

Exciting Exhibition on Disability History

Re-Framing Disability: Portraits from the Royal College of Physicians

14 February to 8 July 2011, Royal College of Physicians

28 July to 29 September Shape Deane House Studios London

www.rcplondon.ac.uk/re-framing-disability

Disability history is a growing field, and increasingly gains attention from the media, general public, and the academic community alike. It is one of the few fields that has immediate resonance with almost everyone who has ever felt isolated by their appearance or by health problems. It is also helping to demonstrate the inheritance and adaption of ideas about the health, identity, and the cultural visibility of disabled people from past societies. Following on from the influential '*Buried in the Footnotes: The Representation of Disabled People in Museum and Gallery Collections*' project (2002-3), the Royal College of Physicians and Shape, the Disability-Led Arts organisation (<http://www.shapearts.org.uk>), have put together an innovated, and fully accessible exhibition to look at these issues.

Re-framing Disability: Portraits from the Royal College of Physicians features 28 historical portraits of disabled people held within the RCP collections, set next to the images and voices of disabled people discussing the portraits and their identities today. The striking historical portraits show disabled men and women of all ages and from all sections of society, many of whom earned a living exhibiting themselves to the public. The portraits and biographies of these individuals were researched and presented by the organisers and by Julie Anderson of the Disability History Group (<http://www.disabilityhistory.co.uk>).

Bridget Telfer, project curator at the RCP, highlights the three main questions of the exhibition:

Are we as curious about difference as we were 400 years ago?

Are there more positive images of disabled people today?

Do contemporary disabled people have more control over how they are represented?

As part of the exhibition, 27 focus-group participants were asked to discuss the historical portraits and biographies of the individuals on display, and to discuss implication of the portraits on contemporary depictions of disability. As part of this process, the participants were invited to be filmed and photographed: all of which is now on display alongside the historical images. The photographic portraits of the participants were created by disabled photographer Lynn Weddle, who used a shutter release cable to give the sitter control over how they appeared on camera. A short film interviewing the participants was also created by Deaf film makers Ted Evans and Bim Ajadi: it is available on the exhibition website, www.rcplondon.ac.uk/re-framing-disability

Exhibition Opening Times:

The Royal College of Physicians

14 February to 8 July

Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm

(booking advisable, groups of three or more people by appointment only).

1 March, 11 May, 7 June: Late night opening 6pm–8pm

Including a free 30-minute guided tour of the RCP's Grade 1 listed building and collections at 6.30pm. BSL-interpreted tour 11 May. No booking needed.

16 April: Saturday opening 10am–2pm

Including a free tour (as above) at 11.30am. No booking needed.

Shape Deane House

28 July to 29 September 2011

Monday to Thursday, 12pm–4pm (by appointment only)

Thursday 28 July 2011, 12pm–4pm, (open house, no appointment needed)