

Artist Brief

A contemporary art commission for Ripon Workhouse Museum in 2020-2021



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As part of an exciting phase at Ripon Museum Trust, we are working with contemporary artists to bring the history of our three museums to life in a new way.

We are inviting artists working in all disciplines to respond to one or more of the outdoor spaces at Ripon Workhouse Museum, and to work with our staff, volunteers and community of special interest groups to develop a contemporary art commission.



Background and Context

Ripon Workhouse Museum is located in the historic city of Ripon. The Workhouse Museum is one of Ripon Museum Trust's three museums – the Courthouse Museum, the Prison & Police Museum and the Workhouse Museum – which aim to engage visitors with the themes of law and order, crime and punishment and social justice.

The Workhouse Museum is housed in the former Ripon Union Workhouse, built in 1854 on the site of an earlier workhouse. The museum is arguably the most complete workhouse complex in England, comprising the Vagrant's Block, Main Block, Woodshed, and the surrounding outdoor space, which includes the Kitchen Garden, Master's Garden, Front Garden and the female and male work yards.

Ripon Union Workhouse provided help for the most poor and destitute members of Victorian society. Individuals and families could apply to the Board of Guardians to enter the workhouse, where they would be provided with basic accommodation and food in return for working. Entering the workhouse was a last resort, which carried a stigma and shame. Men and women were strictly segregated, families were separated and children only saw their mothers once a week. The decision to enter would not have been taken lightly. Inmates were not forced to stay - they could apply to leave at any time, but many were unable to, especially if they were elderly or physically or mentally unwell.

The Workhouse Museum provides an immersive experience, enabling visitors to walk in the footsteps of those who lived and worked in the workhouse, and discover their stories and experiences.

Working with artists

Ripon Museum Trust has a successful track record of working with artists and groups. For the past four years, the Trust has commissioned artists to create artworks in response to their museums. For the past two years, this work has been funded by Arts Council England, under their National Portfolio Organisation scheme and in line with the Creative Case for Diversity. Artists we have worked with have included Catherine Bertola, Pippa Hale, Paul Rooney and Faye Claridge.

Ripon Museum Trust is now inviting artists working in all disciplines to respond to one or more of the outdoor spaces at the Workhouse Museum and the stories, themes and experiences connected with them.

This is a rare and interesting opportunity for artists who are interested in creating work in response to the history of poverty; individual and personal stories of those who experienced Ripon Union Workhouse; and the wider themes of social justice and the treatment of the poor and destitute.

Brief

Ripon Museum Trust is seeking to commission a contemporary work that responds to, and is located in, one of the outdoor spaces at the Workhouse Museum.

Our outdoor spaces include:

- The Master's Garden – a pleasant flower garden, located outside the Workhouse Master and Matron's accommodation, for their sole enjoyment.
- The Kitchen Garden – a working garden, where produce for the inmates was grown by the inmates, recreated with 1890 heritage varieties.
- The Female & Male Work Yards – originally stark yards designed for work, strictly segregated by gender, now green spaces.
- The Vagrants' Work Yard – a stark work yard for stone-breaking, strictly segregated by 'class'.

The Workhouse Museum also has a Front Garden and the Trust is seeking funding for developing this space from 2021. If successful then this project may limit the artistic opportunities in the Front Garden. This would be confirmed in time for the proposal stage.

We are open to artists using a wide range of art forms and media, as well as the possibility of performance, sculptural or installation work. In fact, we are keen to ensure the brief is not prescriptive and that the response from artists is imaginative and broad, drawing upon the strengths of the individual artists themselves. However, it is important to note that Ripon Workhouse Museum is a Grade II* listed building and therefore an artwork is subject to physical limitations (for example, works cannot be fixed to the buildings if this will cause damage). Large scale outdoor works may require temporary planning permission.

We seek an artist interested in researching our archives, stories and history; responding to our outdoor spaces; and working closely with our staff and volunteers, and external groups, throughout the process. We are particularly interested in artists who work collaboratively and encourage participation and co-production.

We have identified some of the themes that you may be interested in responding to:

- Segregation, by gender, age, or class;
- The emotional experience of entering and living in the workhouse;
- The physical experience of working in these outdoor spaces;
- The external facade of the workhouse buildings and the physical outdoor space;
- Stories about individual people who lived or worked in Ripon Workhouse;
- 18-19th century social history, including poverty, the Poor Law and workhouses;
- Comparisons with contemporary ideas about poverty and treatment of the poor.

The artist must work closely with the Curator and the Garden Leader to ensure the installation does not adversely affect the maintenance of the outdoor spaces or access to the museum during opening times.

Budget

The total budget for the commission is £12,000.

This is inclusive of all costs, including artist fees, expenses, travel and commission costs, equipment, materials, installation and de-installation. It includes time for workshops, public events, input into marketing and project meetings.

It is also inclusive of VAT and you are responsible for your own tax and NI.

The payment will be split: £4000 on appointment; £6000 on installation (or at the start of our season, depending on the format of work), and £2000 on de-installation or completion.

There are additional funds for curatorial support, interpretation, marketing and learning activities relating to the work.

Timeline

The artist will be appointed in 2020 and the work must be installed between February and November 2021. Within this timeframe, there is flexibility and we understand that working with external groups may affect the timings of the commission.

How to apply

Expressions of Interest

Deadline for Expressions of Interest is Friday 27 March 2020.

Please send an Expression of Interest with an outline of your initial ideas for this commission, why you are interested in this commission, and details of your practice with images. Expressions of Interest should be no longer than two sides of A4.

Please submit this alongside your CV.

Detailed proposals

The project steering group will invite 3-4 artists to develop a full proposal for the commission. We will inform these artists by Friday 10 April 2020.

Deadline for proposals is Friday 15 May 2020 and interviews will be held on Friday 22 May 2020.

Contact

If you would like to discuss this commission further, please contact:

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