

The second installment of 'Unravelling' is at The Wyne, says Pamela Buxton

## Changing rooms

Something strange is going on at The Wyne in Hampshire, the historic National Trust property dating from the 16th century. In one room, scarlet roots emerge from a fireplace and spread around the space, while one floor up, in a room lined with tapestries, a tree full of birds has grown. Elsewhere textile pigeons, dressed up to the nines, enjoy a lively party.

These installations – 10 makers and artists creating work inspired by the rich history of the house – are part of *Unravelling The Wyne*, the second of the three-part project *Unravelling the National Trust*, which began last year at Nymans house and gardens in Sussex.

According to Caitlin Heffernan, who co-founded the Unravelling group with Matt Smith and curator Polly Harknett, the project allows artists to unpick The Wyne's rich and sometimes hidden stories, creating unusual, contemporary responses, and narratives very different from the conventional notion of the place. These add new layers of interpretation to its highly crafted interior, playing, as Heffernan says, 'with the history and heritage of what's part of the house and what is part of the intervention.'

The project, says Smith, allows the various artists to 'explode the narrative of the wealthy man passing on the estate to his son.' His own pieces tackle the close, long-standing relationship between 18th century owner John Chute and writer-collector Horace Walpole. Both were bachelors sharing a passion for collecting art and design, the exact nature of their relationship open to modern speculation. They considered themselves as arbiters of style, setting up the 'Committee on Taste', but didn't always agree – the many objects Walpole tried unsuccessfully to encourage Chute to collect are amalgamated into Smith's piece *The Gift*, a single extravagant ceramic work topped with strings of pearls. Fittingly, for such an unwanted present, it is displayed behind the staircase.

Another piece reflects on the nature of the dandy in Walpole's and Chute's

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Clockwise from right: *Two Dancers*, Charlie Whinney; *We Could Have Been Anywhere*, Caitlin Heffernan; *Short Cuts and Pop-Ups*, Maria Rivans; *We Could Have Been Anywhere*, Caitlin Heffernan. All work 2013



day, deliberately fusing what Smith perceives as bad taste with what they perceived as good, in a 1.5 metre tall totem on the staircase.

In the library, Maria Rivans's complex installation *Short Cuts and Pop-Ups* is a 'micro-environment' of piled vintage books and intricate paper cut-outs, referencing both the landscape of The Wyne and the lives of those who lived there or visited over the centuries. Figures include Chute-era dandies, dancing ladies and Jane Austen, as well as cut-outs representing recent visitors since the house has been open to the public. There is also a reference to the fourth or fifth century gold ring displayed in the house, and believed to have inspired Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Plus there's a werewolf, which echoes the unsettling feeling that Rivans experienced as she toured the house.

Heffernan's tree-and-roots piece is inspired by the 18th century tapestries depicting fantastical Persian and Asian scenes. In bound fabric with hand-made leaves and birds, her tree also evokes the family history of the generations living in the house, with its roots heading off towards the fireplace and emerging in the room below as crimson, wired satin ropes seemingly invading the richly coloured wallpaper.

Several exhibitors refer to the house's social life. Textile graffiti artist Mrs Smith uses pigeons to evoke the hedonistic upper class social whirl of the 'Season', while Charlie Whinney's steam-bent wood sculpture evokes the movement of dancing figures in Tudor times. Two metres high, the installation is made of intertwined, 11 mm thick oak and ash pieces, and sited in a room previously used for dancing. It represents male and female partners, and Whinney hopes visitors will be able to imagine them dancing, hundreds of years ago, as they view the piece.

Alec Stevens has also taken inspiration from Tudor days, carving 49 pomegranates from oak cubes and arranging them as if being swept under a carpet in the Oak Gallery, a wood-lined promenade. The pomegranate was Catherine of Aragon's symbol, found 49 times in the room's panelling. When Henry VIII visited after his divorce, the carvings were covered up, to avoid offence.

*Unravelling The Wyne* will be followed next year by a show featuring site-specific commissions responding to the historic property Uppark in East Sussex. *'Unravelling The Wyne' is at The Wyne, Wyne Road, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG24 9HL, from 28 June – 22 December 2013. www.unravelling.org.uk*