



Artist Michele Allen, who has recently completed an artist in residence scheme, funded by the Leverhulme Trust and hosted by Northumbria University.

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Region's charitable history explored in exhibition

An exhibition exploring the history and legacy of philanthropy in the North East is currently taking place in Newcastle.

Entitled 'A Brief Compendium of Named and Unnamed Objects', the exhibition includes photographs, archive material and a handmade book, all documenting some of the many people, places and activities associated with philanthropic giving in the region.

It is the result of a nine month-long artist in residence scheme, funded by the Leverhulme Trust and hosted by Northumbria University.

The exhibits have been created by artist Dr Michele Allen in collaboration with social scientist Dr Siobhan Daly, of Northumbria. They include materials from the archives of the Natural History Society of Northumbria, as well as a handmade book, created by Michele with help from the volunteer book repair group at the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle.

Siobhan has written on the subject of philanthropy, thinking in particular about how it is defined and the role philanthropy plays in our social and cultural lives. Speaking about the exhibition, she said: “This project set out to explore the legacy of philanthropy in North East England, thinking in particular about different impressions people have of philanthropy as well as definitions of philanthropy and some of the tensions those definitions reveal.

“Is philanthropic work solely defined by wealthy donors? Is it simply about the donation of money or should we consider philanthropy in the full spirit of voluntary action? How can we reveal the full spectrum of philanthropic work, which is often invisible? In this way, we wanted to encourage people to talk about philanthropy and what it means to the region.”

Michele added: “This exhibition and book is a document of the sites, archives, donations and voluntary work we have encountered in trying to explore these ideas. It reveals the diversity of the activity we have found; though it must be stressed, what is contained here is only a fraction of what could have been included.

“Since some of our research has drawn on materials held in the archives of the Natural History Society, focussing in particular on the numerous donations of both time, money and objects which fed into the creation of the Hancock Museum, alongside other public institutions and parks, this library seemed a fitting place to exhibit the work.”

The exhibition builds on Michele’s previous artistic projects, Public and Private (2015-16) and For the Elevation of Man (2013-16), which explored ideas related to government, culture and public space. In the latter, Michele documented numerous sites in Newcastle, which were changing, or being sold as a result of cuts to local government funding. These spaces were often public parks, libraries galleries and leisure facilities and during the project,

she discovered that many had originally been philanthropic donations. This sparked an interest in the motivation behind these philanthropic gifts and the values they embodied.

The new project has developed these ideas further by identifying and exploring sites in the city with philanthropic histories. Throughout the research, Michele and Siobhan engaged with different groups in the city, including artists, academics and volunteers. As well as photographing numerous sites in around Newcastle, they also conducted research in the archives of the Natural History Society of Northumbria, Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, North East of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers and the library of the Lit and Phil.

Michele added: “Our thanks must go to the many volunteers, archivists and librarians who have shared their knowledge with us as part of this work. We had generous support from the Archivist and volunteers at the Natural History Society of Northumbria and the society of Bookbinders based at the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle who shared their considerable skill in assisting with the production of the book as well as allowing me to document the work their group does.”

“We would also like to thank Northumbria University for hosting the residency and all the staff and technicians who have supported this work, in particular Oliver Moss for instigating the project.”

The exhibition, A Brief Compendium of Named and Unnamed Objects, by Michele Allen is on display at the Great North Museum: Hancock library until 3 March. Opening times are 10am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. For more information, please visit <https://greatnorthmuseum.org.uk/whats-on/a-brief-compdium-of-named-and-unnamed-objects>

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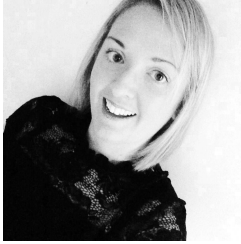


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