

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 the Museum's 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 on display at the RAF
Museum London until 16 October 2026.**

Context



David Tovey

In 2025, the Museum commissioned veteran artist David Tovey to create an artwork exploring the impact of the UK government's ban on gay and lesbian people serving in the Armed Forces (1967–2000). Tovey, who suffered homophobic discrimination while serving in the Army during the ban, worked collaboratively with LGBT+ RAF veterans and serving personnel to develop a work of installation art, to mark the 25th anniversary of the ban's repeal.

In workshops they discussed experiences of military service, including achievements, discrimination and dismissal, and their feelings of trauma, resilience and hope. The resulting work combines sculpture, sound and archival documents to share perspectives that went unheard until long after the ban was lifted.

About the Artwork

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

- A steel cell that symbolises imprisonment, isolation, marginalisation, 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 affected by the ban and currently serving RAF LGBT+ personnel.
- A Historic Ministry of Defence letter of dismissal displayed alongside a later official apology, illustrating changing attitudes over time.
- Five silhouetted figures painted with quotations from testimonies. These represent shared experiences, community support and collective resilience.
- Layered imagery and messages on the prison walls, beneath the surface paint, that reflect memory 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 BAY' (1967-2000)
AND ITS LEGACY**

20th marks the 50th anniversary of the repeal of all government legislation that criminalised and persecuted gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in the armed forces. This is based on an interview with Lord Eatherton, a former senior officer in the armed forces, and a member of the 'Gay Bay' community.

1967

Homosexuality becomes criminalised in civilian life. It is a criminal offence to have sex with a man or woman of legal age or to have sex with a minor in the armed forces. This is based on an interview with Lord Eatherton, a former senior officer in the armed forces, and a member of the 'Gay Bay' community.

1999

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) rules that the UK is in breach of Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. This is based on an interview with Lord Eatherton, a former senior officer in the armed forces, and a member of the 'Gay Bay' community.

2000-2022

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

2023

The government begins implementing restorative measures outlined by Lord Eatherton, 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 traumas they experienced.

1967-1999

Repealed legislation in the UK was dismantled. Some governments after undergoing other legislative changes by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), that military regulations and policies are reviewed, and that other measures considered.

12 JANUARY 2000

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

2022

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

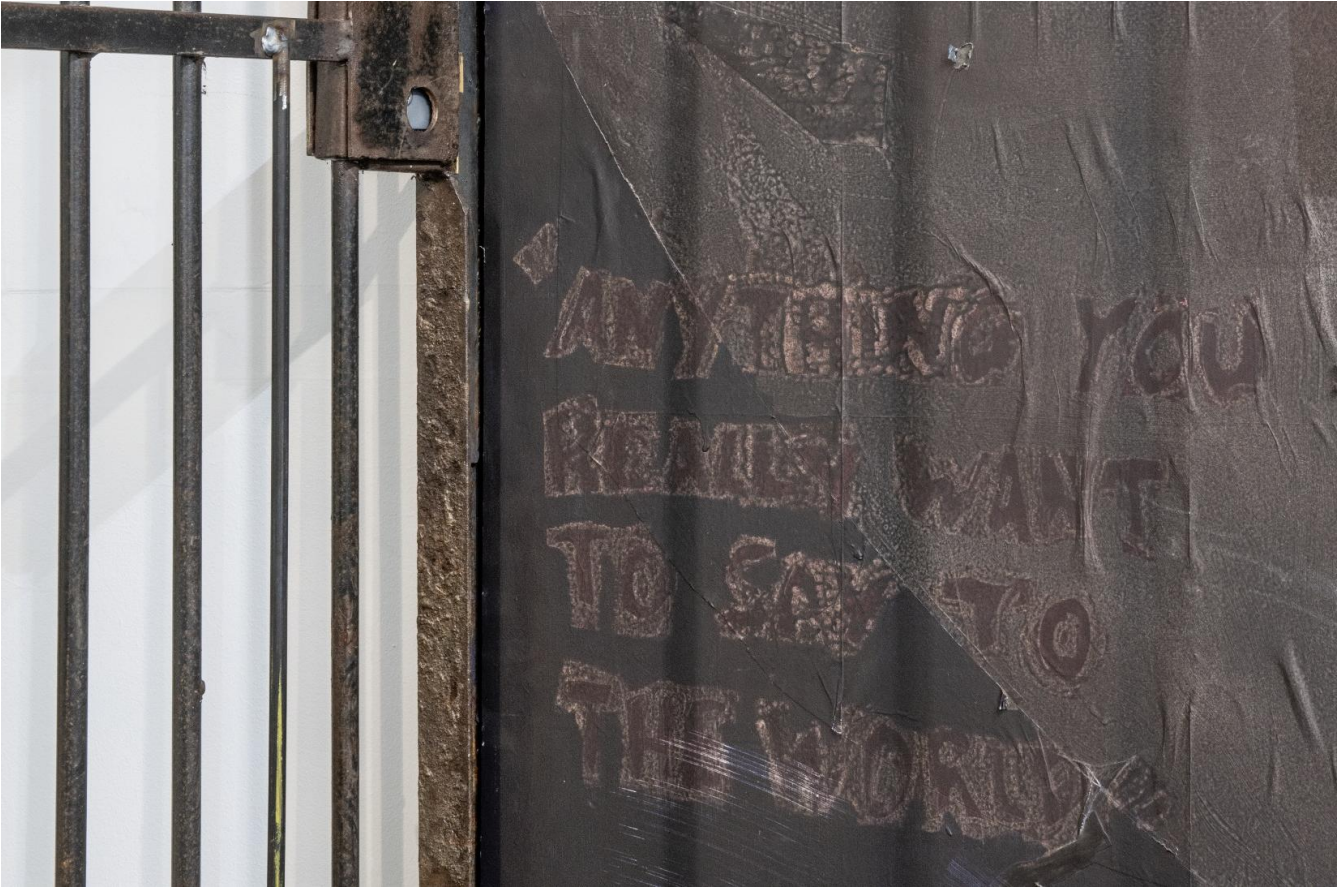
2025

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

The Echoes and Shadows of Identity



The Echoes and Shadows of Identity



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
BAD THAT AT ONE POINT I
ENDING MY LIFE...
SO IT FELT NICE WHEN A
SERGEANT SHUT IT
DOWN, THE SYSTEM
NO LONGER TOLERATE
HOMOPHOBIC OR
ANY TYPE OF ABUSE
OR BULLYING.
BUT THERE WILL
ALWAYS
WHO
PROBLEM
ME BEING

I WAS
QUITE RELUCTANT
TO COME OUT I
A FEW YEARS
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
RE SOMEONE
WASN'T JUST
FIT IN WITH THEM
WHEN I CAME OUT
IT WAS
LIBERATING. BUT
THEN THEY
THAT HAD ME
OUT OF 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!

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Activity 1: Analysing Identity and Representation

Activities to try at the Museum

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?

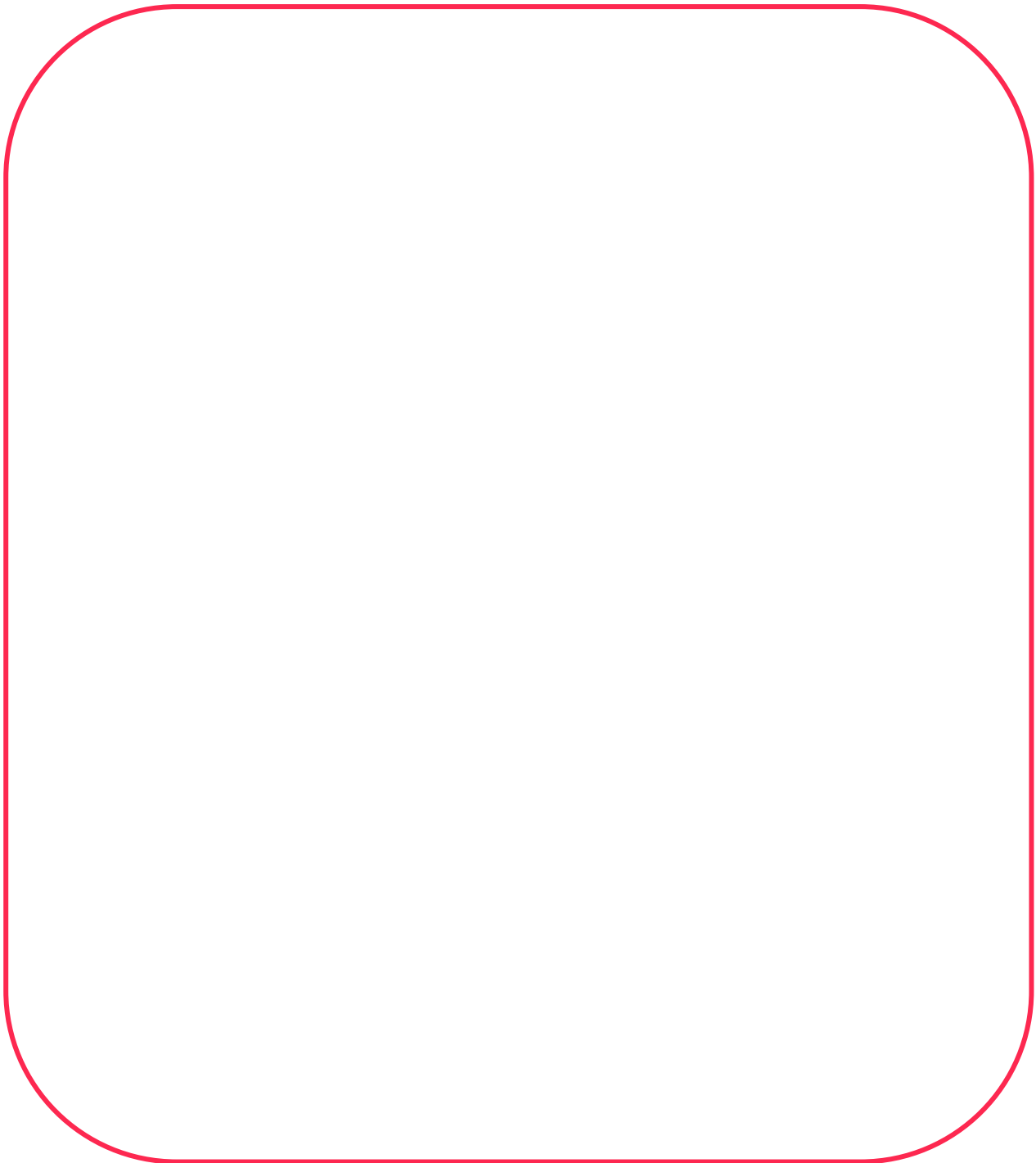
Activity 1: Analysing Identity and Representation

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.

A large, empty rounded rectangle with a red border, intended for an annotated sketch. The rectangle is centered on the page and occupies most of the lower half of the document. It is currently blank, providing space for a student to draw and write.

Activity 2: PSHE Discussion – Belonging, Inclusion and Respect

PSHE and Citizenship

Activities to try at the Museum

The artwork explores how policies can affect people's wellbeing, identity and sense of belonging.

Discussion Questions

What does it mean to feel accepted within a community?

How can discrimination affect a person's mental health, confidence and opportunities?

Why is it important that institutions acknowledge past mistakes?

How can listening to personal stories increase empathy and understanding?

Reflection Task

Write a short paragraph explaining why diverse voices and experiences should be represented in museums and galleries.

[illegible]

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Activity 3: Artistic Skills Workshop – Layered Mixed Media

Practical Art Skills

Activities to try in the classroom

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

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Activity 4: Voices and Stories – Collaborative Artwork

Art & Design and PSHE

Activities to try in the classroom

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?

Activity 5: Figure Drawing and Expressive Silhouettes

Activities to try in the classroom

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

Activities to try in the classroom

In the exhibition, David Tovey has included a soundscape featuring voices of the veterans, relaying their experiences.

What do you think is the significance of using disembodied voices in an audio installation, rather than videos or photographs which allow us to see the speakers?

The below task is 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?