemma (central to my work), to reflect on a time when the Thames Estuary and the docks were alive with a plethora of new and ravishing products tantamount to mesmerising the senses. Audiences were seduced into trading within a new and intoxicating enlightenment. The colours used reflect the exotic and focus on the sensual.



Marybeighteen, *Spice River* (2016), 61cm x 86cm, £600

SUSAN EYRE

Susan Eyre is interested in the aura of place and the agency of object. The work *Containment* was made in response to exotic objects traded by merchants who journeyed across the globe five hundred years ago when navigation was reliant on reading the stars. Shaped plates, etched using a sugar lift technique, are filled with inks made from ground spices and copperplate oils. These operate as markers plotting the spice route from India around Africa to Europe along the latitude and longitude lines taken from c. 16th maps of Mercator and Ortelius. The patterns of the markers combine ideologies of origins with destinations reflecting the mix of cultures that came together as the spice trade opened up new horizons.



Susan Eyre, *Containment* (2016), screen print on board, sugar lift etched aluminium inked with spices, 4cm x 60cm x 60cm, £400

Exoticism, Individualism and the Aesthetics of Difference

Although St Katharine Dock was established in 1825, Victor Segalen in his essay on 'Exoticism: An Aesthetics of Diversity' written between 1904-1918, not only embraces, but perpetuates the notion of individualism. As a French poet, writer, author, literary critic and theorist, he was well equipped to sensualise human passion and seduce, as it were, our own individuality into alignment with that of others. Otherness in the age of exoticism was affiliated to the new trade with the East, and involved a new found fascination with art, culture, and that which was considered exotic or different. The age of cultural difference initially identified by Segalen had been initiated, and the age of aestheticism took root via an appreciation of beauty, sensuality and the intoxication of that which was 'other'. The scholar Alden Jones, describes exoticism in art and literature as the "Representation of one culture for the consumption of another" and with the arrival of exotic trade from the East in St Katharine Dock, that is exactly what took place.

The *Sugar and Spice* exhibition invites artists of any medium to respond to the trade from the East that defined St Katharine Dock in 1825 and subsequently. Artist practitioners engage with the aesthetic in many ways. Whether by film, the digital world, or sculpture and painting, the artist assimilates the notion of difference through their ability to create their own unique and individual art work. In turn the work can be variously interpreted, evoking an ongoing specificity through each person's interpretative response.

The element of time underpins the exhibits on show at Devon House. There is the element of past history, regarding the trade within St Katharine Dock. This can be illustrated through

the shells, feathers, spices and silks, all of which might be considered, in some sense, hedonistic or self indulgent. There is the notion of time changing in relation to the individual, and the more pluralistic and globalised context in which we live today. Finally there is the contemporary artist responding to a more cosmopolitan society, one that has embraced globalisation and multiculturalism alongside the advance of technology. The artist engages with the aesthetic and the conceptual, exploring difference and diversity through the individuality of the work itself.

Similarly, the work in this exhibition, can be seen not only as a response to the theme of time and exotic trade in St Katharine Dock, but as a collective visual comment on culture, individualism and hopefully an acceptance of that which can be defined as 'other.'

Mary Bernadette Eighteen

2016

Notes:

Jones, Alden, *The Blind Masseuse*, Terrace Books, University of Wisconsin Press, 2013

Segalen, Victor, *Exoticism: An Aesthetic of Diversity*, Duke University Press, 2002

RYAN EVERSON

Our world became smaller through the navigation of trade and the conquest of empires; our basic needs and desires were paralleled not only through geography but also through time. Humankind's ability to control and refine raw materials as artisan and craftsman has been a measure of a civilization, its wealth, prosperity and ultimately its culture. Empires have been built on the trading of these commodities and ideas, becoming absorbed, emulated or trophies of an expanding Empire. Our use of images, icons, relics and sculptures are often symbolic of our need to rationalise and create conventions or rituals upon an otherwise chaotic world. Ultimately, we decode and explain our world through a system of belief.



Ryan Everson *Hubris* (2015), oil on canvas, 120cm x 120 cm, £1200

MOURL FERRYMAN

At the core of Mouri Ferryman's practice is a process of artistic engagement with ideas of cultural identity as an alliance of difference rather than sameness and the acceptance of difference through the constant relation of 'self to other'. Through mixed media and performance, the artist interrogates the politics of representation and the interface with histories and contemporary performed identities. These works explore two feminised ideals; the video vixen from the Caribbean and the historical European courtier. The intermixed lineages embodied within the collages and the culturally significant material of sex, sugar and silk introduce narratives around the racial histories of Commodity Quay and the trade between Britain and her former colonies. Mouri Ferryman has exhibited nationally and internationally, most notably at Scope Miami, USA 2012, the Gothenburg Biennial, Sweden 2013 and the Jamaica Biennial, Kingston, Jamaica 2014.



Mouri Ferryman, *Miss Bria Myles and Lady Bevill* (2015), collage digital images with Ultra Chrome K3 archival ink on paper, 75 x 55cm, £800

JOSEPHINE HARVATT

Josephine Harvatt graduated with a degree in fine art in 1996 and since then has sold and exhibited nationally and internationally. She has also undertaken commissions for public art ranging from a mural for Foyles bookshop to a design for the White Horses Whitstable floating art gallery project. Inspired by British town and countryscapes, and influenced by artists such as Gustav Klimt, Paul Klee, and Friedensreich Hundertwasser, her paintings comprise a synthesis of opposing forces: the abstract and the figurative, the structured and the intuitive, the real and the imaginary. In these artworks earthy shades of cinnamon, turmeric, and paprika act as counterpoints to the dazzling cerulean of sky and water; and forms hinting at warehouses and tall masted ships reflect the rich history of London's dockyards.



Josephine Harvatt, *Now and then* (2016), acrylic and pencil on canvas, 30cm x 60cm, £275

JUSTINE JOHNSON

I draw inspiration from life: an early childhood in the shadow of Disney's fireworks in Anaheim, a textile apprenticeship in Kobe, Art direction in Hong Kong, study in London and rural life in Wales. I am fascinated by landscapes, starscapes, culture and human technology. I look for the universal in the particular and the connections between diverse times, places and cultures. My work is diverse and closely linked to process and an understanding of materials, including their history and connection to culture. Currently I am exploring ancient methods and plant dyeing techniques (organic sugar fermentation and Indigo) and their consequent resonance within culture, nature, space and time. As an artist I don't recognise limits.



Justine Johnson, *You can't take the sky away from me and other colours* (2015), photo of fine wool, natural dyes, from plants/species bundled, £650

SARAH NEEDHAM

St Katharine Docks were built in 1828, at a time of great flux and change in the political landscape of Britain. Tied up with the changes in trade at the time were changes in the public understanding of slavery and the abolition movement. The works in this exhibition explore two events which contributed to the abolition of slavery: the Zong Massacre and the publication of a first hand account of Slavery by Olaudah Equiano. I started off by investigating the qualities of indigo as a paint medium and at the same time researched into the history of the trade in indigo and sugar and found it so tied up with the trade in slaves. The darkness of the pigment as metaphor and the splashes created using sugar leant themselves well to telling the story.



Sarah Needham, *Mr Equiano's Scales* (2016), 37x20x20cm, cast iron scales, indigo, sugar, gold leaf, varnish, printed transparencies

RUTH PACKHAM

I am an artist/maker living in Wales. I work predominantly using British wool fibre to create felt sculptures and pictures. The themes within my work are informed by the natural world. I live in a small village by the sea so am inspired by my surroundings; birds, the landscape, the beach and plant life. Wool fibre and felt-making techniques lend themselves to the creation of natural forms. In 2015 I travelled to Verona to work on the creation of a felt shell large enough to climb inside. It took 5 of us 5 days to complete the shell. The 'Felt' shells I am exhibiting here see the continuation of this project, working different shapes and the ways in which they can be constructed. Each shell has been made in one piece from Cambrian mountain wool using the wet felting technique.



Ruth Packham, *3 shells* (2016), felted wool, 11 x 20 x 18 cm

CLARE SMITH

Clare Smith's practice involves pattern, chance and process. She works with drawing, print media, installation, painting and sculptures to investigate the tensions between identities and traditions informed by her Chinese/English heritage. Her recent series, *Shipped*, uses forms and imagery relating to Nonya ware imported from China by the Straits Chinese Community in the former British Colony of Malaya and to Chinese shipwrecked export porcelain. The work is part of an ongoing investigation into imported identities, the creation of identities through cultural artefacts and it hints too at current political issues around migration. The battered appearance of this paper sculpture (*Tea Caddy*) is a deliberate reflection of the complex history of tea as a global product ... war, ethnic displacement and tensions, amoral trade, monopolies, colonialism but also a contribution to world prosperity.



Clare Smith, *Tea Caddy* (2016), Tea stained Xuan paper, wheat starch, 18x11x11cm

JACQUELINE TALBOT

I am principally interested in the natural world and the structures that are inherent within from a microscopic to a massive level. I paint either straight onto the canvas or create my own surface such as these artworks which were created by gluing strips of fabric, buttons and wool onto a stretched canvas and then painting with an acrylic medium. The meaning behind these artworks concerns the fabric remnants and haberdashery that we habitually keep stored away for years or sometimes decades. We harbour an emotional attachment to these remnants as they may remind us of a time or a person from the past or even an idea that persists that we will use them one day to make something new.



Jacqueline Talbot, *Remnants* (2015), mixed media painting, 24 x 35cm, £85

IAN VINES

Much of my recent work involves a dialogue between photographic images and actual objects, or pictorial space and real space. With this project, I was keen to explore the docks as they exist today, with their mix of commercial and leisure activities. In particular, I was interested in the architecture of the Commodity Quay development and the marina with its panoply of nautical paraphernalia. The works in the exhibition feature photographs of these subjects which are rotated or inverted, creating more abstract images. Mooring hooks are attached to the picture frames, while twine and pulleys reference the masts and rigging of the yachts in the marina.



Ian Vines, *Commodity Quay Inverted* (2016), photograph and objects, 46cm x 43 cm x 9cm, £400

JANE WALKER

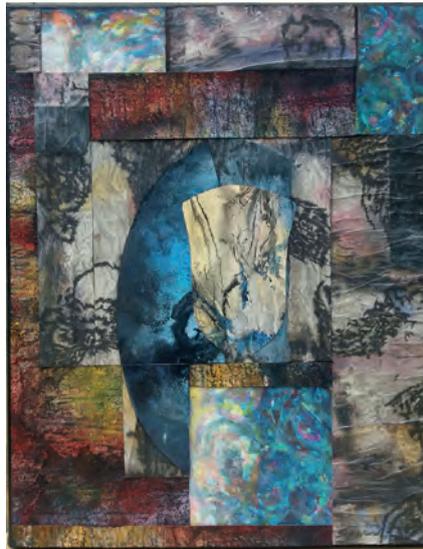
My art practice is an exploration of line in two dimensions. I have reduced painting down to just lines and these have to contain everything. Space in painting and its relationship to a human 'dimension' has always been an ongoing concern. Looking back at my work, today's sense of space in painting is an unimaginable development. I have explored this by thinking of it as a move backwards to a fragmented medieval space. In *Transient City* the lines resemble torn cloth. The lines in *Four Cities* are reminiscent of Indian architectural details I traced previously. Perspective I turn round; rather than a spatial device I use it as an image. In much of the recent work the smallest buildings are at the bottom. I draw cities from high viewpoints, and when I was drawing London the light on the Thames was so beautiful, I did not want the particularities of the buildings to date it.



Jane Walker, *Transient City* (2016), oil on canvas, 150cm x 130cm, £500

SALLY WARD

I work with a wide variety of materials in two and three dimensions. I often include found objects as they have associated memories for me and can evoke a sensation of a time and place. I am inspired by the work and ethos of the Arte Povera artists as I admire their unconventional approaches to materials and techniques. I appreciate the way their art moves away from long accepted methods such as casting or carving with traditional material such as bronze or marble to their use of common place and everyday materials. I explore, experiment and recycle materials until they evoke a strong response within me. These initial pieces may simply be fragments but gradually they build into a complete work. With these works for the exhibition I feel there is a correlation between objects and materials from different cultures that have been transported to this place and time.



Sally Ward, *Material World* (2016), mixed media on canvas, 46 x 36 cm, £250

About Plastic Propaganda

Plastic Propaganda, a non for profit collective, was founded in 2009 by William Henry, a UK-based installation artist and sculptor and by Angus Pryor, Reader & Head of the School of Art & Design, University of Gloucestershire. It was joined by Dr Grant Poole, an Art Historian based at the University of Kent, in 2010. Plastic Propaganda has a track record of delivering successful exhibitions of practice by contemporary artists across a spectrum of media in innovative spaces.

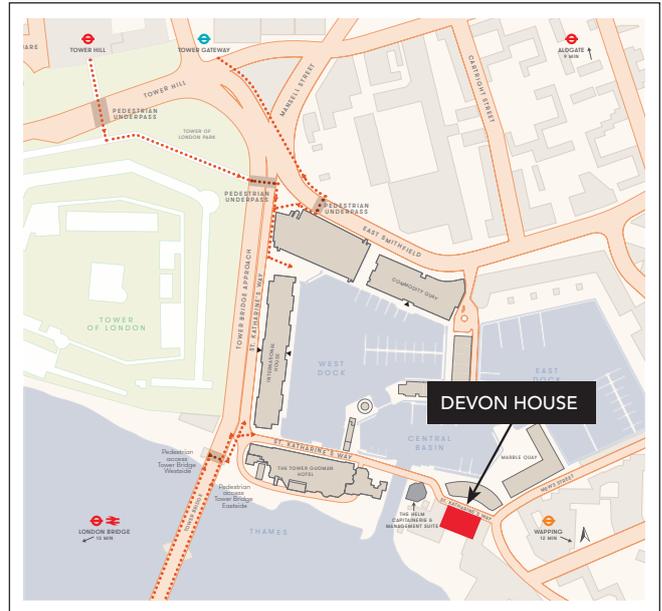
Its members are involved in the plastic and theoretical process of making and authoring art, regardless of medium. The collective has exhibited and showcased work at a range of venues in the UK and internationally, including London's Canary Wharf, Tower Bridge, New Delhi, Taiwan and most recently Amsterdam, Covent Garden and in Cheltenham Art Gallery and Museum, now the Wilson exhibiting the British Biblical Art /Ahmanson collection.

Plastic Propaganda have held three shows in 2016: at APT Gallery, Deptford, entitled *Both Ends of Madness* which, following its success, moved to the Sassoon Gallery in Folkestone. These were followed by *Nautical Perspectives* at St Katharine Docks in London.

The collective's overall objective is to provide an international enabling platform for artistic ambitions and aspirations to be realised within a supportive and constructive environment.

For further information please contact William or Angus at www.plasticpropaganda.co.uk

Thanks to John Brennan, William Minto, David Oates, Dr Grant Poole and Angus Pryor for (variously) logistics, concept design, curation, copy editing, layout and exhibition planning. Thanks also to Sarah Needham for permission to use the image of her work, *Mr Equiano's Scales*, on the promotional material for the exhibition.



Special thanks are due to St Katharine Docks Management and Blackstone for permission to hold this exhibition on the Estate.



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