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Media Release

YOUNG BRITISH ARTIST GAVIN TURK'S NEON WORKS BROUGHT TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME FOR A NEW EXHIBITION AT THE BOWES MUSEUM (25TH January 2014 until 21ST April 2014)

Seven Billion Two Hundred and One Million Nine Hundred and Sixty-Four Thousand and Two Hundred and Thirty-Eight is the exact number of people who will be alive on Planet Earth at the precise moment Young British Artist Gavin Turk's solo show opens at The Bowes Museum on January 25, 2014. His large scale neon light work will broadcast this number on The Bowes's iconic chateau-style façade: a traversable portal through our fixed point of existence, to our future, the now, or our past.

The Bowes Museum couldn't be a more fitting setting for Turk's own collection of neon works he's made throughout his career: its permanent display of decorative and fine arts from the Bronze Age to the 20th century records not only cultural history, but its understanding through technological advancement. That The Bowes Collection was the inspiration and passion of the 19th century Parisian actress Joséphine Coffin-Chevallier and her husband John Bowes is worthy to note as well: the theatricality of art history, its revolving myths and narratives, sets the stage for Turk's ongoing *imposteur* performance.

Situated in The Bowes Museum's main gallery, this exhibition brings together for the first time all of Turk's neon works – signature pieces made between 1995 and 2013 that see the evolution of Turk's practice, quite literally, up in lights; their effervescent glow the epiphany aura of consumer fetish, celebrity and glamour. Quintessentially a modernist medium – now rendered obsolete by digital LED – neon is the vaporous stuff of retro-futuristic glory, of Hollywood optimism and capitalist spectacle, and of history's malleability and forgetfulness: neon light's inventor, French chemist Georges Claude, envisioned their use for fascist propaganda.

Original meaning co-opted, transformed by another, is the basis of Turk's own artistic lexicon. Set within a darkened chamber, his luminous symbols beacon with occultish effect: an egg, a banana, a lobster – the spirit-presence of Magritte, Warhol, Duchamp, art's magical essence distilled as channelled gas, hyper-efficiently packaged as Turk's own-brand logos. Visually reduced to minimal typographies, they offer communication in its barest form: a seeing eye, a flickering flame, primordial hieroglyphs, with their ancient mysteries and secrets, evolved to modern day usage. Each wall adorned with one of Turk's trademark doors accentuates this infinite dimensionality of authorship and perception: the ownership of images, their genuine expression and shifting interpretation, is experienced only as quasi-spiritual hypnotic effulgence.

The property of mass media conscious and art history's legacy, for Turk, becomes a collective commons material to be appropriated for his own legend and artist-persona. Two pieces in this exhibition hold special significance, puncturing Turk's public image with intimate disclosure. A red star, made in conjunction with his Che Gavara series, is a replica of the actual signage on the façade of Turk's London studio, the point of origin for his entire artistic output, the bustling workshop producing his celebrity. This is juxtaposed with an eight pointed Maltese cross – a symbol dating back to the First Crusade and a subject of intrigue for the artist Yves Klein. Turk wore this cross when he recently got married, in a ceremony that was a partial re-enactment of Klein's own wedding. The

cross' points represent the eight lands of origin, the origin of languages, and the values of truth, sincerity and faith – the shared provenance of humanity, each of the 7,201,964,238 of us!

End

Editors' notes

- The Bowes Museum was created over 100 years ago by an extraordinary couple, John and Joséphine Bowes. Together they built up the greatest private collection of fine and decorative arts in the North of England and constructed a magnificent building to house them in. The collection contains thousands of objects including furniture, paintings, sculpture, ceramics, textiles and many other items covering an extensive range of European styles and periods.
- The Bowes Museum receives a core funding grant from Durham County Council and as a Major Portfolio Museum, receives support from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport through the Arts Council England's Renaissance programme. Additional revenue funding specifically for the Museum's acclaimed exhibition programme is provided by The John Ellerman Foundation and The Friends of The Bowes Museum.
- The Bowes Museum has recently undergone major redevelopment. This work was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, One NorthEast through the County Durham Economic Partnership, English Heritage, Northern Rock Foundation, The Monument Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation, The Foyle Foundation, The European Regional Development Fund, DCMS/Wolfson Museum and Galleries Improvement Fund, Designation Challenge Fund, The Shears Foundation, The Richard and Suzanna Tonks Family Fund at County Durham Foundation, Durham County Council, The Friends of The Bowes Museum, The Headley Trust, Sir James Knott Trust, Catherine Cookson Charitable Trust, Fenwick Ltd, Mercers Charitable Foundation, Welton Foundation.
- Normal admission to the Museum: Adults £9.50, Concessions £8.50, Six Month Pass £14.00, Children Free (under 16s). Admission allows access to all exhibitions, permanent displays and some events. Admissions are donation inclusive and are eligible for Gift Aid. If you do not wish to make a charitable donation admission prices are: Adults £8.50, Concessions £7.70, Six Month Pass £12.50, Children (under 16) and carers free.
- The Bowes Museum is a member of the Discover Durham partnership of attractions. Our commitment is to promote Durham as an exciting and vibrant group travel destination and to provide the travel trade with a professional and knowledgeable service: hotline number 0191 301 8531, www.discoverdurham.co.uk