

Culture & Performance Appreciation in London

Research:

These are some of the research projects we worked on while in London:

“Hampton Court Palace is where we lived the history of young Henry VII. We had tour guides that placed you in history with actors that made the audience part of the story. At the end of the tour we had English tea with scones. Clotted cream is great. What really drew me in were the Privy Gardens and the story behind them. King William and Queen Mary got married when William was twenty-six and Mary was only fourteen. She cried for two days before her wedding. However, on their wedding day they found that they both had a love for gardening and were able to connect through that. They are famous for reigning jointly and they are the only monarchs in British history to have done so. Queen Mary II has always interested me and it might be because of her name but either way she loved animals. In her gallery visitors had to be careful not to trip over the little red velvet beds she had for her dogs, she also hung birdcages at each of the windows. She also had a wide variety of ceramics that we were able to see today. Christopher Wren (same guy who built St. Paul’s Cathedral) was commissioned to rebuild Hampton Court (originally the Tudor palace) Unfortunately for William and Mary there wasn’t enough money or time. So now only half of Hampton Court is Baroque architecture, which is lucky for us to see two sides of history. The gardens were also dug up and re-landscaped. The gardens were filled with new plants, including Queen Mary’s own collection of exotic plants from around the world, and bordered by gilded wrought-iron screens by Jean Tijou, and a new Banqueting House by the river. Walking through the garden you feel like Queen Mary walking along her friend the King. Hampton Court Palace was one of my favorite places because the tour guides really amused you into the history. Honestly, the tour was one of the best pieces of theater I’ve seen here.” – **Mary Aalbue**

“Just like at the British Museum, I went into the Victoria and Albert expecting to find something theatre related to do my research project on. However, I was pleasantly surprised at the variety the museum had to offer, and I ended up seeing so many exhibits just by chance that I probably never would have thought about going to on my own. One of these was the Julia Margaret Cameron exhibit, celebrating the bicentenary of the photographer’s birth. What I thought was most interesting about this exhibit was how harshly her work was received and critiqued by her peers, and yet, how none of that stopped her from doing what she loved, in the way that she loved to do it. She was one of the first people to recognize that her mistakes made her unique, and could be a gateway to her success. Though she sought opinions from various mentors, she never let their criticisms deter her from staying true to her personal style, which I, as a young artist, think is a very inspiring characteristic. She pioneered the use of soft focus, and commonly scratched her negatives or used broken or damaged ones instead of seeking what others considered “perfection”. Another thing that interested me about Cameron’s work was that she often portrayed human models as gods and fictional characters. And further, she was known to cast female sitters in male parts. One of my favorite examples of this was from her portrait, *Cupid and Psyche*. Instead of Psyche’s traditional butterfly wings, Cameron instead chooses to perch a butterfly on Psyche’s head, which gives a completely original spin on an otherwise well known character from mythology. The other portrait that stood out to me was called *Kate Dore*, which was actually a photo taken by one of her contemporaries, Oscar Gustaf Rejlander. Cameron took this print and placed ferns between the paper and one of his negatives, which forms a beautiful frame around the portrait. This shows Cameron’s experimental nature and provides a glimpse into her photographic practice, which she was always trying to approve upon, even before she herself acquired a camera at the age of 48. I am so glad that I had the opportunity to be acquainted with this unique artist’s fearless work.” – **Chloe Barg**

“The Tree of Life is a sculpture installation at the British Museum. It is made from 600,000+ surrendered weapons in the British Museum. Mozambique suffered from war and natural disaster in the late 20th century. After the armed struggle for independence from colonial rule ended, Mozambique experienced civil war from 1976 to 1992 in which the country was used as a pawn in a struggle between opposing world powers. Seven million guns were poured into the country during the war, none of which were made in Africa, most of which remain hidden or buried in the bush. The threat of these weapons led Bishop Dom Dinis Sengulane to set up the Transforming Arms Into Tools (TAE) project in 1995, which is supported by Christian Aid. Mozambicans are encouraged to hand over weapons in exchange for agricultural, domestic, and construction items— like ploughs, bicycles, sewing machines. In one case, a whole village gave up its weapons in exchange for a tractor. Some of the weapons are then cut up and turned into sculptures by a group of artists in Maputo. It took 3 months to create. The Tree of Life grew out of a collaboration between Christian Aid, the British Museum, and then Christian Council of Mozambique. The Throne of Weapons was made by Cristovao Canhavato in Maputo, Mozambique in 2001. The throne is made from the decommissioned weapons collected at the end of the civil war. This is a contemporary artwork, but thrones and stools are traditionally symbols of power and prestige in Africa. They are also symbols of discussion and debate in African culture. Since 2005, the throne has toured to 30 venues around the UK, including schools, museums, cathedrals, community centers, and a prison.” – **Alexandria Watts**



“At the British Museum I saw so many interesting exhibits, including the Japanese Mitsubishi Galleries, full of beautiful Japanese art from throughout history, the Sir Harry and Lady Djanogly Gallery which consisted of hundreds of fascinating and intricate clocks, and a journey throughout Ancient Greece. One of the exhibits that intrigued me the most, however, was the Lewis Chessman, which are 12th Century chessman and one of the most famous chess sets in the world. I was especially drawn to this because I love the game of chess, and I have heard of this chess set before. I think it’s incredible the game hasn’t changed since it was created in the Medieval period.

The chess pieces were discovered on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, Scotland, in 1831. The horde consisted of 78 chess pieces carved from walrus ivory and whales teeth, fourteen table men (parts to a different game of strategy), and a belt buckle. Even though the pieces were discovered in Scotland, it is believed they were made in Trondheim, Norway, because of similar figures discovered in Trondheim, and the similarity of shield and armor designs to Norse warriors. The chessman themselves included eight kings, eight queens, sixteen bishops, fifteen knights, twelve rooks, and nineteen pawns. 67 of the chess pieces are displayed at the British Museum, and the other eleven are at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. The figures are in remarkably good condition for being so old, so it is believed they had never been used and were being transported from Trondheim to Scotland for sale. For me this just demonstrates that in the 12th Century, this game was being played by different cultures in different areas of the world, as it still is today.” – **Sarah Hoover**

“At the British Museum on Great Russel Street I saw many amazing things such as the Lewis Chessmen, Oxus treasure, Samurai armour, and of course the Rosetta Stone. Among looking at all the highlights of the museum I came across a section on Vikings. This section really intrigued me because my family is traced back to Norway and there were Vikings on my father’s side. Aalbue is Norwegian. I knew what Vikings did but I knew very little about them and I was very excited to learn. The first thing I saw were some of the weapons used by the Vikings. Vikings behaved opportunistically, whether to trade or raid someone’s ship depending on the ships weaponry. Something interested that I didn’t know was that the origin of Viking is uncertain, but they think it comes from Old Norse words for pirates, seaborne expeditions, or an area in southeastern Norway called Viken. The Double-edged sword was the most prestigious weapon used by high status warrior Vikings and many Vikings used battle-axes and spear-heads. I learned about the home life of the Vikings as well. They lived in the rural communities in their homelands. Farming, fishing, hunting and crafts were central to daily life. Women organized the household, cared for the family, prepared food and made clothing. Another interesting thing was that Vikings were actually pagan before they were Christian. Because of their pagan beliefs they believed a lot in magic. An iron rod from a woman’s grave in Norway may have been used in Pagan magical practices. It resembles similar rods found in burials of women who may have been sorceresses. The staff may have included divination and the control of others. The staff is bent perhaps to remove its powers.” – **Mary Aalbue**

“It was honestly so amazing being able to walk in the same footsteps as William Shakespeare. I really enjoyed visiting his house and seeing the rooms where he learned to walk, grew up, and raised his own family. However, after we talked about how Shakespeare possibly wasn’t the real Shakespeare, it almost diminished the experience for me. It made me really curious about who WAS the real Shakespeare, and I can’t wait to further research the subject when I get home. As far as the other places we visited, I wasn’t too impressed by them. I wish we could have been given free time to travel between the houses, as I would have liked to spend more time in the actual town of Stratford than in Harvard’s house, which wasn’t that interesting to me. Even my experience at Hall’s Croft in no way compared to what I felt when I was in Shakespeare’s house, so I didn’t think it was a necessary part of experiencing Stratford. Also, as much as I appreciated getting to see William Shakespeare’s grave, I didn’t think it was as exciting as seeing where he grew up. I loved what Maria said on the bus ride home, that it is not about where you die, but the things you do while you’re alive. I think that is completely true, so seeing his physical grave didn’t make or break the trip for me.

I loved the talk back with the RSC. I think it was amazing to see all these little kids so interested in theatre as an art form, and not just something their parents dragged them to in order to waste time one afternoon. I thought that the answers the cast were giving were really good for kids at such a young age to be hearing, and the children’s excitement reminded me of myself when I was that age and would see a good show with my parents. I knew very early on that I wanted to in some way be apart of the magic I was witnessing, and this talk back made me realize how important it is to share that excitement with the generations that come after us. It inspired me to try to reach out in some way to the younger theatre population after I graduate.” – **Chloe Barg**

“At the Victoria and Albert Museum ‘Samson and the Philistines’ was originally made in Firenze, Italy in 1749 by Vincenzo Foggini. It’s made of carved marble. It’s inscribed, ‘VINVS FOGGINI / SCVLPSIT FLO / RENTIAE / 1749’. Samson was Nazarite, a chosen people of God that take a vow. The longer his hair grew, the stronger he became. The Philistines were enemies of the Nazirites. The Philistines wronged his wife by convincing her to cut his hair and while he was weak, they captured him. At one of their gatherings of debauchery, brought Samson out to make fun of and insult him. This figure shows the Old Testament hero Samson using the jawbone of a donkey to kill two of the Philistines who were taunting him. This is a recreation of Giambologna’s marble sculpture of Samson and the Philistines, which was recreated in the image of Michaelangelo Buonarroti’s sculpture of the same name. Foggini sold it directly to the young Lord Malton (later Marquis of Rockingham) when he visited Italy in 1749 to buy works of art for Wentworth Woodhouse. Malton also bought sculptures by Giambologna and Michaelangelo, and with these works, Malton’s collection became the most accomplished original sculptural group produced by an Italian sculptor in the 18th century.” – **Alexandria Watts**

“There was so much to do and see at Hampton Court Palace, it was hard to choose what to do my research assignment on. I especially enjoyed the second tour we went on, because I thought the story was fascinating, and then I stumbled upon a room of Henry VIII and all his wives, and I decided to do it on that. (Side note, Mary and I started watching Tudors that night. We were inspired). Henry’s first marriage was to Catherine of Aragon, the daughter of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, and also Henry’s older brother’s widow. Supposedly the marriage had never been consummated before the brother passed away, and Henry’s father insisted he marry her. After being married for 24 years, and having multiple still born children and a son who died at 7 weeks, and one daughter, Mary, Henry decided to annul his marriage to Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn. The Church refused, but that’s a story for another day. Henry married Anne in 1533, and she soon gave birth to Elizabeth. Anne had a string of miscarriages after this, and in 1536 was arrested and accused of having treasonous adultery and incest, and along with five men (one of which was her brother), was executed. Ten days later Henry married Jane Seymour, who gave birth to a son, Edward VI, and then died shortly after. Henry then married Anne of Cleves for political reasons, but he soon wanted an annulment, and she was named “The Kings Sister.” Henry then married the 17 year old Catherine Howard in 1540, but it was discovered she had an affair before she was married with Francis Dereham, whom she employed in her household. It then came out that she was currently having an affair with Thomas Culpeper of the King’s staff, and all three were beheaded in 1542. (That’s what the tour was all about!) Henry’s final marriage was to Catherine Parr in 1543, a widow. Catherine seemed to be a good influence on Henry, and helped him reconcile with his two now illegitimated daughters, Mary and Elizabeth. The marriage ended with Henry’s death in 1547. These were just the women Henry was married to. He was notorious for having affairs (and marrying his mistresses). One significant mistress he didn’t marry was Elizabeth Blount, who gave to Henry FitzRoy, whom Henry recognized as his son, and would have become king had he not died.” – **Sarah Hoover**

