

Ripon Museums Trust – ‘Lives of Disabled People’

Creative Conversation #2

Artist’s Brief

Information about disabled people who passed through Ripon Workhouse and the judicial system in the Victorian era is sparse, often consisting of no more than a name, their age, their occupation and the perceived nature of their disability. The latter usually refers to a psychiatric disorder. Records relating to the court system can be more extensive but these were, of course, created by those in positions of authority. The voices of those whose deeds they report are seldom heard.

As of October 2023, Ripon Museums Trust will have hosted two exhibitions featuring works inspired by the lives of disabled people who experienced the Workhouse and who encountered the criminal justice system. The first is entitled ‘Reclaiming Lunacy’ and this responded to the sparse facts which could be gathered about people with psychiatric disorders in the Workhouse. The second will feature art created during workshops run by artist Stephen Lee Hodgkins which invite responses to stories of those who came into contact with the police and the courts.

The commissioned artist will work to a broader brief than those of the above two projects for they will seek to link and bring together the two themes that motivated them. The artist will examine archival material supplied by RMT and will then engage with local disabled people in order to create artwork which will allow both their stories and of those disabled people who are long gone to be told.

This work will be undertaken in partnership with and the support of RMT Community Engagement Officer Andy Bates who will facilitate contact with local groups and individuals, will arrange workshops and will co-curate the final exhibition with the artist.

The position will be advertised during September 2023 and the successful artist will be appointed after application such that they can begin work on the 1st October. The project will run throughout

October, November and December and an open event will be held to mark Disability Awareness Day on the 3rd December. artwork created during the project will be displayed in an exhibition or exhibitions at one or all of RMT's museums from 1st February 2024 when the museums reopen (they are closed to the public throughout December and January). This will leave January 2024 for any additional workshops that might be required, exhibition curation and installation and for the dissemination of publicity for the exhibition launch event which will mark the reopening of the museums.

Points to consider

- How will disabled people be encouraged and facilitated to share their experiences, their thoughts, feelings and opinions and their creativity in the creation of new artwork?
- How will the project develop an atmosphere of collaboration so that the participants feel ownership of the project?
- Can all three sites be connected in some way?
- How can connections and differences between the past and the present be explored and portrayed in order to enhance understanding of lived experience regarding disability?
- What does a 'fairer society' mean?
- How will historical material be incorporated into the work?
- How will the engagement process be documented?
- How will the impact on the participants be measured and recorded?

Budget

There is £3500 available to the artist for this project. This is inclusive of fee, materials, travel, accommodation and any other expenses that might arise during the research and creation of the artwork and the exhibition.