

## Ferens Art Gallery Artist in Residency Open Call

### Sirens



Herbert James Draper (1864–1920), *Ulysses and the Sirens*, c.1909, Oil on Canvas

#### The Brief

Are you an artist, creative and/or musician with an interest in responding to Herbert James Draper's *Ulysses and the Sirens* and exploring the theme of the Siren call?

Would you like to be artist in residence at the Ferens Art Gallery, Hull, and have exclusive access to its collection and your own studio gallery on site from **September 2024 to March 2025** (dates can be negotiated)?

We are looking for an artist or collective to respond to the themes in a forthcoming exhibition, *Sirens: Women and the sea* and create a contemporary 'siren call' in response to Draper's iconic painting (currently on display in Gallery 5). The commission will be shown in the forthcoming exhibition alongside Draper's work and paintings by Lawrence Alma Tadema, John William Waterhouse and Evelyn De Morgan, amongst others.

Inspired by the Ferens' famous painting by Herbert James Draper, *Ulysses and the Sirens* and to mark the reopening of Hull Maritime Museum, *Sirens: Women and the sea* explores stories of women and the sea. From ancient cultures and mythology to contemporary activist responses, the exhibition will take you on a journey of seduction, suffrage, slavery, migration, gender fluidity, wellbeing, and freedom.

This residency will support the creation of new work by the selected artist(s), responding to the themes in *Sirens: Women and the sea*. The new commission will bring to the fore a contemporary voice, sharing a Siren call with our visitors. As the Sirens did in mythology, the commission will look to entice viewers, and encourage them to explore the exhibition and interwoven themes.

There is no prescriptive medium in which the selected artist must use. However, we will welcome a response which takes into consideration Hull's ambition to become a UNESCO City of Music in 2025. [UNESCO City of Music Archives - Hull CC News](#)

The residency space is flexible and can be used to display past work, make new work, and deliver talks and workshops.

The selected artist will work within the residency space to create their commissioned work. You must be available at least 1 day a week during opening hours to engage with the public, although you are welcome to work in the space more frequently if you like!

## **Background**

*Sirens: Women and the sea* (14 February – 5 May 2025) will be a major exhibition in both Gallery 7 and 8 at the Ferens. Drawing on the Ferens' own collection, with key loans, the exhibition explores the relationship between women and the sea through art from the 1850s to the present day.

From Victorian interpretations of ancient cultures and mythology to contemporary activist responses, the works in this exhibition take the visitor on a journey of seduction, suffrage, slavery, migration, gender fluidity, wellbeing, and freedom.

This will be the first in-house curated exhibition with multi-venue loans at the Ferens in many years. Through key loans this exhibition will allow the Ferens to show its important Designated Maritime Art collection, which only currently includes two works by women artists, as never before. It will be imbued with a fresh narrative that spans eras while exploring contemporary issues and important subjects that matter to women today.

*Sirens: Women and the sea* will be accompanied by a second exhibition curated by the Future Ferens, a group of young artists and curators aged 18 to 25, which will be displayed in a nearby gallery. This young community curated exhibition will further interrogate the theme of 'Sirens' from a fresh local perspective, bringing new narratives and viewpoints to the Ferens. This will aid in connecting contemporary issues to historic cultural stories, social histories, and art, while making the exhibition and collection relevant to a young audience.

## **The legend of Ulysses**

The tale of Ulysses, or Odysseus as he was to the Greeks, was written by the ancient Greek poet Homer (8<sup>th</sup> century BC). One of the principal heroes of the Trojan War, Ulysses' adventures took him to the underworld. On his return, he visited Circe, an enchantress with the power to drive the wind. She warned him that on his journey he would pass the island where the sirens dwelled.

The sirens were mythical creatures, taking the form of half women, half birds, and later fish, who sang hypnotically at sailors to lure them onto dangerous rocks and to their destruction. Circe advised Ulysses to have his men's ears blocked with bees wax and to have himself bound to the mast so he might hear their song and live. Ulysses followed the enchantress' advice, and they sailed safely past the island.

## **Herbert James Draper (1864–1920)**

Herbert James Draper's *Ulysses and the Sirens* painted in 1909, is hugely popular at the Ferens Art Gallery, having been on near constant display since the opening of the Ferens in 1927 to the present. It will take centre stage in *Sirens: Women and the sea*.

Draper was born in 1864 in London, studying at the Royal Academy's schools of Art and travelling to both Paris and Rome. Draper enjoyed popularity as an artist in his own lifetime and we know that Draper took care to ensure the accuracy of his work by visiting the British Museum to consult contemporary artefacts. He became known for his artful depictions of nude young women, created as suggestive but acceptable scene for the male gaze.

## Drapers' Sirens

The depiction of the sirens is an interesting one as Homer's account was rather vague and artists usually drew them as bird like figures with female heads. Draper, however, like many of his contemporaries, depicts them as mermaids and young women. In Draper's composition we see a boat full of terrified sailors. As the Sirens try to climb aboard, an act of assertive sexuality, they change from mermaids into women.

The theme of the nymph and the temptress became something of an obsession in Draper's work. Draper's own experience and perceptions of women are explored through his depictions of the Sirens. The Ferens' depiction of Sirens was completed later in Draper's career, when he was a married man. It contrasts dramatically with an earlier work by him *The Sea Maiden* which although expressing his trademark sensuality, shows the siren in a vulnerable position, cowering, with the sailors as the aggressors.

The picture contains many contrasts: the sea and the air, the masculine and the feminine, the dark and the light, hard and soft. These contrasts are enhanced by the colours used by Draper; the sailors are tanned, and weather beaten, whereas the sirens are pale and untouched by the sun, as many higher-class women were depicted in Victorian/Edwardian paintings.

Siren figures have been the subject of many stories and artwork, from ancient Babylonian creator gods to contemporary symbols of trans identity. What remains a constant part of their tale is the siren song, yet its words and sound remain unknown.

## The Residency

- Create a new artwork in response to the *Sirens: Women and the sea* exhibition inspired by the siren call.
- Be available at least 1 day per week between **September 2024 to March 2025** (dates can be negotiated) at Ferens Art Gallery, Hull.
- Deliver a series of engagement workshops, over a maximum of 5 days, which could include some or all of the following: Art skills CPD based on your practice (for teachers), practical sessions and talks for children and young people, e.g. Primary Schools, our Saturday Art Club group and our Future Ferens members (a group of young artists and curators aged 18 – 25). Deliver a public talk at the Ferens.
- Provide content and images to be used on social media, marketing and for interpretation.
- Participation in the evaluation process, including film based evaluation.

## Eligibility / Criteria

- Must be an artist living and/or working in the UK and prepared to travel to Hull regularly.
- Some experience of working with young people and/or primary school age children.
- Confident to engage with a range of audiences and communities to deliver talks and workshops.

## Fees

£10,000 fee to cover all activity listed above, transport, materials and equipment.

## Project Timeline

July 2024	Artist in residence appointed
September 2024	Artist to start work on new artwork
January 2025	Commissioned work completed
February 2025	Deliver talk
12 February 2025	Work installed in exhibition
13 February 2025	11am press call and evening Private View
1 March 2025	Residency ends

## To apply

Please send us the following:

- A recent CV

- A covering letter/email (300 words max), creative piece, or a 2-minute (max) film telling us about your experience and why you want to be the artist in residence at the Ferens
- Images of your artwork/a link to a host website or video hosting platform, such as YouTube or Vimeo (for multimedia or performance artwork), or active social media account with good examples of your practice

Please send your application to [ferensopen@hcandl.co.uk](mailto:ferensopen@hcandl.co.uk) with the subject heading **ARTIST IN RESIDENCE APPLICATION**.

**Deadline: midnight on 3 July**

**Interview: 11 July**

If you have a question involving the application process or require more information, please contact:

Stephanie Edwards, Exhibition Assistant [stephanie.edwards@hcandl.co.uk](mailto:stephanie.edwards@hcandl.co.uk) Wed PM – Fri

Kerri Offord, Curator of Art [kerri.offord@hcandl.co.uk](mailto:kerri.offord@hcandl.co.uk) Mon-Fri

David Alcock, Learning Manager [David.alcock@hcandl.co.uk](mailto:David.alcock@hcandl.co.uk) Mon – Thurs

We will aim to get in touch with all successful applicants after shortlisting has taken place on **5 July**. If you have not heard from us by **14 July** please assume your application has been unsuccessful.