

# galleryoldham

## Sculpting Stories – Me, You and Us

Sculpting Stories grew out of conversations around the excellent sculpture within several of the collections of Greater Manchester Museums Group (GMMG). Between us, the GMMG collections (<http://www.gmmg.org.uk/>) hold some fantastic examples of this medium. Bolton's collection is particularly impressive, with Henry Moore, Jacob Epstein and Elisabeth Frink represented. Gallery Oldham's modest collection also contains pieces by a number of significant twentieth century names. Epstein is by the far the most well-represented across the GMMG collections.

Having only been in post just over a year, I haven't worked very much with the sculpture collection here at Gallery Oldham. While familiar with a number of key pieces in GMMG painting collections, I hadn't worked at all with the sculpture collections in neighbouring museums at all.



(<http://www.galleryoldham.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/tweet1.png>)  
Lovely colourful plinths for our next exhibition.

It took some time to establish the theme of the show. The original plan was to do a straightforward survey show of figurative sculpture from the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century which was housed in the GMMG collections. While I was excited by the potential content of the show, I felt that the concept needed a bit of work. Through conversations with colleagues it became apparent that the thing that (I believe) is most interesting about this group of works is the story that each piece tells. As we went through the narratives associated with each piece, it began to seem that the stories basically all fell into three categories: stories about the person who made the sculpture, stories about the person shown, and stories about the wider culture and cultural traditions. In the end, I have divided the show into three sections: "Me", "You" and "Us". Interestingly, none of the sculptures are self-portraits, even in the "Me" section.

One of my initial concerns was that the collections might direct the show towards being a room full of white blokes' disembodied heads on plinths. Pleasingly this hasn't turned out to be the case. Women are well-represented in Gallery Oldham's collection of studio ceramics and sculpture from the end of the twentieth century and on into the twentieth-first, as well as a few earlier pieces by Frink in Oldham's and Bolton's collections. The ethnic diversity situation is not so good. It certainly reflects the attitudes of those commissioning and collecting sculpture throughout the bulk of the twentieth century. I was pleased to find Epstein's representation of the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in literature,

Indian polymath Rabindranath Tagore on Salford's list; and Epstein's (again) Paul Robeson at Touchstones Rochdale. Rochdale's more recent acquisition of Taslim Martin's brilliant Portrait Head (Raimi) was a welcome addition to the show.

I'm pleased to be able to showcase some of Gallery Oldham's latest acquisitions in this exhibition. Getting its first showing in Oldham will be this year's Contemporary Art Society craft acquisition, Sticks and Stones by Kerry Jameson. Also on display for the first time here will be the piece we have been awarded via the Crafts Council Museum Purchase Fund, Patience Flower XVIII by Vipoo Srivilasa. I'm looking forward to seeing how members of the public react to these pieces, which are so different from each other.

The exhibition is being installed this week and next. It will open on the 19<sup>th</sup> December and run until the 14<sup>th</sup> May. I'll be giving various talks and tours throughout the show, details of which can be found in our current brochure and the events section of our website.

My personal thanks go to GMMG colleagues Matthew Watson (Bolton), Richard Burns (Bury), Anna Bates and Karen Heatley (Rochdale), Peter Ogilvie (Salford) and Garry Smith (Tameside). Massive thanks also to Gallery Oldham volunteer Phil Hulme who has assisted with many aspects of the show, from measuring plinths to digging out facts that he felt we ought to know.

Rebecca Hill  
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(<http://www.galleryoldham.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/tweet1-e1450179275302.png>)  
Sculpting Stories install

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