



**Arts Council
Collection**

Tread Softly Media Release



An Arts Council Collection National Partners exhibition

27 May–3 September 2017

Bothy Gallery

Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) presents *Tread Softly*, an exhibition exploring childhood, developing identity and family relationships, through artists revisiting and reassessing defining moments and people in their lives. Selected largely from the Arts Council Collection by YSP, as part of the National Partners Programme, *Tread Softly* features over 30 works of sculpture, film, photography, and sound within the historic Bothy Gallery. Shown alongside the selection are specially commissioned poems by acclaimed poet and Scottish Makar, Jackie Kay.

Early experiences in life leave indelible marks on our evolving characters. Childhood and early adulthood are seldom entirely comfortable or idyllic, and this exhibition illustrates some of the complexities and trials of finding our place in the world. *Tread Softly* seeks to make visible events and feelings that can often be swept under the domestic carpet. Encapsulating this idea is Jo Spence's iconic work *Beyond the Family Album* (1979), a candid exploration of how we portray ourselves to the outside world as opposed to our

John Benton-Harris,
*Maidenhead, Berkshire
July 1975* (1975), Arts
Council Collection,
Southbank Centre, London
© the artist



daily realities, with families “encouraged only to photograph their leisure, their consumption or their ownership, and to show the ‘harmony’ of their lives”, rather than their failures, heartbreaks, or insecurities.

The exhibition begins with a selection of black and white documentary photographs, largely from the 1970s. These images capture a broad spectrum of complex family life and reflect the varied experiences of young people, taking in everything from joyful play on a spacehopper to compelling scenes within a women’s refuge. Tish Murtha’s striking image from *Youth Unemployment in the West End of Newcastle* (1980–81) depicts children playing and making their own fun against the bleak background of an abandoned housing estate. Murtha’s brother, who was in the original photograph, looked back on that day, saying, “I’m going on 54, and I’d still love to jump out of a window onto some mattresses”.

Marketa Luskacova’s photographs were taken in Chiswick Women’s Aid, the first ever refuge for victims of domestic abuse and their families, or ‘battered women’ as they were then labelled. Her work captured women and their children rebuilding their lives within this pioneering safe house. Vanley Burke’s *Educational Outing* is from his famed *Handsworth From Inside* series (1968–1982) in which he documented the lives of the Black community in Birmingham. Burke photographed a range of events from very public anti-racism marches and the fall-out from riots, to more private moments such as weddings, graduations and school day trips.

Powerful works by Tracey Emin and Grayson Perry consider escape, salvation and the transformative possibilities of turning difficult experiences around. In a poignant reflection on a well-documented abusive childhood at the hands of his stepfather, Perry’s ceramic work *Mad Kid’s Bedroom Wall Pot* (1996) states, “I was a mad kid and now I ain’t. I got out ‘cos I could paint”. The Turner Prize-winning artist’s already troubled early life became more complicated when he realised he was a transvestite. Feeling out of place, Perry would often retreat to the garden shed and engage in a projected fantasy world with his teddy bear, Alan Measles. Perry continues to revisit these experiences through his art, and says, “It was imperative that I got into a proper art college after the foundation year because art was my ticket out of Essex – the pot *Mad Kid’s Bedroom Wall* is about escaping my roots through art”.

Emin’s confessional first film *Why I never became a dancer* (1995) tells the story of the artist’s teenage years in 1970s Margate, where she used sex in a bid to find freedom and fight boredom after leaving school at 13. Soon disillusioned with these physical encounters, she looked to a disco dancing competition as a means of escape. Grainy Super 8 footage of her seaside hometown rolls as Emin narrates this important work, which she describes as “a metaphor for why didn’t I do everything I ever wanted to do in my life”. As in many works in this exhibition, this conveys the rawness of youthful dreams pitted against the often-painful entry into the adult world.

Marketa Luskacova, *Child in Chiswick Womens Aid, London, 1976* (1976), Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © MARKETA LUSKACOVA; Tracey Emin, *Why I never became a dancer* (1995). Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artists



Tread Softly also features new commission *Shame Chorus* (2017) by Jordan McKenzie, a work originally conceived as a live performance that explores memory, sexuality, community and catharsis through collective action and singing. Renowned psychoanalyst Dr Susie Orbach conducted interviews with members of the London Gay Men's Choir, exploring early, formative experiences of shame and coming out. Giving voice to often-internalised feelings, their stories were then set to music by leading musicians and composers (Billy Bragg, Leo Chadburn, Shane Cullinan, Jessica Curry, Edmund Jolliffe, David McAlmont, Sarah Morrison, Steve Smith, Verity Susman, Benjamin Till, and Jack White).

Paired together in the final room of the exhibition are two profound and iconic works that scrutinize the intensely personal bond between mother and child. Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document: Documentation VI Pre-writing Alphabet, Exergue and Diary* (1978–79) is part of her renowned six-year-long exploration of her relationship with her young son, with his developing writing shown alongside her unspoken internal anxieties and deliberations. Mona Hatoum's *Measures of Distance* (1988) is a candid conversation with her mother conducted through letters sent while in exile; the two women look back over and reconsider aspects of their relationship, the emotional closeness belying the physical distance between them.

Jill Constantine, Arts Council Collection says: "We are delighted to be working with our longest standing National Partner, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, to present *Tread Softly* which brings together an intriguing and layered compilation of works from the Arts Council Collection. The exhibition presents an array of different perspectives on elements of childhood in Britain, focusing on themes such as play, identity, family relationships and displacement. These are complex topics which continue to fascinate and inspire British artists working today."

A new collection of poems by Jackie Kay features in the exhibition and accompanying publication. Kay's work often reflects on her quest to find her birth parents and her experience as a black child adopted into a white family, as described in her acclaimed autobiographical book *Red Dust Road*. Kay will read her new work in a special event at YSP later this year – details to be announced.

Grayson Perry, *Mad Kid's Bedroom Wall Pot*, 1996. Crafts Council Collection, P442. Photo Todd-White Art Photography; Mona Hatoum, *Measures of Distance* (1988), Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist

Notes to Editors

Yorkshire Sculpture Park is part of the Arts Council Collection National Partners Programme. Arts Council Collection is managed by Southbank Centre, London on behalf of Arts Council England. Visitors are invited to see more of the Arts Council Collection in the Arts Council Collection Touring Exhibition, *Kaleidoscope: Colour and Sequence in 1960s British Art* which is at Longside Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park from 1 April to 18 June 2017. Other 2017 Arts Council Collection National Partner exhibitions, curated by YSP are: *[Re]construct* (Chapel), 1 April–25 June 2017 and *Rana Begum Curates the Arts Council Collection* (Longside Gallery), 15 July–29 October 2017.

For press enquiries, contact:

Sophie Steel, SUTTON: +44 (0)20 7183 3577 / sophie@suttonpr.com

Kerry Chase, Yorkshire Sculpture Park: +44 (0)1924 832515 / kerry.chase@ysp.org.uk.

For Arts Council Collection press enquiries, contact: Filipa Mendes, SUTTON: +44 (0) 20 7183 3577 / filipa@suttonpr.com

About Yorkshire Sculpture Park

Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) is the leading international centre for modern and contemporary sculpture which celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2017. It is an independent charitable trust and registered museum (number 1067908) situated in the 500-acre, 18th-century Bretton Hall estate in West Yorkshire. Founded in 1977 by Executive Director Peter Murray, YSP was the first sculpture park in the UK, and is the largest of its kind in Europe, providing the only place in the world to see Barbara Hepworth's *The Family of Man* in its entirety alongside a significant collection of sculpture, including bronzes by Henry Moore, and site-specific works by Andy Goldsworthy, David Nash and James Turrell. YSP also mounts a world-class, year-round temporary exhibitions programme including some of the world's leading artists across five indoor galleries and the open air. Recent highlights include exhibitions by Not Vital, KAWS, Bill Viola, Anthony Caro, Fiona Banner, Ai Weiwei, Ursula von Rydingsvard, Amar Kanwar, Yinka Shonibare MBE and Joan Miró. YSP's core work is made possible by investment from Arts Council England, Wakefield Council, Liz and Terry Bramall Foundation and Sakurako and William Fisher through the Sakana Foundation. YSP was named Art Fund Museum of the Year in 2014. ysp.co.uk

About Arts Council Collection

The Arts Council Collection is a national loan collection of British art from 1946 to the present day. With nearly 8,000 works and more than 1,000 loans made to over 100 venues a year, it is seen by millions of people in public spaces from galleries and museums to hospitals, libraries and universities. Representing one of the most important collections of British modern and contemporary art in the world, it includes work from Francis Bacon, Barbara Hepworth, Henry Moore, Lucian Freud, Antony Gormley and Grayson Perry. The Collection supports and promotes British artists by acquiring art at an early stage of their careers. The Arts Council Collection is managed by Southbank Centre, London and includes the Sculpture Centre located at Longside, Yorkshire Sculpture Park. artscouncilcollection.org.uk

About National Partner Exhibitions

To mark the Arts Council Collection's 70th anniversary, Arts Council England invested in a network of four National Partner museums and galleries across England, Towner Art Gallery, Eastbourne, Birmingham Museums Trust, The Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool and the Collection's existing partner, Yorkshire Sculpture Park. The partners will provide a year-round home for art works within the Collection, hosting a special programme of at least 24 National Partner exhibitions between April 2016 and Spring 2019.

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. artscouncil.org.uk

About Southbank Centre

The Arts Council Collection is managed by Southbank Centre, London on behalf of Arts Council England. Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre, occupying a 21-acre site that sits in the midst of London's most vibrant cultural quarter on the South Bank of the Thames. The site has an extraordinary creative and architectural history stretching back to the 1951 Festival of Britain. Southbank Centre is home to the Royal Festival Hall, Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room and the Hayward Gallery as well as The Poetry Library and the Arts Council Collection. The Arts Council Collection is managed by Southbank Centre, London on behalf of Arts Council England. southbankcentre.co.uk

#TreadSoftly / #ACCNationalPartners



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

wakefieldcouncil
working for you

**LIZ AND TERRY
BRAMALL FOUNDATION**

**SAKANA
FOUNDATION**