

About Your Visit 2020



The Munnings Art Museum is at Castle House, the former home of the artist Sir Alfred Munnings (1878-1959) and his wife, Violet. Described by Munnings as “the house of my Dreams”, he lived and worked in this elegant Tudor and Georgian building for over forty years until his death in 1959. The House, garden, artist’s studio and Garden Café are set in forty acres of beautiful countryside in the Dedham Vale on the borders of Suffolk and Essex. The museum owns the largest collection of art works by this prolific East Anglian painter and former President of the Royal Academy (1944-1949).

Sir Alfred Munnings forged much of his early reputation from time spent as a war artist in France during 1918. The resulting paintings, when they were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1919, brought him great accolade and attention. When Munnings married his second wife Violet in April 1920 his reputation as a notable equestrian portraitist was flourishing. As a result of this he was frequently away from home for extended periods on painting commissions. The museum owns two hundred letters from Munnings to Violet, the majority of which were written in the early days of their marriage. The letters are a product of the spells of separation they endured and provide a unique insight into both the period and Munnings’ own life at this time. In 2020 the museum is publishing the first of several volumes of these unseen letters and three rooms of the museum will be dedicated to showcasing paintings from this time included a number on loan from private collections.

The rest of the museum is hung with another 150 paintings, drawings and rare examples of Munnings sculpture work which give a comprehensive sense of the life and work of the artist whose career spanned six decades. These carefully curated displays ensure that there is always a fully representative selection of Munnings’ art on display, ranging from his childhood drawings to final oils. Visitors have the opportunity to experience Munnings’ passion for the rural traditions and landscapes of East Anglia and Cornwall which he captured on canvas and develop an understanding of the talent and skill he used to convey the explosive energy of the racing scenes for which he is now globally renowned.



Visits begin in the Tudor Gallery, with Munnings' childhood drawings, art school studies and apprentice poster designs. Early oil paintings up until the age of around 20 when he lost the sight in his right eye.

Following on, the Courtyard Gallery explores his early work as an independent artist, trips to Paris and discovering his own style painting en plein air. Large scale paintings of horse fairs and rural life are displayed.

The Library showcases paintings filled with light and colour from Munnings time in Cornwall, working for the first time in the company of other artists of the Newlyn School.

The Dining Room, Drawing Room and Morning Room are dedicated to the important commissions of the early 1920s. These complement the new publication. Equestrian portraits set against the background of hunting and horseracing contrast with rural scenes of hop-picking gypsies and of course pictures of his new wife and home in Dedham.

The landings and two upstairs galleries focus on Munnings two great loves: landscape, both local and of Exmoor and horseracing at Newmarket. Displays also touch on his artistic and social standing as President of the Royal Academy in the 1940s.

The furniture, objects and personal items belonging to Sir Alfred and Lady Munnings remain in situ and the museum welcomes visitors to sit and enjoy the ambience of their home.

There are explanatory text panels throughout, detailing important contextual events, people and influences. Many of the panels include quotes by Munnings so that visitors are offered a sense of the man as well as the artist. Additionally, Room Stewards are pleased to answer questions and provide further information.

In the garden, visitors will find Munnings' studio which houses his painting materials and props. This year the studio is hosting a display of paintings of the Dedham Vale, "Constable Country" as this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty celebrates its 50th anniversary.

Adjoining the studio is the Café serving delicious homemade treats. The museum shop has a range of books, unique gifts and souvenirs.