

# The Courtauld

Press Release

Thursday 14 July 2022

## FUSELI AND THE MODERN WOMAN: FASHION, FANTASY, FETISHISM

The Courtauld Gallery  
14 October 2022 – 8 January 2023

High-resolution images: <https://bit.ly/3O41o0w>

One of the most original and eccentric artists of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century, Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), will be the subject of a new exhibition at The Courtauld, opening 14 October 2022.

*Fuseli and the Modern Woman: Fashion, Fantasy, Fetishism* will reveal the artist's secret lifelong obsession with the female figure through fifty of his strange and striking private drawings, many of which depict the spectacularly extravagant hairdos and fashions of the day. The exhibition will unpick Fuseli's fascination with female sexuality and the modern woman – as a figure of mystery, transgression, and dangerous allure.

Working at the height of The Enlightenment period, Anglo-Swiss artist Henry Fuseli was a libertine and self-proclaimed genius whose experimental and highly idiosyncratic work helped establish a reputation for controversy. Born in Zurich, in 1764 he abandoned the Protestant Reformed church in which he was ordained, to pursue a career in London's literary world. His talents as a draughtsman and flair for self-promotion brought him to the attention of Joshua Reynolds who encouraged his artistic ambitions to pursue his training. In Rome, in the 1770s, Fuseli established himself as the central figure in an international group of artists who shared his desire to rejuvenate modern art by transforming the classical tradition into something more expressive.

Fuseli's vividly stylised paintings depicted fantastic and supernatural themes, drawing on Shakespeare, epic poetry, Gothic horror, folklore, and classical dramas, as well as scenes from his own imagination, often polarising public opinion. His most famous painting, *The Nightmare* (1782) cemented his fame: in 1799 Fuseli was elected Professor of Painting at The Royal Academy and served for 21 years as Keeper of the RA Schools, working and living at Somerset House in what is now The Courtauld Gallery.

While his public paintings often depicted masculine heroes and grand classical subjects, in private this eminent Royal Academician harboured a preoccupation with the figure of the contemporary woman which he drew obsessively in more than 150 works. Often representing his wife Sophia Rawlins, who was a model, these drawings depict the finest details of the extravagant coiffures and latest fashions; at times these modern women appear as figures of disturbing power. The exhibition features fifty examples of Fuseli's captivating and complex

drawings, which provide an insight into late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century anxieties about gender, identity, and sexuality during a transformative period in European history.

Organised in collaboration with the Kunsthaus Zürich, the exhibition will showcase drawings brought together from international collections and will be accompanied by a catalogue presenting new research. Following its presentation at The Courtauld the exhibition will travel to Zürich, the city where Fuseli was born, on show from 24 February – 21 May 2023.

*Fuseli and the Modern Woman: Fashion, Fantasy, Fetishism* is supported by James Bartos, Olivier and Desiree Berggruen, with additional support from the International Music and Art Foundation and the Tavolozza Foundation.

### **Fuseli and the Modern Woman: Fashion, Fantasy, Fetishism**

**14 October 2022 – 8 January 2023**

The Denise Coates Exhibition Galleries

Opening Hours: 10.00 – 18.00 (last entry 17.15)

Weekend tickets from £20, Friends and Under-18s go free

The Courtauld Gallery

Somerset House, Strand

London WC2R 0RN

### **MEDIA CONTACTS**

#### **The Courtauld**

[www.courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/press](http://www.courtauld.ac.uk/gallery/press)

[media@courtauld.ac.uk](mailto:media@courtauld.ac.uk)

#### **Bolton & Quinn**

Erica Bolton | [erica@boltonquinn.com](mailto:erica@boltonquinn.com) | +44 (0)20 7221 5000

Daisy Taylor | [daisy@boltonquinn.com](mailto:daisy@boltonquinn.com) | +44 (0)20 7221 5000

### **THE COURTAULD**

Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN

[www.courtauld.ac.uk](http://www.courtauld.ac.uk)

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### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

#### **About The Courtauld**

The Courtauld works to advance how we see and understand the visual arts, as an internationally- renowned centre for the teaching and research of art history and a major public gallery. Founded by collectors and philanthropists in 1932, the organisation has been at

the forefront of the study of art ever since. through advanced research and conservation practice, innovative teaching, the renowned collection and inspiring exhibitions of its gallery, and engaging and accessible activities, education and events.

The Courtauld cares for one of the greatest art collections in the UK, presenting these works to the public at The Courtauld Gallery in central London, as well as through loans and partnerships. The Gallery is most famous for its iconic Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterpieces – such as Van Gogh’s *Self-Portrait with Bandaged Ear* and Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. It showcases these alongside an internationally renowned collection of works from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance through to the present day.

Academically, The Courtauld faculty is the largest community of art historians and conservators in the UK, teaching and carrying out research on subjects from creativity in late Antiquity to contemporary digital artforms - with an increasingly global focus. An independent college of the University of London, The Courtauld offers a range of degree programmes from BA to PhD in the History of Art, curating and the conservation of easel and wall paintings. Its alumni are leaders and innovators in the arts, culture and business worlds, helping to shape the global agenda for the arts and creative industries.

Founded on the belief that everyone should have the opportunity to engage with art, The Courtauld works to increase understanding of the role played by art throughout history, in all societies and across all geographies – as well as being a champion for the importance of art in the present day. This could be through exhibitions offering a chance to look closely at world-famous works; events bringing art history research to new audiences; accessible and expert short courses; digital engagement, innovative school, family and community programmes; or taking a formal qualification. The Courtauld’s ambition is to transform access to art history education by extending the horizons of what this is and ensuring as many people as possible can benefit from the tools to better understand the visual world around us.

The Courtauld is an exempt charity and relies on generous philanthropic support to achieve its mission of advancing the understanding of the visual arts of the past and present across the world through advanced research, innovative teaching, inspiring exhibitions, programmes and collections.

The collection cared for by The Courtauld Gallery is owned by the Samuel Courtauld Trust.