

PITT RIVERS MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD
NEWS RELEASE – For immediate release

Pitt Rivers Museum puts LGBTIAQ+ voices at the heart of new exhibition

Beyond the Binary: Gender, Sexuality, Power

1 June 2021- 22 April 2022

www.prm.ox.ac.uk/event/beyond-the-binary

1 June 2021- As part of the Pitt Rivers Museum's commitment to stand as an ally with LGBTIAQ+ communities and to continue the process of opening up to new voices and perspectives, the Museum has opened a new exhibition *Beyond the Binary: Gender, Sexuality, Power*. Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, *Beyond the Binary* puts LGBTIAQ+ stories told by LGBTIAQ+ people at the heart of the Museum – from its public galleries to its digital databases.

In *Beyond the Binary: Gender Sexuality, Power*, Pitt Rivers Museum celebrates the strength and agency of LGBTIAQ+ communities and supports individuals and groups in challenging societal binaries around gender, sexuality and power dynamics.

This unique exhibition explores the lived experience of members of the LGBTIAQ+ communities, who co-curated the content, telling their own very personal stories. The exhibition looks at LGBTIAQ+ representation and ideas of gender, using material from across the globe and from many historical periods, including items from the ancient world. Objects and images selected from the collections are displayed alongside loaned and newly-collected contemporary artworks and protest ephemera.

The Museum regularly displays exhibitions on issues relevant to local communities and to our wider visitor audience and has been working on the *Beyond the Binary* project with LGBTQA+ community members since 2016. Co-produced with over 40 community partners, the exhibition was created by making the Museum's collections available to help uncover and narrate deeply personal stories, challenging the conventional silencing of queer voices.

The result is an innovative exhibition that contests the notion that LGBTIAQ+ lives are a western invention, a new trend or that queer people do not have history. It asks visitors to consider the binary groupings that we are often categorised into (e.g. male/female, straight/gay, victor/victim) and how these rigid groups do not work for many of us, often causing feelings of oppression, exclusion and pain. *Beyond the Binary* asks us to look beyond oppression and features some of the ways people have reclaimed power over their bodies and sexual and gender identities, forging thriving communities. It intentionally challenges traditional methods of curation, choosing to highlight the authors behind the texts and remind the audience that the exhibition is about personal, lived-experiences.

The exhibition is shaped around four sections: *Indigenous Power, Countering Colonialism; Rituals and Identity; Representation and Activism; and Objects of Power*. There is also a library space for additional resources and an area where visitors can provide feedback.

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- *Indigenous Power, Countering Colonialism* focuses on diverse sexual and gender identities that flourished before colonial laws and attitudes all but erased them, and how, despite the invading colonial 'norm', they survived and now thrive. Objects in this section range from a historic Native American octopus bag to a contemporary traffic light filter from New Zealand.
- *Rituals and Identity* draws out common life experiences and rituals, such as marriage, becoming a parent and wearing clothes. This section asks visitors to think about how looking at familiar objects, such as baby shoes or a top hat, in new ways can reveal hidden histories and diverse identities, such as different types of family units and gender-fluid modes of dress.
- *Representation and Activism* looks at how important it is for LGBTIAQ+ voices to control their own representation in spaces like museums. It advocates that museums should not speak *about* people but make space for them to present their own stories. This section covers contemporary LGBTIAQ+ activism, with striking artworks, including a phone box painted in the colours of the Trans flag.
- *Objects of Power* shows a range of historical and contemporary objects, including well-known mythological and religious figures that might not have been considered queer originally but have been claimed as icons by the community, such as Francis of Assisi and Joan of Arc.

Museums are rooted in colonialism, and some histories and voices have for too long been ignored, erased or omitted. In a time of challenging politics – nationally and globally – the Pitt Rivers Museum is standing as an ally with LGBTIAQ+ communities around the globe. We hope this exhibition is a positive step in tackling oppression, which LGBTIAQ+ communities often feel in spaces such as museums. We will continue to make changes to our permanent displays and how we work with communities and partners after the project ends.

Events and Activities: To connect the themes of the exhibition to audiences in exciting, engaging ways, community partners have worked with the Museum to develop a vibrant events programme, which includes audio-described tours, and activities from clay workshops and family-friendly storytelling to talks on LGBTIAQ+ activism in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and reclaiming queer identities in Aotearoa, New Zealand. [Download the full events programme here.](#)

About the Beyond the Binary Project: The exhibition – and the *Beyond the Binary* Project which it is part of – sets out to reflect on material from across the globe and from many historical periods, that was already in the Museum collections but also to commission and where appropriate, collect new material to add contemporary queer perspectives.

Funders: The project's major funder is the [National Lottery Heritage Fund](#). [TORCH](#) have supported the project's digital event series.

Community Curators: Rebecca Colmer; Catherine de Guise (She/Her); Harriet Haugvik (She/Her); Dan Laurin (He/Him); Lance Millar (He/Him, They/Them); Shakira Morar (She/Her); Zoe Nunn (She/Her); Meg Roberts (She/Her); Matthew Scott; Sophie Seeyave (She/Her); Cameron Wallis (He/Him, They/Them).

Project Team: Project Officer, Hannah Bruce (She/They); Project Researcher, Mara Gold; Project Curator, Jozie Kettle (She/Her); Head of Public Engagement, Andy McLellan, Collections and Exhibitions Officer, Olivia Sharrard (She/Her); Social Media Assistant, Cameron Wallis (He/Him, They/Them).

Other Contributors: Beth Asbury (She/Her); Braudie Blais-Billie; ButCH; Dotty Clay (They/Them); Sarah-Joy Ford; Thomas Hendriks; Jason Kattenhorn; Jenna Lee (She/Her); Kelsey Lee; Jessica McMann (She/Her); Oxfordshire Drag Collective; Régis Samba-Kounzi; Suzy Prior; Jon Sleigh (He/Him); @stickersftw; Stonewall; Trans Happiness Is Real; Valentino Vecchiotti (She/Her, They/Them); Elijah Wells (He/Him); Patrick Wolf; Ela Xora; Beyond the Binary Young Filmmakers; My Normal.

Special thanks to the public who attended the project and exhibition development workshops and events, to the Pitt Rivers team who have supported the exhibition in countless ways, and to the *Beyond the Binary* Steering Group.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

For further information or image requests or to visit the Museum, please contact Louise Hancock, Marketing & Press Officer, Pitt Rivers Museum, louise.hancock@prm.ox.ac.uk

Images can be downloaded at the link below. All images are © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. Where possible, photographer (noted in image name) should be credited.

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6gs5snhbg77qmk4/AAAITLedBM2NS1DeNpkHaibVa?dl=0>

About the Pitt Rivers Museum

The Pitt Rivers Museum is one of the leading museums of anthropology, ethnography and archaeology in the world. Established in 1884, it now has over 500,000 items in its collections and is in the top 100 most visited museums in the UK, welcoming over 480,000 in 2019. The Museum was shortlisted for the Art Fund Museum of the Year 2019 for its creative programmes of reinvention and reinterpretation, which show a much-loved Victorian space challenging perceptions and demonstrating the vital role museums can play in contemporary society.

Founding Aims of the *Beyond the Binary* Project

1. Collaborate with partners to bring varied LGBTIAQ+ lived experiences, stories and histories into the heart of the Pitt Rivers Museum.
2. Be a space in which difficult histories, including the impact of colonialism on queer lives across the globe, can be reflected on, acknowledged and the legacy of colonialism in the present, including in the museum space, disrupted.
3. Work co-creatively with local, national and international partners to highlight human histories that are currently under-represented in the Pitt Rivers Museum and at heritage sites in general.
4. Develop and test an ethical framework for collecting by working with partners to acquire new items that highlight and celebrate traditions of gender and sexuality non-conformity, and items that communicate the continuing impact of colonial ways of categorising and regulating sex and gender in today's world.
5. Explore the effectiveness of adopting a non-binary approach to curating, collecting and museum engagement work, where questioning and a multiplicity of perspectives within interpretation is central, and a singular curatorial voice and presenting absolute answers is challenged.
6. Shape Pitt Rivers Museum as a welcoming space so that no individual or group feels excluded from the Museum because of their sexuality or gender, and so that all visitors, however they might identify themselves, can understand humanity better.
7. Co-creative approaches will inform all areas of work, with project partners shaping all areas of the project in meaningful ways.
8. Takeover the Museum's programming, collaborating with community partners to develop events, activities and interventions that will generate awareness and visibility of LGBTIAQ+ heritage.
9. Recognising the Museum's limitations and gaps in our knowledge, expertise and experience, we'll work with partners to examine our own practices and biases and to ensure that expertise from people with LGBTIAQ+ lived experiences shape the project as it develops.
10. Ensure that learning from the project will inform not only the policies and practices of the Pitt Rivers Museum but also our partnership museums locally and nationally.

FAQS

Download a list of FAQs and further information & reading [here](#).