

## Little-seen Norman Cornish sketchbooks to be displayed at Durham University

*For immediate release: Wednesday 6 November*

- **Press kit available**
- **Media call with members of the Cornish family**

Little-seen sketchbooks by Norman Cornish will offer an intimate insight into the work and mind of the acclaimed North East artist when a new exhibition celebrating the centenary of his birth opens later this month (November).

**'Norman Cornish: The Sketchbooks' will be at Palace Green Library, Durham University, from Saturday 16 November until February 2020.**

Norman Cornish was born in Spennymoor, County Durham, and worked as a coal miner for 33 years before becoming a full-time artist in 1966.

His artworks documenting life in the County's pit villages are both critically acclaimed and hugely popular.

Before his death in 2014, Mr Cornish said he hoped his sketchbooks would "have a life of their own and be of interest to people". His studio, at his home in Spennymoor, contained **269 sketchbooks**, containing a huge range of images from quick sketches to finished drawings.

'*Norman Cornish: The Sketchbooks*' features some of these treasures, focusing on his observations of life, landscapes and family, offering an intimate insight into his personal thoughts and reflections. Some of the 50 sketchbooks and loose drawings also link directly to paintings featured in the exhibition, showing the progression from an initial observation through a series of steps to a finished work.

**Liz Waller, Director of Library and Collections at Durham University, said:** "Norman Cornish is an icon of North East life and art. We feel honoured to be part of celebrating the centenary of his birth and privileged to be hosting this very special exhibition.

"We're sure it will be of interest to both art enthusiasts and those who fondly remember the period Norman painted. We're also looking forward to helping introduce a new generation to his work and we'll be running workshops and family-friendly events to assist this."

**Norman Cornish's son, John Cornish, said:** "My father's sketchbooks offer an extraordinary insight into his world. For him, drawing was a compulsion; in his words sketching was 'an itch that he had to scratch'.

"His sketchbooks contain a wealth of interesting images, including spontaneous character studies, bar scenes and so much more. Some sketches are preparatory pieces for the larger paintings on show in the exhibition."

'*Norman Cornish: The Sketchbooks*' will be in the Dennyson Stoddart Gallery at Palace Green Library, Durham University, from Saturday 16 November until Sunday 23 February.

**Entry costs £2 for adults, £1 for concessions and is free for children under five and Durham University staff and students.** Group rates are also available.

**Palace Green Library is open daily from 10am to 5pm, with last entry at 4.30pm.**

The Norman Cornish Centenary Exhibition programme is supported by Durham County Council and Arts Council England National Lottery Fund.

**Accompanying the exhibition, there will be a series of talks, events and family activities including:**

November 16 and 17: *Norman Cornish Collage*. An opportunity for the whole family to make a collage inspired by Norman Cornish's art.

November 23 and 24: *Northern Poets*. A poetry workshop for all ages, inspired by Norman Cornish's art.

Wednesday 27 November: *Norman Cornish: Sketching Pub Tour*. Explore the pub scenes of Durham as Norman Cornish did.

January 25, February 1, 8 and 15: *The Alternative Drawing School*. An open and collaborative four-week drawing course led by local artist Paul Raymond.

Saturday 8 February: *Behind the Scenes: Norman Cornish Sketchbooks*. Join Norman Cornish's son-in-law Mike Thornton for a special illustrated lecture exploring the development of Norman Cornish's work.

**ENDS**

For further enquiries, supported visits to the Centenary celebrations, and interview requests please contact:

Susie Gray – 07834 073 795 [susie@thecornershoppr.com](mailto:susie@thecornershoppr.com)

For enquiries related to Durham University, please contact Durham University Communications Team on 0191 334 6075, [communications.team@durham.ac.uk](mailto:communications.team@durham.ac.uk)

**Media Call:**

**Date:** Wednesday 20 November

**Time:** 10am

**Where:** Palace Green Library, Palace Green, Durham, DH1 3RN.

**What:** View the 'Norman Cornish: The Sketchbooks' exhibition. Interviews available with members of the Cornish family and a Durham University representative

To register, please contact: [communications.team@durham.ac.uk](mailto:communications.team@durham.ac.uk)

**Please note:** parking at Palace Green is restricted. Please contact Durham University Communications Team for further details.

**Notes to Editors**

Norman Cornish was one of the region's most influential and sought-after artists of recent times whose work is held in public and private collections across the UK and abroad.

He worked as a miner in the Durham Coalfield for 33 years – beginning his working life at the age of 14 until he took the bold decision to become a full-time professional artist in 1966.

Essentially self-taught, Norman Cornish was always primarily an artist - drawing and painting came naturally to him. He described his compulsive artistic drive as '*an itch that he had to scratch*'.

As an artist, he sought beauty in the life and shapes of the everyday, capturing his particular 'slice of life' with a spontaneity and an honesty that only one who had experienced it could

successfully portray. His drawings of people demonstrate real skill in capturing a mood or a moment in an instantaneous sketch of just a few lines.

**This exhibition is part of a centenary programme which features five other exhibitions across Spennymoor, Bishop Auckland, Newton Aycliffe and Barnard Castle. Full details of those exhibitions can be found here – <https://normancornish.com/centenary>**

A **press kit** with further information on the Centenary, images, and quotes from and about Norman Cornish can be found [here](#).

A book, first published in 2017, *Behind the Scenes: The Norman Cornish Sketchbooks* is available to buy at [www.normancornish.com](http://www.normancornish.com) and from Palace Green Library shop while the exhibition is on show.

An article on Norman's sketching can be read [here](#).

Exhibitions which are currently open include:

The Story of the Durham Miners' Gallery, The Bob Abley Art Gallery, Spennymoor – until Feb 2020

Norman Cornish: A Slice of Life, Mining Art Gallery, Bishop Auckland – until Jan 2020

Norman Cornish: A Man of Destiny, Greenfield Arts, Newton Aycliffe – until Dec 2019

Norman Cornish: The Definitive Collection, Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle – until Feb 2020

More information is available on [www.normancornish.com/centenary](http://www.normancornish.com/centenary)

**ENDS**