

THE ART INSIDER.

RUTHIE COLLINS, FOUNDER OF CAMBRIDGE ART SALON,
GIVES HER ARTY PICKS OF THE MONTH

T

he air in paintings,' Edgar Degas once said, 'is not air we can breathe.'

But make you breathe, *Degas: A Passion for Perfection*, will. Now showing at the Fitzwilliam Museum until 14 January 2018 – marking the centenary of Degas' death – this is a divine walk-through of his life's work. An utter treat for Cambridge, it offers a surprising glimpse into the depth of an artist most famous for being the 'painter of dancers'.

From wax and bronze sculptures, to his Impressionist paintings of Parisian women, to nude drawings full of energy – this is a fabulous show with a packed programme of talks and events, that will not disappoint.

The show also reveals the far-reaching influence of Degas on other artists, too – from Lucian Freud, to Francis Bacon, Picasso and Henry Moore. Degas' charm, vivacity and wit shines through, his restless creative drive, arresting. Maynard Keynes was instrumental in persuading the UK treasury to give the National Gallery £20,000 to buy several works from war-besieged Paris: a coup he described to friend, Vanessa Bell, as a 'whirlwind affair', later leading the way to making the Cambridge-based economist a vital influence, not just in cementing Impressionism to Cambridge, but to the UK, too. Famous more for his staunch advocacy for interventionist economics, it's less well known that Keynes was a member of the Bloomsbury set and founded the Arts Council. A keen art collector, he snapped up Cézanne's *Still Life With Apples*, for £500, which you can also see at the exhibition, now one of the top ten most viewed masterpieces today.

With traditional portrayals of Degas as a bitter misanthropist, the show also shines a light on his witty, warm-hearted side. His final letters to Alexis Rouart make for poignant reading, as blindness took over: "I can't see what I'm writing," he lamented. Described as an 'urban creature' by curator Jane Munro, who drew inspiration from Parisian café culture, his iconic paintings such as *At The Café* are breathtaking to see in person. It's been 'nice to bring him alive' comments Jane. Watch out for the chance to visit the museum for a late opening on 15 November.

Cambridge Literary Festival brings an array of literary treats to the city this month. I'm looking forward to

Rebecca Solnit discussing her new work, *The Mother of All Questions*, on 2 November. A radical voice for hope, Solnit will not disappoint. You can also join the winner of the Goldsmiths Prize for fiction, announced this month, in conversation with culture editor of *New Statesman*, Tom Gatti on 26 November. Plus, there's an appearance from Cambridge's Ali Smith, too.

Make a start on your Christmas shopping by visiting Eclectic Mix, a platform for local artists with an array of pop-up shops this season, showcasing a variety of makers, designers, jewellers and printmakers at some great Cambridge venues. On Friday 10 November and Saturday 11 November, Eclectic Mix are at St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, then on 19 November, they will be south of the city at Stapleford Community Primary School, whose Christmas Gift Fair dates back 30 years.

Then on 6 December, back in the city centre, Santander Bank on St Andrew's Street are hosting Eclectic Mix. It's the first time Santander have done anything like this – art in a bank, fabulous!

"In the true spirit of Eclectic Mix, we have a really good mix of venues to showcase our wonderful makers," says the founder of Eclectic Mix, Delia Naylor. "We have some fabulous artists on board, with a range of price points, so people can find little stocking fillers or more extravagant gifts for their loved ones. All our artists and makers we select work from home or in small studios, crafting work from scratch, often using sustainable materials. As one customer suggested, Cambridge needs a shop like Eclectic Mix. So we will keep popping up all over Cambridge!"

Another fantastic addition to Cambridge's pop-up art circuit is Gallery 9 on Norfolk Street (formerly Changing Spaces), founded by artist Paul Arsenaault. Created in partnership with CB2 Bistro, the space has a rolling programme of shows, with several artists based there, too. Check out the website gallery-9.co.uk to see current shows and pop in to have a look.

Finally, listen to Nick Mulvey's new album, *Wake Up Now* – and put it on your Christmas list. *Mountain To Move*, the seventh track on the album, is a total joy, with the Cambridge-raised star inviting us to wake up, a warning against losing yourself in comparisons in a world dominated by selfie-culture and materialism – timely indeed. Have a fabulous November all! ■

