

This small exhibition is me being let loose at Eton. I was lucky enough to be given the run of the collections. Ignoring the overwhelming history, I went for things that moved me. Quite why is not easy to say. But they continue to be fresh and have a bearing on what it is to be human. It also made me think about circumstance, why this or that came about, why it was kept, and so on. It gave me the chance to put a medieval chalice next to a work by my contemporary, Richard Wentworth. The chalice, weighted by ritual and association, is still a cup. Wentworth's printed buckets, a more commonplace container, converted and customised like a car and then drenched in red, comes nearer my own experience of myth.

The groupings are mine. For instance, the two women, one a delicate watercolour by Thomas Lawrence, the other probably a marsh Arab, photographed by Wilfred Thesiger, though different, were perhaps equally constrained. Both might find things changing now. I certainly hope so. The Egyptian mummified kitten that once had a face and was loved has become as abstract and sculptural as the axe head. From the natural history collection I am showing a pair of stuffed mallard, the spectacularly dowdy female alongside the more colourful male. It bewilders me, when sitting in a hide looking across a piece of water, how every other bird excites comment or notice among watchers, especially if rare or unusual. Not the mallard. It is invisible, ignored, too common by half. These magnificent and underestimated ducks are my revenge. Robin Hanbury Tenison's tender photograph from Brazil of a Xingu woman nursing a bird is full of fellow feeling. When using binoculars to bring a bird a bit closer, seeing its fierce unsentimental eye I can bet I will never know what it is thinking. But the look on the deer in John Frederick Lewis's watercolour says it all: in a wild world it is eat or be eaten. A world away and more like our own, the boys in the painting by William Nicholson are busy leading teenage lives. They are just differently dressed. Who knew what was in store for my enigmatic Siamese prince. The dice could roll this way or that and for him most probably did. They do for all of us. We juggle and cope, or try to at least.

# Humphrey Ocean Fresh as Paint



Humphrey Ocean would once have been dubbed a Renaissance Man. A very modern Renaissance but the range of his creativity, skills, interests and knowledge would have delighted my genial predecessor Sir Henry Wotton, a man of the original Renaissance. Wit, polymath, bass player with Ian Dury, painter in the classical style of one of the great modern portraits in the NPG – that of Philip Larkin – experimenter with dot books, bird watcher, traveller, etcher, master of gouache – it is a delight that he has agreed to curate an exhibition of his favourite objects from the Eton Collections. Stand by for an original look at our treasures – with some good jokes as well as some new perspectives – he is, after all, a Professor in that very subject.

Fear – something we live with

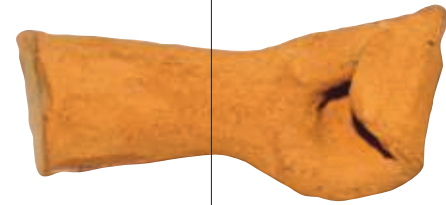


Love – we love birds but I am not sure they love us



Chance – what next

Circumstance – being us and staying alive



Hope – what would you like



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Position – things do change



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Pillar – like us, defying gravity



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Humphrey Ocean Fresh as Paint

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 The Verey Gallery, Eton College  
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[etoncollege.com/collegecollections](http://etoncollege.com/collegecollections)



Position

27 Photograph by Wilfred Thesiger published in Desert, Marsh and Mountain (1979) depicting a woman of the Harasis, inner Oman, early 1949. (MS 433 07 03 06)  
 28 Mrs Jens Wolff, Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830), 1800-20, pencil, black and red chalk (FDA-D.324-2010)  
 Pillar  
 29 Mummified kitten, linen wrappings (ECM.2188-2010)  
 30 Photograph by Wilfred Thesiger published in Desert, Marsh and Mountain (1979) depicting the brick tomb-tower at Gunbad-I-Gabus, Persia, built in 1006. (MS 433 07 03 07)  
 31 St Goar Looking Towards St Goarhausen and Burg Katz on the Rhine, Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851), c.1844, pencil and watercolour (FDA-D.514-2010)  
 32 Photograph by Wilfred Thesiger published in Desert, Marsh and Mountain (1979) depicting Sheikh Adis's tomb, northeast of Mosul, (MS 433 07 03 07)  
 33 L'Etat present de la Chine, Joachim Bouvet, (Paris: Pierre Giffart, 1697) (College Library, Bl.3.21)  
 34 Sitten, Gebrüchre und Kleidung der Russen in St. Petersburg, Johann Gottfried Richter and Christian G. H. Geissler (Leipzig, 1801-1803) (College Library, Bk. 4.22)  
 35 Basalt axe head (ECM.2346-2017)  
 36 Gabor, Humphrey Ocean, 2009, Gouache on paper 76.5 x 56cm  
 37 Orange Car, Humphrey Ocean, 2022, oil on canvas 122.5 x 153cm