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Phoebe Cummings named winner of the inaugural Woman's Hour Craft Prize

Clay artist Phoebe Cummings was named the winner of the inaugural £10,000 Woman's Hour Craft Prize in a live broadcast this morning from the V&A, where she was awarded the prize by a judging panel made up of Rosy Greenlees, Executive Director of the Crafts Council; Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A; Martha Kearney, BBC journalist and broadcaster; Susie Lau, fashion writer and style influencer; and Jacky Klein, art historian.

Rosy Greenlees, Executive Director, Crafts Council, said: "Phoebe's work is truly original. It encompasses performance art and studio ceramics and defies easy categorisation. Working exclusively with raw clay to create site-specific pieces that change subtly day-to-day, her staggeringly beautiful work asks us to celebrate rather than mourn the passing of time. She challenges ideas of what craft is with work that is almost impossible to possess but delights in the physical process of making and shows a highly skilled understanding of the material. And so despite stiff competition from 11 other exceptional makers, she has been awarded the inaugural Woman's Hour Craft Prize."

Phoebe uses unfired clay to create temporary sculptures and installations that gradually disintegrate, challenging expectations of what craft is. Intricate and detailed, her work responds to the natural world and lasts only for the duration of an exhibition after which the clay is, where possible, reclaimed and reused on future pieces. For the Craft Prize she created a fountain that dissolves as the water flows, which has been on display at the V&A since 7 September 2017 alongside work by the other 11 finalists. The exhibition, which will embark on a UK-wide tour from early 2018, provides an important snapshot of how contemporary British craft practice reflects on, and engages with, the world today.

Phoebe Cummings, said: "I am overwhelmed to have been chosen from such a strong and diverse shortlist. The Woman's Hour Craft Prize has done a huge amount to raise public awareness and discussion around contemporary craft and the breadth of practice it

encompasses. Making work that is ephemeral and performative isn't always the most straightforward path to take, so the recognition and support of the prize will have a big impact in enabling me to continue pushing my work forward. I plan to use the money to make a usable work space at home - no doubt my family will be overjoyed that they can finally reclaim the kitchen table."

Eschewing conventional practices of producing objects that are then sold through a gallery or shop, Phoebe Cummings has forged a career through commissions for public museums and galleries. She was an Artist in Residence at the V&A in 2010, where she first saw fragments of the (recently restored) 18th Century Meissen Fountain which inspired her piece for the Craft Prize.

The Woman's Hour Craft Prize was launched in October 2016 by the Crafts Council, BBC Radio 4 and the V&A, in order to celebrate the most innovative and exciting craft makers in the UK. The finalists were selected by 29 expert judges who whittled down over 1,500 applications to 12 finalists all of whom celebrate the possibilities of using particular crafts and skills in different ways.

Tristram Hunt, Director of the V&A, said: "Craft is at the heart of the V&A and central to its purpose, so it was a huge pleasure to judge the Woman's Hour Craft Prize and for the museum to host the exhibition. The 12 finalists demonstrate an incredible array of talent and breadth, which reveals just how exciting craft practice is today. I have known Phoebe's work since her 2011 displays in Stoke, and she has grown as an artist and maker. I adore this work's mix of earthiness and ephemera, quality craftsmanship and elegiac thoughtfulness. We are delighted to award her the Prize."

Martha Kearney, said: "At first glance, I was drawn to this stunning profusion of exquisitely wrought flowers. Looking more closely, the course of water eroding the raw clay evokes a beautiful melancholy. Phoebe Cummings' work is a highly deserving winner for its high concept combined with immense skill, showing how traditional craft techniques can be re-imagined."

Jacky Klein, said: "Phoebe's work is rich and multi-layered, both visually and conceptually. Exquisitely crafted yet wistfully self-destructive, it opens up a fascinating dialogue with the history of sculpture, of craft and of ornament - making her a deserved winner of the Woman's Hour Craft Prize."

Following its display at the V&A until 5 February 2018, the Woman's Hour Craft Prize exhibition will begin a UK-wide tour from March 2018 initially displaying at The Forum, Norwich (12 March – 12 April 2018), Mottisfont National Trust, Hampshire (28 April – 1 July 2018) and Bristol Museums (14 July – 11 Nov 2018). Further locations to be announced in due course.

Notes to Editors:

1. For interview requests, images or further information please contact Sophie West in the Radio 4 press office on sophie.west@bbc.co.uk / 07718 117 723 (not for publication).
2. About the finalists:

Laura Ellen Bacon is a sculptor who works with willow and other natural materials to create striking monumental and site-specific sculptures, using techniques traditionally associated with basketry. After studying Applied Arts at the University of Derby, she began making work from dogwood and hazel branches on a large-scale, before moving into willow. She was selected for Jerwood Contemporary Makers in 2010. For the Woman's Hour Craft Prize, she's created a new work, Form of Instinct, from Flanders Red willow, which is, in her words, "about movement and vigour and trying to show how the material is being worked".

Alison Britton's career spans 40 years of making and writing. She first rose to prominence in the 1970s as part of a radical group of ceramic artists whose work challenged established traditional notions of the material. She has consistently focused on the pot as a form, to which she continues to bring new ideas about sculptural form and painted surface, exploring function, history, containment and ornamentation. For the prize she is showing three pots from three different series. In her words, "They all explore layers of ambiguity across art and craft, the sculptural and the everyday."

Neil Brownsword creates installations using ceramics, film and performance. He takes the ceramics industry of The Potteries in his native Staffordshire as his primary subject, with globalisation and the loss of industrial knowledge as the backdrop. His piece, Factory, is a pared-down version of an exhibition opened in South Korea earlier this year. In this performative installation, Brownsword explains that, "Rita Floyd – one of the last generation of artisans to retain the skill of china flower-making [one of the few methods of mass-production that relies on manual dexterity] – re-enacts her former working practices, disrupted by the instruction to discard whatever she makes. The waste that accrues becomes a metaphor for the loss of intangible cultural heritage."

Lin Cheung is an artist and designer who questions the established uses and meanings of jewellery. She looks at how jewellery is used to express identity, and how it is a powerful trigger of memory and emotion. For the prize she will be displaying 15 different pin badges from her Delayed Reactions series, inspired by people wearing pin badges in reaction to political, social and personal events. Her 'Confused' badge, a play on the EU flag, shows the gold stars reorganised in a confused mouth shape.

Caren Hartley uses her metalwork skills and background in jewellery making to produce high-performing bespoke bicycles tailored to each rider, using techniques from bronze brazing and silver-soldering to piercing and wax-carving. Founder of Hartley Cycles, she makes bespoke bikes by hand and transforms an industrial process into applied art. Caren trained in 3D Design, Metalwork and Jewellery at University College for the Creative Arts, Farnham, and in Goldsmithing, Silversmithing, Metalwork and Jewellery at the Royal College of Art, London. For the prize, Hartley will be exhibiting a bike she made for the Design Museum's Cycle Revolution show in 2015, her Design Museum 953 Gravel Road Bike.

Peter Marigold's output ranges from furniture design, to public art projects such as the 188m wall outside the Edinburgh's new Royal Hospital for Sick Children, to material experimentations, such as FORMcard, a credit card sized piece of meltable bio-plastic. In 2009 Marigold was given a Designer of the Future award by Design Miami. His shortlisted pieces for the Prize, from the Bleed series, are based around an interest in movement and decay. Using cedar tongue-and-groove cladding and steel nails, stripped of their zinc coating, the pieces are left outside and exposed to the elements. The tannin in the timber has then reacted with the metal to create a bleeding pattern.

Celia Pym carefully darns other people's clothing, including socks, hoodies, jumpers and cardigans, making us think about our attitudes to care, repair and vulnerability. She completed an MA in Textiles at the Royal College of Art, London, and later trained as an Adult nurse. For the prize Pym will be showing, Where Holes Happen, two sweaters, from a GP and an intensive-care nurse, along with text describing their stories and profile pictures. She will also be working in the V&A doing repairs for visitors and creating a new work from a tracksuit.

Romilly Saumarez Smith transforms the stories contained in discarded everyday objects, such as dress pins found in the mud of the Thames, into beguiling works of art. Unable to use her own hands, she works alongside jewellers Lucie Gledhill, Laura Ngyou and Anna Wales who translate her pieces. For the prize, Romilly will be showing a combination of new and old boxes, which include finds such as Tudor glass, old buttons and an Anglo-Saxon ring, and allow her the freedom to use materials sometimes too awkward for jewellery. Saumarez Smith says,

“Everywhere we walk in this country there are treasures beneath our feet. I am touched that a particular find comes to me and that I can give it a new life, while referencing the place from which it emerged.”

Andrea Walsh creates exquisitely-crafted box and vessel forms made of glass in combination with bone china that explore ideas of containment, materiality, preciousness and value. She studied Fine Art at Staffordshire University, followed by a year at Dudley’s International Glass Centre, learning an array of different techniques. This was followed by a Masters in glass at Edinburgh College of Art, where she introduced clay to her practice and learnt to slip cast. For the craft prize, Walsh will be presenting a continuation of her Contained Boxes series inspired by a research visit to Japan.

Emma Woffenden creates glass sculptures and installations based around the human figure, using a wide variety of techniques and materials, including gypsum fibreglass and plastic. Uncanny and at times unsettling, her works reflect observed human behaviour, with traits of humour, aggression and the absurd. She says her pieces “look quite alien but quite classical at the same time”, and that glass as a “material signals modernity and has a futuristic quality”. She specialised in glass on the 3D Design, Ceramics and Glass course at West Surrey College of Art and Design and studied at Tyler School of Art in Philadelphia. For the prize she will be showing three pieces in mixed media, containing mould blown and free-blown elements.

Laura Youngson Coll works mainly in vellum creating intricate pieces that lie somewhere between fiction and fact as she articulates the often overlooked details of our environment. The daughter of an archaeologist and an environmental educator, Youngson Coll has always been fascinated by the natural world, particularly those parts that are often overlooked. For the prize she will present three sculptures Haeckel to Aplidium inspired by the 19th century biologist and philosopher Ernst Haeckel, and examines the pharmaceutical use of marine organisms.

3. The judges:

Maria Amidu (artist), Annabelle Campbell (Head of Exhibitions and Collections, Crafts Council), Professor Carole Collet (Design for Sustainable Futures, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London), Karen Dalziel (Editor, Woman’s Hour), Deirdre Figueiredo MBE (Director, Craftspace), Simon Fraser (Course Leader, Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London), Grant Gibson (Editor, Crafts magazine), Alun Graves (Senior Curator, Ceramics and Glass Collection, V&A), Alastair Hudson (Director, mima), Philip Hughes MBE (Director, Ruthin Craft

Centre), Catrin Jones (Curator of Decorative Arts, The Holburne Museum), Corinne Julius (writer and curator), Jenni Lomax (Director, Camden Arts), Polly Macpherson (Associate Professor – Design, Plymouth University, Faculty of Arts & Humanities, School of Art, Design & Architecture), Kim Mawhinney (Head of Art, National Museums Northern Ireland), Martina Margetts (Royal College of Arts), Oliver Makower (Vice-Principal, Bishopsland Educational Trust), Professor Lesley Millar MBE (Director of the International Textile Research Centre and Professor of Textile Culture at the University for the Creative Arts), David Mills (Director of Goldsmiths' Fair), Clare Philips (curator, V&A), Helen Ritchie (The Fitzwilliam Museum), Sarah Rothwell (Assistant Curator, National Museums Scotland), Julia Stephenson (Head of Arts, National Glass Centre), Professor Carol Tulloch (Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London), Professor Jeremy Till (Head of Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London), Helen Walsh (Curator of Ceramics, York Art Gallery), Annie Warburton (Creative Director, Crafts Council), Daniella Wells (Events Consultant with craft specialism), David Weir (Director, Dovecot Studios).