

New exhibition exploring missing stories of the disabled experience opens at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery

Wednesday 4 June, 2025

- **Watch Us Lead** is a new exhibition by multi-disciplinary artist Christopher Samuel
- Exhibition highlights the disabled experience in Birmingham
- It features newly recorded interviews with disabled people of colour in the city, as well as stained glass and drawings.

Birmingham Museums is pleased to announce the opening of a new exhibition exploring missing stories of the disabled experience on Thursday 5 June 2025 at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery.

Through nine newly recorded interviews for the city of Birmingham's collection, *Watch Us Lead* by artist Christopher Samuel highlights the experiences of disabled people of colour in Birmingham.

The exhibition combines their stories with stained glass and drawings by Christopher that investigate themes of stigma, belonging and agency, reflecting significant moments in the lives of the individuals featured.

It also includes a selection of objects that the artist has selected from Birmingham's own collection and from the Birmingham-based Midland Mencap Archive, to build a fuller picture of the historic disabled experience in the city.

Christopher Samuel is a multi-disciplinary artist whose practice is rooted in identity and disability politics.

Often echoing the many facets of his own lived experience as a Black disabled man, his work tells stories, highlighting the often-unseen experiences of his day-to-day life and those of others in similar circumstances.

His practice includes small, detailed ink drawings, film, print, audio, research and large installations.

This exhibition aims to spark conversations around the ongoing issues of under-representation, autonomy and the real disabled experience.

The commission was made possible by University of the Arts London's (UAL) three-year 20/20 programme led by UAL Decolonising Arts Institute, with funding from Freelands Foundation, Arts Council England and UAL.

As part of 20/20, Christopher Samuel undertook a 15-month paid residency with Birmingham Museums during 2023 and 2024, leading to the production of this artwork for the city's permanent collection.

Speaking about the exhibition, Christopher said:

"The realisation of how important making this body of work is was highlighted for me through the barriers I encountered to deliver this work - showing that the system has not historically been set up to preserve stories or voices like mine.

"The 20/20 residency programme has been profoundly transformative. Everybody at Birmingham Museums Trust has been massively supportive and fully engaged with my aims and the drive for change.

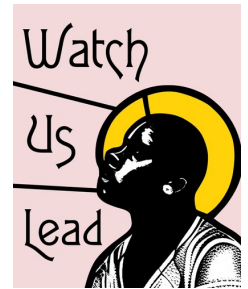
"I feel immense gratitude toward all who made it possible—the mentors who guided me, the peers who inspired me and the collaborators who shared this vision for change. Without this collective support, neither the work I created nor the personal growth I experienced would have been achievable.

"I hope this exhibition creates new connections between Birmingham Museums and the diverse - and often culturally disengaged - communities which it serves."

Sara Wajid, co-chief executive of Birmingham Museums Trust, said:

"It was an honour for us to host Christopher's residency at Birmingham Museums and to be selected to be part of the national 20/20 project to address racial inequality in our artistic heritage and collections.

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“Christopher's work is exquisite, playful, provocative and joyous and I am delighted to see the opening of his new exhibition as part of our ongoing commitment to social justice and artistic excellence.”

Professor susan pui san lok, director of University of Arts London's Decolonising Arts Institute, said:

“It has been a pleasure and privilege to work with Christopher and Birmingham Museums colleagues and to support their inspiring artistic and collection practices.

“We are immensely proud that the 20/20 residencies have led to 20 permanent acquisitions across the UK, contributing to the ongoing work of catalysing change in collections.

“We continue to learn with our artists and partners, and I can't wait for audiences to experience Christopher's wonderful work.

Watch Us Lead will be on display in the Contemporary Voices space at Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery from Thursday 5 June.

Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery is open Wednesday to Sunday from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm. Admission is free.

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