



# *The Clearing* wins major public art commission

## Uncertain vision of the future wins major public art commission in the grounds of Compton Verney.

British artists Alex Hartley and Tom James have won a major public commission to create *'The Clearing'* a new, eye-catching work of art in the historic grounds of Compton Verney Art Gallery and Park, Warwickshire.

The work is part of a £2.5 million landscape restoration project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, to help audiences re-engage with the 'Capability Brown'-designed landscape at Compton Verney. Selected from over 150 entries, the work will create a contemporary response to the idea of a 'folly'. It will be unveiled in spring 2017.

*The Clearing* will take the form of a geodesic dome, in the middle of an evolving encampment, built on the shores of Compton Verney's iconic lake. Here, the artists will create a physical space where people can come together to explore and imagine the dystopian future that's waiting for us, just around the corner.

The dome, inspired by the utopian communities of 1960s America, will be built of scrap materials (car bonnets, metal and old doors) in a high-profile contrast to the Grade-1 Listed Georgian Mansion opposite it, and the Capability Brown-designed landscape that surrounds.

Inside, a series of regular workshops will be held to help local people learn the skills they'll need for a future without fossil fuels or a functioning economy: from making fire to keeping chickens, from brewing alcohol to building a wind turbine. Between the workshops, the dome will be inhabited by a series of artist caretakers, who will maintain the camp and keep the illusion alive.

The exciting thing for the artists is the opportunities for dialogue that *The Clearing* will create, and the way it will grow over its duration. As Alex Hartley comments *"The art is not the dome itself, nor the products of the workshops: it's the encounters that happen in the Clearing, the way it evolves, and the community it will generate."*

When it launched its search for the new work, Compton Verney sought to commission something significant, high-profile and impactful; something which could be participatory, and contain an element of surprise for the viewer.

*The Clearing* is an ambitious, eye-catching response: but also, an appropriate one. The project takes the idea of the Capability Brown-era folly – a faux historical structure that acts as a talking point in the landscape – and reinterprets it for our own, anxious times.

As Tom James says *"We wanted to create something ambivalent – half hopeful and half hopeless, half melancholy and half optimistic – to help people feel and understand this future, rather than just talk about it."*

Compton Verney Curator Penelope Sexton says: *"My hope is that this exciting and ground breaking commission will prompt enquiry and give opportunity to look at our site in new ways. Hopefully, it will deepen understanding and enjoyment of Compton Verney."*

Since opening in 2004, Compton Verney Art Gallery and Park has established a reputation for regional and national excellence. In recent years, Compton Verney has also forged pioneering collaborations with major museums and galleries across the UK.

Featuring a wide diversity of exhibitions - from historic shows such as Canaletto, Gainsborough or British Folk Art, to more contemporary shows on the *Arts and Crafts House* or last year's *Periodic Tales* - Compton Verney has come to be regarded by many as the 'national gallery on your doorstep'. With visitor numbers increasing, the unveiling of *The Clearing* is expected to give fresh impetus to the myriad reasons to visit this inventive and progressive destination for art lovers.

### **NOTES FOR EDITORS**

Compton Verney is an award winning, national art gallery in Warwickshire, based in a Grade I-listed Georgian mansion and set in 120 acres of Grade II-listed Lancelot 'Capability' Brown parkland. With six permanent collections (Naples, Northern European Art 1450-1650, British Portraits, Chinese, British Folk Art & The Marx-Lambert Collection) and a schedule of thought-

provoking changing exhibitions, it is an accredited museum, a registered charity, and the Chinese collection is nationally designated. More at [www.comptonverney.org.uk](http://www.comptonverney.org.uk)

**Alex Hartley** is a UK based artist whose work explores our understanding of utopian ideologies. His early work focused on the white cube of the gallery space; testing the parameters of art's containers. This has expanded to explore iconic modernist architectural forms, as the work considers buildings as social experiments manifested in both the built and natural environments. He has taken part in solo and group exhibitions in the UK, Europe and the USA, as well as earning a number of significant awards and commissions – including *Nowhereisland*, one of 'Artists Taking the Lead' projects for the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad. More at [www.alexhartley.net](http://www.alexhartley.net)

**Tom James** is a writer, self-publisher and artist. He's set up imaginary tourist boards; published fanzines about cities; written intros for biennales; and blown up cooling towers. His fanzine project, *GO*, is part of the permanent collection of the V&A. He is also part of Spacemakers, a utopian regeneration agency that tries to get inside the machinery of regeneration, and use it for good instead of evil. More at [www.tom-james.info](http://www.tom-james.info)

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, INTERVIEWS AND IMAGES**

Tracy Jones, Brera PR & Marketing – [tracy@brera-london.com](mailto:tracy@brera-london.com) / 01702 216658 / 07887 514984