

National Trust Press Release

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Expressions in Blue: Monumental Porcelain by Felicity Aylieff

Petworth House and Park, West Sussex, 23 May to 27 September 2026



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Towering sculptures by renowned ceramicist Felicity Aylieff are to be exhibited in the glorious setting of the National Trust's Petworth House and Park in West Sussex.

Expressions in Blue invites visitors to see Petworth through the lens of these monumental works in porcelain, set in the Capability Brown landscaped park and inside the house.

Continuing Petworth's rich history of artistic collaboration and collecting, Aylieff has created several new pieces, revealed here for the first time. Highly decorative floral *fencai* enamelled vessels take their inspiration from intricate wood carvings by Grinling Gibbons, while other sculptures draw on Petworth's magnificent collection of 17th-century Chinese porcelain-enamelled vessels take their inspiration from intricate wood carvings by Grinling Gibbons, while other sculptures draw on Petworth's magnificent collection of 17th-century Chinese porcelain.

In the Marble Hall, visitors can walk through a 'forest' of huge blue and white pots, painted in cobalt blue glazes with brushstrokes full of movement. Climbing Petworth's Grand Staircase, they can look down on another monolithic work, whilst outside two soaring obelisks stand between the house and the lake.

In the exhibition gallery, film and photographs reveal the remarkable 'making' process and its sheer physicality. A selection of Aylieff's fascinating mark-making tools is displayed, including giant horsehair brushes used to whip around the vessels to create energetic flicks and splashes.

“Seeing my sculptures within Petworth’s grand baroque setting is both exhilarating and humbling,” says Aylieff. “Petworth House has been a profound source of inspiration for me, for its extraordinary architectural presence and its deep connection to history and landscape. The light, space, and sense of permanence within the house allow the work to resonate differently, echoing both the heritage of porcelain and the timeless atmosphere of Petworth’s collection. I hope the setting encourages people to look more closely, experiencing the works as objects that hold memory, ornament, and a contemporary energy.”

Aylieff’s journey towards working at an unprecedented scale began with a visit to China in 2005 when she became captivated by the city of Jingdezhen, known for centuries for its high-quality porcelain production.

Over the next two decades, Aylieff has spent long periods living and working in China each year, developing close working relationships with craftspeople who have accumulated specialist skills and knowledge over generations.

Through a long-standing process of creative collaboration with them, Aylieff has forged an ambitious and experimental path combining tradition with innovation across cultures. This has enabled her to push the limits of her work in a notoriously challenging material.

Painting the blue-and-white vessels is a spontaneous, performative act that engages the artist’s whole body and brings energy to their surfaces, which she sees as canvasses for her artistic expression. In monochromatic shades of grey when applied, the cobalt oxides transform in the kiln into deep and vibrant blues.

Works such as *Blue: Triple Form* (2023) are painted with large brushes in bold and fluid swathes, built up layer on layer to give depth, with bold gestural marks bringing movement across the form. Others, including *Blue: Earth, Fire, Water, Undulating Form I*, (2024), have smaller, more frenetic surface marks created using improvised brushes made from bunches of bale twine.

Aylieff was drawn to cobalt not only for its luminosity but for its significance in the history of Chinese ceramics. Using the classic blue and white of Chinese porcelain, she synthesises old and new, creating her ‘new Ming’ vases.

Property Curator of Petworth House Dr. Emily Knight says: “The dramatic grandeur of Aylieff’s work conjures the same sense of spectacle and awe as Petworth’s baroque interiors. This exhibition is a conversation between the past and present, and we’re thrilled to be showing new work by Aylieff in the place that inspired it.”

Tarnya Cooper, National Trust Cultural Heritage Director said: “National Trust houses are repositories of centuries of human creativity and ingenuity, and their collections inspire artists, craftspeople, writers, and all of us who visit. Every object now carefully displayed was once contemporary and it is wonderful to see these bold and beautiful works of contemporary art ‘in conversation’ with the outstanding historic collections at Petworth.”

Expressions in Blue has been made possible through support and collaboration with Adrian Sassoon, London, who represent the artist internationally.

Expressions in Blue: Monumental Porcelain: Petworth House, West Sussex, 23 May to 27 September 2026. Entry is free after normal admission to the house (free to National Trust members).

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About Petworth House and Park

Home to an extraordinary collection of art, this magnificent 17th-century mansion stands as a monument to the evolving taste of one family over 900 years. Rooted in the powerful northern Percy dynasty, their journeys through the Tudor Reformation, the Gunpowder Plot, the Napoleonic Wars and up to the present day are reflected in an astonishing array of treasures that survive at Petworth today. The palatial state rooms offer an infinity of paintings and sculptures, including major works by van Dyck, Turner, Flaxman and Blake. Separate Servants' Quarters offer a glimpse of life below stairs, featuring domestic rooms and historic kitchens. The house stands in the grounds of Petworth Park, a landscape park designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown.

About the National Trust:

The National Trust is an independent conservation charity founded in 1895 by three people: Octavia Hill, Sir Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley, who saw the importance of the nation's heritage and open spaces and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. Today, across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, we continue to look after places so people and nature can thrive.

We care for more than 250,000 hectares of countryside, 780 miles of coastline, 1 million collection items and 500 historic properties, gardens and nature reserves. In 2023/24 we received 25.3 million visitors to our pay for entry sites. The National Trust is for everyone - we were founded for the benefit of the whole nation, and our 5.38 million members, funders and donors, and tens of thousands of volunteers support our work to care for nature, beauty, history for everyone, for ever.

About Felicity Aylieff

Felicity Aylieff (b. 1954 Bedfordshire, UK) is one of the UK's most innovative contemporary artists working in clay. Her work provokes an immediate sense of awe, both through its monumental scale and the expressive, yet considered, handling of surface decoration. Deeply rooted within a context of

traditional Chinese ceramic-making, yet extremely contemporary, her work can be found in some of the UK's most prestigious public collections.

Aylieff established her reputation as a maker of large-scale, sculptural ceramics at the Royal College of Art in 1996. Ten years on, an 'incredibly liberating' artist residency in Jingdezhen, China, the historic home of Chinese porcelain production, saw the beginning of a series of monumental pots, the largest of which stands three metres high. Returning each summer since then Felicity has developed the surface decoration of the pots with stylised drawings of plants and flowers or colourful clouds of exquisite, exotic butterflies.

The strong relationships developed with porcelain factories have enabled Aylieff to work in an unprecedented way and the knowledge and expertise gained from this rich cultural exchange have offered her limitless inspiration. Her work reflects her confidence when drawing-on and reinterpreting traditional Chinese techniques of porcelain production and decoration.

Aylieff has a teaching career that spans over 40 years and is currently Professor of ceramics and glass and research at the Royal College of Art, London. Her work is held in numerous international private and public collections including the Victoria and Albert Museum, London and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, USA.

Felicity Aylieff is represented by [Adrian Sassoon, London](#).