

THE GIFTS

TABATHA ANDREWS



The Gifts is a socially-engaged, multisensory sculpture made for and with learning-disabled and neurodiverse communities of Exeter to form a lasting community legacy. It was made by sculptor Tabatha Andrews and co-created through the artist's long-running relationship with Freefall+, a group of young adults with a range of learning disabilities who meet weekly at Exeter Phoenix to engage with the arts in an inclusive space.

It was commissioned by Exeter Phoenix as part of Tabatha's wider, 2025 Arts Council funded project, The Slightest Gesture, a sculpture, dance and film project. The work now resides at EP Sidwell St (an Exeter Phoenix off-site project space) under the care of Pelican Projects, a collective of adult learning-disabled members, families, teachers and partner organisations offering regular groups, projects and social activities that reduce isolation and raise quality of life.

The work is available for learning-disabled and neurodiverse communities of Exeter to access, use and enjoy as a lasting legacy of the project.



About Tabatha Andrews

Tabatha Andrews is a sculptor and installation artist who works across diverse media. Her work explores the relationships between memory, materials and the observer. Creating experiences that question how we communicate through the senses, her works are immersive, tactile, and invite mental and physical interaction. Her projects are often socially engaged and collaborative, building relationships with a wide variety of diverse communities and contexts. Tabatha also works with arts in health and the sciences, exploring connections between craft, play, memory loss, sensory perception and language acquisition. She has worked with cathedrals, hospitals, composers, scientists, communities with diverse needs, singers and local craft groups.

The Slightest Gesture is a socially-engaged sculpture, dance and film project by Tabatha Andrews, made with learning-disabled and neurodiverse communities of Exeter. Tabatha is running the project in collaboration with Exeter Phoenix, Pelican Projects and Southwest Dance Hub with workshop support from West Dean College of Arts. The commission has enabled the artist to pursue new ways of working, exploring deep experiential questions about how sculpture can be encountered and what these experiences may mean to different people.





About Freefall+

Freefall+ supports young people who have a physical and learning disabilities, are no longer in education, and have complex support needs. The group offers an inclusive space to come together to explore the arts, to create and to access the networks of support that Exeter Phoenix facilitates through its role as a creative hub in the city. The group's dynamic offer is delivered in partnership with The Pelican Project CIC and is constantly evolving to support a diverse spectrum of need and ambition, from workshops that explore the tactility of materials to individually tailored sessions that support those who have their own emerging creative practices. Freefall+ is entirely funded through generous gifts and donations from our visitors and supporters.



About South West Dance Hub

South West Dance Hub is an inspirational space for professional dance artists and choreographers to share, learn, grow, support and be supported through facilitated sessions that include contemporary techniques, improvisation and choreographic exercises. Their mission is to nurture talent, foster collaboration, and push the boundaries of dance innovation. They aim to elevate local talent and create vibrant performances that resonate with communities.



Project Feedback and Reflections

How can sculpture be a participatory act and inspire communication, curiosity and joy?

This commission aims to consolidate some of the work Exeter Phoenix has been doing around reverse inclusion to explore a more universal attitude to audience/user experiences of art, rather than retrospectively addressing accessibility for particular communities.

“The Pelican Project have created an amazingly supportive environment for this work, enabling the activities in the workshops to build resilience and choice in the artists’ creativity and daily lives.” - Tabatha Andrews

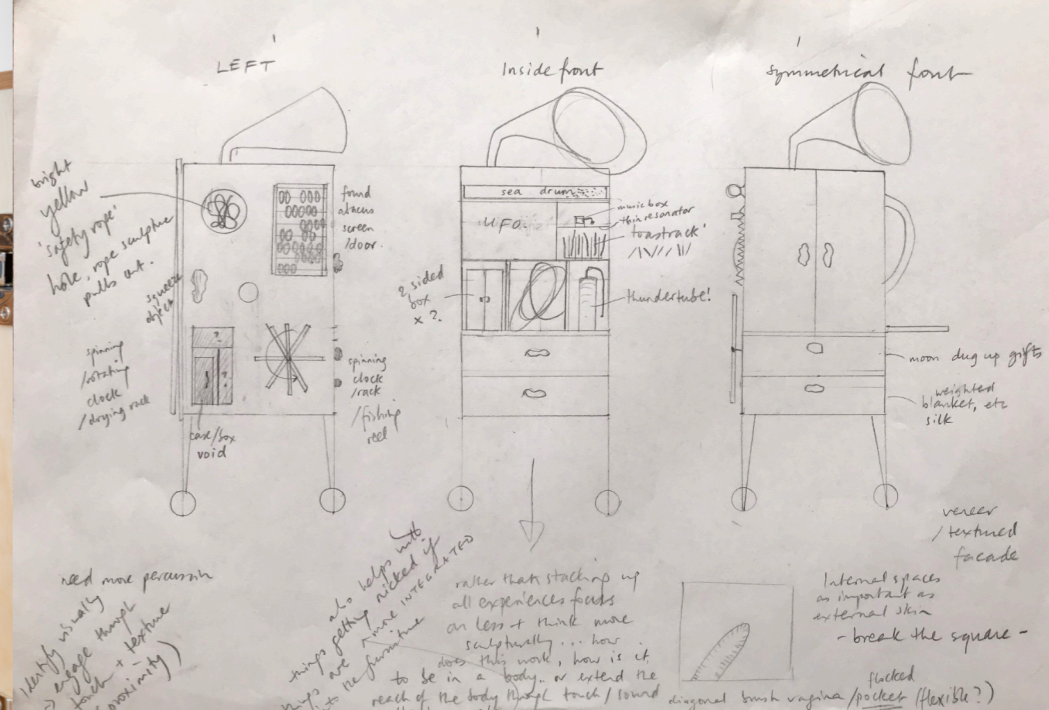
How can sculpture operate differently for artists with complex needs?

The Gifts were launched with a sharing event at Exeter Phoenix, where friends, family, and participants in the project were invited to take a first look at the completed commission and engage with it. The work was then moved to Positive Light Projects where it is now housed, and members of the Pelican Project SenseArt group have been using it in their sessions.

“For us the real value of The Gifts lies in how it positions our members not as recipients of inclusion, but as leaders within their creative community. Through sustained collaboration with Tabatha Andrews, and access to quality materials, processes and professional artistic relationships, our members gained meaningful experience and agency, and in return, they taught the artist and audiences about the nature of their multisensory interpretation, non-verbal communication, and embodied ways of knowing. Since the work’s arrival at Positive Light Projects, it has been striking to see its resonance with people from so-called ‘mainstream’ backgrounds, reminding us that sensory curiosity is something we all hold, but often forget. At The Pelican Project, we value this work for resisting fixed blueprints of inclusion: The Gifts quite literally holds the physical impressions of our members at its centre. A huge thank you to Exeter Phoenix, Tabatha Andrews and SouthWest Dance Hub for making this collaboration possible, and to our members for shaping an experience that has been generous, transformative, and deeply instructive for us all.” - Charlie Robinson, The Pelican Project

“Thank you for making sure my boy is not forgotten. Through The Gifts, his ways of experiencing and expressing the world have been given space, value and permanence, and it means everything to see him recognised as part of Exeter’s creative life.” - D, Liam’s Mum





Contents

Creating immersive experiences that both unsettle and enthrall the senses, The Gifts explore how we communicate and create meaning through objects and materials. The series of objects explore material, formal, sonic and haptic sculptural qualities, and can be interacted with in a range of ways.

They celebrate everyday gestures, however small, and find ways these gestures can become sculptural form through materials; gestures of routine, of care, repetition, joy or exhaustion. The objects can act as a score, inspiring a new movement or choreography – they can create a sort of internal 'bodily imaginary' through senses other than sight, bypassing verbal language.

Housed within an overall 'mother' structure that forms the complete work, objects can be accessed through a range of drawers, hooks and portholes, the structure itself housing elements that create sound, can be peered through, and interacted with.



Access and use

The work is available for learning-disabled and neurodiverse communities of Exeter to access, use and enjoy as a lasting legacy of the project.

If you are a community group and are interested in experiencing The Gifts please get in touch by emailing either George Barron - george@positivelightprojects.com or Charlie Robinson - charlie@pelicanproject.org.uk to arrange a time to visit.

With thanks to

Tabatha Andrews, Freefall+, The Pelican Project, South West Dance Hub, Jack Riley Trust, Arts Council England, Positive Light Projects.



