Watts Gallery to reopen after £11million restoration

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Having been placed on the English Heritage At Risk Register, the Gallery's plight came to public attention when it narrowly missed winning the final of BBC's Restoration Village in 2006. The project subsequently received major funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (totalling £4.9m) and many generous individuals, trusts and foundations.

In his own lifetime, George Frederic Watts OM RA (1817-1904) was widely considered to be the greatest painter of the Victorian age. He was an outstanding portraitist, sculptor, landscape painter and symbolist and became the first living artist to have a solo exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

He lived in Compton for the last 13 years of his life and built the gallery in the Arts and Crafts style with his second wife Mary Seton Watts to provide 'art for all'. The gallery is unique in the UK in being the only purpose-built art gallery in the country devoted to a single professional artist.

The collection includes paintings, drawing, prints and sculptures which were owned by Watts during his lifetime. Important works include *Paolo and Francesca* (c.1872-74), *The Sower of the Systems* (c.1902) and the original model for the monumental sculpture, *Physical Energy* (1884-1904), bronzes of which stand in Kensington Gardens, Cape Town and Harare.

Visitors to Compton will now experience Watts Gallery as the artist intended, with many of the Gallery's original features returned. In addition, 21st century technology has been subtly introduced to create greater access and to provide much needed environmental controls that will safeguard the collection.

The gallery reopens with a special exhibition of the artist's masterpieces from the Tate collection. Amongst the important loans will be *The Minotaur* (1885), *The All-Pervading* (c.1887-90) and *Jonah* (1894).

One of Watts' most celebrated works, *Hope*, is the favourite painting of US President - Barack Obama having been the subject of a sermon by his former pastor Jeremiah Wright which set him on the path to the White House.

Further information

Andrew Churchill, Watts Gallery
Phone: 01483 813 584 / 07866 332 621
Email: marketing@wattsgallery.org.uk

Katie Owen, HLF Press Office
Phone: 020 7591 6027 / 6036
Email: katieo@hlf.org.uk

Erica Bolton, Bolton Quinn Ltd
Phone: 020 7221 5000 or 07711 698 186
Email: erica@boltonquinn.com