

# MESSUMS

YORKSHIRE

LONDON

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Dame Elisabeth Frink RA (1930 – 1993)  
Man is an Animal

MESSUMS WILTSHIRE  
26 September - 16 January 2022

*I think all art is an instrument of change through awareness. One of the most important things about art – and I don't mean sculpture, I mean all the arts – is that it must be a civilising influence. That is its main value: to make people aware of all sorts of different areas of their minds.*

Elisabeth Frink interviewed by Sarah Kent, 1992

*Man is an Animal* is the most extensive collection of large-scale sculptures by Dame Elisabeth Frink to be shown in this country since the artist's death in April 1993. Loaned from various institutions and private collectors, it was first exhibited at the Gerhard Marcks Haus Museum in Bremen, Germany. The exhibition explores axioms of tension, threat, intensity and mankind's atavistic tendencies within Frink's figurative representational sculpture. It presages how her work continues to be resonant of her time as well as function as a carapace to our contemporary concerns.

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*[Frink] believed that traditional patterns of expectation had a lot to do with the fact that men tend to be more fixated on power than women. "I think the male obsession with power is something they have been brought up with," Frink said in an interview with [Sarah] Kent, "it is put upon them."*

Feico Hosktra

This exhibition allows for a contemporary reflection on the duality of masculinity and the contrasts and conflicts that it entails, whilst also revealing the timelessness of Frink's expressionist figurative oeuvre. It highlights her almost unique insight - as a female sculptor - into the dichotomy of masculinity and of Man's capability for cruelty as well as compassion and includes works made from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, when Frink was in the height of her artistic prowess. Sculptures which include her *Riace* figures, *Running Man*, *Judas* and *Seated Man*, which have never before been shown together in this country.

*Judas* (1963), loaned by Yorkshire Sculpture Park, is a figurative embodiment of betrayal and a demonstration of Frink's ability to convey the nature of Man. Created before her *Goggle Head* series (examples of which also feature in the exhibition) there is a kind of shield over the eyes in *Judas*, foreshadowing that art that was to come. At the time, many of the works created at Woolland were seen as romanticised pieces and regarded with little attention or respect, but they have become some of her most well known and loved works. Bryan Robertson, former director of the Tate who hold a significant collection of Frink's works, described her "as an artist with great courage, integrity and style, someone who gambled continually against the odds both in work – against stylistic fashion, or any kind of comfortable or ingratiating image – and in her life."

As she said herself in a 1992 interview with Sarah Kent (a recording of which will be playing within the exhibition), "art is an instrument of change through awareness" and it is this very quality that allows her work to be as relevant today as it was sixty years ago – acting as both a reflection on our shared past as well as channelling today's concerns.

Elisabeth Frink was born in Thurlow in Suffolk and spent her formative years in war-time East Anglia. She studied at the Guildford School of Art (1946–49) and at the Chelsea School of Art (1949–53) and remained resolutely an expressionist figurative artist against the prevailing trends of her time. She died prematurely in 1993 at the age of 62 and was widely admired in her lifetime; a Royal Academician, a Dame and a Companion of Honour. There was a major exhibition of her work at the Royal Academy in London in 1983 and a posthumous show at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in 1994. More recent exhibitions include the Lightbox in Woking (2013) and at the Djanogly Gallery in Nottingham (2015), which focused on her public commissions. In 2020 Messums Wiltshire presented *A Place Apart*, an exhibition of her working plasters and making processes. Frink is represented in major collections in the UK, notably a substantial collection at Tate who purchased a work from her first exhibition in 1952. In 2020 the Sainsbury Centre acquired 29 sculptures and drawings by Frink after the exhibition *Elisabeth Frink: Humans and Other Animals* after her late son Lin Jammet requested that there be a permanent collection of Frink's work in the Suffolk region where she was born. *Man is an Animal* also comes to the South West in the same year that Dorset County Museum has reopened its doors after a £16.4 million refurbishment, allowing for the creation of a gallery dedicated to Elisabeth Frink and the creation of an archive.

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*Man is an Animal* is a significant exhibition made possible with loans from Dorset County Hospital Charity, Dorset County Museum, Elisabeth Frink's grandsons, The Ingram Collection of Modern British Art, Victoria Gallery & Museum, University of Liverpool, The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts and Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield and the support of the Members of Messums Wiltshire and Patrons. It is accompanied by a full colour catalogue.

## **Press Launch**

Friday 24 September 2pm

To attend please email [press@messumswiltshire.com](mailto:press@messumswiltshire.com)

## **INTERGRATED PROGRAMMING:**

Dame Elisabeth Frink was one of the most celebrated British sculptors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. She died in 1993 and the recordings made during her lifetime are now one of the few ways audiences are able to gain greater insight into her life and working practice.

With the support of the Dorset History Centre, the exhibition will feature important recordings of Frink interviewed by both Sarah Kent and Bryan Robertson. These audios reside in the critical archives of the Dorset History Centre, and the British Library where they are rarely enjoyed by the public. Both the recorded interviews and screened films allow us access to her voice and to understand intimately how she saw and felt about her work.

FRINK 1930 – 1993

Produced by Mick Csaky

Copyright Antelope South Limited, 1993

50.46 mins

Elisabeth Frink at Woolland

Produced by BBC South, 1995

Courtesy BBC South

3.15 mins

National Life Stories Artists' Lives

Dame Elisabeth Frink Interviewed by Sarah Kent, 1992

Third Ear,

Dame Elisabeth Frink interviewed by Bryan Robertson, 1989

On view daily throughout the exhibition

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## ADDITIONAL PROGRAMMING

Saturday 25 September, 10.30am

**Talk with Dr Arie Hartog**, Gerhard Marcks Haus, Bremen and curator of *Man is an Animal*

Friday 15 October, 6.30pm

### **Frink in the 21st Century**

Helen Pheby (Yorkshire Sculpture Park), Jo Baring (Ingram Collection) and Calvin Winner (Sainsbury Centre of Visual Arts)

Friday 29 October, 7pm

### **Bridgepoint Ensemble**

A gala night responding to the music collection of Elisabeth Frink with Sarah Gabriel, Viv McLean (piano), Ruth Rogers (violin) playing music from Beethoven, Gershwin, Ella Fitzgerald and Carmen

Friday 5 November, 6.30pm

### **Public Sculpture – What's the Point?**

Annette Ratuszniak (former curator of the Frink Estate and Archive), Isabel de Vasconsellos (author of *Fourth Plinth: How London Created the Smallest Sculpture Park in the World*)

### **Bridget McCrum – New Works**

25 September – 28 November  
(Messums Wiltshire, Pod)

### **Ti Parks - A retrospective survey**

3 December – 9 January  
(Messums Wiltshire, Long Gallery)

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### **Dame Elisabeth Frink (1930 – 1993)**

**Man is an Animal**

**26 September - 16 January 2022**

**Messums Wiltshire**

### **About Messums Wiltshire**

Messums Wiltshire is a leading multi-purpose gallery and arts centre. It has become a platform for creative expression across artistic genre and a meeting point of minds to explore how art as a language is made, interpreted, resolved and shared.

Opened in Autumn 2016 after a two-year restoration project to bring a thirteenth century tithe barn, the largest thatched building on the country, back to life as an exhibition and event space. The gallery's one year anniversary was marked with the opening of the Long Gallery,

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a former dairy that lies perpendicular to the main barn to present two-dimensional works of art and objects of scale as well as The Mess Restaurant. The exterior landscape was remodelled in 2020 with sculpture grounds and outside seating,

In 2020 we opened a Membership Programme to help support the ambitious artistic programming in Wiltshire, including international artist residencies, Contemporary Dance premiers and educational workshops. Messums Creative sees the act of physical making, often lacking in a digital world, brought back into focus via our Ceramic workshops, which have been running since Summer 2021.



In summer 2020 Messums Wiltshire exhibited 'A Place Apart', which saw the resurrection of Elisabeth Frink's historic Woolland studio. The building, which Messums rescued from collapse in 2019, was reconstructed to display a collection of original plasters alongside tools and objects salvaged from Woolland, providing a never seen before insight into her creative process.

Frink lived and worked at Woolland, Dorset from 1977 up until her death aged 63 in 1993, and her studio there bore witness to over a decade of prolific drawing and sculpting. It was revived as an exhibition space displaying works from her studio and elements of her working practice and environment. 'A Place Apart' was adapted from a longer quote by Frink that includes the following words: 'I could not work without a place where I am able to shut myself off... This is the place where I work, I have to keep it apart from everything else.'

Our Active Environmentalism programming, a series of talks from leading minds and thinkers, aims to inform our individual thinking around collective decisions. From better understanding nature at the seabed and upwards, to rationalising how a price can be put on environmental practices, the thinking at the intersection of science and necessity sits closely with the problem solving inherent in the creative process.

Underpinning all of this is an appreciation and respect for nature to which most artists and individuals will readily align and the prospect of innovation runs like creativity itself at the vanguard of our thoughts.

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Messums Wiltshire is an independent business run by a team led by Johnathan Messum and maintains a number of galleries supporting the promotion of modern and contemporary arts. These venues currently include Messums London on Cork Street, and Messums Yorkshire on James Street in Harrogate.

**For further information on the life and work of Elisabeth Frink and her exhibitions at Messums, please visit**

**<https://messumslondon.com/elisabeth-frink-messums/>**

**For press enquiries please email: [press@messumswiltshire.com](mailto:press@messumswiltshire.com)**

**For further information on the wider artistic programming please email: [hannah.hooks@messumswiltshire.com](mailto:hannah.hooks@messumswiltshire.com)**