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## EMPIRE MUSEUM NOMINATED FOR NATIONAL AWARD

The current exhibition 'Breaking the Chains' at the British Empire & Commonwealth Museum has been long-listed for a £100,000 award. The Art Fund Prize for museums and galleries (formerly The Gulbenkian Prize) is the UK's most valuable annual arts prize.

The £1million Heritage Lottery funded exhibition opened in April 2007 as the centerpiece of Bristol's bicentennial commemorations for the abolition of the slave trade. 'Breaking the Chains' uses modern techniques such as video, sound stations and personal experiences and opinions to explore the history of the slave trade and question why we are still living with slavery and legacies of the trade today.

Anne Lineen, the Exhibition Manager responsible for developing 'Breaking the Chains' says, "*We are delighted that the hard work and dedication of everyone involved in this exhibition, including local people, community groups, academic advisors and staff, has been recognised at such a prestigious, national level. We have had fantastic feedback from our visitors and hope that this will encourage more people to come and experience the exhibition.*"

The British Empire and Commonwealth Museum competes with nine other museums and galleries across the UK. The coveted prize will be awarded to the museum or gallery whose project demonstrates the most "originality, imagination and excellence". The diverse long list includes a unique exhibition created by soldiers, a groundbreaking new space that brings together medicine, life and art and a remarkable collection of 20<sup>th</sup> Century British art displayed in a series of historic harbourside buildings in the Orkneys. Also on the list are the International Slavery Museum in Liverpool, an entirely volunteer-

led project overlooking the Exe Estuary in Devon, four leading London venues and a new museum and archive in Scotland's most northerly islands.

The 10 long-listed museums and galleries are:

**The British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, Bristol, for 'Breaking the Chains'**

A powerful and memorable commemoration of the bicentenary of the abolition of the British slave trade which demonstrates the humanity of those enslaved by the transatlantic trade.

**The British Library, London, for 'Sacred – Discover What We Share'**

This highly acclaimed exhibition brought together the world's greatest collection of Jewish, Christian and Islamic holy texts together side by side for the first time.

**International Slavery Museum, Liverpool**

This new museum, which opened in August 2000, uses the largely hidden story of the transatlantic slave trade to explore issues such as freedom, identity, human rights, racism and cultural change.

**The Lightbox gallery and museum, Woking**

Developed with strong community involvement, this contemporary space combines an innovative approach to presenting local history with a dynamic display of modern art.

**London Transport Museum, London**

A £22 million transformation of one of London's most iconic cultural attractions, the new Museum explores the powerful link between transport and the growth of London, its culture and society since 1800.

**The National Army Museum, London, for 'Helmand: The Soldiers' Story'**

This unique exhibition, created by soldiers, explores the British army's first campaign in Afghanistan's Taleban heartland, Helmand Province.

**The Pier Arts Centre, Stromness, Orkney**

The redesigned Centre on an historic harbour-side houses a remarkable collection of 20<sup>th</sup> Century British art and hosts a contemporary programme of exhibition, educational and outreach events.

**Shetland Museum and Archives, Lerwick, Shetland**

Set within a restored 19<sup>th</sup> Century dock, the Shetland Museum and Archives tells the fascinating story of Britain's most northerly group of islands - from its geological beginnings to the present day.

**Topsham Museum, Exeter, for the River Gallery Project**

The River Gallery Project transformed the entirely volunteer-run Topsham Museum, creating a new gallery to house historic local boats and displays reflecting the local history of the Exe Estuary.

**Wellcome Collection, London**

This groundbreaking new space is devoted to exploring the connections between medicine, life and art. Over 1,500 exhibits, spanning six centuries, shine light on the past, present and future of medicine and contemplate our changing relationship with our bodies.

This is the first year that The Art Fund, the UK's leading independent art charity has sponsored this major arts prize, which is open to all accredited museums and galleries in the UK. The Art Fund Prize for museums and galleries recognises and stimulates

originality and excellence in museums and galleries and aims to increase public appreciation and enjoyment of all they have to offer.

Sue MacGregor, Chair of the Judges, comments:

*'We're going to have an exciting and absorbing time visiting all ten museums and galleries. Some of them are relatively small - Orkney's Pier Arts Centre or Woking's ultra modern Lightbox museum for instance. Others are huge and all- embracing, like the Wellcome Collection of the History of Medicine in London, or tightly focussed, like the soldiers' own version of the conflict in Afghanistan's Helmand province, at the National Army Museum. There are two different exhibitions to consider on the history of the Slave Trade: one in Liverpool and one in Bristol. Eventually ten must be whittled down to one - but I know we'll all have been bowled over by the imagination and inspiration we've encountered on the way.'*

David Barrie, Director of The Art Fund comments:

*'With the prize now in its sixth year, the long list once again presents us with an impressive range of projects that reflect the ambition, diversity and excellence of our museums and galleries. The Art Fund is determined to encourage more people to explore the museum collections that we work so hard to enrich. I'm delighted that we are able to support this important prize which recognises the most imaginative, innovative and popular developments of the previous year.'*

Following judges' visits, four museums and galleries will be short-listed and announced in early April. The winner will be announced on Thursday 22nd May at the Royal Institute of British Architects in London during Museum and Galleries Month 2008.

The 2008 judging panel comprises:

- Sue MacGregor CBE (Chair), broadcaster
- Keith Khan, Head of Culture for the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games
- Diane Lees, Director of the V&A Museum of Childhood and Director Designate of the Imperial War Museum
- Christopher Lloyd CVO, former Surveyor of The Queen's Pictures
- Dr Mark Miodownik, Head of Materials Research Group, King's College London
- Maggie Semple OBE, Chief Executive of The Experience Corps Ltd
- Emma Soames, Editor of Saga Magazine

Last year's winner was Pallant House Gallery in Chichester. Previous winners include Brunel's ss Great Britain in Bristol (2006), Big Pit: National Mining Museum of Wales, Blaenafon (2005), The Scottish Gallery of Modern Art for Landform - part sculpture, part garden, part land-art - by Charles Jencks (2004), and the National Centre for Citizenship and the Law at the Galleries of Justice in Nottingham (2003).

END

**Notes to Editors:**

A range of high res images is available from Lucy Edwards 01179 25 4980 Ext 230  
Or [lucy.edwards@empiremuseum.co.uk](mailto:lucy.edwards@empiremuseum.co.uk)

Art Fund Prize: [www.artfundprize.org.uk](http://www.artfundprize.org.uk)

British Empire & Commonwealth Museum: [www.empiremuseum.co.uk](http://www.empiremuseum.co.uk)

**Other awards to date:**

- Silver: Roses Awards for 'Breaking the Chains' exhibition graphics 2007
- Short-listed: Museums and Heritage Awards for Excellence 2005
- Best in the Region: Britain's Best Museums and Galleries 2004
- Finalist: European Museum of the Year 2004
- Winner: Sandford Award for Heritage Education 2004
- Winner: Good Britain Guide 2004
- Short-listed: Museums and Heritage Awards for Excellence 2004
- Double-winner: Museum & Heritage Awards for Excellence 2003
- Winner: National Railway Heritage Awards 2003
- Short-listed: Group Travel Awards 2003
- Short-listed: British Guild of Travel Writers Awards 2003