



PRESS RELEASE

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Beautiful, but thought-provoking photographs shine a light on the lives of Sierra Leone's LGBT community in new exhibition

International documentary photographer Lee Price is set to launch a powerful new exhibition at Humber Street Gallery in Hull on Thursday 27 July as part of Hull UK City of Culture 2017's LGBT 50 programme. That day marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act 1967 that decriminalised homosexual acts in private between two men in England and Wales.

It is still illegal to engage in homosexual acts in 77 countries, including in Hull's sister city Freetown, Sierra Leone where a maximum sentence of life imprisonment can be imposed.

While the law is rarely enforced, people of the LGBT community face persecution of a different kind. Harassment, ridicule, eviction and violence at the hands of people who say homosexuality goes against their religious or cultural beliefs. Therefore, the vast majority of LGBT people choose to keep their sexuality a guarded secret from the people around them.

However, within the heart of Freetown, lives a young transgender woman who offers a warm welcome to members of the LGBT community in need. Her home is a sanctuary where they do not have to hide who they are and can live without oppression whilst surrounded by those who understand and accept them. They call it 'The House of Kings and Queens'.

Lee Price was commissioned by Hull 2017 to create this unique collection of photographs, which acts as a window into the lives of the house's inhabitants and explores what it means to be gay in Freetown.

The photographs convey both the cloud of secrecy that the subjects of the images live under and the sense of liberation that they feel at being able to express themselves freely, even in such a restricted environment.

Lee said: "I was delighted to be asked to document such a poignant subject matter and to mark this important anniversary year of decriminalisation.

"The work, whilst a reminder of the progress still to be made with regards to international gay rights, is also a celebration of the inspiring defiance of oppression and segregation amongst the gay community of Sierra Leone."

One of those people who visit the house, who can't be named for fear of persecution back home, said: "Life is tough for gay people in Sierra Leone and especially those who are transgender. We face a lot of problems here; transgender people can be flogged in the streets and we don't feel safe going out after dark in case we are attacked. When ebola came to Sierra Leone it was blamed on gay people. We suffer so much humiliation every day, but I am proud to be gay."

Price's personal work predominantly focuses on the topic of sexuality. As a gay man, sociological attitudes towards sexuality have always been of great interest to him, and he has explored this subject matter in numerous forms and in various parts of the world.

His projects often document groups and subcultures that are hidden from view, from the gay cruisers of *Sex with Strangers* to the discriminated LGBT community of Uganda in *Against the Order of Nature*, and act as windows into underground worlds we might otherwise not know exist. With his ability to tell a poignant visual story, Price hopes to raise questions and spark debates surrounding issues he feels ought to be addressed.

Martin Green, Director of Hull 2017, said: "In this country we are in the privileged position of being able to celebrate how far LGBT rights have progressed, which is an important part of our LGBT 50 programme. However, we also wanted to shine a light on those parts of the world where they do not enjoy those same advances.

"We often hear the question 'why does the LGBT community still need Pride', the answer is simple, it's because there are parts of the world where people are still persecuted for being themselves. That happens in Sierra Leone, but it also happens on the streets of our towns and cities where many LGBT people do not feel confident and comfortable to be themselves for fear of physical or verbal abuse.

"Lee Price's strikingly beautiful, yet thought-provoking photographs show that hope can persevere, even in the face of adversity and I hope that in some small way, they will inspire people to be more supportive of each other closer to home."

Minister for Women and Equalities Justine Greening said: "It's fantastic that the UK Pride and LGBT 50 festival celebrations will be taking place in Hull as part of hosting the 2017 UK City of Culture because it shows what an important role diversity and equality plays in our culture. It's a great opportunity to showcase our country's values of understanding, acceptance and openness to the rest of the world.

"Pride is special, and it's been fantastic being a part of the celebrations this year. I'm proud to see how far we've come as a country in the past 50 years, but there is still more to do. This exhibition is a reminder of the work we still have to do to stamp out bullying and hate crime, which can have such a damaging impact on LGBT people's lives. We're investing over £1.6 million from the Magna Carta Fund to in projects working to promote and protect LGBT rights abroad.

"I hope everyone in Hull has a fantastic time celebrating UK Pride and the progress we've made in the fight for equality."

House of Kings and Queens will be on display at Humber Street Gallery 's gallery four in Pier Street from Thursday 27 July until Sunday 24 September. The exhibition will also be the subject of a Moved by Art ' session on Thursday 17 August from 5pm-8pm. These sessions for young people aged 18 - 24 to connect with arts and culture and become involved with the exhibitions.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About Hull UK City of Culture

Hull UK City of Culture 2017 is a 365 day programme of cultural events and creativity inspired by the city and told to the world. Hull secured the title of UK City of Culture 2017 in November 2013. It is only the second city to hold the title and the first in England.

Divided into four seasons, starting with **Made in Hull**, this nationally significant event draws on the distinctive spirit of the city and the artists, writers, directors, musicians, revolutionaries and thinkers that have made such a significant contribution to the development of art and ideas.

Hull 2017's second season, **Roots and Routes**, runs from April to June and explore Hull's unique place as a gateway to Europe and one of the world's busiest ports. Its maritime history and global connections inspire the stories of the city; this season of work will also celebrate Hull's international links, including Rotterdam, Reykjavik and Freetown.

Freedom runs from July to September. Building on the legacy of Hull-born anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce MP, *Freedom* will explore the concept of freedom in all its many forms. The final season, **Tell the World** will run from October to December.

The Culture Company was set up to deliver the Hull 2017 programme and is an independent organisation with charitable status. It has raised £32 million, with over 70 partners supporting the project, including public bodies, trusts and foundations and local and national businesses.

Key contributions are coming from: **Host City** - Hull City Council; **Principal Partners** - Arts Council England, BBC, Big Lottery Fund, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Heritage Lottery Fund, KCOM, KWL, Spirit of 2012, Yorkshire Water and the University of Hull; **Major Partners** -Associated British Ports, Arco, BP, the British Council, British Film Institute, Green Port Hull, Hull Clinical Commissioning Group, MKM Building Supplies, P&O Ferries, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Sewell Group, Siemens, Smith & Nephew and Wykeland Group. The National Lottery has contributed more than £10m of this funding, making it the largest single funding body for Hull 2017.

68 per cent of the funding is dedicated to public facing activities, including the widest range of cultural events in every corner of the city, with a further 11 per cent for legacy and contingency. More than £5 million is being invested in volunteering, learning and community engagement. £1.6 million is being invested to ensure a legacy after 2017. This includes capacity building, such as supporting existing events so they can grow, staging curtain-raiser events, developing future programming for after 2017 and building a new platform to support a unified ticketing system for the city.

Hull 2017's International Partners are: Aarhus, Denmark, which is European Capital of Culture 2017; Reykjavik, Iceland; Rotterdam, The Netherlands; and Freetown, Sierra Leone (twinned with Hull). These relationships are reflected in a number of events throughout the year.

For information go to www.hull2017.co.uk

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