



A tribute to the world of myth: Ovid and Holkham Hall

Ovid at Holkham Hall

Suzanne Reynolds:

I think for me what makes Holkham so special is the integrity of the vision that it embodies, that one man wanted to build a house which reflected his passion for classical architecture, sculpture and art.

Jessica Hughes:

There are so many different periods that are represented here so you've got ancient statues; you've got mediaeval manuscripts, 17th and 18th century paintings, and all of these things work together to give a multi-layered view of what Ovid has meant to many different generations over the centuries.

Holkham Hall was built to reflect the tastes of its owner, Thomas Coke.

Jeremy Dimmick:

When you look around at Thomas Coke's collecting, as it's on show in Holkham Hall the thing that's most obvious is a pervasive classicism. His aesthetic is fashioned by his time in Rome, by being taught a bit of draughtsmanship, in a very Renaissance kind of neo-classical style.

The library includes medieval manuscripts of classical texts.

Jessica Hughes:

When I first found out about the Ovid manuscript I just read a textual description of it and it was described in all these different illuminations and, even without seeing the pictures, just hearing it described and all the colours that had been used, made me very excited.

Jeremy Dimmick:

It's in absolutely remarkable condition this manuscript, I mean you can see the way that the colours are so vivid, it's so well preserved, and actually that's one of the things about manuscripts, that they're quite robust.

Suzanne Reynolds:

The excitement of working with manuscripts comes from the sense of an immediate connection with other readers. You're always aware of the first people who commissioned and read the manuscripts. Later readers, like Thomas Coke, leave their signatures or their annotations, so I think you feel yourself to be in a succession of people who've been lucky enough to be able to handle these amazing things.

Jeremy Dimmick:

Most manuscripts now, of course, are living in institutional libraries, in universities, but this is where you can really see the tastes of one particular collector.

This part of the collection includes sculptures dating back to the second century CE.

Jessica Hughes:

This room is full of statues of mythical figures and they're all mythical figures with some relationship to nature and the outdoors, so what Thomas Coke has done with this gallery is really bring a bit of the outside inside.

The contents of the rooms have hardly changed over the last 200 years.

Suzanne Reynolds:

As you walk around the house you can see several large scale canvases based on classical themes, a statue gallery to house the classical statuary that he bought, and even the design of the house itself is all of a piece with this passion for classical architecture and art.