In consolidating Curation and Library Services at Leeds Arts University, it is fitting that our first exhibition in the new gallery should explore a contemporary revision of Saint Jerome — the patron saint of libraries and an enduring figure of intrigue for artists, especially during the Renaissance.

As part of our commitment to Northern artists, we have invited Nicola Dale to be our first resident researcher. In her practice, Dale has been consistently interested in the potential connections between libraries and curation as primary sites of knowledge making. Primarily working in the realms of sculpture, installation and performance, Dale’s practice is conceptually rooted. She is chiefly concerned with how knowledge is made visible.

‘Figurehead’ is contemplative and deeply art historical. The exhibition and related performances present the findings of Dale’s research trip to Rome in October 2018 (generously funded by The British Council and ACE). Thirteen contemporary portraits of Saint Jerome are drawn with an innovative use of chenille stems and based on a series of Renaissance paintings. One revelation for Dale was that Jerome is almost always depicted distracted from reading, with his body often contorted into a performative twist. Viewers are invited, in turn, to contemplate their own reading habits and physical encounters with text and images.

Here we collaborate (for a third consecutive year) with Corridor8 and d.ust Collective on a writing residency to augment this timely exhibition. Emerging writer, Saffron Ward, has been commissioned to develop a new text in relation to Dale’s exhibition. ‘Who’s Seen Jerome?’ includes Ward’s detailed reflections on the composition and materials of Figurehead as well as insights into its complex semantics. This publication also welcomes an essay by art historian Sara Riccardi who provides the indispensable context for Saint Jerome imagery and interview material with Dale from their time in Italy.

Exhibition

Installation images
