

HIDDEN OBJECTS, OXFORD LAUNCHES SILVER FUTURES PROJECT WITH NEW SILVER COMMISSIONS

Hidden Objects, Oxford is delighted to announce the launch of a new project *Silver Futures* heralded by two new silver commissions for St John's College, Oxford.



Maria Hanson and Chris Knight with the finished work 'Here I Am' in their Sheffield studio. Photo: Mark Howe.

Silver Futures has been developed by HOO curators, Amanda Game, a modern silver specialist and Matthew Winterbottom, historic silver expert and Curator of Sculpture and Decorative Arts at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford with the support of Lauren Dyer Amazeen.

Silver Futures is designed to reflect contemporary responses to the historic process of melt and re-use of damaged silver in Oxford college collections. We are hosting an ongoing conversation with several colleges about ways in which their damaged and disused silver objects might find new life within the College community through their melt and re-use for contemporary commissions. If you would like to discuss joining the *Silver Futures* conversation, contact us [here](#).

St John's College has been the first college to participate in *Silver Futures* with the active support and encouragement of Professor Hannah Skoda, Tutorial Fellow in History, Keeper of Silver and Vestments, and her colleague Dr. Georgy Kantor, Associate Professor of Ancient History, Official Fellow and Tutor in Ancient History, Keeper of the College Pictures.

A shortlist of experienced silversmiths was proposed to St John's and Sheffield silversmiths Maria Hanson and Chris Knight (working collaboratively) and London silversmith Simone ten Hompel were selected.



St John's have been outstanding and thoughtful patrons, creating a light touch brief which actively encouraged selected designers to consider different formal uses for the silver that would encourage a new engagement with the material, its physical and cultural properties, within the contemporary College community.

The melt of the selected damaged Collection objects took place in Sheffield in November 2021 with the assistance of the Goldsmiths' Company, London and the Sheffield Assay Office. The melt process was documented in film and photography by Julia Skupny and took place in the presence of the designers, Professor Skoda and Lauren Dyer Amazeen. You can watch a video of the melt [here](#).

The silversmiths were invited to work directly with the melted silver, in its 'raw' form as a billet. The commissions, both designed to hang on a wall, were installed in early September 2022 in the intersectional space between St John's historic Laudian library and its new Study Centre (2019).



Damaged objects awaiting melt. Photo: Simon ten Hompel

man, were installed in early September 2022 in the intersectional space between St John's historic Education Library and its new Study Centre (2019), making a clear conceptual link between the old and the new.

Hanson and Knight chose to create a mirror form in silver and cast steel entitled 'Here I Am' and engraved with a verse from the poem 'Mirror' by Sylvia Plath commenting:

The aesthetic language used within the work is both symbolic and representational. The cast iron frames speak of the process of transformation through making, referring to traditional casting frames used within the manufacturing of silver forms. The imposed surface treatment and colouring of the iron evokes the passage of time and gives resonance to the contextual positioning of the mirror within St John's; on the threshold between the old and the new. The silver oval held within the cast iron frame, harnesses in its centre the reflective material properties of this noble metal which has been instrumental throughout history in the production of mirrors.

In the 21st century where we are constantly exposed to the digitised image of ourselves and others, this piece offers a moment to reflect, acknowledge and celebrate being here.



The damaged objects are put into the furnace for melt. Photo: Julia Skupny

www.mariahanson.co.uk

<https://www.chrisknightdesign.co.uk/silverware>



Maria Hanson, preparing 'Here I Am' for installation. Photo: Matt Hulse

ten Hompel chose to create a low relief sculpture 'Things Change' which takes the form of a Corten steel panel embedded with an unmelted fragment of a Victorian silver tray; a silver representation of a plan of the St John's Estate and the title words in silver in braille commenting:

From the early model I decided to include an unmelted fragment of the College Victorian tray. I felt this would bring out the aliveness of the tradition... which I understand as a maker. It is always part of my philosophy of making that I try to use materials that need to be used... have a reason to be used in a certain context. The use of corten steel for me represents, as a material, the earth, the ground we are standing on. I did not use all the melted silver billet. I have returned the remaining billet plus test sheet pieces, wire and dust to the St. John's Collection so they have all original silver molecules back in the collection: some as a new work, some as a study collection of silver's different states.

'Things change' is a transferable title: not only about states of being in metals... but being in terms of the times in which we live... the experiences we have.... throughout my life I have learnt to understand, and be, with difference and change due to my very profound dyslexia.

Professor Hannah Skoda comments:

We are delighted to see the silver collection of St John's invigorated and given new life by the Silver Futures project. Tracing the development of the silver commissioned by, donated to, and recycled by the college tells us a great deal about how that community has evolved.

Our commissioned artists have more than fulfilled our ambitions for the brief and we are truly grateful. Recycling a small part of our silver in this way is an acknowledgement of our profound connection to all who have gone before us at St John's, whilst celebrating the growing diversity, intellectual ambition, and joy of being members of the college.

All the Hidden Objects Oxford team are grateful to the President and Governing Body of St John's College for their support for *Silver Futures*; to the Goldsmiths' Company, and London and Sheffield Assay Offices for their assistance with the melt; to Julia Skupny for her excellent documentation of the melt; and to Oliver Warner, Works Facilities Manager at St John's for his assistance with installation.



Simone ten Hompel with her finished work 'Things Change'. Photo: Julia Skupny

A newly commissioned Moving Image work by filmmaker Matt Hulse will be launched at St John's in October and will be available for viewing online from late October. Please check back to the site for details.

Visit [The Silver Futures Project](#) for more information.



St John's College
Oxford



PREVIOUS

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Images from a Filmcraft performance by Matt Hulse 2010. Photo: Shannon Tofts

Detail of John Piper Stained Glass window commissioned for Nuffield College chapel 1961. Reproduced with kind permission of Nuffield College, Oxford.

John Piper, Design for Stained Glass Window for Llandaff Cathedral. Pembroke College JCR Art Collection. With thanks to Tatjana Leboff, Curator Photo: Copyright by kind permission of the John Piper Estate

Detail of Wendy Ramshaw gate for St. Johns College, Oxford. Photo: Bob Cramp. By kind permission of the estate of the late Wendy Ramshaw CBE