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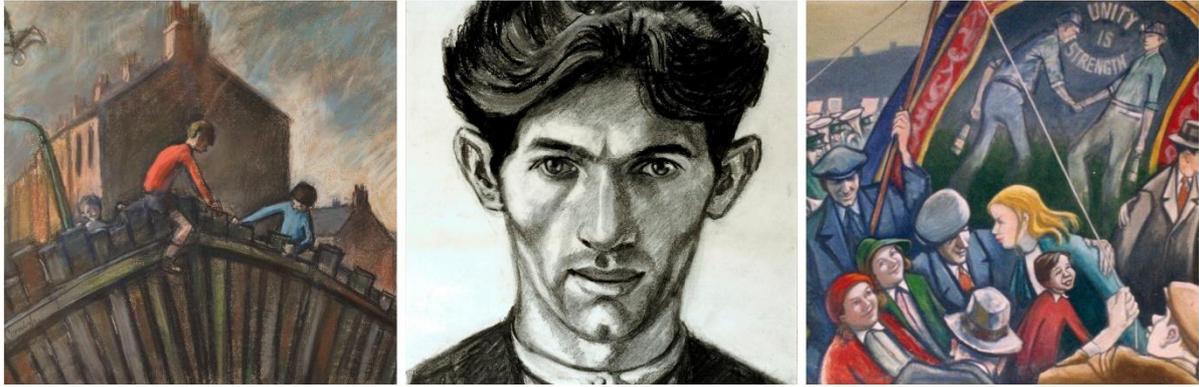


NORMAN CORNISH CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS 2019

The artist's family, and galleries across County Durham, are launching a year-long centenary focus on one of the North East's most celebrated artists, Norman Cornish - famous for capturing the hard-lived but often bright lives, despite adversity, faced in mining communities in the 20th century.

- Six exhibitions across County Durham throughout 2019 offer some previously unseen works, fresh insights and a major retrospective of Norman Cornish's art.
- Work will be exhibited at The Bob Abley Gallery in Spennymoor Town Hall, the Mining Art Gallery in Bishop Auckland, The Gala Gallery Durham, Durham University's Palace Green Library, The Greenfield Gallery Newton Aycliffe and The Bowes Museum Barnard Castle.
- The Norman Cornish Trail, around his hometown of Spennymoor, allows walkers to follow in the footsteps of the artist and return to the days of coal – once the life-blood of industry in this community.
- Further exhibitions to celebrate the artist's life and work include Gallery North Northumbria University and Castlegate House Gallery in Cockermouth; his former home from the 50s and 60s is set to be recreated at Beamish Museum as part of the Remaking Beamish Project.
- The Norman Cornish Centenary year is part of Durham's year-long celebration of culture, #Durham19
- www.normancornish.com/centenary

"The local collieries have gone, together with the pit-road. Many of the old streets, chapels and pubs, are no more. Many of the ordinary but fascinating people who frequented these places are gone. However, in my memory, and I hope in my drawings, they live on. I simply close my eyes and they all spring to life." **Norman Cornish**



Boys on the Fence, Self-portrait, excerpt from Miners Gala.

Today the artist's family, along with Durham County Council, and six galleries and arts venues across County Durham, announced details of the first in a series of exhibitions set to run throughout 2019 to mark the centenary of the birth of Norman Cornish.

Norman Cornish MBE was perhaps one of the most famous artists to emerge from the North East of England in the 20th Century and became one of the most celebrated British artists of his time. His works are held in public and private collections throughout the UK and beyond.

Born into the mining town of Spennymoor, County Durham, Cornish was a magnificent chronicler of one of the most important passages in English history. He recorded the social environment and industrial landscape in which he lived and worked; he was deeply attracted to humanity – to the wonderful shapes people made in their varied attitudes.

The paintings and drawings of Cornish tell the story of these hard-lived lives in a community which endured despite prejudice and adversity. He has not only preserved a life lived by millions of people in this country and others around the world, he has given it significance and permanence that only a real artist can achieve.

Cornish died in 2014, but 2019 marks the centenary of his birth and his family has worked in partnership with curators, academics, artists, biographers, galleries and the community to draw together a celebration of his life and work. This year will offer those familiar with his work, and with an already deep affection for it, new perspectives and the opportunity to see many previously unseen pieces, while also introducing his work to new audiences.

In Norman Cornish's hometown, **a new exhibition at the Bob Abley Art Gallery** in Spennymoor tells the fascinating story of his mural depicting the Durham Miners' Gala, painted by the artist in 1963.

The Story of the Durham Miners' Gala Mural features a range of preparatory paintings, drawings, sketches and correspondence plotting the artist's sometimes challenging journey from the commission of the nine-metre mural by Durham County Council to its installation at Durham's County Hall, Aykley Heads where it remains. This exhibition contains many items which are previously unseen by the

public, as well as works for sale, and runs throughout the centenary year from 6 April 2019 to the end of February 2020.

In **Bishop Auckland, the Mining Art Gallery, part of The Auckland Project** brings a different perspective to the celebrations with a special exhibition demonstrating Norman Cornish's deeply ingrained identity within the community, felt still by those whose history it mirrors.

Norman Cornish - A Slice of Life is co-curated by residents of Norman's home-town of Spennymoor, alongside his children John and Ann, all guided by the gallery's curator Angela Thomas of The Auckland Project.

Community Groups including the **Spennymoor Settlement Sketching Club** and **Rosa Street School** and Tudhoe & Spennymoor Local History Society have selected work by Norman from various themes, including some rarely seen mining and street scenes. Their selections offer a warm and refreshing perspective on one of the most enduringly popular artists, as well as a fresh insight into how his work resonates with the community that lives on today.

This temporary exhibition sits alongside the Mining Art Gallery's permanent collection featuring further work by Norman Cornish, as well as other prominent artists such as Tom McGuinness, Tom Lamb and Bob Olley.

Norman Cornish - A Slice of Life opens at the Mining Art Gallery, Bishop Auckland Market Place on 6 April and runs until 13 October 2019.

Returning to Spennymoor, where Cornish was born and lived his whole life, the Spennymoor Town Council is opening the superbly refurbished **John Kitson Archway** within the Spennymoor Town Hall where a rich and diverse selection of the artist's work is uniquely displayed on backlit glass panels, forming a stunning celebration of his work.

For those visiting the artist's home town of Spennymoor, a visit would not be complete without taking in **The Norman Cornish Trail** which sets his work in their actual locations - taking people back to a time when coal was once the life-blood of industry and an important part of community life.

Visitors can walk in Cornish's footsteps guided by a free trail guide or app offering insights into the 10 key locations which were the source of his inspiration.

Later in 2019, four further exhibitions will be announced at Gala Gallery in Durham (Portraiture, June – Sept); The Greenfield Gallery in Newton Aycliffe (Man of Destiny – success over adversity, Oct – Dec); Durham University's Palace Green Library (The Norman Cornish Sketchbooks, Nov – Feb); and Bowes Museum at Barnard Castle (A Major Retrospective, Nov – Feb).

Cornish's former home from the 1950s and 60s is set to be re-created as part of the Remaking Beamish Project 1950s' town, which is expected to conclude the centenary events around the region.

2019 promises to be a spectacular year for Durham as it is designated as the county's Year of Culture. With an incredible line-up of openings, activities, festivals,

events and anniversaries, there's never been a better time to celebrate and shout about the county's diverse range of sport, culture, arts and heritage. Get involved #Durham19.

Norman's son John Cornish said: "As a family, we are delighted that my father's legacy is being recognised with such an exciting programme of exhibitions at galleries across Durham County and beyond. Enduring projects such as 'The Norman Cornish Trail' in his home town of Spennymoor, and the unique display of his artwork on glass in the refurbished archway there, will ensure his legacy lives on.

"We are very proud of the esteem in which my father's work is held by the public and we hope the planned exhibitions and events will serve to reinforce the region's pride in its cultural heritage.

Cllr Ossie Johnson, Durham County Council's Cabinet member for tourism, culture, leisure and rural issues, said: "Norman Cornish was an extremely influential artist, particularly in the North East, so I am thrilled that we are working with our partners to honour his work during this special centenary year.

"The packed programme of events and activities is sure to appeal to a wide audience: from those who are lifelong fans of Norman to those who are new to his work. And with so much on offer, I'm sure this year of celebrations will also draw in plenty of visitors from outside our county – making the centenary a key part of our Year of Culture."

Colin Ranson, Bob Abley Gallery and Spennymoor Town Hall said: "Norman Cornish is synonymous with Spennymoor and so many of our streets, landmarks and ways of life have been captured by him. Our new Trail around the town brings his story to life for those living here and those who visit for his centenary, showing the strong connection he had with his community. This is perfectly complemented by a stunning installation of the artist's work in the John Kitson Archway.

"Norman's largest undertaking was the fascinating and stunning nine-metre mural depicting the Durham Miners' Gala. At the Bob Abley Gallery, we will tell the story from commission to completion with correspondence, preparatory paintings and sketches previously not seen by the public."

Angela Thomas, Curator, Mining Art Gallery said: "The Auckland Project is delighted to be celebrating Norman Cornish's impact as the country's best-known mining artist, both on the local community he lovingly immortalised and the UK public. For this exhibition we felt it was important to give a voice to the communities Norman lived amongst and took inspiration from. We've invited them to choose some of their favourite works and think about what they mean to them today, highlighting how Norman's work continues to resonate with all kinds of people. There has been a hugely positive response to Norman's work from visitors since the gallery opened in 2017, and we hope the centenary celebrations encourage even more people to come and discover his unique point of view."

More information on the artist and the Norman Cornish Centenary events can be found at www.normancornish.com/centenary

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

For further enquiries, opportunities to visit the Centenary celebrations, and interview requests please contact:

Susie Gray – 07834 073 795 susie@thecornershoppr.com

Will Moss – 07566 843 784 william@thecornershoppr.com

Listings:

Norman Cornish – A Slice of Life
Sat, 6 April 2019 – Sun, 13 October 2019
Open daily, 10am-4pm
Mining Art Gallery
Part of The Auckland Project
Bishop Auckland Market Place
DL14 7NP
01388 743 750
www.aucklandproject.org

Co-curated by residents of Norman's hometown, this unique exhibition gives a special insight into how his work is viewed today.

People from Spennymoor and Norman's son and daughter have selected their favourite paintings, offering a warm and refreshing perspective on one of the most enduringly popular mining artists.

Story of the Durham Miners' Gala Mural
6th April 2019 – 23rd February 2020
Opening Times: 12-4pm Monday - Friday, 10am-2pm Saturday
Bob Abley Art Gallery
Spennymoor High Street
Spennymoor
DL16 6DB
01388 815276

Celebrating the centenary of Norman Cornish, this exhibition tells the fascinating story of the mural depicting the Durham Miners' Gala, painted by the artist in 1963.

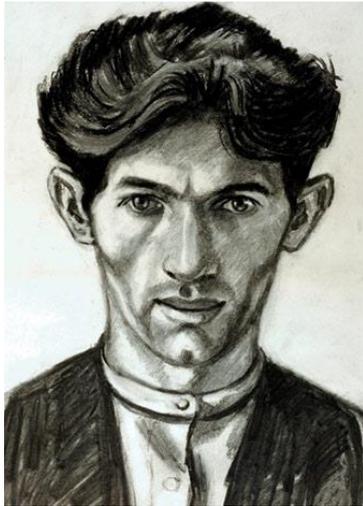
Featuring a range of preparatory paintings, drawings and sketches, the exhibition plots the artist's journey, and highlights the challenges he faced, from commission of the mural painting by Durham County Council to its completion.

Large compositional pieces, images and a range of correspondence, many of which are previously unseen by the public, also tell the story of the mural which remains on display in Durham's County Hall building at Aykley Heads.

Please find images [here](#) to accompany both exhibitions. Caption information is as follows:

Image 1: Boys on Fence © Norman Cornish Estate. To be shown at Norman Cornish – A Slice of Life, at the Mining Art Gallery, Bishop Auckland.

Image 2: A section from the mural *The Story of the Durham Miners' Gala*. Norman Cornish. © Norman Cornish Limited.



Norman Cornish, Self-Portrait

Norman Cornish is undoubtedly the most celebrated and most sought-after British Artist of the 20th century. For over 50 years his images of the miner's working life and his observation of social activities have intrigued an appreciative audience.

Norman was born on the 18th of November 1919 in the small town of Spennymoor. At the age of just 14, Norman left school and began work as a coal miner. From a very young age, Norman had always been passionate about drawing and painting and he soon became aware of the sketching club at the Spennymoor Settlement. Norman was accepted as a member at the age of 15, giving him the opportunity to meet other likeminded artists and ultimately offering him the opportunity to exhibit his work.

During the post war years, Norman's work gained a discerning following nationally and he was subjected to increased pressure by the owners of The Stone Gallery in Newcastle to become a professional artist. The closure of coal mines in SW Durham during this period accelerated Norman's decision to make the step with support from his wife Sarah - a decision which was to become his destiny. In the years that followed, Norman became known as one of the most sought-after contemporary British artists. In 1974 Norman was awarded an Honorary Master of Arts degree from Newcastle University and in 1995 awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Civil Law from the University of Northumbria, to whom he gifted a body of work for their permanent collection just a couple of years later. Norman also had a long-standing connection to the University of Sunderland, which was recognised in 2012 when he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Arts from the University.

Norman continued to paint until his peaceful passing at the age of 94 in August 2014. His work continues to be loved by people of all ages and backgrounds.

<https://normancornish.com/resources/biography>

About #Durham19

For a number of years Durham has seen continued growth and investment in cultural activity through Durham County Council, wider partners and cultural institutions large and small. 2019 sees the compounding effect of this sustained investment in an incredible year of openings, activities, festivals, events and anniversaries, which has been designated as the county's Year of Culture.

With a number of high-profile, multi-million pound developments coming on board to add to the wealth of world-class attractions, festivals and events, #Durham19 will celebrate the county's cultural offer.

The campaign, delivered by Visit County Durham in partnership with Durham County Council and cultural partners across the county, will increase visits, promote Durham as a cultural destination, engage residents and encourage local communities to discover Durham's culture and heritage.