

Laying the Groundwork for an artistic exploration of Cornwall’s creative heart



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If you had a £600,000 box of fireworks, would you blow the lot in your own back garden in one amazing spectacular display or share the joy over the months and make it a summer to remember?

Teresa Gleadowe had no hesitation about which was the better option: the slow burn.

She will light the blue touch paper on Saturday to launch Groundwork, an international programme of arts across Cornwall that runs until September.

So it is film, dance and sculpture and the like rather than rockets, air bombs and Roman candles, but the promise is this will be a sparkling celebration of art, with a life beyond the close.

“Legacy is incredibly important and has been part of our thinking all along,” says Ms Gleadowe. “We did not want one big ‘fireworks’ display. We are building something that will continue.”

The programme has some star names. The biggest and brightest is the Oscar-winning film director Steve McQueen (12 Years a Slave), who is also a former winner of the Turner Prize, the leading contemporary art award. Gravesend, his short about mining, and Unexploded, made while an official war artist in Iraq, are being screened. He will be at a special event in Truro on June 3.

Other big noises include another film-maker Tacita Dean, a Turner Prize nominee, who has exhibited at the Venice Biennale. Her work will be shown at Falmouth University, where she graduated in 1988.

Groundwork will also play out at some emblematic locations: the Goonhilly Earth Station, Telegraph Museum in Porthcurno, and the

Artists showcase Cornwall’s science, technology and landscape in a programme of events from next week. **Martin Freeman** talks to the organiser of Groundwork, Teresa Gleadowe

Godolphin estate. The £600,000 programme, supported by Arts Council England, is the culmination of a three-year project of field trips, workshops and a learning programme with Helston Community College, Cornwall College, Truro and Penwith College and Falmouth University.

Kestle Barton – an art and conservation project near Helston – Newlyn Art Gallery & The Exchange, and Tate St Ives are also involved. The project is led by Cornubia Arts and Science Trust (Cast), based in Helston in the former School of Science and Art given to the town by the philanthropist John Passmore Edwards in 1897.

Ms Gleadowe is chair of Cast. Never one for an easy life, she is currently overseeing the £700,000 renovation of the building, made possible by a £499,999 maximum grant from Arts Council England. Cornwall Council, the Monument Trust, Helston Town Council and the Helston Downsland Trust have also provided funding.

Sixteen artists already have studios at Cast. The work will turn a café into a full-time operation, bring the old school assembly hall into use as a space for public events and activities, and create room for residencies.

Work will resume after Grounwork closes, to be completed next spring.

“Helston and Cornwall will get a place that is vibrant and that attracts more young people. It will offer



something very different from the other arts institutions, very much in partnership with the Newlyn & The Exchange. Tate St Ives and Kestle Barton,” said Ms Gleadowe.

She is well used to having her hands full. She was an exhibitions officer for the British Council – the UK’s international culture and education organisation – taking art shows around the world, to the likes of the Venice Biennale.

Later she spent 13 years at the Royal College of Art where she set up the first MA teaching curation.

“To be a curator you have to be interested in ideas,” she says after a



Turner Prize-winning artist Steve McQueen and a still from Gravesend

hesitation, mindful she is also talking about herself. “You have to be good at working with people; and have attention to detail. Much of contemporary art is about exploration of ideas. You have to be able to articulate sometimes complicated things in ways that can be shared with a wide range of people.”

She is more comfortable talking about her Cornwall connections, fortunately. Her grandfather, Reginald ‘Dick’ Gleadowe, was a teacher and designer who was Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford University.

“He was a keen sailor who wanted a shore base and had a house built by the Helford River. Somewhere to ‘dry the sails’. My father was in the navy and we moved a lot. The house in Cornwall was the place to which we always returned. It was the place I always dreamed about.”

She initiated two art conventions, in Falmouth (2010) and Penzance (2012), and developed the Cornwall Workshops series at Kestle Barton, which led on to the founding of Cast in 2012.

She is married to Sir Nicholas Serota, who was director of the Tate art museums and galleries from 1988 to 2017, before becoming chairman of Arts Council England.

“I will not talk about that,” she says firmly, referring to her marriage to Sir Nicholas.

There’s no threat of fireworks when she is asked a second question – she is too polite – but she does make it clear there was no clash of interest as the grant award to Cast was while Sir Nicholas was still at the Tate.

She is a great believer in the transformative power of art on people, communities and locations.

“I expect that over the next decade quite gently Helston will get a different sense of itself through the work of artists who live and work here.”

Before that, Groundwork will be helping people see Cornwall in a different light, as it focuses “on the terrain of past, present and future human activity”, with technology (Goonhilly and the Telegraph Museum, for example) and mining (such as the clay works of the St Austell area) given particular attention.

“Did you know that Par beach is one of the most biodiverse locations in the whole of Cornwall? It’s partly to do with seeds and other material that came in the ballasts of the China clay ships,” she adds, passing on knowledge gleaned from a botanist, Colin French, who led a field trip there as part of the earlier phase of Groundwork; the type of insight that might be a metaphor for how Groundwork and Cast works: not flashy and overblown, but still dazzling – a true sparkler.

Weekend start for Groundwork art

The Groundwork season of exhibitions and events launches with talks, performances and screenings over the bank holiday weekend., beginning at Cast in Helston at 10am on Saturday.

The town’s band will play at 11am and Steve McQueen’s Gravesend and Unexploded will show there 10am-5pm (until June 3).

Other weekend events include: Semiconductor, As the World Turns, film, and Simon Starling, Black Drop, moving image, until June 3, Goonhilly Earth Station; Manon de Boer, Bella, Maia and Nick, film, until July 8, Kestle Barton, Manaccan; Andy Holden, Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape, live performance, 7pm Saturday, Falmouth University’s Academy of Music and Theatre Arts; Christina Mackie, The Judges II, installation, until June 24, Godolphin House; Adam Chodzko, Ghost, canoe and trips, until May 7, St Anthony-in-Meneage Church, Helston and in the creek; Sean Lynch, What Is An Apparatus and Latoon, video, until June 2, Helston Museum; Abigail Reynolds, screening of The Mother’s Bones with a live score performed by St Keverne Band, Sunday, Epworth Hall, Helston; Abel Rodriguez, drawings until May 7, Trebah Gardens, Mawnan Smith; Artists Robin Dowell and James Fergusson, lead field trip around Tywanhayle Mine, Porthtowan, 11am-3pm. All events are free, but booking is essential for some. See the website groundwork.art/ programme for details.



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