

## Press release

### Terra Firma

Pallavi Paul

24 October 2017 – 4 February 2018

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Pallavi Paul will present a new installation, *Terra Firma*, at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge this autumn, inspired by the secrecy and histories of the top-secret Codebreakers of Bletchley Park.

During a residency at Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridgeshire in Spring 2017, Paul visited and accessed archival material from the Bletchley Park collection for *Terra Firma*. The new commission will be installed as a 'carpet' in Gallery 8 of the Fitzwilliam Museum, amongst the collections of 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century Spanish and Flemish art. With the upholstery acting as a textual landscape on which museum visitors can walk, the text on the carpet appears like concrete poems. The central motif is the word 'secret', with changing permutations of words around it. These concrete poems are composed to visually look like code and will contribute a distinct, stylistic accent to the gallery.

The installation is inspired by the secrecy surrounding the work that was being undertaken at Bletchley Park during WWII. A lot of these histories, especially those of espionage, remain outside of the mainstream narrative fold. Under obligation to never reveal anything about the war effort, the possible witnesses to these moments - through whom a story could have been produced - have either departed or struggled with failing and inconsistent memories. In suggesting and speculating, rather than reporting on what happened there, via this new work, many kinds of actions and triumphs can be imagined.

Pallavi Paul explains, "*The word 'Terra Firma' means dry earth. Mostly used in comparison to water or air- dryness can evoke safety but also aridity. This work plays on the possibility of*

*speculation amidst the imperatives of '(H)istory' making, it doubles up as a place of rest and provocation at once. Visitors are encouraged to walk over, read, read-aloud, lie, sit, roll on these words - for them to find new lives both within and beyond the museum."*

The commission ties in with a new exhibition at the Fitzwilliam Museum this autumn - *Codebreakers and Groundbreakers* (24 October to 4 February 2018), exploring the groups involved in breaking WWII codes and those who deciphered the ancient script of Linear B – Europe's earliest comprehensible writing system. *Terra Firma* will be installed just before the entrance to the exhibition, responding artistically and philosophically to the *Codebreakers and Groundbreakers* exhibition.

*Terra Firma* is also part of the University of Cambridge's *India Unboxed* series celebrating 70 years of Indian Independence. Malavika Anderson, Programmer of *India Unboxed* commented: "We are delighted to be showcasing a fascinating new artwork by a contemporary Indian artist. The *India Unboxed* programme shows Cambridge's connections with India, not only through our historic collections, but also by creating new responses to our work today."

As part of the Cambridge Festival of Ideas, Pallavi Paul will be in conversation about her new work, *Terra Firma* on Friday 27 October, 13.15-14.00 in the Fitzwilliam Museum's Seminar Room (35).

*Terra Firma* is co-commissioned by University of Cambridge Museums and Wysing Arts Centre. It was supported using public funding by Arts Council England and with support from Diversity Art Forum and the Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation. With thanks to Bletchley Park.

The  
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#### **MEDIA ENQUIRIES:**

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## **Notes for editors:**

### **Pallavi Paul**

Pallavi Paul's practice is about speculating the stake of poetry in the contemporary. She works primarily with video and the installation form to test the contours of fantasy, resistance, politics and history. The idea is to think about the relationships between truth making and world making. Her work has been shown at the AV festival in Newcastle, Contour Biennale, Tate Modern (project space), The Garage, Rotterdam, Edinburgh Art Festival, Bhaudaji Lad Museum, Whitechapel Gallery, KHOJ International Artists' Association among a few other spaces. Her films have also shown in film festivals like Experimenta, TENT, Mumbai Film Festival, 100 years of Experimentation in Film and Video (organized by Film's Division).

She was the recipient of the Charles Wallace and Inlaks Shivdasani Foundation Fellowship to take part in the Delfina Foundation residency programme. Other residency programs she has been a part of include – Wysing Arts Centre, SARAI, Vancouver Biennale and KHOJ.

Some of the fellowships that have supported her practice(s) include – CSDS social and digital media fellowship, IFA arts practice fellowship, PSBT fellowship for non-fiction film and CAMP pad.ma fellowship for experimental video.

Paul's first solo exhibition at Project 88, Mumbai was titled '*Mistaking < > for Direction Signs*' and was held between Nov 2014- January 2015. She is currently a PhD candidate at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU.

### **Wysing Arts Centre**

Established in 1989, Wysing Arts Centre develops new ways to support artists and enables art and ideas to engage a wide range of people in unexpected ways. Wysing's large rural site near Cambridge comprises artists' studios, a gallery and project spaces, a 17<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse and outdoor sculptures and structures. In the summer of 2017 a recording studio is being added to the site [www.wysingartscentre.org](http://www.wysingartscentre.org)

This year, Wysing is exploring the Polyphonic or 'many voices' in all aspects of programming. Across the year Wysing are working with a range of artists to explore a diversity of contexts and positions to help better understand the role of art, artists, and arts organisations such as Wysing, at this moment of global political change.

### **The Fitzwilliam Museum**

Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam Museum is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge and lead partner for the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) Major Partner

Museum programme, funded by The Arts Council. The Fitzwilliam's collections explore world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century, world class prints and drawings, and outstanding collections of coins, Asian arts, ceramics and other applied arts. The Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation. [www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB | Free admission  
OPEN: Tuesday – Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 – 17.00  
CLOSED: 24-26 & 31 December, 1 January, Good Friday

### **Diversity Art Forum**

Diversity Art Forum is a private organisation founded in 2005 which supports artists and organisations, nationally and internationally in a multitude of ways. Previous projects supported include the Whitechapel Gallery London Open, Stephen Willats exhibition THISWAY at the Index Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation, David Maljković at BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead and the ICA Artists Film Biennial 2014.

[www.diversityartforum.com](http://www.diversityartforum.com)

**University of Cambridge Museums** is a consortium of the eight University Museums, which works in partnership with the Cambridge University Botanic Garden and other Cambridge University collections. They include: Fitzwilliam Museum, Kettle's Yard, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Museum of Zoology, Museum of Classical Archaeology, Whipple Museum of the History of Science, The Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences and The Polar Museum. The University's collections are a world-class resource for researchers, students and members of the public representing the country's highest concentration of internationally important collections, all within walking distance of the City Centre. [www.museums.cam.ac.uk](http://www.museums.cam.ac.uk)

**India Unboxed** marks the UK-India Year of Culture 2017. The University of Cambridge Museums and Botanic Garden is celebrating a shared season on the theme of India - a programme of exhibitions, events, digital encounters, discussions, installations and more within the museums and the city of Cambridge. Rooted in collections, the programme will explore themes of identity and connectivity for audiences in both the UK and India, with support from Arts Council England. [www.museums.cam.ac.uk/india-unboxed](http://www.museums.cam.ac.uk/india-unboxed)