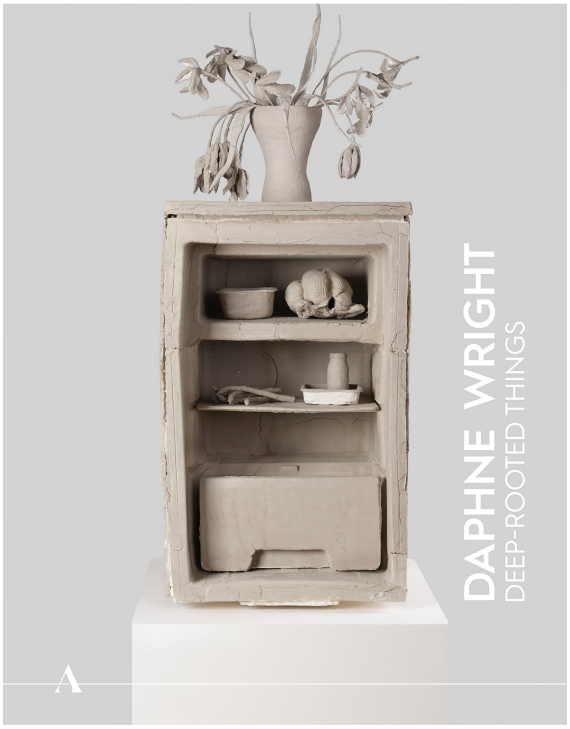
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Ashmolean NOW: Daphne Wright

Deep-Rooted Things

Xa Sturgis

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ISBN	9781910807675
Publisher	Ashmolean Museum
Binding	Paperback / softback
Territory	USA & Canada
Size	9.06 in x 11.02 in
Pages	96 Pages
Illustrations	70 color, 8 b&w
Name of series	Ashmolean NOW
Price	$35.00

- Award-winning artist Daphne Wright makes multi-narrative sculptural installations using a variety of techniques and media, including fragile materials such as plaster, tinfoil, unfired clay, sound and video
- Published to accompany an exhibition at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, from June to December 2025

Artist Daphne Wright is fascinated with the collections of the Ashmolean Museum and the history of seeing they present. Her latest project grows out of a lifetime's engagement with this theme. Much of Wright's existing body of work is steeped in a deep understanding of the iconography and history of Western art, as represented in the Ashmolean's extensive collection. This book establishes connections to the Ashmolean's rich collection of 17th century Dutch Still Life paintings. These genre paintings portray a range of subjects from arrangements of flowers to fruit, fish and game. Sometimes the paintings include a symbolic reference to the transience of life, in the form of fruit that has begun to rot or flowers that are losing petals. In *Fridge Still Life*, the exposed body of a fridge, containing upon its shelves a raw chicken and bundle of asparagus, is topped with a vase of wilting tulips. This is a contemporary re-telling of a still life painting, with its various familiar elements, such as a brace of hanging pheasants, a bowl of fruit and a vase of blooms, with can connote status or vanitas. Wright has explored the transitory nature of life throughout her practice. In previous work, Wright has used plants and animals, with their shorter life spans, to stand in for the human. Wright's work also resonates strongly with the Ashmolean's extensive and celebrated cast collection. Prominent amongst the plaster casts of Greek and Roman sculptures are the gods and heroes of Homeric legend. These idealized images of men still form the basis of our ideas of masculinity today. With *Sons on Couch* Wright is seeking to capture the elusive moment of transition into manhood. The athletic figures in the cast court may have been updated to social media influencers, but the pressure young men face today to achieve a perceived ideal body type remain the same.

Xa Sturgis has been Director of the Ashmolean Museum since 2014. Before taking up his current post he was Director of the Holburne Museum, Bath (2005-2014) where he oversaw the Museum's major renovation and extension. From 1990 to 2005 he worked at the National Gallery in a number of roles including Exhibitions and Programmes Curator. **Emily LaBarge** is a freelance writer living in London. she has contributed essays for artist books, exhibitions and monographs, including on the work of Nancy Holt, Etel Adnan, Carolee Schneemann, Margaret Raspé, Prunella Clough, Camille Henrot, Meriem Bennani, Megan Rooney, Tai Shani, and others.







Published 26th Aug 2025