

Press release: **Fossil Finder In Us ALL**

ExploreTheArch's vibrant new community arts project is inspired by the arrival of the maquette of Denise Dutton's sculpture of nineteenth-century geologist and palaeontologist Mary Anning at Hastings Museum and Art Gallery.

Fossil Finder in Us ALL is an exciting new community project that empowers an early career artists team representing Hastings multicultural population to support their communities to explore and enjoy the town's free local resource, the shore. Kindly supported by the Ashley Family Foundation, this initiative is inspired by the arrival in Hastings of the maquette made for a public statue of Mary Anning that was recently installed in Lyme Regis by the <https://www.maryanningrocks.co.uk> team. The 'mini Mary' has been on tour around the UK, facilitated by <https://geologistsassociation.org.uk/maryanning/>. It arrives at Hastings Museum and Art Gallery on Monday 6 November and is on public view from Tuesday 7 November.

An interactive response exhibition in the museum's walkway gallery, created by ExploreTheArch's young artists team, reflects how relatable and inspiring Mary Anning's story of 'finding' on the shore at a young age with her father and brother is, as well as her experience of facing and overcoming barriers as a working class woman to be respected for her expertise.

Fossil Finder in us ALL project lead, Yasmin Aishah, and team members Sam Brown, Elizabeth Isadora, Cai Jones and Catherine Rajhans are looking forward to exploring on the shore with their community in 'finder' excursions and after-beach sharing of 'finds' at the museum through November and December, more details to be released this week. The team will change up the visible 'finder' community in Hastings to reflect 'finder families' of diverse heritage that reflect the town's population.

Inviting 'finders' to activate their innate creative ability to select forms, patterns and colours on the beach that appeal, Yasmin Aishah explains, "The act of selecting a rock

on the shore is a creative act. In acknowledging a shape, colour or pattern that is appealing, we're exploring artistically. It's an innate skill that we all have."

"Fossils are also global connectors. Once upon a time, continents were fused. When I have rocks in my hand that have been shaped by global processes, I feel connected with my ancestors from around the world," says Catherine Rajhans.

Eighteen year old Cai Jones, the youngest team member, shares the confidence boost 'finding' has given her. "When I look through the collections of rocks I have found along the beach, both big and small, and varying in colours, I think to myself, "I found those!"

Project partner Philip Hadland, Collections and Engagement Curator - Natural Sciences at Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, has been working with the team and organised the hosting of the miniature of the sculpture by Denise Dutton. "To me fossil hunting is an escape from the trials of modern life and the toll they take on the mind. When I study them, I feel like I am transported to another world millions of years ago. It is like travelling through time and very good for mental wellbeing".

Viewers can enjoy the free experience at Hastings Museum and Art Gallery from 7 Nov 2023 - 7 Jan 2024. Tickets for the free beach excursions and after-shore meets at the museum for 'finder families' will be available to book from 11 November 2023 at explorethearch.com/fossilfinder.

For more information on this project, please email explorers@explorethearch.com