

MuseumfromHome

A new road on which the world should travel...

William Morris, *Preface to Ruskin's 'The Nature of Gothic'* (1892)



Entrance to 'Ruskin: Museum of the Near Future', with John Ruskin, 'Cloud Study' (London: Cook & Wedderburn, 1905), VII, Plate 65
© Margot Lombaert Studio

In March 2020, when we closed our exhibition ‘[Ruskin: Museum of the Near Future](#)’ with Morris’ words, we had no idea how different life was about to become. Since lockdown, while the museum has temporarily closed its doors, we’re finding new ways to stay connected. We have focused on sharing The Ruskin Whitehouse Collection digitally: campaigns under the global [#MuseumFromHome](#) banner, connecting Ruskin collections worldwide through [#CollectionsUnited](#), and a virtual exhibition tour of [‘Ruskin: Museum of the Near Future’](#) launched on International Museum Day, on how life takes shape and where tomorrow’s world is today.



The Ruskin – Night Sky
© Gordon Sutcliffe

Look to the skies, our first [#MuseumfromHome](#) campaign, drew on a lifetime of looking by Ruskin, who once reflected ‘The really precious things are thought and sight, not pace.’ And again: ‘The sky is for all and yet we never make it a subject for thought ...’ Take a moment, look up and share your thoughts, we asked. And stunning lockdown skylines came in from across the world: from the Lake District to Hong Kong, Brazil and California; and from collections, including The Royal Society in London and The Morgan Library in New York.



John Ruskin, Cloud Study—Over Coniston Water, 1880 © The Ruskin, Lancaster University

These were the early days of the explosion of digital images and activities during the pandemic, connecting collections and communities, giving pause for reflection on new meanings of ‘g/local’ and of hyper-local, while confined to home. Subsequent digital campaigns demonstrated how profoundly Ruskin’s art and ideas remain a pathway to look closely, see clearly and imagine freely, finding resilience as we traverse these increasingly uncertain times. The past year has brought home how Ruskin’s words remind us that we might find more beauty in the small things on our doorstep from the filament of a thistle or barb of a peacock’s feather, to the branch of a tree, or a bird’s wing or stone: ‘than with the telescope or photographs from all the moons on the milky way.’ And as the arts and culture sectors have had to adapt rapidly to digital first activity, we have asked: How has COVID-19 changed the relationship between museums and their communities? What is the impact of digital initiatives by museums on wellbeing and resilience in relation to crisis? And, a question directly aligned with The Ruskin’s mission as a ‘Museum of the Near Future’: How might COVID-19 inform practice in the museums of the future?



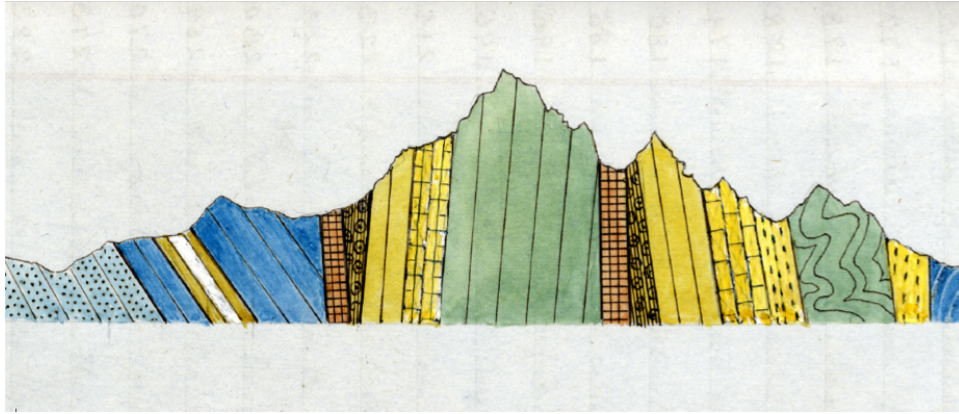
Lecture Diagram, Four Studies of Buds
© The Ruskin, Lancaster University

Ruskin's thinking is well-suited to contemporary adoption: he hyper-linked his own works across media, and was an early adopter of optical and other scientific technologies of the 19th century, as well as experimenting with new ways of documenting, representing, and communicating knowledge. His archive is therefore well-placed for experimentation regarding how, in a world – both during and post pandemic - increasingly dependent on blended forms of learning, working and living, museums can shape experiences of negotiating the increasingly porous digital and physical worlds of the future. 'When we build, let us build forever ...' Ruskin's words reach into the future and encourage us to reflect on our responsibility for stewardship of the world around us and the impact of what we notice, and of what we do, today. Lockdown has accelerated The Ruskin's new strategic direction following the purchase of the collection by Lancaster University in 2019, harnessing the power of this extraordinary historical collection, and the role of the museum as a catalysts in reimagining society and our relationship to the planet after COVID-19 and in response to contemporary social and environmental challenges



John Ruskin and Frederik Crawley, Chamonix, 1854 (Daguerreotype)
© The Ruskin, Lancaster University

The ways in which the works in The Ruskin's collection reflect Ruskin's emphasis on the social value of access to nature and our role as 'custodians' of the natural world have become particularly significant during lockdown as public interest in local, natural environments has increased.



John Ruskin, Diary Notebook (1862-1863 (detail))
© The Ruskin, Lancaster University

Ruskin's works on geology, botany and meteorology capture the explosion of knowledge resulting from the 19th century voyages of discovery, which shaped our understanding of the natural world today. During lockdown, working with Ruskin collections nationally and internationally, in addition to connecting digitally, we've been researching our new exhibition on Ruskin and science: ['Revisioning Ruskin: the Art of Scientific Innovation'](#) and look forward to opening our doors again.

Professor Sandra Kemp
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