

Faces Of Yorkshire- Artist's Statement

From chefs to umpires, circus masters to novelists: is there no end to Yorkshire's talent?

Marco Pierre White, Dickie Bird, Barbara Taylor Bradford and Gervase Phinn may have diverse professions but these flamboyant individuals have one thing in common: Yes! They are all from Yorkshire.

They are among the personalities featured in a unique month-long portraits exhibition, which opens at Victor Js art bar in York this August.

The show is the brainchild of Samuel Potts, who lives in Northallerton. Samuel, 31, said he wanted to celebrate some of Yorkshire's most talented progeny.

'There's still this stereotypical idea among some people from down south who think it's just flat caps and whippets; a nice place to go for a stroll, full of dog walkers and racing pigeons. But there's a lot more going on,' says Sam, who studied at Leeds College of Art and Design, which has turned out art-stars such as Damian Hirst, and sculptors Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth.

'I was actually struck by just how many famous artists come from Yorkshire, when I started to look into it,' he says. 'David Hockney was born in Bradford and now lives in Bridlington; Henry Moore was a miners son from Castleford and Barbara Hepworth grew up in Wakefield.

'I even found myself emailing Mel B from the Spice Girls. There's loads of people you wouldn't think of, who come from odd, far away places. Yorkshire is a source of raw TV talent!'

'I also realized a lot of my subjects were all quite crazy characters in their own right, enigmatic and fierce like Marco Pierre White.

As well as the original celebrity chef Marco Pierre White, Sam has painted other household names such as gardening guru Alan Titchmarsh, children's author Gervase Phinn and famed Leeds-born novelist Barbara Taylor Bradford.

Samuel's paint brush has also traced the features of sporting heroes, such as cricket umpire Barnsley-born Dickie Bird and former English rugby union international Peter Squires.

Two former pupils from his own high school Ripon grammar also feature: circus ringmaster Norman Barrett, and the North Yorkshire school's most famous export fashion designer Bruce Oldfield.

In a nice twist of fate, Sam won 'the Bruce Oldfield prize for art and design' back in 1999.

Sam also included some celebrities who have adopted Yorkshire as their home – such as TV chef Rosemary Shrager, and presenter Janet Street Porter.

Sam Potts, a native of Hunsingore near Wetherby, has developed a distinctive style over the years. He specializes in stark, realist portraiture acrylics painted on bold, large canvases. His influences include Lucian Freud and Chuck Close. Sam Potts has chosen what he calls 'patronage style portraiture' because it's more challenging than 'painting people I know'.

All paintings will be for sale, and profits will be donated to a mix of charities chosen by the sitters, including the Wingate Institute, researching digestive disorder Gastroparesis, Dickie Bird's sports foundation, and CoolTan arts.

It was the charity focus and Yorkshire-pride that inspired Dickie Bird to have his face painted for the show.

'Yorkshire is a wonderful, wonderful place. I have traveled the world and people who know England always tell me that Yorkshire has the best hospitality in the world,' he says.

'The people are straight forward, tell you what they are thinking and there is never any messing around with them.'

Sam's Charity

Samuel is supporting research into the little known and even less understood functional disorder, Gastroparesis, sometimes called Digestive Tract Paralysis. The existence of this illness was brought to his attention by his friend's sister Natalie Roux-Bean. Natalie is thirty years old, married with two children. She was a normal healthy young woman until 2010 when she suddenly became unable to eat or drink without considerable pain and vomiting. It took over 18 months to get to a proper diagnosis, an experience shared by many patients. Whilst diabetes and viral infections are a known cause of this condition, for the second largest group of sufferers the cause remains unclear. It is not surprising therefore that management of the symptoms of this condition is often inadequate causing considerable morbidity. Natalie now can no longer tolerate any food or drink directly into her digestive system and relies on being given essential vitamin and minerals intravenously through a line into the artery close to her heart and waits for medical science to come up with some solutions. This is why she is keen to provide a support forum for other sufferers of this devastating illness and to raise funds for the The Neurogastroenterology Group lead by Professor Qasim Aziz of the Wingate Institute which represents a collaboration of experts, both clinicians and scientists, from several disciplines within the Blizard Institute of Cell and Molecular Science, Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, and Barts and The London NHS Trust, who are working together to advance basic scientific study into this disease. Though the main causes of gastroparesis are still a mystery, what is known is that it can attack anyone at anytime, no-one is immune.

Natalie's story can be found at www.helpmeminx.com