

PRESS RELEASE

Date: Wednesday 16 July 2025

## Recoverist Curators: Re-imagining the World We Live In

25 July 2025 – June 2026

- Bold new partnership with Portraits of Recovery and the Whitworth
- Trailblazing exhibition co-curated by people in recovery, reframing the Whitworth collection through lived experience.
- Personal artefacts exhibited alongside works by artists including Francis Bacon, Tracey Emin and Wolfgang Tillmans
- Part of CHAORDIC, a pioneering 3-year commissioning programme led by Portraits of Recovery with the Whitworth, Castlefield Gallery, and Manchester Art Gallery



Portraits of Recovery and the Whitworth are proud to present *Recoverist Curators: Re-imagining the World We Live In* - a bold, co-curated exhibition that reinterprets the Whitworth's collection through a recovery lens.

In this innovative partnership between pioneering visual arts charity Portraits of Recovery and the Whitworth, *Recoverist Curators* brings together six participants: Anastasia, Annie, Chanje, Dom, Paul, and Penny, each with personal journeys and unique perspectives on substance use and recovery. Over 12 months of exhibition development they have selected works of art from the Whitworth's collection that speak to their personal and collective histories – their hopes,

fears, desires and dreams. Together, they have created a space for authentic dialogue, healing, and identifiable connection.

Featuring more than 25 artworks including paintings, photography, wallpapers, textiles and prints, the exhibition includes, works by artists Francis Bacon, Tracey Emin and Wolfgang Tillmans, alongside personal stories and artefacts like Paul's vinyl records and Anastasia's rainbow hat. These create powerful, intimate connections between their lived experience and the Whitworth's collection.

**Paul, Recoverist Curator**, said: "Engaging with *Recoverist Curators* has given me the opportunity to explore my own journey of recovery. I was able to reflect and appreciate the changes and growth that I had experienced during my journey. I realised what it was like to be free. I had stepped out of the darkness and pain and into the light of hope."

*Recoverist Curators* is a re-narration of a condition often much mis-understood, rooted in collaborative arts practice and cultural inclusion and aiming to disrupt commonly held misconceptions. It is more than an exhibition – it's part of the Recoverist movement, which sees activism as art for social and cultural change.

Through the work, three exhibition themes emerged: **In the Madness, Keep(ing) it Simple**, and **Self-Love**. These themes invite visitors to view recovery not as a destination point but as a deeply human and transformative process that re-configures a person's identity.

**Annie, Recoverist Curator**, said: "It has been a great opportunity and learning experience to be part of the Recoverist Curators. Learning, laughing, discussing the complex decision of curating an arts exhibition. Six of us strangers becoming comrades in recovery."

*Recoverist Curators* is an exhibition which reflects Portraits of Recovery and the Whitworth's collective mission: to amplify unheard voices, support mental health and wellbeing and shift balances of power. It reflects on Recoverism as a cultural movement for positive social change by helping us to rethink how we work, live and creatively express ourselves.

**Mark Prest, Director and CEO of Portraits of Recovery**, said: "Recoverist Curators breaks new ground by opening-up a national conversation on the need to give those in recovery power and control over their own self-representation. In this instance a twelve-month long, mile stone art exhibition and a cultural platform for being authentically seen and heard. Recoverist Curators re-writes the narrative and highlights the positive value people in recovery make to society and the arts and culture itself."

**Prof Sook Kyung Lee, Director the Whitworth**, said: "We're proud to collaborate with Portraits of Recovery on this important project for the Whitworth. Recoverist Curators powerfully demonstrates how art, lived experience and co-curation can come together to reimagine the world we live in. It reflects our commitment to care, creativity and amplifying voices that are too often unheard - opening-up new ways of seeing our collection, and of understanding each other."

**RECOVERIST = recovery + activist**

*Recoverist Curators* forms part of the pioneering 3-year commissioning programme **CHAORDIC**, initiated and led by **Portraits of Recovery**, developed and delivered in partnership with the Whitworth, Castlefield Gallery and Manchester Art Gallery.

**CHAORDIC** explores the social impact that collaborative contemporary visual arts can play on redefining substance use narratives and recovery identities. The **CHAORDIC National Symposium** and *Recoverist Curators* are key events for Portraits of Recovery's **RECOVERIST Month September 2025** - placing lived experience at the heart of an annual, month-long arts programme.

**CHAORDIC National Symposium**

Thursday 25 September 2025  
the Whitworth

Delivered by [Portraits of Recovery](#) and the Whitworth, the **CHAORDIC National Symposium** will be a landmark, one-day sharing event, with key insights examining the transformative power and pivotal role of the arts in driving social and cultural change on substance use recovery. The event will take place at the Whitworth and Castlefield Gallery. [CHAORDIC press release](#)

Further exhibition and public programme events for *Recoverist Curators* are to be announced.

ENDS

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

For all press information, images and interview requests please contact: Melissa McFarlane, Communications Manager at the Whitworth: [Whitworthpress@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Whitworthpress@manchester.ac.uk)

**Image credit:** Recoverist Curators Group, 2025, the Whitworth, The University of Manchester. © Recoverist Curators. Photo: Joel Chester Fildes.

**Listing Information**

Recoverist Curators

25 July 2025 – June 2026

The Whitworth, The University of Manchester

Free entry

<https://www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/whats-on/exhibitions/recoveristcurators/>

**Exhibition credits**

The exhibition, engagement programme and CHAORDIC have been generously supported by The Baring Foundation.

Alongside the *Recoverist Curators group*, the exhibition has been delivered by the Portraits of Recovery and the Whitworth project team: Mark Prest (Director and CEO, Portraits of Recovery),

Dominic Pillai (Curator of Social Engagement, Portraits of Recovery), Dominic Bilton (Producer, Projects, the Whitworth), Victoria Hartley (Assistant Curator: Wallpaper and Textile, the Whitworth), Francine Hayfrom (Cultural Park Keeper, the Whitworth).

### About Portraits of Recovery

Portraits of Recovery is a pioneering visual arts charity, inspiring and supporting people affected by substance use and those in recovery (Recoverist's). As the UK's only contemporary visual arts organisation focused exclusively on this field, it collaborates with leading contemporary artists, recovery communities, and a range of agencies to rewrite the human experience. Founded in 2011 by Director Mark Prest, whose own lived experience informs its mission, Portraits of Recovery seeks to reshape conversations around substance use, emphasising it as a health, social, and cultural issue. Through the transformative power and lens of contemporary art, it breaks down barriers, promotes inclusion, and empowers Recoverist's to reclaim their narratives by becoming artists, fostering artistic creation and amplifying voices often unheard.

<https://portraitsofrecovery.org.uk/about>

### About the Whitworth

The Whitworth is proudly part of The University of Manchester, operating as a convening space between the University and the people of the city. Founded in 1889 for "the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester" it continues this mission today in new contexts. The gallery, its park and gardens are home to the collection of over 60,000 works of art, textiles, sculptures and wallpapers and provides a platform for artists from around the world. The Whitworth is driven by a vision to actively seek and manifest connections between art, creativity, and their role in developing a more resilient and caring society through its exhibitions and award-winning civic engagement programme

Gallery opening times: Tuesday to Sunday 10am-5pm, Thursday late opening until 9pm

[www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth)

### Related Events

#### **ANEW Way to Peel an Orange**

**3 August 2025 – 19 October 2025**

**Castlefield Gallery**

**Free entry**

Celebrated designer Joe Hartley and the ANEW recovery community present ANEW Way to Peel an Orange, an ambitious exhibition of co-produced work developed during Hartley's five-month residency with ANEW in Tameside (Greater Manchester, UK).

ANEW Way to Peel an Orange is part of the pioneering 3-year commissioning programme CHAORDIC, initiated and led by Portraits of Recovery.