Press Release

Yorkshire Sculpture Park's children's wartime art collection gains UNESCO recognition

Painting by Grete Blatney, 1922. Courtesy Franz Cižek Collection. Reproduced by permission of Wanda Stanley (Mrs Marjoram).

Painting by Rosi Hedding, 1922. Courtesy Franz Cižek Collection. Reproduced by permission of Wanda Stanley (Mrs Marjoram)

Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) is delighted to announce that children's artwork from its own National Arts Education Archive (NAEA) has been inscribed on the UNESCO Memory of the World Register.

Marking a major achievement for Yorkshire and the UK, the decision places YSP's Franz Cižek Collection alongside globally significant documents such as Beethoven's 9th Symphony and the Diary of Anne Frank.

For more than seven years, a group of organisations have taken part in a pan-European initiative to nominate "drawings and writings of children during wartime in Europe: 1914–1950" for the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. This nomination, coordinated through the International Research and Archives Network (IRAND), brings together 17 collections from across Europe, highlighting the voices and creativity of children who lived through the upheavals of the First and Second World Wars.

YSP's contribution to this international project was the ***Franz Cižek Collection***, comprising 101 paintings, wood and lino cuts created by children at Vienna's pioneering and free Juvenile Art Classes which Professor Cižek organised during holiday times and weekends, between 1915-1922.

This rare collection is on loan to YSP and held in the NAEA, one of the UK's foremost repositories for arts education materials.

The UNESCO Executive Board has now confirmed the inclusion of this submission in the Memory of the World Register. The decision underlines the importance of children's perspectives in the documentation of Europe's wartime history.

Wood Cut by Franz Probst, 1920. Courtesy Franz Cižek Collection. Reproduced by permission of Wanda Stanley (Mrs Marjoram)

The Franz Cižek Collection, first exhibited in London in 1921 by Birmingham art teacher Francesca Wilson, has played a pivotal role in shaping modern approaches to art education, inspiring generations of teachers and students in the UK and beyond. These works offer a unique window into the lives, hopes, and fears of children during some of Europe's darkest times, serving as a powerful testament to resilience and creativity.

YSP welcomed the news:

"We are deeply honoured that the children's artwork in our care has been recognised by UNESCO as part of the world's documentary heritage. This inscription not only celebrates the extraordinary vision of Franz Cižek and the children he taught but also affirms the vital role that Yorkshire Sculpture Park and the NAEA play in preserving and sharing stories that matter. We hope this recognition will inspire even more people from our region and beyond to engage with our collections and reflect on the enduring power of creativity in times of adversity."

The UNESCO Memory of the World Programme, established in 1992, aims to preserve and provide access to the world's most significant documentary heritage. The UK has several inscriptions on the International Memory of the World Register, including some of the nation's most iconic documents such as The Domesday Book, The Magna Carta, The Bill of Rights (1689), the Personal Archive of Sir Winston Churchill and most recently added (2024) Charles Darwin Archive.

The inclusion of the NAEA's collections ensures that the voices and experiences of children from the past will continue to inform and inspire future generations.

The NAEA is the only archive outside of Vienna, Austria where Cižek's work with students is accessible to the public. YSP would like to thank HS-Prof. MMag. Dr. Rolf Laven and the Wien Museum for their work to enable the inclusion of the British collection of work by pupils of Franz Cižek in this programme.

For more information about the National Arts Education Archive and the Franz Cižek Collection, visit ysp.org.uk or explore the archive online. The full listing of the UNESCO Memory of the World Register entry can be found on the German UNESCO Commission's website.

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Painting by Victor Fadrus, 1922. Courtesy Franz Cižek Collection. Reproduced by permission of Wanda Stanley (Mrs Marjoram)

Poster by Herta Breit, 1924. Courtesy Franz Cižek Collection. Reproduced by permission of Wanda Stanley (Mrs Marjoram)

Notes for Editors
Press enquiries
YSP / +44 (0)1924 832 631 / comms@ysp.org.uk
Download images at ysp.org.uk/press

Listings information
Yorkshire Sculpture Park, West Bretton, Wakefield WF4 4LG
Near Wakefield and Barnsley – M1 Junction 38
+44 (0)1924 832631 | ysp.org.uk | @YSPsculpture
Check online for opening hours.
Book tickets at ysp.org.uk

Social media
Instagram: @YSPsculpture
Facebook: @YorkshireSculpturePark
#YSPSculpture

About Yorkshire Sculpture Park
Awarded VisitEngland's gold accolade in 2023-24 for an outstanding visitor attraction, Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP) is the leading international centre for modern and contemporary sculpture. Welcoming around 380,000 visitors each year, YSP is a registered charity and accredited museum situated in the 500-acre, 18th-century Bretton Hall estate in West and South Yorkshire.

YSP is the largest sculpture park in Europe. Founded in 1977 by Sir Peter Murray CBE it is currently led by Interim Director Kevin Rodd. It is the only place in Europe to see Barbara Hepworth's The Family of Man in its entirety, alongside a significant collection of sculpture, including bronzes by Henry Moore, important pieces by Hemali Bhuta, Roger Hiorns, Damien Hirst, Kimsooja, Marc Quinn, Hank Willis Thomas and Erwin Wurm, and site-specific works by Andy Goldsworthy, Alfredo Jaar, David Nash, Sean Scully and James Turrell.

YSP mounts a year-round temporary exhibitions programme including some of the world's leading artists across three indoor galleries and the outdoors. Highlights include exhibitions by Fiona Banner, Anthony Caro, Tony Cragg, Leonardo Drew, Robert Indiana, Amar Kanwar, KAWS, William Kentridge, Bharti Kher, Joan Miró, Henry Moore, Lindsey Mendick, Annie Morris, Giuseppe Penone, Jaume Plensa, Ursula von Rydingsvard, Sean Scully, Yinka Shonibare CBE, Chiharu Shiota, David Smith, Joana Vasconcelos, Bill Viola and Erwin Wurm.

Across its 48-year history, YSP has worked with over 1,000 artists from more than 40 countries, on varied projects from short-term residencies to major surveys. YSP supports artists at vital stages in their careers and is rare in having the accommodation, workshops and expertise to enable open-ended and risk-taking practice, giving artists space, time and support to think and to develop new ideas.

Over this time, YSP has sought to ignite, nurture and sustain interest in and debate around contemporary art and sculpture, especially with those for whom art participation is not habitual or familiar. It enables open access to art, situations and ideas, and continues to re-evaluate and expand the approach to considering art's role and relevance in society. Supporting 40,000 people each year through YSP's learning programme, this innovative work develops ability, confidence and life aspiration in participants.

YSP's core work is made possible by investment from Arts Council England, Wakefield Council, Roger Evans, the Liz and Terry Bramall Foundation, The Garfield Weston Foundation and the Dunard Fund. YSP was named Art Fund Museum of the Year in 2014 and awarded the 2023 Visitor Attraction of the Year and Cultural Award in the Yorkshire Post Tourism Awards.

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