



Regenerated by art?

From Hastings to Glasgow, a spectacular array of new museum buildings and extensions is opening this year. As Michael Hall explains, a major impetus behind their creation is the hope that they will encourage economic revival

VISITORS arriving at Margate's grand neo-Classical railway station are rewarded immediately by an enticing view. The sandy beach curves around the bay to the little harbour in the distance, crowned by what at first sight appear to be three white boatsheds, gleaming—if you're lucky—in the sun. This is Turner Contemporary (*Fig 1*), the town's new art gallery, which opened last month. It heralds an extraordinary summer for Britain's regional art galleries and museums. No fewer than 11 major projects—both new buildings and extensions—open in 2011. This would be an impressive figure at any time, but seems almost unbelievable when the Arts are coping with deep cuts to public funding. The explanation, of course, is that these projects were initiated before the economic downturn, but even so, they could not have come to fruition at a better moment.

The idea of an art gallery in a town with close associations with J. M. W. Turner—a regular visitor from the 1820s onwards—was already well established when Turner Contemporary, now a charitable trust, was founded in 2001. Its ambition to build a permanent home for its exhibitions of contemporary art (it has no collection of its own) has taken 10 years to realise, partly because the first design it obtained proved too expensive to build. The new gallery, by David Chipperfield Architects, is on the site of the long-demolished boarding house in which Turner used to stay. It is a challenging, exposed site, and the acid-etched white glass in which the building is clad has a practical purpose in providing protection against the salt spray. Minimally detailed, the gallery's most memorable feature is its enormous windows looking out to sea, which bathe the interior in the pearly northern light that drew Turner here. There will always be at least one work by Turner on display, and next year, the gallery will stage its first exhibition devoted entirely to the artist, 'Turner and the Elements' (January 28–May 13).

The building's £17.4 million cost has been met by grants from not just Arts Council England and Kent County Council, but also the South East England Development Agency. This reflects the hope that Turner Contemporary can help to spearhead the

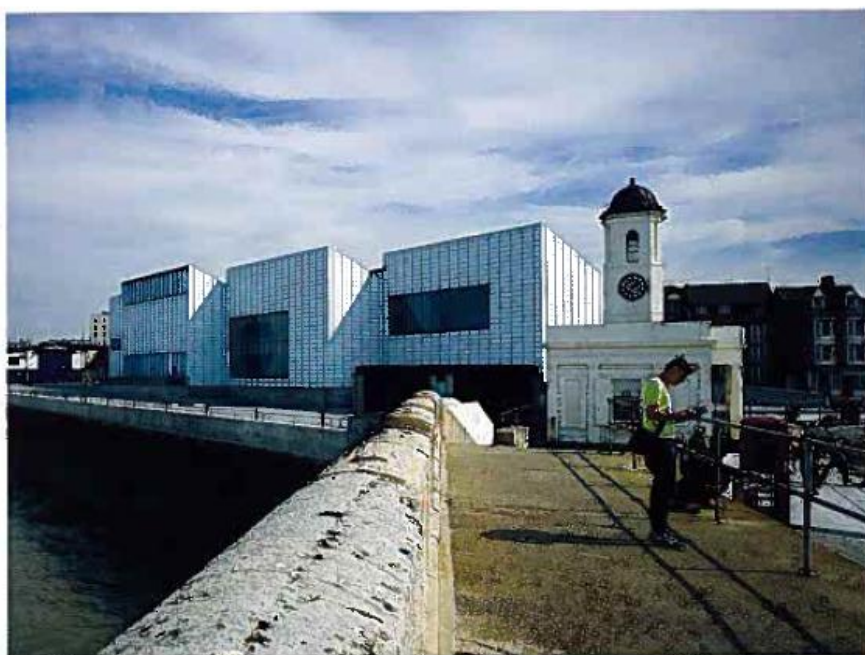


Fig 1: Margate's Turner Contemporary crowns the seafront

Fig 2: Hepworth Wakefield provides a new home for the town's art collection

regeneration of a town that is seriously deprived economically: some 63% of Margate's population depends on welfare. A major reason why so many art galleries are being built is the widespread belief that they can play a part in economic regeneration. Many of the other galleries opening this year form part of large urban redevelopment schemes. There are strong parallels between Turner Contemporary and another building by David Chipperfield, the Hepworth Wakefield (*Fig 2*), which opens later this month. Not only do they look somewhat similar—although the Hepworth Wakefield is built of smooth, dark concrete—they both have waterside settings. The Hepworth Wakefield sits on a loop of the River Calder, where it forms part of a previously derelict district that encompasses listed mills and warehouses, as well as a new market hall (designed by David Adjaye) and a large retail and office development, all planned for completion this year.

The Hepworth Wakefield's main purpose



is to provide a new home for the town's art collection, which is primarily an internationally significant survey of 20th-century British art. This has always included work by Barbara Hepworth, who was born in the town in 1903, but the collection's move to a new building, which has cost £34.2 million, and its renaming as Hepworth Wakefield, have been prompted by a gift from her daughters, Rachel Kidd and Sarah Bowness, of a substantial collection of works, including 44 full-size working models for sculptures. This has transformed Wakefield into a major centre for the study and enjoyment of 20th-century sculpture, a role that is enhanced by the proximity of the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds and the Yorkshire Sculpture Park.



Fig 3: The fins of the new extension to Bath's Holburne Museum, designed by Eric Parry, have attracted much attention

A third gallery, due to open in Hastings in the late summer, forms in some way the third panel in a triptych with the buildings in Margate and Wakefield. Although not by Chipperfield—its architect is HAT Projects, a young practice based in Colchester—the Jerwood Gallery (**Fig 4**) also has a water-side setting that forms the centrepiece of a regeneration scheme. Built on the site of a former coach and lorry park on the Stade, the town's fishing harbour, the low building is clad in dark, rather metallic-looking

ceramic tiles, again as protection in an exposed seaside setting, but also forming a link in terms of colour with the neighbouring weatherboarded and tarred net stores. More modest in cost than any of the other galleries opening this year—it has been built for just £4 million—it has been funded entirely by the Jerwood Foundation, a private charitable trust for the Arts endowed by John Jerwood in 1977. The foundation has created the gallery as a permanent home for its little-known collection of some 150

works of British art, mostly dating from between 1914 and the 1960s, but including also many winners of the Jerwood Paintings Prize. The gallery will, in addition, provide a venue for the travelling exhibitions that form part of the Jerwood Visual Arts programme dedicated to contemporary art.

Architecturally, these three galleries share a reticent aesthetic. Pleasing though they are, there is no doubt that Colchester's new gallery, Firstsite (**Fig 6**), which opens in late September, will be a welcome contrast



Fig 4 The ceramic-clad Jerwood Gallery in Hastings has been built for a modest £4 million. It has been constructed on the site of a former coach and lorry park on the town's fishing harbour



Above Fig 5: The design for the V&A at Dundee. Will all the funds be found in time for it to be opened as planned at the end of 2014?



Left Fig 6: Colchester's Firstsite is in a visually and archaeologically sensitive area

to the visual puritanism so often associated with buildings for contemporary art. Its architect is the New York-based international star Rafael Viñoly, currently poised to make a major impact on London's skyline with his tower block at 20, Fenchurch Street (the 'Walkie-Talkie') and master plan for Battersea Power Station. This is his second regional project in Britain—the first, the Curve theatre in Leicester, opened three years ago. Firstsite is also a curve, a low, crescent-shaped building in a visually and archaeologically sensitive site in the city centre between the Georgian East Hill House and the Roman walls. Its striking roof is clad in a gold-coloured alloy of copper and aluminium. Like Turner Contemporary, Firstsite, founded in 1994, and for years housed in the Minories Art Gallery, has no permanent collection, but stages temporary exhibitions of contemporary art.

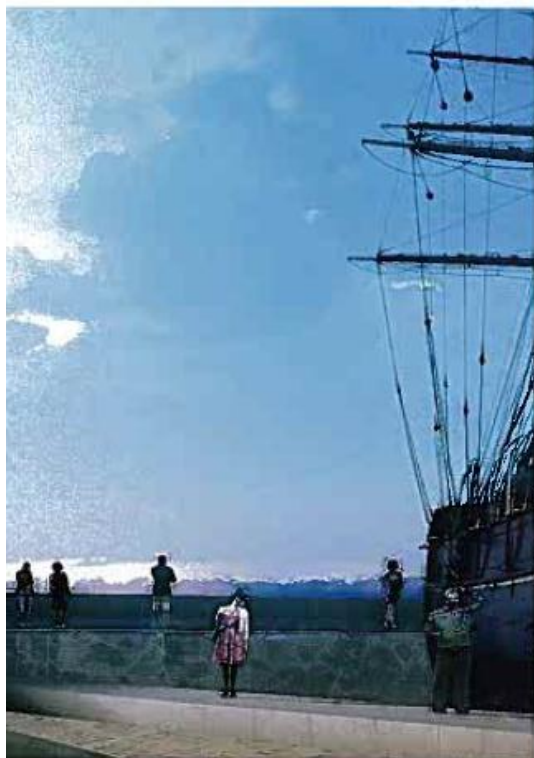
Historic art is also benefiting from investment. Earlier this year, the Millennium Gallery in Sheffield unveiled its £200,000 refurbishment of the Ruskin Gallery, which displays the remarkable collection of art, plaster casts, geological specimens and medieval manuscripts assembled by Ruskin as an educational resource for the people of Sheffield. On June 18, the Watts Gallery (Fig 9) in Compton, Surrey, will reopen after a £11 million restoration of its 1903–04 building, which houses a collection of paintings and sculpture by the Victorian artist G. F. Watts (to be previewed by Mary Miers in our June 8 issue). The architect, Zombory-Moldovan Moore (working with Purcell Miller

Tritton as conservation architects), has faced a tough challenge in incorporating new gallery space as well as greatly improved visitor facilities without any sacrifice of the atmosphere of this idiosyncratic building.

It is hard to imagine a more striking contrast with the Arts-and-Crafts ambience of the Watts Gallery than the refined elegance of the Holburne Museum (Fig 3), which has occupied its 1796 building in Bath since 1893. On May 14, it will unveil its extension designed by Eric Parry Architects. The design has had a troubled history: an earlier version was refused planning permission in 2007. The architect had a difficult brief as the museum wanted a three-storey extension that would rise from a glazed cafe on the ground floor to a windowless paintings gallery at the top. Mr Parry has clad the top storey in 'fins' of mottled, gently reflective bluish-green ceramic that step back behind

glass walls on the middle storey and then disappear altogether on the ground floor. Although this is the aspect of the design that has attracted the most attention, the real significance of the scheme is what has happened inside this once dark and cluttered building. By ingeniously moving its main staircase, Mr Parry has created a plan that provides spacious circulation areas and well-lit galleries. The Holburne's famous collection of largely 18th-century British fine and decorative arts has space to breathe for the first time, and at every turn, visitors can enjoy glorious views out to the Georgian houses of Great Pulteney Street or the trees of Sydney Gardens, behind the museum.

For once, our national collections are cast a little in the shade by these exemplary regional developments. In July, however, the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff opens its new galleries for 20th-century and con-



temporary art, and the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh unveils a £46 million redevelopment that will add 16 new galleries to its Chambers Street building (Fig 7). Nonetheless, in architectural terms, the summer's great events are the opening of two new civic museums, in Glasgow and Liverpool. On June 21, the old (and very popular) Museum of Transport, formerly at Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, reopens as the Riverside Museum (Fig 8) on the site of a former ship-

yard, at the junction of the Clyde and Kelvin. This eye-catching £74 million building—financed primarily by Glasgow City Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund—has been designed by Zaha Hadid, working with Buro Happold as engineer.

Then, only a month later, the Museum of Liverpool (Fig 10) will open the first phase of its galleries (the rest will follow later this year). Built in the World Heritage Site on the city's Pier Head, close to the Liver Building, this is the realisation of a plan for a museum here that goes back a decade—the original design was cancelled in 2004 when projected costs spiralled. Even so, the new building, based on a 'design concept' by Danish architects 3XN, has cost a hefty £72 million, of which the Heritage Lottery Fund has supplied £11 million.

The extraordinary number of openings in 2011 is surely not likely to be repeated for some time to come. However, on the horizon is the V&A at Dundee (Fig 5), an outstation for the London museum that will showcase Scottish design. Planned for a prominent site on the central waterfront, its architect is the Japanese firm Kengo Kuma and Associates. It will cost £45 million, and although the Scottish parliament has made a start with an initial grant of £5 million, fundraising has a long way to go if the building is to be finished, as planned, by the end of 2014. However, if the galleries opening this year prove their worth in terms of the hoped-for urban regeneration and economic revival, then the impetus should not be hard to find. 🐾



Clockwise from top left Fig 7: The Museum of Scotland redevelopment in Edinburgh; Fig 8: The Riverside Museum in Glasgow; Fig 9: The restored Watts Gallery, Surrey Right Fig 10: The Museum of Liverpool's publicity for the opening this year



New for 2011: museums and galleries around the UK

Bath Holburne Museum, Bath, refurbishment and extension
Reopens May 14

01225 388588; www.holburne.org

Cardiff National Museum of Wales, new modern and contemporary art galleries

Opens July 9

029-2039 7951; www.museumwales.ac.uk

Colchester: Firstsite Gallery
Opens late September

01206 577067; www.firstsite.uk.net

Compton, Surrey Watts Gallery, restoration and extension
Reopens June 18

01483 810295; www.wattsgallery.org.uk

Edinburgh National Museum of Scotland, redevelopment
Reopens July 29

0300-123 6789; www.nms.ac.uk

Glasgow Riverside Museum
Opens June 21

www.riversideappeal.org; www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums

Hastings Jerwood Gallery
Opens late summer

www.jerwoodgallery.org

Liverpool Museum of Liverpool
First phase opens July 19

0151-207 0001; www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/mol

Margate Turner Contemporary

01843 233000; www.turnercontemporary.org

Sheffield Ruskin Galleries, Millennium Gallery

0114-278 2600; www.museums-sheffield.org.uk

Wakefield Hepworth Wakefield
Opens May 21

01924 247360; www.hepworthwakefield.org

