**Contact**

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**Mat Collishaw ‘The Nerve Rack’**

**Ushaw, County Durham**

**5 July – 3 November 2019**

**Mat Collishaw challenges perspectives on faith with new installation at Ushaw**

A new commission by artist Mat Collishaw explores the themes of martyrdom and treason, worship and heresy at Ushaw, the former seminary in County Durham, from 5 July until 3 November.

*The Nerve Rack* is a life-sized animatronic eagle inspired by the grand scale of the college, chapels and Ushaw’s extensive archive. Collishaw commented: “I was drawn to a document in the library *The Sincere and Modest Defence of English Catholics* (1584), annotated by the Elizabethans’ chief priest hunter and torturer Richard Topcliffe. It outlines the two diametrically opposing viewpoints that defined religious belief in England at the time. When church and state are bound together the consequences are magnified, Protestantism and Catholicism, martyrdom and heresy – they are two sides of the same coin. It was this mirroring of religious conviction that I wanted to work with.”

Installed opposite one of the treasures of Ushaw; a lectern topped with a bronze sculpture of an eagle designed by Augustus Pugin, *The Nerve Rack* highlights the dangers of extremism and intransigence. The two eagles confront each other inside a large barrier, as though engaged in conflict in an arena. *The Nerve Rack* is Pugin's golden eagle stripped of its embellishment to reveal a chilling machine-driven steel armature. Whilst tormenting a small mechanical mouse, Collishaw’s eagle stares at its adversary and raises its wings to full span in a bid to intimidate its more stoic opponent.The mechanistic nature of Collishaw's 'mirror image' of Pugin's eagle suggests a cold and clinical ruthlessness which echoes the fanatical enmity that existed between the two opposing viewpoints of Christianity.

Lucy Jenkins, Heritage and Curatorial Manager at Ushaw, adds: “This is our third public art installation at Ushaw but the first new commission of a site-specific work created especially for the space. To have an artist of Mat’s calibre involved is hugely exciting for us and we’re all looking forward to experiencing this new work created in response to our history, collections and architecture. When both eagles take their place in one of our most spiritual settings, it will be an exceptional opportunity to see new work from one of our most engaging British artists, and will offer a chance for visitors to examine their perspective on history and faith, both past and present.”

**Mat Collishaw will be at Ushaw and available for interview along with representatives from Ushaw on Thursday 4 July. Opportunities for interview are also available in London in advance. To request an interview please contact Anys Williams at Anita Morris Associates on 01943 603311,** **Anys@anitamorrisassociates.co.uk**

**Ends**

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**Notes for editors**

**Ushaw College**

**Durham**

**DH7 9RH**

Day Entry to Ushaw is £3 for adults, £1 for children; an annual pass is £6 for adults, £2 for children and £14 for a family which allows multiple visits throughout the year. The main house and chapels are open Monday to Saturday 11am to 3pm. There is onsite catering in the magnificent refectory and an ongoing programme of concerts and events. See the website for further details: [www.ushaw.org](http://www.ushaw.org)

**Ushaw** is a former Catholic seminary near the village of Ushaw Moor, just a few miles outside Durham city. It was founded in 1808 by scholars from the English College, Douai, who had fled France after the French Revolution. Ushaw College was the principal Roman Catholic seminary for the training of Catholic priests in the north of England, until it closed in 2011. Many of Ushaw’s nineteenth century buildings are grade one or two listed and include a complex of chapels designed by AWN Pugin. The library holdings are of huge range and variety including books on architecture, art, geography, travel, science and literature. There are first editions by Newton, Galileo, Dickens and Darwin, exquisite illuminated books of hours, the Nuremberg Chronicle printed in 1493, Thomas Cranmer’s own copy of Martin Luther’s writings and a coded letter sent during secret negotiations over the marriage of Charles II to Catherine of Braganza. As well as the books and manuscripts there are ecclesiastical vestments, gold and silverware, paintings, sculpture and religious relics.

Ushaw began opening as a visitor attraction on Saturdays in May 2015 and welcomed over 7,000 visitors in the first year. This grew to over 22,000 visitors in 2016 and with an extension to opening hours in 2017, further growth was recorded to 38,000 visitors.

Pugin’s eagle lectern was featured in the 1851 Great Exhibition. It was made possible due to a donation from one of Ushaw’s first students, Francis Sloane.

**Mat Collishaw** (Nottingham, 1966), lives and works in London. A key figure in an important generation of contemporary British artists he began his career exhibiting the acclaimed work *Bullet Hole* at the legendary show Freeze in 1988. His broad practice includes sculpture, photography, film and installation, and his work has been exhibited in numerous solo shows around the world.  Collishaw’s work is in many public and private collections including; Tate and British Council Collections, both London; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Arter Foundation, Istanbul; Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Museum of Old and New Art, New South Wales and Olbricht Collection, Berlin.

**Blain|Southern** was founded in 2010 by Harry Blain and Graham Southern. The gallery has spaces in London, Berlin and New York, representing a roster of contemporary artists and several artists’ estates. Over the past 9 years, Blain|Southern has established a strong, artist-led exhibition programme, exhibiting new work by contemporary artists as well as, on occasion, placing focus on significant 20th Century artists or art historical movements.