

# WORLD ART COLLECTIONS EXHIBITIONS

SAINSBURY CENTRE  
for Visual Arts



Figurine, Japan,  
Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection  
UEA 1091. Photo James Austin

## Press Release

### ***unearthed* exhibition at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts**

***unearthed***, a major new exhibition which brings together prehistoric ceramic figurines from the Balkans and Japan for the first time, opens at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, Norwich, on Tuesday 22 June and runs until Sunday 29 August. Over 100 ancient figurines from Albania, Macedonia, Japan, Romania and the UK will be on display together with contemporary artworks. This exciting fresh approach will reveal new ideas about some of the most remarkable survivals from prehistory, enable us to think about figurines in new ways and reflect on what makes us human. The exhibition has been developed by the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures and is supported by The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), The Henry Moore Foundation, the Japan Foundation, the British Academy and the Duke of Omnium Fund.

*"There may never again be the chance to see this many ancient objects from the worlds' two great figurine traditions together in one exhibition. It is impossible to look at these evocative European figurines and Japanese dogū and not be transported to mystical worlds from deepest prehistory. What did these objects mean to their makers? Were they goddesses and gods? Were they toys? Were they portraits? The exhibition poses these and other unsolved questions for archaeology and art history" – Douglass Bailey, *unearthed* curator, San Francisco State University.*

*unearthed* will focus on two of the earliest and most elaborate traditions of ceramic figurine making: the Jōmon from the Japanese archipelago (c.16,000-2,000 years ago) and the Neolithic and Eneolithic from the Balkans (c.8,500-4,500 years ago). Whilst some information is known about how prehistoric people lived in Japan and the Balkans, our understanding of why figurines were made and how they were used is less certain. The exhibition brings together objects made by village dwellers from two unconnected regions, to enable comparison. Stimulating new interpretation is made possible through the identification of intriguing similarities and differences; why, for example, were they both making human forms from clay and why were figurines commonly broken?

Theories about the possible functions of figurines include toys, dolls, magical objects designed to guarantee or increase fertility or successful harvests, and the representations of gods or as 'Mother Goddesses'. The exhibition will explore these possibilities and will use the figurines to ask questions about how people express their worlds, why people make and break things, why people use small objects and how people lived in the past. Visitors will be encouraged to make their own interpretations, encountering the figurines as an archaeologist would and piecing together the fragments of evidence they find.

Amongst the works on display will be the distinctive 'goggle-eyed' figures from northern Japan, objects from important early collections from the Tokyo University Museum and, back in Norfolk for the first time since its discovery in 1930s, the *Grimes Graves Chalk Goddess*. The exhibition includes 6 ornate Jōmon figurines (known as dogū) from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection, which is permanently housed at the Sainsbury Centre.

*unearthed* includes a series of contemporary artworks and images from present day Japan and the Balkans. Ancient and contemporary will be juxtaposed to stimulate wider thinking about figurines, the representation of the human form and the ways in which these ancient figurines have become important visual icons in the development of 21st century cultural identities. Amongst the works on display will be Japanese manga characters inspired by Jōmon figures, modern representations of the human form, and dioramic photographs with animations that recreate a sense of being in prehistoric worlds.

*"Building on and responding to a major exhibition of prehistoric Japanese figurines at the British Museum in 2009, unearthed is breaking new ground in the understanding and appreciation of figurines and how they contribute to what it means to be human. unearthed sets a new agenda for art and archaeology, linking local concerns with themes of global significance"* – Simon Kaner, *unearthed* curator and Assistant Director of SISJAC.

One of the key themes in the exhibition is miniaturisation and our relationship with small figures. Many of the figurines were designed to be held in the hand (typically 4-5cm in height with the smallest object being just 2.3cm tall). *unearthed* will look at the ways in which people interact with such small objects and how their size may affect how they are perceived. As part of this, visitors to the exhibition will be given a biscuit-fired figurine made by artist Sue Maufe, enabling them to experience the tactile quality of the ancient figures they will see on display. They will also be able to break their figurine, adding it to a heap of fragments in the gallery reminiscent of the archaeological sites where figurines have been found.

*“Small things, especially ones that look human, allow us to think about our place in the world in new ways. unearthed develops this notion and creates fresh opportunities for us to reconsider who we were in the past, who we are today, and who we want to be”* – Andrew Cochrane, *unearthed* curator, University of East Anglia.

The exhibition is accompanied by an exciting programme of academic and public events including artist-led workshops, family events and talks. A study day, organised by the Sainsbury Centre and SISJAC will be held at Norwich University College of the Arts on Saturday 19 June. **See Notes to Editors for more details.**

*unearthed* runs concurrently with Henry Moore Textiles. This major exhibition of Moore’s textiles designs from the 1940s and 1950s reveals his passion for colour and form. **Full press release available on request.**

**Further information including copies of the gallery guide, wall texts and full image sheet are available on request.**

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**For further information or photographs please contact**

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East Anglia

## Notes to Editors

### Dates, Times and Information

*unearthed* runs from Tuesday 22 June to Sunday 29 August 2010. NOTE NEW OPENING TIMES - The exhibition will be open Tuesday to Sunday (closed Mondays including Bank Holiday Mondays), 10am to 5pm. Tel 01603 593199 [www.scva.ac.uk](http://www.scva.ac.uk).

*Combined Admission to unearthed and Henry Moore Textiles*

£4, concessions £2

Family admission (up to 2 adults and 3 children) £8, concessions £8.

### Exhibition Support

Arts and Humanities Research Council

The Henry Moore Foundation

Japan Foundation

The British Academy

The Duke of Omnium Fund

### Exhibition Marketing Sponsors

National Express

### Exhibition Curated By

Douglass Bailey, San Francisco State University

Andrew Cochrane, University of East Anglia

Simon Kaner, Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures

### Associated Research

The *unearthed* exhibition draws on a programme of research developed by the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures and supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council

### Book

An *unearthed* book by two of the exhibition curators, Andrew Cochrane (University of East Anglia) and Douglass Bailey (San Francisco State University) is to be distributed by Oxbow Books in Oxford, UK. It is intended that the book will set the future agenda for the study of prehistoric figurines

### Study Day

Saturday 19 June

10am – 4pm

Where: Norwich University College of the Arts, Duke Street Lecture Theatre

Price: free

Booking: not required

Join exhibition curators and specialists from Japan and the Balkans for the day and take an in-depth look at the *unearthed* exhibition. Presentations will introduce the objects, consider key themes and explore the ideas behind the exhibition. Speakers will discuss the impact of making, holding and perceiving the world through encounters with small objects. They will also talk about the relevance of archaeology and prehistoric cultural properties to notions of identity today

Organised by the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures. Supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. In association with Norwich University College of the Arts

### Other Information

George Sexton Associates have provided the lighting and exhibition design for *unearthed*

The Sainsbury Centre is supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and The Gatsby Charitable Foundation

Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures is also supported by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation