



Professor Jean Brown and PhD student Lucas Ferguson-Sharp at Northumbria University's Gallery North - home to the Cornish Revealed exhibition

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Cornish Revealed – artist as you’ve never seen him before

Northumbria University exhibition provides a behind-the-scenes look at the life and work of the celebrated County Durham painter.

Never-before-seen sketches, journals, letters and paintings by the artist Norman Cornish have gone on display as part of a unique exhibition, revealing more detail about his early work and artistic processes.

Cornish Revealed, currently on show at Northumbria University's Gallery North, provides a fascinating insight into Cornish's life and includes work which has never been displayed in public before.

The exhibition is the result of years of research by academics at Northumbria University – which has a strong link to the County Durham artist and his family and is home to the largest collection of his work anywhere in the world.

Professor Jean Brown is director of Northumbria's University Gallery and one of the UK's foremost authorities on the life and work of Norman Cornish.

She said: "This exhibition brings together pieces from our own collection as well as others on long term loan to really examine the techniques and materials Cornish used in his work.

"As well as finished paintings we have also examined a whole variety of materials, including initial sketches, notes, letters and other personal items which, together, give us a much clearer picture of his development as an artist.

"This focus on research means this exhibition is very different to anything else and definitely a must for any fans of Cornish's work."

Norman Cornish was born in Spennymoor, County Durham in 1919 and left school at the age of 14 to work as a coal miner. He had always been interested in drawing and painting and joined a sketching club at the Spennymoor Settlement, where he was given the opportunity to exhibit his work. In 1966 he left the pits to become a professional painter and became known as one of the most sought-after contemporary painters in the country.

Last year marked the 100th anniversary of Cornish's birth, with exhibitions and events taking place to mark the milestone, including a major retrospective exhibition at The Bowes Museum in County Durham, which Professor Brown has been involved in.

Northumbria's connection with Norman Cornish dates back to the late 1980s, when he presented a body of his work to the University for its permanent collection. Over the years this has been used to support both research and

teaching.

Many of the paintings held in the Northumbria collection were not dated, so academics have been working closely with Cornish's son and daughter to try and piece together information to determine the chronology of his work.

As Professor Brown explains: "We have had a really unique opportunity thanks to the archive of materials which Cornish left to the University.

"He was of a generation that never threw anything out and we have had access to photos, letters, annotated journals and plans which have allowed us to understand more about his mindset during the time he was painting."

PhD student Lucas Ferguson-Sharp has been working alongside Professor Brown to explore Cornish's practice, materials and techniques. Originally from Canada, Lucas was drawn to Cornish's ability to capture the world around him, including the nuances of everyday life, social interaction and labour; themes that remain relevant to a wide audience.

As he explains: "Norman Cornish's unique artistic voice derives from his self-taught nature and unending enthusiasm to create art. During his life time he was sometimes criticized for lacking an art school education and yet that has not handicapped the quality of his work due to a combination of his innate ability and the fact that he taught himself by studying the works of some of the world's greatest artists. The evidence for this can be seen in the vast collection of art books and journals which he collected throughout his life.

"Cornish took a took inspiration from many master artists such as Van Gogh, Lautrec and Rembrandt and his art practice was an obsession for him, he drew constantly, always trying to perfect his colour, composition, and technique.

"Outside of his art practice he took a keen interest in music, literature, and politics, yet he always kept his own unique voice, following the advice of one of his early mentors to 'draw what you know'.

"Our research aims to uncover the techniques, materials and artistic practice that Norman Cornish utilised, and to contextualise Cornish's artwork in a larger national and international art historical context.

“The exhibition draws from the Norman Cornish Family archive that is currently being held and researched at Northumbria University. The archive holds thousands of objects from Norman Cornish's studio, from his sketch to correspondents to audio recordings.”

Cornish Revealed is on display at Northumbria University's Gallery North until 22 February. Gallery opening times are 10am to 4pm, Tuesday to Saturday. See some of the work on display in the video below.

Find out more about Northumbria University's [Department of Arts](#).

[View embedded content here](#)

[Cornish Revealed @ Gallery North – artist as you've never seen him before](#) from [Northumbria University](#) on [Vimeo](#).

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