



Curating the East Midlands: Lesley Beale and Neil Walker

Lesley Beale is Craft Coordinator and **Neil Walker** is Head of Visual Arts Programming at the University of Nottingham's [Lakeside Arts](#). Their programme spans the Djanogly Gallery – where they present a year-round programme of largely twentieth-century and contemporary art exhibitions by British and international artists, a number of which are related directly to research conducted at the University – and the Wallner Gallery and Angear Visitor Centre, which provide smaller scale exhibition spaces for the exhibition of work by regional artists. All the exhibitions are complemented by public events and supported by learning activities for schools and the wider community. An [artist-in residence](#) scheme is run from a purpose built studio.

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Ivon Hitchens 'Red Centre' featuring in Hitchens retrospective in 2019/20

How did you come to curating?

NW: I studied Art History and Theory at Essex University followed by a post-graduate year at Manchester University reading Museum & Gallery Studies. My first job was in the Exhibitions department at Nottingham Castle and then for 10 years I was the Castle's Keeper of Fine Art responsible for the Fine Art Collection. I came to the University of Nottingham in 1998 and have programmed exhibitions at the Djanogly Gallery since then.

LB: Well I came to curating contemporary applied art from a very winding route. I did a Geography BA at the University of Nottingham, many years ago and then became a social worker. I sang in a band for several years before working at Broadway, an independent art house cinema in Nottingham, mainly because I love the medium of film. However, the constant in my life has been my love of art and craft and I am at the moment studying for an MA in textiles at Nottingham Trent University. I came to Lakeside Arts as the craft officer in 2008 where my job has grown to include managing our retail space as well as curation. I am truly passionate about craft. I think that it can be much less intimidating to people than fine art, to engage in as a viewer or to participate in.



Ceramic by Aneta Regel



Installation of 'Eurydice Prevails' by Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva, 2019

What's happening behind the scenes at the moment?

NW: Artist Elpida Hadzi-Vasileva is completing work on a major sculpture commission for the University. It is destined for an area of ground outside Lakeside's DH Lawrence Pavilion and will be installed at the end of April. Readers may remember Elpida's exhibition at the Djanogly Gallery in 2016 called 'Making Beauty' that featured a stunning installation composed of caul fat and a reworking of her 2015 Venice Biennale piece commissioned by the Vatican.

LB: Lots of planning. In November, we have our annual contemporary applied art market with over 70 stalls. It happens just for a weekend, but we take over the whole of Lakeside and it takes a lot of planning – in fact a whole year!



Lustre

Who are you working with at the moment?

NW: Our next major solo artist exhibition in the Djanogly Gallery at the beginning of 2020 will be of work by YBA Mat Collishaw who originally came from Nottingham. This will be the first exhibition in the city devoted to his work and we are very excited to be working with Mat and Blain Southern, London.

LB: At the moment I am working with artist and maker Kay Van Bellen. Lakeside are commissioning a set of plates that will depict the characterful and funny Canada geese that inhabit the space around Lakeside. Ceramicist and artist Susan Disley has just finished a limited edition set of lino prints these are graphic 2D representations of some of the artefacts in our archaeology museum.



Work by NTU Graphic Design students in 'Homage to the Bauhaus'

Tell us about your current exhibition or upcoming exhibition or project.

NW: We are currently showing 'Homage to the Bauhaus' an exhibition of over 100 works from the amazing Jack Kirkland Collection. It features work by Bauhaus Masters Anni and Josef Albers, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Paul Klee as well as by students Max Bill and Iwao Yamawaki. A mix of paintings, sculptures and photography, the exhibition demonstrates the ripples of influence that extended from the Bauhaus across the globe in the post-war period and is particularly rich in examples of work from Latin America.

LB: My next big event will be Lustre on 8th – 10th November. We are just about to select the makers who will show this year, which is always very exciting and then I will visit as many degree shows as possible to select the graduates for our Young Meteors room in Lustre. This is my favourite part, as these are the makers of the future. I really love spotting new talent and helping graduates start on the path to being a maker.



Ceramic, Bronwen Grieves

How do you select the artists you work with?

NW: By keeping our eyes open to what is going on and who is producing interesting work. The Djanogly programme is perhaps more likely to feature mid career artists than those just starting out. I look for work that marries conceptual integrity with a regard for materials, so there needs to be an idea but that idea has to be expressed effectively in material terms. Increasingly we are looking for artists who might respond to research projects taking place at the University.

LB: I visit a lot of shows and I am always on the look-out for up-and-coming talent. I like to try and show the work of makers that are fairly new in their career along-side the work of more established makers. At the moment there is some really exciting jewellery that is being made from non-precious materials. I'm really drawn to makers that push the boundaries of their craft.



Albion, Mat Collishaw, featuring in a solo show in 2020

What dates should we put in our calendars?

NW: In September/October we are mounting a selected open exhibition culminating in an auction; this is followed by a major exhibition from November to February 2020 of the abstract landscape painter Ivon Hitchens in our ongoing series of Modern British artists; Mat Collishaw follows in spring 2020.

LB: 8th – 10th November of course – Lustre 2019.

What or who are you really excited about?

NW: Elpida's commission and the Mat Collishaw exhibition are the projects I'm most looking forward to in the near future.

LB: New Designers, Part One, in June which is a dedicated exhibition for this year's craft graduates from around the country.



Aluminium ring, Eva Fernandez

Whose work or what space would you most like to curate?

NW: One of my favourite art spaces is the Yorkshire Sculpture Park so I guess that would have to be on my wish list to curate. Too many interesting artists out there to single out one.

LB: I'd like to curate an Applied Art Exhibition at Nottingham Contemporary. Those spaces are huge! I think I would chose a medium, like basketry or wood and then select different artists that represent the craft, from established makers to new artisans.

What do we need to see more of in the East Midlands?

LB: Much more contemporary craft.

Lesley and Neil were interviewed in May 2019.