

MORAY ART CENTRE

The Park, Findhorn, MORAY, IV36 3TA • 01309 692 426 • [www.morayartcentre.org](http://www.morayartcentre.org)

**PRESS RELEASE**

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## **MASTERS AND CHAMPIONS: Momentous exhibition programme revealed.**

With historical artwork never exhibited before, an abundance of Olympic-themed 'have a go' activities, and a contemporary take on Grecian culture, Moray Art Centre's *Masters and Champions* provides Scotland with a unique look into our relationship with Greece.

Inspired by the original Greek Olympics, in which the arts were as prominent as sporting events, *Masters and Champions* invites viewers to delve into the past, bringing Britain's historical connection with Greece to life, and bridging the gap between Moray and London in 2012.

Having been awarded the coveted Inspire Mark London 2012 badge, and receiving financial support from Creative Scotland, the Big Lottery and Highlands and Islands Enterprise, *Masters and Champions* is Moray Art Centre's biggest exhibition to date.

### **HISTORICAL EXHIBITION: Classical Greece - 300 Years of British Inspiration**

The planned historical exhibition, celebrating three hundred years of British inspiration, is at the heart of *Masters and Champions*. The exhibition has two focuses; the first, bringing eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain to life, when the very first Greek artifacts arrived on our shores; and the second, exploring the presence of the horse as a figure within Greek culture and its status as a heroic icon throughout Greek history.

The presence of the horse is none so more apparent than in the collection of works borrowed from the British Museum for this exhibition. Here, a Panathenaic vase depicts a chariot event, whilst two reliefs show horses - one portraying excited equine heads and one a pair of quiet horses led by their riders. The famous Taranto horse head, which parallels the Selene horse head from the east pediment of the Greek Parthenon, will also be on show.

The association of the horse with high status and heroism is noticeably present in ancient Greek art and architecture, where horses were treated with the same degree of observation and interest as human figures. Not only was the horse viewed as a status symbol, but Greece was also aware of their natural therapeutic values, something we are only just beginning to realise.

The appeal and excitement of the Parthenon Frieze to the British public on its appearance in 1810 London is thought to be linked to the emphasis that Greeks placed on illustrating the beauty and competitive spirit of both horses and humans alike. The symbolic nature of the horse was then mirrored in British culture during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the importance of equine sports still evident in today's Olympic Games.

A selection of works borrowed from the private collection of Lord Elgin allows *Masters and Champions* to bring to light the excitement of Britain at the time when Thomas Bruce, Seventh Earl of Elgin, brought Ancient Greek artifacts back to London. Professor Elizabeth A Moignard, MA DPhil FSA FRSE, Classics, University of Glasgow, writes for the exhibition catalogue: "*Lord Elgin has kindly agreed to lend not only the earliest documentation-drawings of the Parthenon Sculptures, but also a selection of John Henning's drawings, made from 1811, of the equine parts of the Parthenon frieze, which have never been exhibited previously, and have remained in the Elgin family's private possession.*"

A Cockerell drawing of the original 1816 exhibition and documentary drawings of sculptures, including the Selene horse head by Benjamin Haydon, accompany the selection of John Henning drawings in the Elgin family's private collection. In addition, a number of items that celebrate the ancient Games of Olympia, including a cast of the original fourth century BC throne, upon which Olympic winners were crowned, will also be exhibited on loan from the family.

Dr Ian Jenkins, Senior Curator in the Department of Greece and Rome, the British Museum, and leading expert on the Parthenon and its sculptures, said: *"The Museum is delighted to share its collections and expertise with visitors to the Moray Art Centre. 'Masters and Champions' focuses on sculpture from the greatest of Classical Greek monuments, the Parthenon. The Scottish Enlightenment is profoundly connected to the Parthenon and its Sculptures. One only has to think of Charles Robert Cockerell's unfinished attempt to endow Edinburgh - that Athens of the north - with a full-scale replica of the temple. The Sculptures are famously linked with Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin. It is especially thrilling that the eleventh Earl has generously lent works from his own collection at Broomhall. Another Scottish personality featured in the show is John Henning of Paisley, who is one of many artists to have been inspired by the Parthenon Sculptures. Another is James Skene of Rubislaw whose watercolour drawings capture the Parthenon and other Acropolis monuments in the years immediately following the Greek War of Independence."*

Randy Klinger, Director, Moray Art Centre, said: *"As far as we know, the first time that our species has ever made a deliberate and concerted effort to realistically portray nature in a systematic development was in ancient Greece. From our vantage point, we view this as a 'Golden Age', a perceived pinnacle of the development of aesthetics, politics and philosophy; a culmination of the most complete realisation of ideas, principles and high technical standards that evolved from Greece's 'Dark' Archaic period. The premise of this exhibition is to pose a question: as we look at the manifestation of minds, talents and impulses of fifth century BC Greece, what would it take to generate a Golden Age in our time? What would this Golden Age look like? How could our current culture, in an age of such diversity and relativity, begin to appreciate a shared unified goal that could launch a Golden Age right now?"*

### **CONTEMPORARY EXHIBITION: Young Athenians**

Following the historical exhibition, a showcase of work from young artists brings Masters and Champions to its climax. These contemporary artists have been inspired by the architecture of Scotland's capital city. Referring to the cliché of Edinburgh as the 'Athens of the North', the exhibition draws on the rich architectural and artistic influences of Greek culture on western European art.

### **ART AND SPORTING ACTIVITIES:**

Throughout the life of *Masters and Champions*, Moray Art Centre will provide a variety of 'have a go' art and sport related activity for all the family to enjoy. From badminton in Burghead, where sound artists create tracks from the noises of the match, to Ping Pong Pollock, where a messy table tennis game creates Pollock-inspired artwork, and a mobile foundry for Olympic-style bronze medal making.

Moray Art Centre is committed to engaging with individuals of all abilities, including those who have limited access to cultural activity. The Centre hopes that the participatory activities on offer will do much to achieve this, whilst ensuring visual art's relevance to the wider public.

**- ENDS -**

**- NOTES TO EDITORS -**

About Moray Art Centre:

Moray Art Centre is a non-profit centre for the arts, located in the unique landscape of Findhorn Bay, that runs an annual local and international programme of exhibitions, events, classes and art residences.

Internally, the environmentally built and designed Centre has been planned to be a vibrant and motivating environment which allows people to meet, discuss and generate a community of creativity. The Centre has three flexible, rentable classrooms, four individual artist studios, Gallery II – with meeting and study areas – and the main, high spec Gallery I.

**- FURTHER INFORMATION -**

For high-resolution images, interviews and further information please contact:

Diane A Smith, Centre Manager or Helen Beveridge, Marketing & PR Officer

Moray Art Centre,  
The Park,  
Findhorn,  
MORAY  
IV36 3TA

01309 692 426  
info@morayartcentre.org  
marketing@morayartcentre.org  
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