



Exhibiting Difference

Celebrating the work of eight London schools to commemorate the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire



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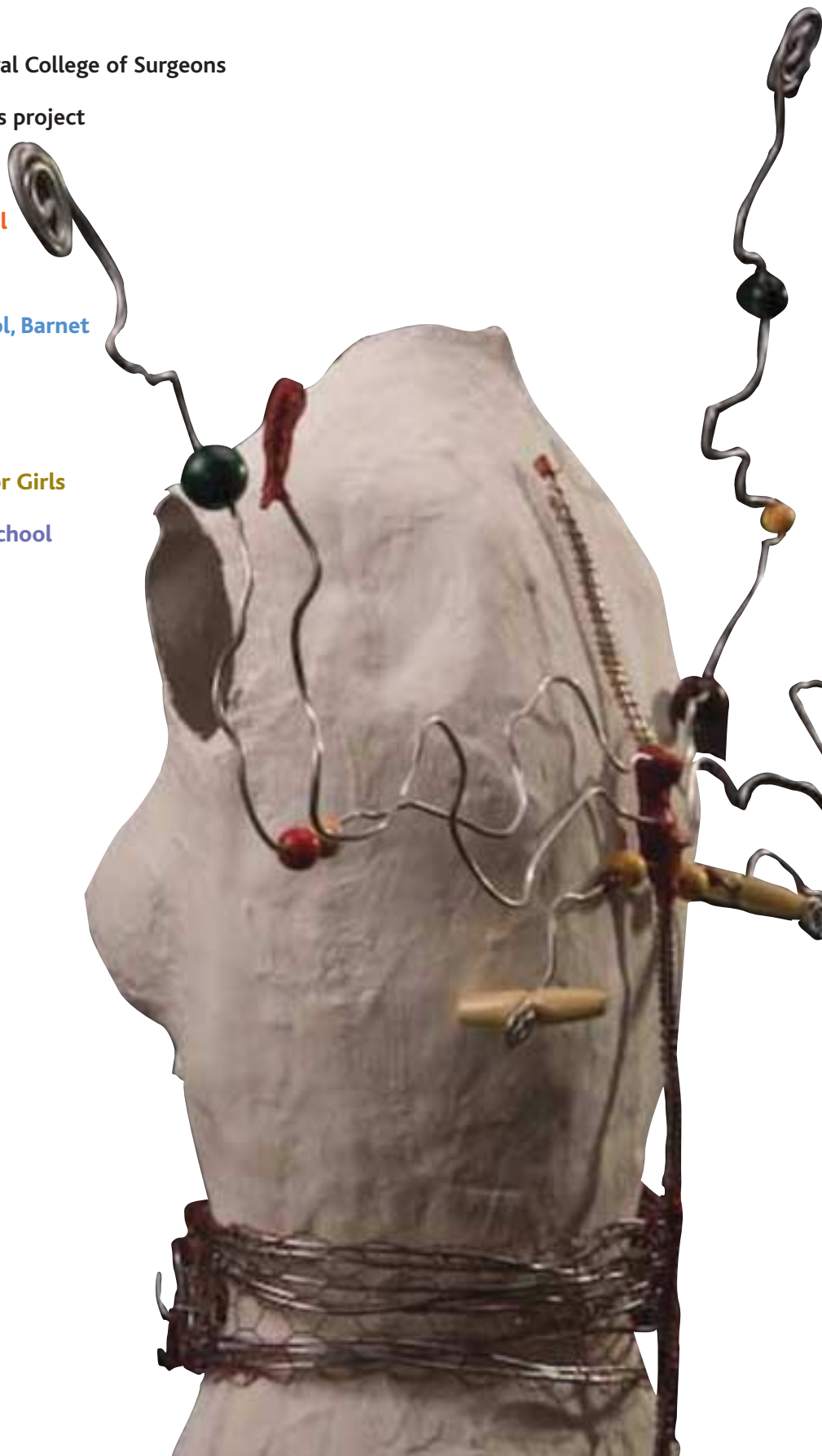
Heritage
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**Hunterian
Museum**
at the
Royal College of Surgeons



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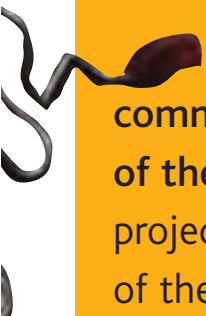
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Introduction to the Hunterian Museum

The Hunterian Museum at the Royal College of Surgeons holds the human and comparative anatomy collections of the surgeon John Hunter (1728-1793). The centrepiece of the museum is a stunning display of over 3,500 specimens owned by Hunter. Supporting exhibitions explore the background to Hunter's life and work, the development of surgery since 1800 and the history of the museum as a centre for teaching in anatomy, surgery and natural history in the 19th and 20th centuries. The museum also contains displays of paintings from John Hunter's collection, including several works by George Stubbs. The Hunterian Collection has been designated as a collection of national importance by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council.

Exhibiting Difference



In 2007 the Hunterian Museum made a unique contribution to the commemoration of the **2007 Bicentenary of the Parliamentary Abolition of the Slave Trade in the British Empire** through the Exhibiting Difference project. This was an opportunity to broaden current awareness of the history of the Transatlantic slave trade through the history of medicine and the experiences of those who were living on the margins of society.

Exhibiting Difference focused on the hidden histories of Black Africans living with skin pigmentation conditions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The project encouraged participants and visitors to explore issues of identity, self-image and cultural distinctiveness in modern society and examine their own attitudes and behaviour towards people with a visible difference both from the past and the present day.

Exploring visible difference

Exhibiting Difference project with schools

A Visible Difference: skin, race and identity 1720-1820

The Hunterian Museum worked with over 200 secondary school students aged between 11 and 15 years to create an amazing display of sculpture, painting, collage, photography, film and sound recording. Working with four professional artists, the students responded to the visual images from the exhibition 'A Visible Difference: skin, race and identity 1720-1820.

Students were encouraged to think about the people with skin pigmentation conditions shown in the exhibition, in particular the children George Alexander Gratton and Mary Sabina. The young people discussed identity, self image, and the need to respect difference and combat prejudice and discrimination. Their work represents their personal responses to and reflections on the lives of people living in the past and today with visible differences.

This booklet is a celebration of their work.

The forgotten histories of black Africans living with skin pigmentation conditions in the 18th and early 19th centuries were explored through this exhibition.

On display were two rare paintings of black African slave children. The little-known portraits depict Mary Sabina, who was born in South America in 1736, and George Alexander Gratton, who was born in St Vincent in 1808. Both children had piebaldism - a rare genetic skin pigmentation condition causing extreme white patches on the skin.

George and Mary were among many black African men, women and children with similar conditions who were exhibited at public fairs and in private "curiosity collections" as freaks of nature. These paintings illustrate the popular fascination with unusual bodies.

During the Enlightenment period when new theories about the nature of human races emerged, these skin conditions challenged established definitions and conventions. As social outcasts and medical phenomena, black people with spotted, patched or white bodies became a sought after commodity.

The exhibition sought to find out how much of this history has changed and through the contemporary voices of individuals living today with skin pigmentation conditions, whether people are not equally as curious about visible differences now, as they were two hundred years ago.



Henry Compton Secondary School

Student quotes Year 8 boys

My work was muddled up and I had my thumb in the place on my index finger and my index finger was on my wrist.

Teachers quote

The 'Exhibiting Difference' project was an excellent cross-curricular opportunity for the students at Henry Compton. The visit to the Hunterian Museum was particularly enjoyed by the boys who were fascinated by the samples on display. The final pieces of work demonstrated the impact that the project had on the students who gained a lot from the discussions around culture and identity.





*It was fun!
We used mod rock.*

*It is a hand with missing
fingers.*



*I made a model
of my hand and drew
a disfigured piece of
art work.*



Notting Hill and Ealing High School

Student quotes Year 8 girls

The colours I used expressed the envy and sadness (green and blue) at the abnormality in the face. The gold represents the true beauty.

I could do hands on things which I find easier to learn from.



Teachers quote

We feel very privileged to have been involved in the **Exhibiting Difference** project. Our resident artist, Gaynor Pelham, swept into our studio in a whirlwind of energy, enthusiasm and ideas, taking us on an unforgettable journey which started at the Hunterian Gallery. It is an exquisite collection which provided us with a wealth of resources to tackle the theme of race, identity and difference. Over six weeks, Gaynor guided the students through a range of materials and processes, like drawing from distorting mirrors and casting our faces in plaster. The results, like the collection, were haunting, thought-provoking and beautiful.

The gold shines out from the vibrant, strange, angry, different exterior to show a shining person inside.



I really enjoyed looking at the paintings of Mary and George and learning about the history of them

Northolt High School

Queen Elizabeth's Girls' School

The Bearded Boy

It's shocking
Thrilling
Prepare to be amazed
He's just a boy
But he has hair on his chin
Like a grown man
Wicked

Fantastic
Shocking
Amazing
Outstanding
Unique
Brilliant
Wonderful
Bad!

The Mermaid Girl

Come to see the mermaid girl.
Born in a mysterious, far off country
and captured by sailors.
Her mother a mermaid.
She was born like Venus from the sea.
She looks just like an ordinary girl
except her eyes are green as emeralds,
green as the waves.
And she was born with real diamonds,
glistening like teardrops around her eyes.
She's worth a fortune.
A marvel of the modern age!

To listen to the sound installations created by the schools go to the **Exhibiting Difference website** www.rcseng.ac.uk/museums/exhibiting_difference



Student quotes Year 8 girls

I learnt a lot about technology and how editing can make a recording sound different.

I got to use my creative side in my history work and it was a good experience

I learnt about different diseases and tried to make more sense about why they were like that.

Teachers quote

This was a great opportunity to work with a museum that we had not made previous links with.

The students were really proud of their end product and its final presentation while the chance to exhibit their work in the museum was a new and exciting experience for them.

Text from the sound recording

As I move through the
colourful sea
My world is horrible
I am a freak screaming
in the world
But there are doors
I can't move
And they are before me,
I cry!
I can't love my own self,
My heart is blocked by
criticism

The extraordinary spotted boy
When he looks in the mirror
how does he feel?
Different and unwanted
What does he dream about?
Being accepted for who he is



Friern Barnet School





St Augustine's Priory

Student quotes

I learnt about using a mirror to make odd faces joined together using complementary colours

I learnt thinking skills



Teachers quote

We were very pleased to be part of the **Exhibiting Difference** project and felt that the whole experience made a valuable contribution to the artistic development of our pupils. Our resident artist, Gaynor Pelham, was energetic and dynamic. She helped pupils to develop a personal insight into their creative responses to the themes of race, identity and difference. The nature of the project therefore, provided us with an opportunity to focus on issue-based artwork. The visit to the Hunterian Museum generated some super sketches and some fascinating responses that were later followed up in the art room.



I learnt how to express myself differently



I learnt about working as a team and seeing how well our ideas work together



I learnt about working with people and how they work and their different techniques

The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls

Centi-beetle - it has never been seen before with its shiny bead like body and sharp uncomfortable wings.



Student quotes Year 10 girls

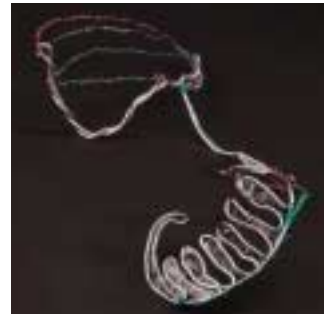
Securis hatch - The metal wires surrounding the hand symbolise the chains entrapping the desperate hands.

Teachers quote

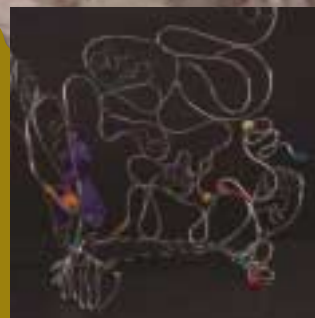
The students at The Ellen Wilkinson School for Girls were fascinated by the exhibits on display at the Hunterian Museum and provided them with some wonderful inspiration for the 'Exhibiting the Difference' project. Our artist in residence, Jacky Oliver, really inspired the girls with her work and pupils went on to develop a body adornment piece based on a series of specimens found in the collection. The girls particularly enjoyed working with the 3D materials and were overjoyed to see their work on displaying in a public place, many returning to show relatives and friends.

The whole experience deepened the students understanding of the work of the professional artists. The journey that the students undertook from the initial inspiration of seeing other artists work on display to having their own work exhibited was an enormously enriching one.





It is a symbol of the struggle of African slaves, the colours symbolise the bright person trapped inside



Jungle rush - the claws meet in the middle but don't connect as they extend beyond each other, which gives an effect of something being trapped

Twyford Church of England High School

Student quotes Year 8 boys

I learnt how to film professionally, to take good picture angles. I also learnt to think about poems and putting emotion into them.



It makes me think before asking questions about it [vitiligo] and not to think just because they've got a skin problem their life is hard!

Teachers quote

The students enjoyed this experience and were fascinated by the things they saw and learnt. It helped them to think and look beyond appearances. Now that they have gained more knowledge on this subject I think that they will be more tolerant of people with skin disorders or with different appearances. And as students are of African or Caribbean descent they are all aware of how they might be perceived by society and how that matches reality. They have become more thoughtful young people.



This will change how I behave towards people who look different because I won't be so aggressive to people who are different.

The artists

Jennie Baptiste

Jennie Baptiste was born in North-West London, her parents are from St Lucia and came to London in the sixties.

As a photographer, her work is inspired by youth culture and music in relation to her identity. She has documented many genres within youth culture. She has photographed P Diddy, Mary J Blige, Nas and Jay Z to name a few.

"I continue to be fascinated by the influence of Black Youth Culture in London. I wish to use my work to inform and educate people about Black Youth Culture outside the stereotype. So that our history is also their history, creating a greater understanding of the different cultural diversities that makes up British society here and beyond."

Her work has been shown in The V& A and is also in The National Portrait Photographic Archive. In 2007 she was featured in Russell Simmon's Art for Life annual art auction in The Hamptons, New York.

Website: www.jenniebaptiste.com

Jacky Oliver

Jacky Oliver As an artist working on a range of scales, my work has always been interested in the body and how we see ourselves. Trained as a jeweller at the Royal College of Art, my work has since grown in scale – to large architectural pieces. As well as making, working with others is an important part of my practice, I teach at a range of levels, from primary, to secondary school, through to degree level.

Jacky is currently artist in residence at Whitby Hospital and Whitby Community School and is working on a commissioned piece for Scotsdown School

Website: www.jackyoliver.co.uk

Gayna Pelham

Gayna Pelham is an artist who creates installations which the viewer can touch and interact with: precarious furniture made from springs or cities made from cards which collapse at the slightest touch. Her latest exhibition "Fully Booked" at The Novas Gallery, Southwark, involved over 10,000 books and created a world where books were the building material for creation and destruction.

For many years Gayna has combined working as an artist with lecturing at the National Gallery and the Courtauld Institute.

For more information please go to my **website: www.gaynapelham.com**

Vik

vik is an english artist interested in history, memory, and the idea of ownership – of the past, of public space, and of how one is represented. She often works with museums and archives, using art as a way to explore hidden histories.

She began as a documentary photographer, but now uses everything from photography to sound-installation to textiles to mosaic. She is interested in participatory, collaborative art, with people who don't necessarily call themselves artists.

To find out more about the Exhibiting Difference project, to view the exhibition, listen to the student's sound installations and watch the student's films go to the **Exhibiting Difference website**
www.rcseng.ac.uk/museums/exhibiting_difference