

Major UK sculpture project launches online

London, 22nd February 2019

EMBARGOED UNTIL 18.00 on 21st February 2019

Today sees the launch of Art UK's unique sculpture project. The first thousand sculptures are now available online, free of charge, to people in the UK and all over the globe via www.artuk.org. An estimated 150,000 more will follow by the end of 2020.

These first images, and their associated digital records, form part of the largest sculpture cataloguing project ever undertaken in the UK. Most sculptures in the national collection have never been photographed before. By the project's conclusion, the UK will become the first country in the world to create a free-to-access online photographic showcase of its publicly owned sculpture, for everyone's enjoyment, learning and research.

Seeing the nation's sculpture collection online will prompt a re-examination of some of the burning issues affecting society today, raising complex questions. Why are there so few sculptures of women, and what is being done to redress the balance? Is it time to rethink how we display female nude sculptures in the post-#MeToo era? How do we talk about the difficult legacies of slavery and colonialism in Britain when sculptures commemorate those who profited from them? With the backdrop of Brexit, what does our sculpture say about us as a nation?

The first records include [a sublime statue of Eve by Auguste Rodin](#) outside Nando's in Harlow, [a sculpture of the head of the Italian heiress and legendary patron of the arts, Marchesa Luisa Casati Stampa di Soncino](#), created by Sir Jacob Epstein, and [a sculpture by Robert Baden-Powell](#), the founder of the Scout Movement.

The new sculpture records will join the 200,000 oil paintings already digitised by Art UK, and a growing number of works on paper. The sculpture project is part of Art UK's ambitious drive to democratise access to the nation's public art collection, much of which is in store, and is often not easy for people to find and see.

Sculpture is often seen as the poor relation of 'flat' art – the American artist Ad Reinhardt famously teased that 'Sculpture is something you bump into when you back up to look at a painting.' Art UK's sculpture project will give this underappreciated medium the same status as the oil paintings already on the site. This will change people's perceptions and allow sculpture to take its rightful place at the centre of the art world.



Eve, bronze by Auguste Rodin (1840–1917).
Photo credit: Tracy Jenkins/Art UK.

A diverse, global collection

The UK's national collection of sculpture is drawn from across the globe, comprising works from almost every country and era over the last thousand years. The sculptures represent a wide range of diverse cultures, from fifteenth-century Nigeria and Buddhist sculpture from south-east Asia to Italian Neoclassicism and twentieth-century America. The collection reflects a strong global influence compared to the oil paintings in the national collection, which are primarily part of a European tradition.

Transforming access to sculpture

Many sculptures in the national collection have not been catalogued or photographed before. Currently, only an estimated 1% of public collections have their full sculpture collection online, while many public monuments are not fully recorded and are at risk. The project will throw into sharp relief questions about how we care for our public art.



Benin Head with Headdress, bronze by an unknown artist. Photo credit: Towner.

Opportunities to engage with sculpture are also scarce. Art UK's ambitious project will transform the way people discover and learn about their sculptural heritage. It will allow audiences to share knowledge, exchange opinions and visit sculptures – both in person and online.



Seated Figure, 1974, bronze & wood by Hannah Frank (1908–2008), © the artist's estate. Photo credit: The Glasgow School of Art.

An ongoing digitisation project

Art UK began photographing sculpture in April 2018 and new sculptures are being added to the website all the time. The sculptures that are being digitised are located inside galleries, museums and public buildings, as well as outdoors – in parks, streets and squares across the UK. A large team is travelling across the country to complete the project – dedicated and enthusiastic project staff, photographers and hundreds of volunteers.

On the Art UK website, people can see records of the sculptures in public ownership across the country and photographs of many of the key works. The site also includes additional information about the artists, the objects and subject matter. A range of writers will continue to tell the stories behind the works through online articles.

The project brings together sculptures from the length and breadth of the UK, from Shetland to the Channel Islands, from Northern Ireland to the Isle of Man. Art UK is collaborating with national collections including the V&A Museum, Tate, National Trust, Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales and National Galleries of Scotland, as well as thousands of regional and local institutions.

Learning and engagement

The sculpture project's extensive and ongoing learning and engagement programme is taking place across the country. Sixty sculpture-related films are being made with and by young people, linked to the National Curriculum. The Masterpieces in Schools initiative is taking 125 sculptures into primary and secondary schools for the day, inspiring a passion for art from a young age.

Project partners and funding

Seven partners are working alongside Art UK to deliver the sculpture project. Art UK is collaborating closely with major partner the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association (PMSA) to catalogue and photograph outdoor public sculpture. Other key partners include the BBC, Culture Street, Factum Foundation, the Royal Society of Sculptors, the Royal Photographic Society and VocalEyes.

The total cash cost of the project is expected to be £3.8m (including in-kind partner contributions this amounts to £5.2m). The National Lottery Heritage Fund has generously agreed to provide £2.8m of the funding, and Art UK successfully raised the remaining £1m from a range of donors including the Henry Moore Foundation, the Scottish Government, Arts Council England, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the Garfield Weston Foundation.

Yinka Shonibare CBE, Art UK's 2019 Patron, said, 'Art UK gives incredible access to public collections of art and I am especially pleased that Art UK will be launching the new database of sculpture online. Public sculpture is the most democratic way to share art. It transcends race, class or economic status. I very much look forward to contributing to the work of Art UK as its new Patron.'

Andrew Ellis, Art UK Director, added, 'Art UK is all about democratising access to the art owned by the British public. This project will enable a global online audience to learn about the UK's extraordinary collection of sculpture – held both inside institutions and in our streets and squares. What is immediately obvious from the sculptures now appearing online is the incredibly rich variety of artworks owned by the nation. We are very grateful to our funders for the support that has enabled this project to happen.'

Stuart Hobley, Head of The National Lottery Heritage Fund, London, said, 'Wherever you are in the UK, you can find public sculpture, quietly existing within our parks, museums and squares, yet many of us are unaware that this sort of world-class art is on our doorstep and free to access. We're delighted to support this digital platform that will make it so much easier for the public to find and engage with their nearest work.'

Sir John Lewis OBE, Chairman of the PMSA, said, 'It has long been the ambition of the PMSA to provide a complete listing of public sculpture in the UK for all to access, as easily and inexpensively as possible. Our partnership with Art UK will ensure that sculpture is given its due recognition on this digital platform that showcases the nation's art to the world.'

Press images

High-resolution images are available via Dropbox: <https://bit.ly/2UUG5mY>

Supporting content

Browse our [sculpture-themed stories and news at Art UK](#)

###ENDS###

Notes to Editors

About Art UK

Art UK is a cultural education charity on a mission to make the art in UK public collections accessible to everyone, for enjoyment, learning and research.

We enable global audiences to learn about the UK's public art collection. We digitise artworks, tell the stories behind the art and create exciting opportunities for public interaction with art, both online and offline. We play a major role in supporting public art collections, by improving their accessibility and sustainability. Although we are a relatively small charity, our platform is shared by over 3,250 UK art collections and over two million people use our website each year.

Between 2003 and 2012 Art UK digitised over 200,000 oil paintings from locations across the UK – a unique national achievement. Since September 2016, works on paper – watercolours, prints and drawings – have been progressively added to the website. The award-winning [Masterpieces in Schools](#) and [Art Detective](#) initiatives provide online and offline opportunities for learning and participation and contribute to collection knowledge.

Art UK is the operating name of the Public Catalogue Foundation, a charity registered in England and Wales (109685) and Scotland (SC048601).

To find out more, visit www.artuk.org



[@artukdotorg](#) [#ArtUKSculptureProject](#)



facebook.com/artukdotorg



instagram.com/artukdotorg

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Thanks to National Lottery players, The National Lottery Heritage Fund invests money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about – from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. www.hlf.org.uk

About the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association

The Public Monuments and Sculpture Association aims to heighten public appreciation of Britain's public sculpture, and to contribute to its preservation, protection and promotion. www.pmsa.org.uk

About R K Harrison

R K Harrison designs insurance solutions for private collectors, museums, gallery owners and art dealers. We are proud to provide insurance cover for the sculpture project, in particular the Masterpieces in Schools initiative. www.rkharrison.com

About Hiscox

Hiscox is a global specialist insurer, headquartered in Bermuda and listed on the London Stock Exchange (LSE:HSX). We are proud to provide insurance cover for the sculpture project, in particular the Masterpieces in Schools initiative. www.hiscoxgroup.com

For more information please contact:

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Available for interview

Andrew Ellis, Director of Art UK
Professor David Ekserdjian, Art UK Trustee
Katey Goodwin, Art UK Deputy Director, Head of Digitisation and Public Engagement
Clare Lilley, Director of Programme, Yorkshire Sculpture Park and Art UK Trustee
Yinka Shonibare, artist and Art UK Patron 2019
Bob and Roberta Smith RA, artist and Art UK Trustee

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