OUR PLACE

ELLY FRASER-WATTS x CURTINS

Through the portraiture lens, their eyes and their stories, Our Place explores the symbiotic relationship between Leeds and those who have lived, worked or studied here.

What defines arts and culture? In Leeds 2023: Year of Culture, this exhibition explores how engineers, their creativity and their lives influence the cities they shape and places them within creative cultural events. Who are the people behind the buildings that we see?

Our Place has been curated by photographer, Elly Fraser-Watts from the point of view of Curtins' people. It tells the story of how they've influenced places around the country whilst Leeds has been influencing them.

Of the 22 portraits on display, all except one honourable inclusion have been captured in this city. Alongside the pictures are objects of sentimental value. They each illustrate the individual's connection to Leeds, echoed by their chosen songs that you will hear in the surroundings.

Leeds 2023 aims to celebrate and transform the city's identity, creating a legacy of economic and social impact. To honour this, Curtins have welcomed students from local schools in to enjoy interactive STEAM activities that have explored civil and structural engineering, transport planning and environmental engineering, whilst also experiencing the cultural richness of an art exhibition.

OUR PHOTOGRAPHER

I'm Elly Fraser-Watts, a 22 year old artist, singer, and photographer based in Leeds. My portfolio ranges from painting, music, graphic design, to multiple genres of photography. I've exhibited work in three galleries, each collection being based on experiences in my own life. My current focus is on documentary photography. I've gained a real passion for storytelling through imagery - looking to uncover overlooked communities with a thoughtful artistic response. This is why this exhibition seemed like the perfect fit for me. I've been able to interview over twenty brilliant individuals, finding out about their lives, their knowledge, and their experiences. This is the side of photography that makes the art so rewarding, getting to discover new people, new places, and explore the connections that tie them together. Leeds has quickly revealed itself as a hive of creativity and culture in the short two years I've lived here, and I know that there are thousands more stories like the ones in this exhibition that are yet to be told. I'm incredibly grateful to have begun that journey with the team at Curtins and Leeds 2023.



Building a better future



Elly Fraser Watts

@ elly elizabeth



ANDY Buckley

Andy grew up in West Yorkshire and has worked in Leeds since the age of eighteen. Following several years of travel and a stint living and working in Australia, Andy decided Leeds was home, and the place he'd like to settle down and raise a family. Andy is a design director, running the structures team and is passionate about bettering and making a difference in his local community.

Andy's dedication to his field stretches outside of work too. He is an active member around the city and part of a several boards and committees that organise local events for the construction industry – raising the city's profile and promoting construction to young people. He's also been a 'joint board moderator' for universities, with a focus on improving university programmes around the UK.

Andy portrait is taken in a The Stew & Oyster, Calls Landing – a local bar adjacent the River Aire in central Leeds. Socialising with friends and colleagues is a big part of what makes this place home for him. These bars provide fond connections to the city, along with the rivers and canals of Leeds that lead to Horsforth, where Andy lives with his family – the place he now calls home.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Man in the Mirror by Michael Jackson



COLIN Riches

Colin grew up in North Yorkshire and lived near Saltburnby-the-Sea until he went to university in Newcastle. Before getting a job in Leeds, Colin had only spent about an hour in the city, but decided to stay for the next 24 years! Colin is a business unit director who leads the civil and structural team in Curtins' Leeds office. He's a structural engineer by profession but has now moved onto a more managerial role.

Outside engineering, Colin's attention is taken up by his two young children, spending his weekends going to parks, swimming pools, and generally having fun with the family. Colin also enjoys keeping fit. He did martial arts for a number of years and loves cycling, which is why it's his transport to work every morning. He describes himself as an avid reader too; as soon as one book is finished he's straight onto another!

Colin's portrait was taken beside the River Aire, chosen because almost everywhere he's worked in Leeds has looked over this river – it's rather important to him and acts as a trip down memory lane.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Canned Heat by Jamiroquai



AMIE Sinclair

Originally from Burnley, Lancashire, Amie came to study in Leeds in 2008. She is a proud mum of two little girls and family is the biggest part of her life - her youngest daughter is only a few months old.

In her spare time, Amie loves to go swimming to relax and unwind. Next to family, Amie's faith is very important to her. She attends Gateway Church in Leeds — a family orientated evangelical church, and the same one that she and her husband got married in.

At Curtins, Amie is a senior structural engineer. She manages and mentors junior members of her team and delivers designs for new projects in the city.

Amie's portrait has been taken outside St Mark's Building in Woodhouse - the church she is a big part of. Her church building was refurbished from a derelict state, and this reflects Amie's passion for refurbishing historic buildings to protect them from demolition.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Better Together by Jack Johnson



EMMA Scholes

Born in Nottingham, Emma studied in Leeds and now works as a senior geo-environmental engineer at Curtins. Having worked in the industry for over 5 years she loves that she can see projects she worked on as a graduate coming to life in the city. Emma lives outside of the city and really enjoys the rural areas of Leeds. In her free time she goes hiking in the Yorkshire Dales or Lake District, and climbs with colleagues from work. This is where she met her partner - a structural engineer! She loves going out for a glass of wine with friends or spending an evening in the garden cooking on the pizza oven.

For her portrait, Emma decided to have it taken by the River Aire near the docks and Curtins' office. She lived along here during the covid lockdowns and spent a lot of time walking along the canal. She now ventures along it every week as part of the Curtins running club.

Emma's object is a rock collected in her childhood from Snowdonia. She spent a lot of time there growing up as her mum is Welsh, and her Taid (grandad in Welsh) used to take her out exploring mountains, quarries and mines. Those experiences shaped her life so much - her love for being outdoors and in the mountains, and eventually going on to study geology at university.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Dreams by The Cranberries



GEORGE Marchant

Born in Castleford, just east of Leeds, George spent many weekends as a teen going into Leeds from his hometown for shopping and to explore the city. He went on to study at Leeds University and decided to stay!

George is a project structural engineer, but before this, he was a professional rugby player, even playing in Australia for a time. He was undecided on a career post-rugby, but soon his love for buildings, architecture, and skills in maths led him to engineering. George loves to travel and enjoys spending time in the city, going to events, shopping, or socialising with friends - it's quite reminiscent of his childhood when he used to go with his mum.

His connection to the city centre is what led him to have his portrait taken at Belgrave Music Hall. George met his girlfriend there and has since spent many evenings enjoying the music and the atmosphere of this classic Leeds bar.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE



HARRIS Khan

Harris was born and bred in Bradford and still lives there now with his wife and child. He attended university in Leeds for five years until he began his job as a project structural engineer at Curtins.

His interest in engineering stemmed from his uncle being a civil engineer. Harris would go out to sites with his uncle and always enjoyed the trips - seeing structures being built from scratch sparked an interest... This combined with his skills in maths and physics, led him to where he is now.

Outside of work, Harris is proud to be a dad to his twoyear-old son, whom he happily devotes most of his time to. Harris wanted to have his portrait taken outside of the engineering building in Leeds - that building is where Harris spent four years, socialising, studying, and growing up, so it's filled with memories. He also spent a lot of time there getting to know his future wife, Marija, making it hold that extra significance.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Castle of Glass by Linkin Park



JEHAN Bowden

Jehan is originally from Bedford in the south of England and went on to attend university in Sheffield where she met her four best friends and now-husband. They all finished university and moved home, going their separate ways. After a while one of Jehan's best friends, suggested that the whole friend group all move up to Leeds where she was from. And that's exactly what they did! The group have now been in Leeds since 2010 and have acquired husbands, kids and mortgages along the way!

Leeds seemed to be the place they all belonged. At Curtins, Jehan is currently the office manager – starting out as a temporary receptionist but soon becoming a permanent member of the team. Outside of work, Jehan absolutely loves music, there's hardly ever a time when she isn't listening to a song. When she was younger, she'd often go to music festivals - including Leeds Festival in 2000, which was her first ever festival. Since building her life here, it now means even more to her.

Jehan chose to have her portrait taken at Kirkstall Abbey. She picked this place because her and her group all lived across from the Abbey when they first came to Leeds - so the location represents a really special time for her and brings back very fond memories.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Higher and Higher by Jackie Wilson



KALUM Hall

Kalum is an office administrator who has lived and worked his whole life in Leeds - growing up in Woodhouse and attending school in Headingley. Kalum started out as a music producer and DJ and went onto refurbish guitars. Music and creativity are still his greatest passions outside of work.

Leeds is woven into Kalum's family life, his childhood, and his passion for music – it's such a creative and vibrant city. He's seen the town centre change and develop over the years; feeling like it's new every time he goes.

Kalum chose his portrait to be taken in Hyde Park Corner. It's a crossroads between all the places that are most memorable to him and, for Kalum, Hyde Park Corner is the centre of Leeds.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Ready or Not by Fugees



KAMAL Fuller

Kamal is a Jamaican born structural engineer. He lived in the US for three years, moved back to Jamaica briefly, then decided to do his masters in Leeds, joining his sister who was also studying in the city - and he never left!

Kamal grew up in an environment where it was common to see residents building their own houses and helping each other with structural projects. A few members of Kamal's family also worked in the industry, so this is what initially attracted him to engineering. Before Kamal became an engineer, he was an accomplished athlete, representing his country for a number of years whilst living in the States through his sports scholarship.

Now he lives in Leeds, one of the biggest aspects of Kamal's life is his church community. He helps out teaching the children in the church about their faith and the bible, and gives them advice on their careers. This is why Kamal chose to have his photo taken by his church building - it continues to bring him joy every week, it's a place of refuge, and has provided him with the second family he's incredibly grateful for.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Smile Jamaica by Chronixx



KEV Egan

Kevin (Kev) Egan was born and bred in Leeds, a place he's very proud to be from. He still lives in the city now with his wife, step-son, and daughter. He has an Irish Catholic background, which to him is an important part of his family history. Kev studied civil engineering at Leeds College of Building, and carried on his studies at Leeds Beckett where he got his HND to become a technician - which he has now been for twenty years.

Outside the office, Kev's favourite place to be is at the pub, with a good beer and friends watching the football. He's a very passionate Leeds United fan and goes to see as many Leeds games as he can. To Kev, watching the football and having a drink is his main form of socialising with family and friends.

As football is so important to him, he chose to have his photo taken at Elland Road. However, he describes himself first and foremost as a family man before a football fan, so Kev wanted to have his family be beside him in the image, to show what's most precious to him.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

A Thousand Years by Christina Perri

KIMBERLY Dunning-Philp

Kimberly grew up in Bradford. She studied Linguistics with English in Nottingham, having always had a passion for words and their meaning, and ended up in an administration job in Leeds after graduation. Filled with ambition, she worked her way to becoming an office manager at Curtins. The manager role was not her limit though. Kimberly now sits within the central legal team and Curtins is currently training her to become a lawyer.

Outside of work Kimberly is on a field hockey team. She also has a great love for music and drinking wine - which makes Leeds great for her as there are events celebrating music and culture on so often.

Kimberly's portrait has been taken under the Freedom Bridge in Lower Briggate, a vibrant area that's known for its annual hosting of Pride and its reputation of support and love for the LGBTQ+ community in Leeds. Kimberly is happily married to her wife, Amy so this place holds sentiment, and a strong significance to her relationship and identity.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Heaven is a Place on Earth by Belinda Carlise



LAURA Barlow

Laura is a civil engineer from Sheffield and now lives in Brewery Wharf - an up-and-coming neighbourhood by the River Aire in Leeds. Laura's role focuses on flood risk and drainage, making sure new developments don't negatively affect the surrounding local residents.

The work Laura does feels rewarding for her as she's directly affecting people's lives. This passion stretches beyond work too, as she volunteers with an organisation that helps respond to big flood events. This has allowed her to speak face-to-face with many families who have been severely affected by flooding, which gives her even more motivation to do the work that she does.

For Laura's portrait, she chose to have it by the river in the city centre. Her connection to this location comes from her time in lockdown when the river was the one place she would go to have some fresh air, take in the nature, and wind down. She still walks along it now and it acts as a lovely place of refuge.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Rocky Took a Lover by Bell X1



LOUISE Rice

Louise was born and raised in Liverpool. At eighteen she left her home city to move to Leeds for university. Louise was drawn to Leeds because she and her friends had been going to Leeds Festival since they were young and had great memories of the place.

She originally wanted to study architecture, but her course at Leeds University was 'Architectural Engineering'. Louise found that after a while she started to love the engineering side of the course more than the architecture side, which led her to the role she now loves - a structural engineer at Curtins.

Aside from work, Louise is proud to be an LFC fan. She used to go to games with her dad and she still gets tickets to go whenever she can. Louise loves to go out socialising with friends and is also a talented painter, often creating painted gifts for others in her spare time.

For her portrait, Louise can be seen in front of her old student house in Hyde Park. As anyone could imagine, this house holds many fond memories from her time in university. She spent her third year here, which was her best year at university, so it felt more than appropriate to be the location for her photo.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

September by Earth, Wind & Fire



MARIJA Sosnova

Originally from Latvia, Marija grew up in Riga, the capital city. She came to Leeds to do her master's degree at Leeds University. Her first graduate job was in temporary works design, moving to permanent work design when she joined to Curtins!

She works as a project structural engineer alongside her husband Harris. Marija considers herself to be quite outdoorsy - she loves camping and being in nature, but she's also not afraid to be daring, as one of her big goals is to do a skydiving course to gain a qualification.

However, most of her time outside of work is spent being a mother - having fun with and looking after her two-year-old son. Marija's photo was taken in the mac suites in the Engineering Building at Leeds University. She spent so much time studying in those rooms, as well as a lot of time making friends, having a laugh, and meeting her husband - so there's plenty of great times for her to reminisce when thinking back to that place.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE



MATT Young

Matt is a true Yorkshireman. Born and raised in Leeds, he now works as a principal engineer at Curtins leading a structural team. Before he got into engineering, Matt was a professional footballer for Huddersfield town. He decided to move towards engineering because of his skills in maths, as well as a desire to make a positive impact on his local community by carrying out work that helps towards creating a more sustainable city.

Understandably, Matt decided to have his portrait taken at Elland Road, Leeds' football ground. The sport remains his passion and the site takes him back to his roots where he began watching football with his family (parents, uncle and grandad). He now watches Leeds at Elland Road with his children, Poppy and Mason.

It is this relationship with Elland Ground that led Matt to have his photo with the Billy Bremner statue outside. His grandad used to watch Bremner play and so Leeds United's history have been passed down through generations. Matt credits his experience as a footballer for mentally preparing him for engineering. Both roles require responsibility, working successfully within a team and a strong mind.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Happy by Secrets in Stereo



MICHAEL Spence

Michael grew up in West Croydon, London. Early in his life, his parents separated, his mum moved to the US to work while Michael, along with his brothers and sister, all relocated to Leeds. They moved in with their dad. went to school, and built a life here. When he was young, Micheal's dad used to come home from work covered in plaster and paint, which was his first introduction to the world of construction and engineering. However, Michael had a great skill in art and graphic design that he was interested in pursuing. Never-the-less, he decided to push through and get the qualifications he needed to become an engineer. It took a lot of hard work, learning, and experiences for Michael to find his feet and settle in a career he loved, but after spending five years working in Manchester, and having his daughter, Michael came back to Leeds and got his job as a project engineer at Curtins. Outside of work Michael loves the outdoors and still loves to draw. Whether it's portraits, landscapes, or comic book characters, he finds it the perfect way to relax and appreciate his surroundings.

Michael is pictured on the pathway from the area he grew up to his old high school, Leeds City Academy. He spent a great deal of time in that area as a young boy, and revisiting the place brought back some fond memories.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Soul to Soul by Fairplay



NEIL Parkinson

Neil is from Liverpool and grew up around Mossley hill. Neil's father, Gary Parkinson started working for Curtins when he was a teen, and was one of the first employees that founder Bill Curtin brought onto the team in Liverpool. As Neil grew up, his father became more senior within the company, but whilst Neil was at school he struggled to focus and eventually ended up working in a warehouse instead of completing his studies. Unhappy with Neil's circumstances, his father told him to come and work at Curtins - little did Neil know, he'd be brilliant at the job and happily work there for a further thirty-one years.

Throughout his many years at Curtins, Neil has worked in multiple branches including Edinburgh, Isle of Man, Liverpool, and Leeds. After marrying his wife, they decided to move down from Edinburgh and settle down in the Leeds office. Over time, Neil took over as office director, joined Curtins' board and held responsibility for the office legally and financially. Curtins is a lot more than a job for Neil, it's been in his life and his father's life for so long that it can't be just a job - this company feels like family to him, so its continuation and progress is very important.

Outside of work, Neil loves to spend time with his three daughters, capturing as much quality time as possible before they leave home.

Neil found it difficult to choose a location for his portrait, but as he kept thinking of places that were special to him, he couldn't get past thinking of the Leeds office. He's been there ten years now, building the team up from three people to sixty. He's incredibly proud of the office, the people who make it, and how far it's come, so it felt just right.



NIAMH McCloskey

Niamh is originally from Grimsby. She moved to Leeds with her partner 7 years ago as a graduate engineer and now leads on sustainability for Curtins. Throughout her time in school, she was sadly never encouraged to pursue the subjects she thrived in, such as science and maths. At that age, she never thought she would have been able to become an engineer, let alone design buildings in a city like Leeds and talk nationally on sustainable design.

Fortunately, Niamh's mum was an engineer and competitive weightlifter - she strongly supported Niamh to challenge stereotypes. Her current role is focused carbon reduction in engineering and construction. She lobbies the government to make embodied carbon part of legislation and campaigns to get people to think differently about their designs. Outside of work, Niamh likes running and sports, as well as visiting cultural events - whether that's independent pop ups, music gigs, or art exhibitions.

For her portrait Niamh decided to have it taken at the ME & YOU mural by Anthony Burrill. Niamh has a copy of this piece in her home and it's a place she visited often with her partner during lockdown, taking a can of Northern Monk beer to sit under the artwork.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Spanish Sahara by Foals



NIC Webb

Born and raised in Kent, Nic attended university in Birmingham where he met his wife – a Leeds girl. After graduating they moved up to Leeds through work. Nic now has three boys, all over eighteen - he never thought his kids would grow up to be thorough Yorkshiremen! In Nic's role as a technical director at Curtins he looks after risks and contracts, and acts as a link between Curtins' people, their clients and their insurers.

In his spare time, Nic is a keen cyclist and considers himself to be quite sporty. That has passed down to his children too, as he's spent many years taking his sons to various sports events and competitions, cheering them on. Now his sons are older, Nic has more time to spend with his wife and they do a lot of walking across the Dales and Moors of Northern England.

Nic has been presenting a course at Leeds University to help graduates achieve chartership status in structural engineering, which has been a really rewarding experience for him. Nic's portrait was taken by the canal near Granary Wharf as this is the start of his daily peaceful and enjoyable cycling commute home.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Can't Take My Eyes Off You by Andy Williams



OWEN Townsend

Owen is a civil engineer born in South Shields, currently living in Harrogate, and he's always had an interest in engineering and construction. His university degree was heavily focused on civils rather than structures, which led him into the career he's been in for twelve years now. Owen has been very involved in the digital side of his job and how his team produces their information - pushing new, effective, and innovative ideas.

Whilst he works at Curtins, Owen is also in the army reserve and has been for fifteen years. He's currently part of their mountain biking team, representing the army at national events. Through his work with the army, Owen has been able to do beneficial work abroad, including construction work in Germany and Cyprus, and even six months in South Sudan working for the UN, building accommodation for displaced families. This arrangement is ideal for Owen as the design aspect of his job in the UK works hand-in-hand with his physical work abroad.

Owen's portrait it taken along the river where he kayaked a lot in the past. Having seen rivers across the world bring life to the places they run through, the River Aire felt like the right place for him.

Song of SIGNIFICANCE

Demons by Imagine Dragons



PAUL Metcalfe

Paul is the former Curtins' director responsible for establishing the office here in Leeds. Now living in Italy, Paul was unable to have his photograph taken locally by Elly, but it was felt that his story was an important inclusion in this exhibition. His photo is his own.

Paul got his degree in civil engineering from Leeds University between 1970-73. "Three years of frenetic fun!", he describes. "Sweaty Betty's" fish and chip shop stood directly opposite the Engineering Block on Woodhouse Lane, so the chip box included as his object holds memories for so many reasons.

He'd chosen Leeds University by reputation - the course was arguably ranked in the top 3 in the UK, plus it was famous (internationally even) for its mountaineering club. Born in the Lake District, his lifelong passion from the age of 11 was, and still is, climbing.

In Paul's final week at university, he listened to an irrepressible Bill Curtin give an impromptu lecture. Before he knew it, he was invited to go climbing with him in Wales, which would involve visiting Bill's office on the way. This turned out to be the start of his wonderful 39-year professional career with Curtins.

On 1st April 1989, having become a Chartered Civil and Structural Engineer, Paul returned to Leeds to open a new office for Curtins. This office grew over time, and when Paul drives through Leeds now he takes great pride and satisfaction in spotting the many buildings the team were involved in.

In 2010, as part of the Curtins' 50th birthday celebration, Paul undertook a solo traverse over the summit of the Matterhorn, raising money for Oxfam and Save the Children by presenting any corporate sponsors with a framed photograph taken on the summit, holding a flag displaying their corporate emblem.

Paul retired as Director from the firm at the end of 2012, feeling lucky at having such a career in such a wonderful location. "Thanks Curtins, thanks Leeds!"



ELLY Fraser-Watts

Elly – this exhibition's curator – is a Leeds based photographer, artist, and singer. She was born in Liverpool and raised in Lancashire, living in a small town called Chorley until she moved to Leeds to study Photography at the Arts University.

Elly loves the arts and always dreamed of working in some area of the industry when she was younger. Her family had quite tough financial struggles growing up, so she wasn't too confident she'd be able to achieve anything in an industry that relies so heavily on funding yourself - but her faith, and continuous support from her Mum and Stepdad helped her get where she is today.

As a young girl you would often find Elly painting, singing, practising piano, or taking millions of photos on her phone - and she still frequently does all these things now at 22. Elly started to view her photography as an art form and combined her skills in fine art with her photography to become better at understanding her craft.

Now, she is most passionate about documentary photography - capturing overlooked or uncovered stories of people close to her, or complete strangers. Her photographs give the viewer information, making them aware of something she wants to express, while being artistically driven - paying attention to colour, detail, depth, and emotion.

When Elly isn't working on photography, she is usually rehearsing or writing music. She's been singing professionally for about eight years and doesn't plan on stopping! She now collaborates and performs under the artist's name 'mina' - the name her parents gave her before they changed their mind to Eleanor. The city of Leeds has given Elly more creative opportunities than she could have imagined, and for the time being, she's very grateful to call it home.