

Media release

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The Bowes Museum Unveils Landmark 2026 Exhibition Programme Celebrating Icons of Fashion, Art and Craft



Vivienne Westwood retrospective, never-before-seen Impressionist masterpieces and the redisplay of the cherished Blackburne Lace Collection headline a groundbreaking year at The Bowes Museum, County Durham.

The Bowes Museum today announces an exceptional year of exhibitions for 2026, showcasing a bold and imaginative programme that bridges historical artistry and contemporary vision. Highlights include *Vivienne Westwood: Rebel – Storyteller – Visionary*, *Impressions of Light: Masterpieces from MuMa – Le Havre and The Bowes Museum* and *Lace and Legacy: Fashion Treasures from The Blackburne Collection* — three must-see shows that celebrate creativity, cultural exchange and heritage.

Vivienne Westwood: Rebel - Storyteller - Visionary

28 March 2026 – 6 September 2026

A multi-gallery exhibition **honouring one of fashion’s most provocative and imaginative British designers, Vivienne Westwood** (1941-2022). Spanning the early 1980s to 2000s, the show charts Westwood’s extraordinary journey following the rebellious energy of punk from her early partnership with **Malcolm McLaren** (1946–2010), to her reinvention of historical dress and couture in the 1980s and ’90s.

Featuring many pieces from rarely seen private collections, *Vivienne Westwood: Rebel – Storyteller – Visionary* offers an unprecedented glimpse into Westwood’s artistry, one that defied convention and challenged the fashion world. Uncover the making of Westwood’s work through mock-up calico toiles and digitally deconstructed garments, alongside complete ensembles that unfold chronologically, paired with historic objects from The Bowes Museum’s own collection.

Following the museum’s success of *A Collector’s Story: A Private Collection of Vivienne Westwood* (2023 – 2024) and *Framing Fashion: Art and Inspiration from a Private Collection of Vivienne Westwood* (2024 – 2025), this is **The Bowes Museum’s most ambitious Westwood exhibition to date — a new and exclusive fusion of rebellion with tradition.**

This exhibition is the result of a collaboration between The Bowes Museum, Peter Smithson and other private collectors. It is not an institutional partnership with the Vivienne Westwood brand.

Impressions of Light: Masterpieces from MuMa – Le Havre and The Bowes Museum

26 September 2026 – 14 March 2027

A major international partnership with the **Musée d'Art Moderne André Malraux (MuMa), Le Havre**, brings Impressionist masterpieces from France, never-before-seen in the UK, to The Bowes Museum, County Durham. Tracing the evolution of landscape painting from Pre-Impressionism to Post-Impressionism, *Impressions of Light: Masterpieces from MuMa – Le Havre and The Bowes Museum* explores how artists captured landscapes through light, colour and atmosphere.

Works by **Claude Monet** (1840–1926), **Eugène Boudin** (1824–1898), **Gustave Courbet** (1819–1877), **Camille Pissarro** (1830–1903) and **Raoul Dufy** (1877–1953) bring to light the artistic innovation and emotional depth that transformed modern art. Presented in themed groupings that echo the coast, cliffs, moorland and dales surrounding the museum, the exhibition connects French visions of light and place to the landscapes of County Durham.

Deeply connected to France's art scene, founders **Joséphine** (1825 – 1874) and **John Bowes** (1811 – 1885) collected works by living French artists, an unusual approach in the UK at the time. A painter herself, Joséphine was influenced by the en plein air approach of pre-Impressionist painters, and the couple's frequent travels to Le Havre, whose town hall inspired The Bowes Museum's design, reflect their enduring ties to the birthplace of Impressionism.

Bringing together world-class loans from MuMa and The Bowes Museum's collection, *Impressions of Light* is a journey through artistic vision, cultural exchange and landscape's enduring power to move and inspire.

Presented by The Bowes Museum and MuMa – Musée d'Art Moderne André Malraux, Le Havre.

Lace and Legacy: Fashion Treasures from the Blackborne Collection

14 November 2026 – 11 April 2027

Marking 20 years since the landmark exhibition *Fine & Fashionable: Lace from the Blackborne Collection*, **The Bowes Museum commemorates the extraordinary gift and enduring national significance of the Blackborne lace collection to the North of England.** *Lace and Legacy: Fashion Treasures from the Blackborne Collection* examines the antique lace trade through the Blackborne family business and reveals how lace was once the ultimate symbol of luxury, highlighting the beauty, skill and creativity in every thread.

The Blackborne family's historic collection, a treasure trove that builds on lace acquired by Joséphine Bowes in the nineteenth century, charts the evolution of European lace from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Through portraits, garments and comparisons with other decorative arts, the exhibition considers the legacy of lace as a source of inspiration for artists, makers and designers alike.

Presented alongside student work developed through an AHRC-funded research partnership with the National Gallery and Northumbria University, the exhibition showcases newly studied

works and unseen discoveries from The Blackborne Collection, reaffirming its national and international importance.

Vicky Sturrs, Director of Programmes and Collections at The Bowes Museum, commented:

“2026 is a year of firsts at The Bowes Museum, a moment to connect past and present through new perspectives. From a bespoke partnership featuring French works never seen before in this country, to the first major Northern retrospective of Vivienne Westwood and the redisplay of the Blackborne Lace Collection after 20 years, each exhibition offers an original way to experience objects, artists and their stories. These shows are bound by history. Vivienne Westwood opened *Fine & Fashionable: Lace from the Blackborne Collection* two decades ago and now her own work returns in conversation with the art and ideas that inspired her. Together, these exhibitions reflect the spirit that has always defined The Bowes — Joséphine Bowes’ belief in creativity, curiosity and the importance of sharing art with others. Our 2026 programme continues that legacy, celebrating innovation and connection, and bringing world-class art to the North East.”

Each exhibition is accompanied by a wide-ranging public programme of events, talks and workshops inviting visitors to explore key themes in greater depth and engage directly with the art and ideas on display.

For more information keep up to date on the museum's [website](#).

-ENDS-

Note to editors:

Image Credits Left to Right

1. Vivienne Westwood (1941–2022), *Anglomania*, AW 1993/94, MacAndreas pink tartan mohair wraparound jacket with matching tie, Private Collection. © The Bowes Museum, County Durham. Photography by Claire Collinson.
2. Claude Monet, *Fécamp, bord de mer*, 1881, huile sur toile, 65,3 x 80 cm. Le Havre, musée d’art moderne André Malraux, inv. 994.01. Achat de la Ville, 1994. © MuMa Le Havre/ Florian Kleinefenn
3. Unknown, *Parasol*, 1860s with seventeenth-century raised Venetian needle lace, The Bowes Museum. © The Bowes Museum, County Durham.

Images of objects which feature in the 2026 exhibitions can be found [here](#).

Individual exhibition press releases alongside confirmed object lists will be released closer to the time of the exhibition launch.

For film and photography requests and more information, please contact Marketing & Communications Coordinator:

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About The Bowes Museum

The Bowes Museum is a charity managing a Grade 1 listed accredited museum and Grade 2 listed parkland in Barnard Castle. Founded by Joséphine & John Bowes 150+ years ago, this purpose-built museum brings together an extraordinary, designated collection of European fine and

decorative art as a cultural resource for the people of Northern England, where today we celebrate artists, designers and makers.

The Bowes Museum receives funding from Durham County Council and, as a National Portfolio Organisation, receives support from Arts Council England. Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. [artscouncil.org.uk](https://www.artscouncil.org.uk)

The Bowes Museum is a member of the Discover Durham partnership of attractions, whose commitment is to promote Durham as an exciting and vibrant group travel destination and to provide the travel trade with a professional and knowledgeable service. [discoverdurham.co.uk](https://www.discoverdurham.co.uk)

Admission to The Bowes Museum is £17.70 for local members (residents of County Durham and Darlington), £20.00 for members (residents elsewhere), £19.50 for a day ticket, £21.45 for a day ticket including gift aid. Under 18s, full time students and carers are free. As a registered charity (number 1079639) The Bowes Museum needs to generate more than half of its income each year to care for the historic collection, buildings and parkland. Your donations are vital to that work. Visit thebowesmuseum.org.uk/support/ for more information.

