

Exploring The Echoes and Shadows of Identity (2026)

By David Tovey

Commissioned by the Royal Air Force Museum
London

Information and Activity Pack

KS5 Art, Citizenship and PSHE

This pack contains information about this community co-creation project with artist, David Tovey. It explores themes of diversity, discrimination, identity and belonging, through powerful stories of veterans from the LGBTQ+ community.

Inside are also questions for discussion and a range of activities to try both during a visit to the RAF Museum London, as well as back in the classroom.

Tovey's artwork is exhibited at the RAF Museum London between 31 May 2026 and 16 October 2026.

Context



David Tovey.

In 2025, the Museum commissioned veteran artist David Tovey to create an artwork exploring the impact of the Armed Forces' ban on LGBT+ personnel (1967–2000). Having personally experienced discrimination while serving in the Army, Tovey worked collaboratively with LGBT+ RAF veterans and serving personnel to develop the installation.

Participants shared experiences of military service, achievement, dismissal, discrimination, trauma, resilience and hope. The resulting installation combines sculpture, sound, text and archival documents to reveal stories that were previously hidden from public view.

About the Artwork

The Echoes and Shadows of Identity is an immersive installation featuring:

- A steel cell that symbolises both imprisonment and the boxes containing replacement medals and badges issued through the UK government's reparations scheme.
- A soundscape made from anonymised oral testimonies of LGBT+ veterans and personnel.
- Historic letters of dismissal displayed alongside later official apologies, illustrating changing attitudes over time.
- Five silhouetted figures painted with quotations from testimonies, representing shared experiences, community support and collective resilience.
- Layered imagery and messages that reflect memory, identity and hidden histories.

The artwork explores themes of identity, belonging, exclusion, justice, remembrance and social change.

The Echoes and Shadows of Identity



'THIS ARTWORK NEEDED TO BE CO-CREATED, LED BY THE COMMUNITY... IT REMINDS US ALL OF THE STRENGTH THAT COMES FROM BEING SEEN, HEARD, VALUED.' - DAVID TOVEY

THE ARMED FORCES 'GAY BAN' (1967-2000) AND ITS LEGACY

Over the 33th anniversary of the repeal of the government legislation that banned and discriminated against the British Armed Forces' LGBT personnel, we reflect on the legacy of the ban, its impact on the lives of those affected, and the ongoing struggle for equality and justice.

1967

Homosexuality becomes regulated in civilian life, it is outlawed when it is considered a criminal offence for anyone, gay or lesbian. LGBT personnel in service in the Armed Forces. This is based on an assumption that their homosexuality is incompatible with discipline, effectiveness and morale.

1999

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) rules on the case. The ruling states that the ban is a violation of the right to private life, it breaches the right to freedom of expression, and it is discriminatory against LGBT personnel.

2000-2022

Advocating for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and other identities (LGBT+), veterans and charities including fighting with Pride campaigns for government recognition of the devastating impact of the 'gay ban' and for reparations. The MoD reviews include policies to support open service for LGBT+ personnel.

2023

The government begins implementing restorative measures outlined by Lord Esherton, including a formal apology, the restoration of rank and return of medals and cap badges, and a Financial Recognition Scheme.

2026

Support for veterans continues with the government's rollout of reparations and campaigning by groups including Fighting with Pride. The long-term repercussions of the ban, however, provoke the question: what do 'justice' and 'closure' look like - each meaning something different to veterans affected. Some regard these as unattainable due to the trauma they experienced.

1967-1999

Repealed legislation in the UK was dominated. Some amendments after undergoing other legislative changes. The Armed Forces (Discipline) Act 1999, which removed the ban on homosexuality, and the Armed Forces Act 2006, which introduced the ban on discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, were passed. The ban on homosexuality was lifted, leading to the repeal of the ban.

12 JANUARY 2000

The military ban on LGBT personnel serving in the Armed Forces is lifted.

2022

The government commissions Lord Esherton OBE PC to conduct an Independent Review. The report shares veterans' accounts and proposes restorative measures.

2025

Marking the 20th anniversary of its repeal, a memorial to those affected by the ban is unveiled by HRH King Charles III at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire.



The Echoes and Shadows of Identity



I JOINED AFTER THE BAN HAD BEEN LIFTED AND I'M STILL SERVING. WHEN I FIRST CAME OUT I HAD A PROBLEM WITH BULLYING, IT GOT SO BAD THAT AT ONE POINT I WAS ENDING MY LIFE...

SO IT FELT NICE WHEN A SERGEANT SHUT IT DOWN, THE SYSTEM NO LONGER TOLERATED HOMOPHOBIC OR ANY TYPE OF ABUSE OR BULLYING. BUT THERE WILL ALWAYS BE THOSE WHO HAVE A PROBLEM WITH ME BEING GAY!

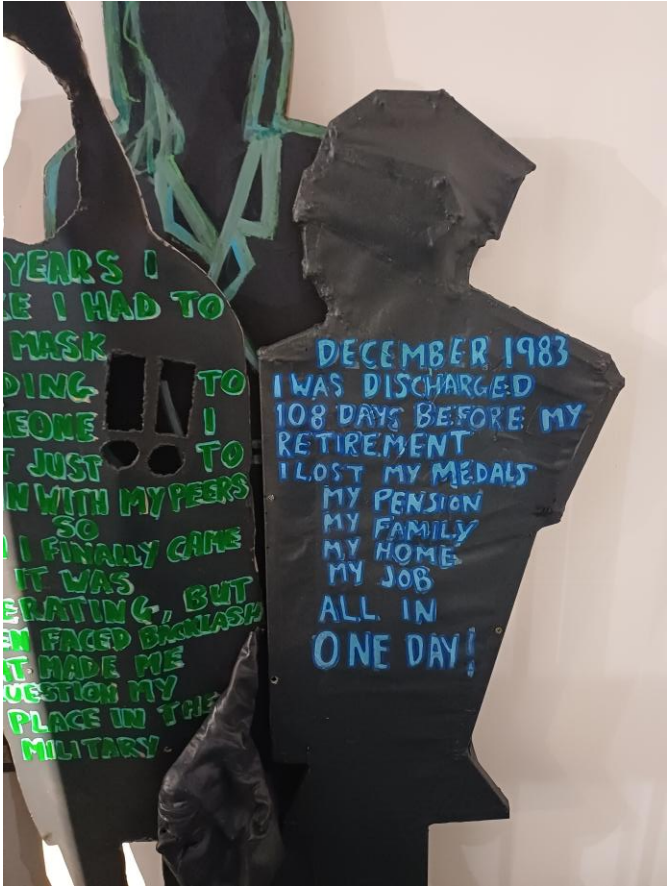
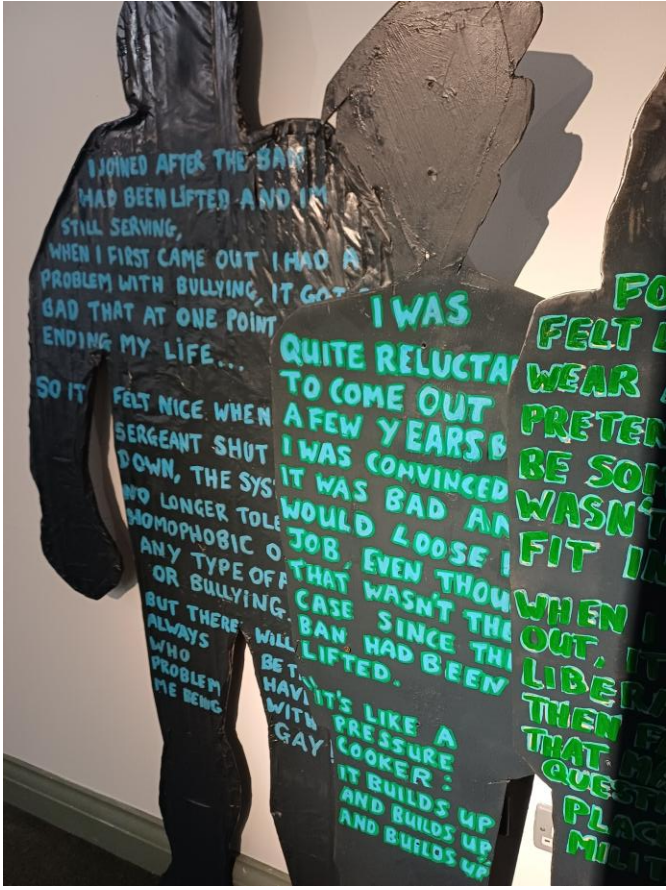
I WAS QUITE RELUCTANT TO COME OUT A FEW YEARS AGO I WAS CONVINCED IT WAS BAD AND WOULD LOOSE MY JOB. EVEN THOUGH THAT WASN'T THE CASE SINCE THE BAN HAD BEEN LIFTED.

IT'S LIKE A PRESSURE COOKER - IT BUILDS UP AND BUILDS UP

FOR YEARS I FELT LIKE I HAD TO WEAR A MASK. PRETENDING I WASN'T JUST TO FIT IN WITH MY PEERS. WHEN I FINALLY CAME OUT, IT WAS LIBERATING, BUT THEN I FELT LIKE I HAD TO GO BACK TO MY PLACE IN THE MILITARY.

DECEMBER I WAS DISCHARGED 108 DAYS BEFORE RETIREMENT. I LOST MY MEDALS, MY PENSION, MY FAMILY, MY HOME, MY JOB. ALL IN ONE DAY!

The Echoes and Shadows of Identity



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Art & Design and Diversity

Look closely at the installation.

Questions

1. How does Tovey use materials, space and sound to communicate emotions and experiences?

2. Why might the artist have chosen silhouettes rather than detailed portraits?

3. How do the letters of dismissal and apology help tell the story of changing social attitudes?

4. In what ways does the artwork give visibility to people whose stories were previously unheard?

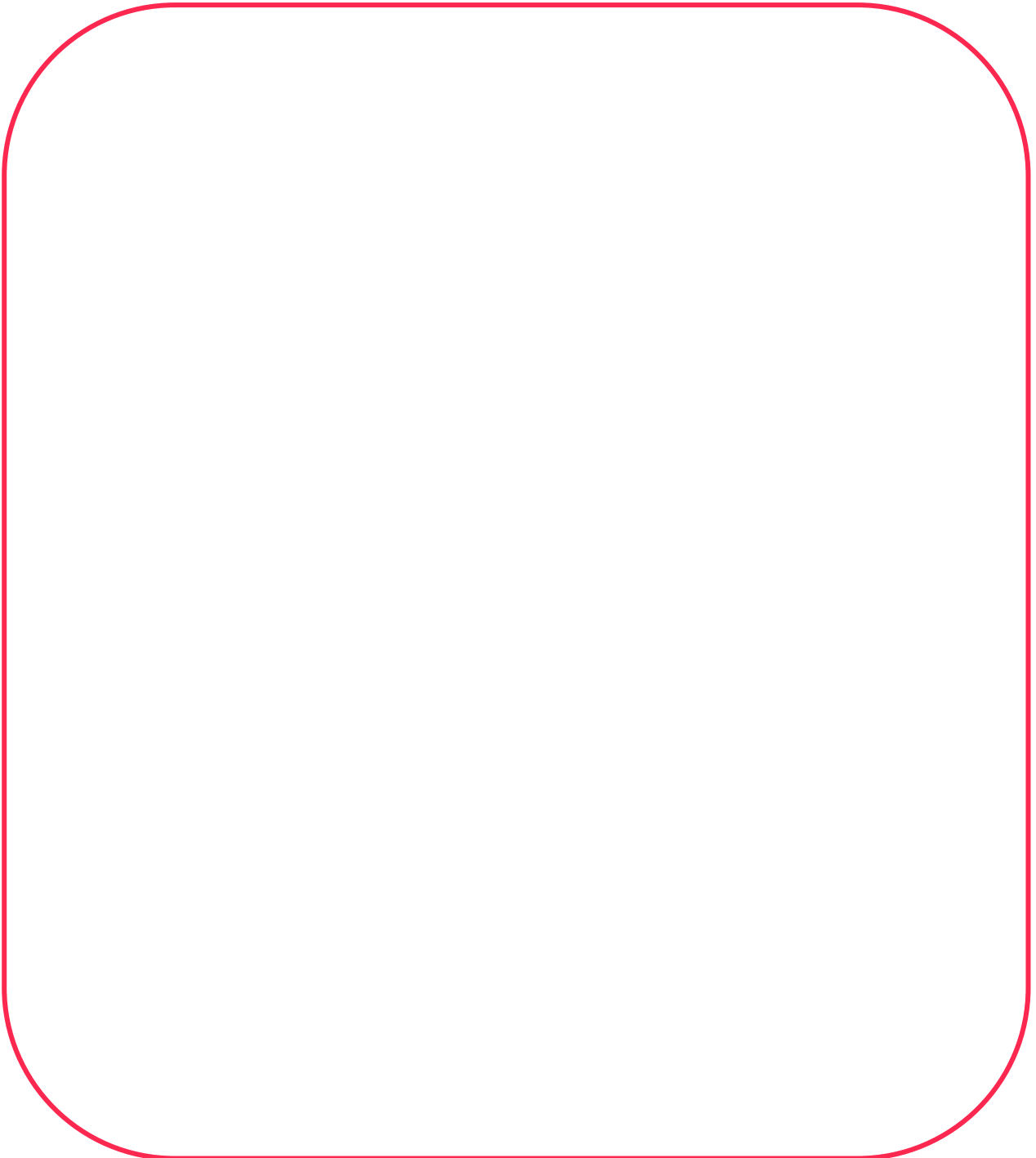
Activity 1: Analysing Identity and Representation

Activities to try at the Museum

Art & Design and Diversity

Extension

Create an annotated sketch of one section of the installation, identifying visual and symbolic elements that communicate meaning.



Activity 3: Artistic Skills Workshop – Layered Mixed Media

Activities to try in the classroom

Practical Art Skills

Inspired by Tovey's use of layered histories and hidden narratives.

Task

Create an A3 mixed-media artwork exploring the theme of **Identity**.

Include:

A silhouette or figure.

Layers of text, memories, quotations or symbols.

At least three media (for example: drawing, collage, paint, photography or digital imagery).

Areas where information is partially hidden or revealed.

Skills Focus

Composition

Layering techniques

Mixed media experimentation

Use of symbolism

Visual storytelling

Activity 4: Voices and Stories – Collaborative Artwork

Activities to try in the classroom

Art & Design and PSHE

Tovey developed his artwork through listening to the experiences of others.

Task

Working in pairs or small groups:

Interview each other about a time you felt included, supported or valued.
Record key words or short quotations.

Create a collaborative artwork that combines all participants' voices through text and imagery.

Notes



Evaluation Questions

How did collaboration influence your creative decisions?

Which visual techniques best communicated different viewpoints?

How does art help preserve personal stories and experiences?

Plenary Reflection

Tovey's installation demonstrates how art can be used not only to express personal experiences but also to challenge prejudice, promote inclusion and preserve histories that might otherwise be forgotten. How can contemporary artists contribute to a more inclusive society through their work?

Practical Art Skills – Shape and Symbolism

Inspired by the five silhouetted figures in **The Echoes and Shadows of Identity**.

Task

Create a series of silhouette studies that communicate emotion and experience without showing facial features.

Produce 3–5 quick gesture drawings from photographs or life. Simplify each figure into a silhouette.

Fill the silhouettes with words, patterns, symbols or imagery that represent a personal memory, value or experience.

Experiment with scale, overlap and positioning to create relationships between figures.

Skills Focus

Observational drawing
Figure proportion
Positive and negative space
Visual communication
Symbolism

Evaluation Questions

How can body language communicate meaning?
Which visual elements help viewers interpret the figure's story?
How does removing facial detail affect the viewer's response?

Activity 6: Sound to Image – Visualising Testimony

Practical Art Skills – Mark Making and Experimental Media

Inspired by the installation's soundscape of veterans' testimonies.

Task

Listen to a spoken testimony, interview extract, speech or piece of audio.

While listening:

Create a continuous drawing using expressive marks, lines and shapes.

Respond to changes in tone, emotion and pace through different mark-making techniques.

Develop the drawing into a final artwork by adding colour, texture and layered imagery.

Include selected words or phrases from the audio as part of the composition.

Skills Focus

Experimental drawing

Expressive mark making

Colour and mood

Text integration

Abstract visual responses

Extension Challenge

Create a diptych (two-panel artwork) showing contrasting emotions or experiences, such as exclusion and belonging, despair and hope, or silence and visibility.

Reflection Questions

Which marks or colours best captured the mood of the recording?

How did translating sound into visual form change your understanding of the testimony?

What artistic decisions helped communicate emotion most effectively?