

Museums n'That Episode 5 Transcript

Sara: Hello it's us! And welcome to the Museums n'That podcast, where each episode we have a chinwag and serve you the steaming hot tea on the things museum people love the most. We're your hosts Meg and Sara, from Leeds Museums and Galleries, and we get to know the people behind the objects by asking them the questions you really want to know.

(Theme music)

Meg: You've been practising that haven't you? Yeah she has. Hello the Smez.

Sara: Hi Meggles.

Meg: Look at what you've done with your thing there.

Sara: I know it's exciting isn't it, it's like a book.

Meg: Me and Smez have show notes and I've printed them off today on some insanely expensive looking paper.

Sara: Yeah

Meg: And Smez has just folded hers up like a little stand.

Sara: Well I figured I might make best use of it, it's great paper, I'm going to keep this.

Meg: It is great paper. What the Dunder Mifflin thing. Paper, people, pape...

Sara: Oh yeah, I umm

Meg: People's paper, paper people.

(laughing)

Meg: Anyway, museums.

Sara: Museums. Yeah.

Meg: So, what's your best thing from your week?

Sara: Erm, well it's just been the weekend. I had a nice weekend, weather was atrocious, but I went to a...

Meg: Cold wasn't it.

Sara: Ugh and windy and gross, when you have to walk a dog, ugh bad.

Meg: Yeah but at least you've got a dog.

Sara: That's true, yeah. Erm but.

Meg: Shall I get the violins out. **whispers** at least you've got a dog...

Sara: Yeah, true. You did get a new sofa though. Sorry, I might have just stolen your week thing.

Meg: That was my best thing. I got a sofa yeah.

Sara: Right ok.

Meg: And it had been on order for like 8 weeks so I'd not had a sofa and then they came and I got trapped in my hallway, with a man.

Sara: Because you knew it wouldn't fit.

Meg: I knew it wouldn't fit, and he was like 'it will fit won't it? It will fit, you've measured this, love?' and I was like 'yeah'.

(laughter)

Sara: I've measured it and I know it won't fit.

Meg: No it won't fit and I just kept quiet and hoped that it would go away. And then I got trapped, naturally, in a hallway with a man who was very weird about it and then we booted it in and it was fine. And then I had a nice nap on it yesterday and it was lovely.

Sara: How wonderful. That sounds like a very wonderful weekend. Mine was not dissimilar in that it was quite homely. We went to a Christmas fayre at our local pub and I bought things and drank mulled wine.

Meg: Did you have rum in it?

Sara: No, but I did have four mulled wines.

Meg: Amazing. At Leeds market, you can have rum in your mulled wine. You have to ask for Hot Love.

Sara: Yes, you have to ask for Hot Love. You can't ask for mulled wine with rum.

Meg: It's so bad, you have to be like 'Hello can I have one Hot Love please.'

Sara: Yeah it is making my skin crawl thinking about saying it.

Meg: Ugh I hate myself when I do it but you know I do.

Sara: Yeah, yeah.

Meg: Who have we got on today?

Sara: Ooh it's exciting! Today...

Meg: I can't stop thinking about how good it is.

Sara: Today we have Dr Rebecca Wade.

Meg: Have you planned your outfit?

Sara: Yes, I think it's in line with yours.

Meg: By the way, me and Smez are wearing the same outfit today, it's insane. All black.

Sara: All black.

Meg: I'm dressed like the groke.

(laughter)

Sara: Yeah, I don't know what I'm dressed like, just all black.

Meg: Yeah, All Blacks. Off of New Zealand. Do you like New Zealand?

Sara: I do like New Zealand, do you not like New Zealand?

Meg: No, I've got my best friend, my best friends are in New Zealand.

Sara: Yeah. They've just had a baby.

Meg: Just had a baby, shout out Matilda James Schumacher, well done on having the best name.

Sara: Great name.

Meg: Anyway, enough about people that none of you know. What are we talking about?

Sara: Erm, sculpture. That's her thing, That's what she does. She's very very good at it. I sometimes listen to her talk and think all of the stuff that comes out of my mouth is nonsense.

Meg: Hang on I've got an itchy ear mate.

Sara: Ugh.

Meg: You know when you've just got an itchy ear and it's like, what do I do.

Sara: You know how you like videos of pops being spotted, spots being popped. I watched a video about people taking earwax out of ears.

Meg: Oh I've done that too, yeah. So good. Like really compacted earwax. If anyone's got any links they want to send me. Please do. It's like ASMR though isn't it.

Sara: Yeah, it's pretty grim. Anyway, sculpture.

Meg: Let's get cracking then, here's Rebecca Wade's Museums n'That episode on sculpture.

Sara: Enjoy.

Rebecca: How far away do you want me from...

Meg: You're fine there actually yeah.

Sara: Oh, going straight in with what's your best one.

Meg: No it's...

Sara: You know, you know.

Meg: Well no, these are just structured. This is just a structure, can you not show me up in front of Rebecca Wade.

Sara: Do you think she's not known how we operate for the past two years?

(laughing)

Meg: Brilliant. Erm, Rebecca Wade, you're here!

Rebecca: Hello.

Sara: Hello.

Rebecca: It's me.

Sara: It's exciting.

Meg: I'm sweating. I actually am sweating.

Sara: It's because you ate that gluten free bloody mince pie.

Meg: Yeah I know, bad breakfast choice.

Rebecca: Why would you do that to yourself?

Meg: What did you have for breakfast? Oh wait was it like, blended linseeds with.

Sara: Bircher Muesli.

Meg: nuts and berries and like, the tears of an angel.

Rebecca: Do you actually want to know?

Meg: Yeah I do, of course I wanna know.

Rebecca: It was overnight oats with chia seeds blended with frozen forest fruits, sesame seeds and sunflower seeds and a little bit of turmeric.

Meg: You're going to start sprouting.

(laughing)

Meg: Any minute now you're gonna start sprouting. Oh my god I just did it.

Sara: Turn into a forest.

Meg: Did you hear that then?

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Yeah right. Also, I've actually got a think to show you both.

(exclaim)

Meg: Dan bought me this t-shirt, for my birthday back in October and it literally arrived this weekend.

Rebecca: Oh my god are you wearing it?

(Meg shows her t-shirt laughing)

Sara: Dirty Leeds. Amazing. What's the peacock?

Meg: Dirty Leeds.

Sara: Amazing.

Rebecca: Congratulations.

Meg: Thank you, anyway I'm going to put this back on.

Sara: Why did it take so long?

Meg: It's not that type of podcast is it.

(laughing)

Meg: Anyway brilliant, glad to have got that off my chest. And on my chest.

Rebecca: Very good, very good.

Meg: So, you're feeling good after your breakfast.

Rebecca: I am really hydrated, all my essential vitamins and minerals.

Meg: I wonder what that feels like.

Sara: I don't know. I literally ate pastry with chocolate for breakfast.

Meg: God, so Rebecca Wade you are here to talk to us about sculptures.

Rebecca: Excellent. That's exactly what I wanted to do.

Meg: What's your best one?

Rebecca: Ugh.

Sara: Told you you'd go in straight away with that question.

Meg: Yeah I knew it, I knew that would be the first one.

Rebecca: Can I give you several answers?

Meg: *Sigh* yeah.

Rebecca: That will be increasingly annoying.

Meg: Yeah ok go on.

Sara: We might cut them.

Meg: Wait, so, sorry, first of all - who are you?

Rebecca: I am Rebecca Wade.

Sara: Dr

Meg: No, Dr.

(laughter)

Rebecca: I am an art historian, curator, writer.

Meg: All round legend. Buffy fan.

(laughter)

Meg: Go on then, so what's your best one? What's your best many ones?

Rebecca: Ok, the annoying answer to this, is, the best sculpture is the one that you're doing the research on at that particular time. Because. Don't do that! Because they have this interesting

habit that the more you find out about a particular thing, it reveals its layers, and suddenly you think - I'm absolutely in love with you.

Sara: Like Shrek.

Rebecca: I'm obsessed.

Meg: But what if you're not researching a sculpture. So I'm not researching a sculpture what would you say is the best one. If I was like, show me one sculpture that's going to make me love sculpture what would it be?

Rebecca: Well in the Leeds collection, the sculpture that I've probably had the longest history with is Antonio Canova's Hope Venus.

Meg: Ohh yeah.

Rebecca: It's one of the earliest sculptures in the collection, so.

Meg: Naked lady.

Rebecca: Pretty nude. Your man Thomas Hope, he's an aristocratic dilettante, amateur architect.

Meg: What is that word. Dilettante?

Rebecca: You know, he's...

Sara: No, we don't know!

Meg: What does dilettante, what's a dilettante? That's a good word.

Sara: It's a great word.

Meg: Hi I'm Megan Dilettante. That's good.

Rebecca: Well imagine you're an 18th century dude.

Meg: Always

Rebecca: You've got some really fancy clothes. You've got some really fancy friends. You've got a really fancy house. Just kinda gadding about. You've got boat loads of money.

Meg: Like, what's his name, that writer.

Sara: Which one?

Meg: Byron.

Rebecca: Yes!

Meg: Dilletante.

Rebecca: You're into your literature, poetry, architecture.

(Meg's phone makes a noise receiving a message)

Meg and Rebecca: Oh My God!

Meg: Oh my god I've literally I've flouted all the rules.

Sara: You're terrible.

Meg: Right so basically a cool guy.

Sara: Got it all going on.

Rebecca: Yeah.

Meg: So, say it again, who's this guy?

Rebecca: Thomas Hope.

Meg: Thomas Hope, yeah.

Rebecca: Thomas Hope, while he's in Italy he goes to the studio of Antonio Canova in Rome.

Meg: Cause they're mates.

Rebecca: It's what you do. You go and see what's going on in the studios of sculptors because probably you want to furnish your fancy house in London and your country house in... in the middle of wherever.

Sara: Leeds.

Rebecca: Hmmm.

Meg: Greatest city in the world.

(laughter)

Meg: Dirty Leeds.

Rebecca: And he sees Canova carving the Venus Italica which is based off of a very famous sculpture off of antiquity called the Medici Venus and Thomas Hope really likes it, he wants it, and he says to Canova, I'm paraphrasing here, please may I have it. Thank you, here's lots of money. And Canova is like dude this is actually for someone else, so sorry, it's eventually going to end up in The Met in New York. PS. I can make you one for your house. And then somewhere along the line, the one Canova makes for Thomas Hope gets a little bit nuder, a bit saucier, and eventually ends up in his London town house on a revolving pedestal so he can show off all the angles of this fancy lady to his friends. Often by candlelight so you get to see all of the shadows playing off the surfaces, it's carved in this really beautiful marble and yeah eventually all his belongings are sold off and your man Edward Brotherton, off of Brotherton library fame, off of University of Leeds.

Meg: Oh, Leeds, off of Leeds. Greatest city in the world.

Rebecca: Buys it for his house, in Roundhay, and when he dies, his niece Dorothy Una Ratcliffe inherits all his paintings and sculpture. And then eventually she bequeathed all of her collection to Leeds Museums and Galleries. So it came, actually, late on in the 1970s.

Meg: So, is that other one still at The Met?

Rebecca: Yes!

(exclaiming in background)

Sara: I know.

Meg: Would you ever want to display it in our gallery the way that Thomas Hope displayed it, with candlelight and stuff. Do you think that's the way it's meant to be - would you ever like people to see it that way?

Rebecca: That would be a very cool experiment. So in the basement at Leeds Art Gallery we have the old pedestal that the sculpture used to be shown on. In the last, I guess, maybe 10 years where the trend has been to take sculpture off the plinth so people can go literally eye to eye with the figure, you're much closer to it. So it would be really interesting to elevate it up again and have it on a rotating pedestal so people could really see it from all angles properly.

Sara: A bit like the revolving floor that they had at Tiger Tiger. But not.

Meg: We've all been on that haven't we.

(laughing)

Meg: So right, if a sculpture is on the floor, what would happen if I knocked it over and then it smashed, how upset would you be?

Sara: She's quite heavy though isn't she?

Meg: Well, is she? I don't know, what's she made out of - marble?

Sara: She's solid.

Rebecca: Yeah, made out of solid carrara marble, there are weak points in the sculpture that we take into consideration whenever it's moved.

Meg: How do you know that?

Rebecca: Well we work with conservators that tell us and do detailed condition reports that tell us all about the flaws in the marble because it's a really imperfect piece of marble. It's got these almost bruise-like grey sections all over the body, it's really not as white as people think it is from a distance. It's bottom heavy like most of these sculptures so it would be very unlikely to tip over unless you really had three or four burly guys with you to do it and then it would do you much more damage than you could do to it. But in terms of conservation the biggest problem for us is general accumulation of dust and dirt. And that happens through the atmosphere but it also happens with wandering fingers, because of course sculpture is probably the most tactile of the arts, people really want to get involved in the surfaces because they are so attractive.

Meg: Sticky hands.

Rebecca: Sticky mitts.

Meg: You're sticky mitts Smez.

Sara: I don't have sticky mitts.

Meg: All over Venus.

Sara: I've never touched her.

Rebecca: Well one place you can actually go and see sculpture by candlelight is the Sir John Soane Museum in London because Sir John Soane was a huge collector of sculpture and he

would give people candlelit tours around his collection, making it almost sort of a romantic experience.

Meg: You're not allowed phones in there I don't think.

Sara: Oh really?

Meg: Yeah it's good because it's obviously like how he wanted people to experience his collection. But also I want to take pictures of stuff. If you didn't instagram it did it really happen?

Sara: Yeah. That's true.

Meg: Talking about conservation then, how do you clean something, how do you clean Smez's grubby mitts off of...

Sara: I don't think you're cleaning my hands, I think you're cleaning.. Oh. Right, my hand prints, fair enough. Carry on.

Meg: You're so quick to judge aren't you.

Rebecca: We would call in a specialist conservator.

Meg: Get Laura Davies on the blower.

Rebecca: Oh yeah. We actually cleaned Venus together a couple of years ago before it went on display which was a massive privilege because you never really get that chance to be so up close and personal with a sculpture for that length of time and really explore every crevice and give it a little pedicure. So what we used were a combination of materials and substances; there's a combination of liquids which is known as the V&A mixture or kilquick which is a very specific combination of deionized water, white spirit and a tiny bit of conservation grade detergent which does something very magical and it's a very very gentle way of lifting dust and dirt off a surface without really saturating it in too much liquid.

Meg: Do you ever get stressed when you're doing it, like oh my god this is literally such an important piece of art and I could ruin it.

Rebecca: It would be really hard to do any real damage, and when you're next to a conservator you know that they are going to let you know if something's going wrong, and usually they are the best person to put it right. So it's an amazing privilege, a brilliant feeling, but not - I get more worried about handling sculpture if I need to take it from a certain gallery to another by hand. Or lifting it from one shelf to another in the store, that's when you really feel the weight of that responsibility.

Sara: I suppose marble is really hard stone, as opposed to something that's quite porous, there's probably a lot more opportunity for contamination with something like that I should imagine.

Rebecca: Yeah, sure.

Sara: Especially wood, because you recently did a display on woodworks and it was quite interesting to see some had been handled a lot more than others.

Rebecca: Yeah for sure and with marble especially when you've cleaned it you can also do quite a lot to protect it. So you can also apply microcrystalline waxes and polish it to quite a hard surface that's easily removed to clean it again, it just gives you a protective layer between the mucky fingers and the surface of the sculpture. But then with something like wood you might not want to necessarily apply a wax finish to the top because it could change the colour of the wood, and with a substance like wood it's much more receptive to environmental conditions so you're going to have to look much more closely at temperature and humidity and especially fluctuations between those two things to make sure it's not going to crack or warp.

Meg: So what's your worst material for a sculpture? If you're getting something out of the collection, what are you like 'flipping 'eck, do we have to?'

Rebecca: Yeah, flipping 'eck, I'd say plastic.

Meg: What because it's bad for the environment.

Rebecca: Well it's connected to that because now that plastic is so much part of the narrative around the environment we have this sense of being almost impossible to destroy. It's just going to stay in the sea for thousands of years, it's going to stay in landfill for thousands of years and it's going to break down in a really problematic way. But for us in museums, plastics are liable to deteriorate really quickly. So, for instance, a sculptor called Naum Garbo was working in the 1920s and 30s with some quite experimental plastics that were cellulose based and lots of his sculptures are at the Tate and they could tell that they were deteriorating because of a particular smell. So if you go into a sculpture store and you smell fish and chips.

Meg: Banging

Rebecca: I mean, your first thought is brilliant, where are the fish n chips, your second thought is, actually, that's acetic acid which smells like vinegar. And that means that the plasticizer is leaching out of the material and it's almost going back into its constituent parts. So that plastic is going to go really brittle, it's going to go really yellow, and it's going to have this kind of oily surface and eventually it'll just look like it's melted. So what Tate did is they removed some of those plastics that were deteriorating and decided to replace them with a modern alternative so

you can preserve the integrity of the sculpture. But then you have to be really clear with your audiences what they're actually looking at.

Sara: I was going to say, because especially with art works it's, that's what it's about for a large part of it and it's the provenance of the artist and the time and the area and the influences and once you take that away and Joe Bloggs makes it with a better material because it lasts longer it changes, and I find that really interesting but I know a lot of people might say 'well it isn't art anymore or it doesn't do the same job, and that's really interesting. I didn't know that though.

Meg: I didn't either.

Sara: Plastics going backwards in time. Like back to science.

Meg: That's mad, science isn't it how that works. Off of science. I feel like I've got so many things and my brain is literally like that pfft. So like from what you just said Smezz, there's a thing with art where people are like 'well I could do that, right'.

Rebecca: Yep.

Meg: Sometimes if I see something I'm like oh what, where, why. But then, so why?

(laughter)

Meg: What is, what makes a good sculpture, what makes a bad sculpture, how do you know what is worth putting in the collections? Is it the context around it, or how do you judge it? Because art's such a subjective thing isn't it.

Rebecca: Good question. It's a really big question and it's a question we think about all the time. The response that people generally give to 'I could have done that' is well, you didn't. The integrity of the sculpture lies with the idea, rather than its materiality which is why the question about authenticity is so interesting. And when we think back through history to even the Renaissance, you're thinking about a named artist and a group of craftspeople, artisans who have a huge hand in the production of that object, but are lost to history. So it's not new that sculpture, or painting, or any other art object has contested authorship, or multiple authorship, or it's fabricated elsewhere. It's much more of a continuum with the way things have always been done and in a way much more of an analogy to architecture where you might have a named architect but you know that architect isn't actually on that building site with a trowel. Or film director.

Sara: I think yeah, perhaps, my parents, sorry mum and dad, they often say well I don't get it, how does it make it art. And certainly they would look at Renaissance and say well that's art, but they can't give an answer why and I think that's half the beauty in it.

Meg: I think that's the thing it's not so much why is it art, it's more that I can't answer, I don't know, I didn't know the answer to that question. How to explain it, and that's the question that I have noticed getting asked a lot. When I'm on the art gallery [social media] accounts or I've posted something, particularly modern sculpture and modern art people find it hard to grasp.

Sara: Yeah, I think Damien Hirst is a good example of that.

Rebecca: And museums and galleries have such a huge part to play in contextualising and interpreting these objects. And so often when an object enters a collection and is displayed in a particular way we see a set of signals and codes that tell us this is art. It's gone through so much discussion by the time it ends up on the wall or the floor of a museum or gallery that we're really confident in its status but it's how we communicate that to our audiences is what's so important.

Sara: As, in the audience team.

Meg: Off of Audience Development.

Sara: Ticking all the boxes.

Meg: Asking all the questions everyone really wants to know. That's the thing isn't it Smez?

Sara: It is.

Rebecca: And these debates are old, that's what's brilliant about them in a way that people have been questioning the value of and purpose and status of art objects for at least a century. If you think about Duchamp's urinal is obviously the classic example.

Meg: The what urinal?

Rebecca: Duchamp's urinal. The artist Marcel Duchamp who very famously displayed a ready made urinal in an art gallery setting, signed it R Mutt, dated it 1917, I think. And in a way that's a false origin story for conceptual art and the ready made but it's one that we go back to again and again to explain the shift in thinking between an artist who works on their own, they're a genius.

Meg: I love the way you said 'they're a genius' then, just really offhand. I'd love it if someone was like Megan Jones, you know, they're a genius.

Sara: Yeah, it's unlikely isn't it.

Meg: Yeah, it's not gonna happen. But you never know.

Sara: Well, I think, what's interesting as well is why Yorkshire is so famous for sculpture. What's the deal with Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth, what's she doing, what's he doing? I mean, nothing now..

Meg: Were they best friends?

Rebecca: Great question. They were almost sweethearts, can you believe.

Meg: Almost, but not quite. What happened?

Rebecca: Can you imagine if they'd have got together and had little sculpture babies?

Meg: That'd have been radge.

Rebecca: What happened?

Meg: Yeah, what happened there?

Rebecca: So, your man Henry.

Meg: What is like no Wakefield's too far, I can't be bothered to go to Wakey.

Sara: Yeah it's true. Shakey Wakey.

Meg: Poor babs.

Rebecca: No

Meg: Go on

Rebecca: He was a little bit older so by the time he gets to Leeds College of Art he's already been gassed in the First World War.

Meg: What?

Rebecca: Yeah.

Meg: What? No oh my god, he was gassed?

Rebecca: He was gassed. He was injured, yeah.

Meg: Was he a soldier?

Rebecca: Hmm, yeah.

Sara: No, he was just there.

Meg: Sorry, did they not have gas masks in England.

Sara: Yes but he, it kind of implied that he was a soldier.

Rebecca: Yeah so he'd seen active service in the First World War.

Meg: Right

Rebecca: And the reason he could go to art school was through a grant via his active service, so his art school training was paid for because he enlisted in the army.

Meg: Oh.

Rebecca: So he's a little bit older than Babs.

Meg: So wait, sorry, what happened, with him being gassed, was he alright?

Rebecca: Well not at the time.

Meg: Did it affect him in later life?

Rebecca: I don't think so, well he lived to a ripe old age.

Meg: Right, how old? I bet you know this.

Rebecca: He lived until the 1980s - 86 I believe was the year he died.

Meg: Rebecca Wade's got this habit of being like oh I don't know and then she'll be like really precise and it'll be right. She's looking it up now.

Rebecca: I'm going to say 1898 to 1986?

Sara: Yep, boom. Bang on.

Rebecca: Yes!

Meg: Literally knew it.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Brilliant.

Sara: Wowzers.

Meg: Go on, so he was older than Babs. Are we allowed to call her Babs?

Rebecca: We already have.

Meg: I've got another Babs to talk about aswell by the way.

Rebecca: Ok.

Meg: Ok sorry, getting distracted. Basically have you ever seen the film Funny Girl?

Rebecca: No

Meg: Right, Striesand. Yes, So I went to see it at the Hyde Park Picture House, great cinema.

Rebecca: Well done

Meg: On Saturday, absolutely unbelievable, never seen it before. Babs Striesand.

Rebecca: She's changed your life?

Meg: It's got all the songs in it that I didn't know they were from that film but it's a really good film. Beautiful, anyway, sorry, Babs, Babs Hepworth.

Rebecca: Yep so Babs rolls up at Leeds College of Art a year later and...

Meg: There can't be that much of an age difference then?

Rebecca: Yeah no but he's in his 20s by then she's 18.

Sara: A mature student?

Meg: That's alright. It's not like 10 years innit.

Sara: She was born in 1903 and he was 1898, yeah there's four years between them.

Meg: Four years.

Rebecca: But when you're young.

Meg: Four years. C'mon, go on.

Sara: Yeah.

Rebecca: Though Henry, he wants to revive the sculpture course that had been paused during the First World War at Leeds College of Art.

Meg: Was it paused because of the war?

Rebecca: Yep. Because obviously so many of the tutors and students were enlisted to fight. And the way Henry Moore likes to tell it is that the sculpture course was started just for him, he was the only student and the tutor only cared about him.

Meg: That's amazing.

Rebecca: So he's...

Sara: A modest mouse isn't he our Henry?

Meg: Yeah. So how does he tell it, has he written it down? We've got letters and stuff right?

Rebecca: Yeah absolutely. And he gives lots and lots of interviews throughout his life. He has very tight control over the narrative of his life.

Meg: Do you reckon he would have come on this podcast if he was alive?

Rebecca: I dunno, I get the feeling he's a bit grumpy, especially in later life. You'd have probably had to go to him, I reckon.

Meg: Can't be bothered, literally just over the road isn't it, Henry Moore Institute.

Rebecca: Well no he was at Hertfordshire, at Perry Green in his studio.

Meg: Oh right that's alright Hertfordshire.

Sara: No I'm not going there.

Meg: It's literally not that far, it's on the train.

Sara: It's not Yorkshire though is it?

Meg: Not in Yorkshire, greatest city in the world. Go on.

(laughing)

Sara: I'm not leaving Yorkshire.

Meg: Yorkshire is in my heart.

Rebecca: Eeh by actual gum. So Henry completes all his sculpture training double quick time.

Meg: How cause he's so good?

Rebecca: Well he just wants to get it done and he wins a scholarship to go to the Royal College of Art in that London. And then Babs joins him a year later. And they have a little group of people from Yorkshire who get to form a tight little group and they.

Meg: Who is it?

Sara: What do they call themselves?

Meg: Yeah is it, is it like...

Rebecca: There were other guys, can I remember them, no.

Meg: Is it like, the fab five?

(laughter)

Rebecca: Yes, just like that. They have lots of (lunches??) together, and it's delightful, so yeah.

Meg: Did they fancy each other, when they were like in this group?

Rebecca: No, there are letters that suggest that they were almost sweethearts and they were definitely very close, but they are pursuing a very similar kind of attitude to sculpture.

Meg: Because Babs was a good looking woman right?

Rebecca: I mean, there's a lot of forehead.

Meg: Is there?

Rebecca: Yeah

Meg: Get her up, go on, let's have a look. She's got like, I swear she wears like, like a scarf in her hair and just looks really cool and beautiful.

Rebecca: I mean she is a force of nature, you would not want to cross that woman.

Meg: Why?

Rebecca: Can you imagine the guns?

Meg: Cause of all the sculptures that she's making?

Rebecca: Yeah

Meg: Do you know what, beautiful stuff.

Rebecca: Absolutely.

Meg: I went to the Hepworth, gallery.

Rebecca: Mmm.

Meg: Which I've now just realised is names after Barbara Hepworth.

(laughter)

Sara: Oh my god! No.

Meg: Right, I'm gonna cut that out because it's embarrassing.

Rebecca: It's actually called The Hepworth Wakefield.

Meg: The Hepworth Wakefield, right sorry. Went to the Hepworth Wakefield and all those ones that's like, she's got like strings in it.

Rebecca: Meg is making a gang sign with her hands.

Meg: I think gang sign, gang strings.

[Sara shows a picture of Barbara Hepworth to Meg]

Meg: Yeah I think she's less, think I had something different in my head. Do you know what I had in my head actually, have you ever seen the Princess Diaries?

(laughing)

Sara: With Anne Hathaway?

Meg: Yeah I had her mum in my head. As Barbara Hepworth.

Sara: The Queen? The Queen of Denmark?

Meg: No... honey...

Sara: That's not her mum, sorry.

Meg: It's, first of all not her mum, that's her grandma...

Sara: Sorry.

Meg: and it's the Queen of Genovia.

Sara: Oh yeah, the made up place.

Meg: Which I thought was a real place, still know all the lyrics to their national anthem. So right, Babs what was she like?

Sara: Helen?

Meg: Helen - yeah.

Sara: Yeah a little bit.

Meg: She looks like Helen. Helen....

Sara: God 2001. This has taken a read turn.

Meg: It was literally right there you just clicked it.

Sara: Where? There look. No.

Meg: Her. No.

Rebecca: Great radio guys.

(laughing)

Rebecca: Just congrats.

Meg: This is your time that we're wasting, how do you feel.

(laughing)

Meg: Look, Caroline Goodall, have you seen it?

Rebecca: No! Why would I?

Sara: It's awful, don't watch it.

Meg: Have you not seen Princess Diaries?

Rebecca: No

Meg: You watch Buffy.

Rebecca: Oof.

Sara: That is not the same. You cannot align those two things and call them the same.

Meg: Anyway, let's talk about Buffy. Sculpture aside...who's your best one out of Buffy?

Rebecca: Oh, that's a tricky question.

Meg: Also, we did a quiz of which Buffy character are you.

Sara: Oh yeah.

Meg: I got Giles.

Sara: Ooh I can't remember who I was, I think I might have been Spike.

Meg: Giles was the intelligent, beautiful...

Sara: I did tailor it so I would become Spike.

Meg: Yeah I do really fancy Spike at the minute, he's wearing some really...

Sara: Tight black t-shirts.

Meg: Tight black t-shirts, that he's rolled up to show a lot of arm. Go on.

Rebecca: As someone who is wearing a tweed jacket I feel you know, very strongly towards Giles, but probably Willow.

Sara: Oh yeah, Willow's good.

Rebecca: It's a strong dungaree and hat game.

Meg: Anyway, if you could make a sculpture out of anyone from Buffy who would it be though, would it still be Willow?

(laughter)

Meg: Would it be like a demon?

Rebecca: I don't know, maybe that guy from...

Meg: Don't ruin it.

Rebecca: ...the first season, with the little tiny teeth.

Meg: What?

Rebecca: There's a podcast called Buffering the Vampire Slayer.

Meg: Yep.

Rebecca: And the main guy who's bad in the first season, is he called the master?

Meg: Oh yeah the master.

Rebecca: They call him fruit punch mouth.

Meg: Sorry, the guy with the tiny teeth?

(laughter)

Meg: There's a lot of other features to him.

Sara: From the first season (looking on her phone for an image)

Meg: Fruit punch mouth.

Rebecca: Fruit punch mouth.

Meg: Cute

Sara: Let's have a look at him. Oh yeah look at his tiny teeth! They're not, they're regular size actually. God it's scary isn't it.

(laughter)

Sara: Cool.

Meg: God, so back to Babs and Henry then. Good, what's your best Henry Moore?

Rebecca: Ohhh probably a really early one. So the interesting thing about Babs and Henry. Henry Moore moves into mass production essentially, he has a big studio set up, he's making larger and larger sculptures, moving from wood and stone into Bronze.

Sara: Is he like the ASOS of sculpture?

Rebecca: He's the Amazon of sculpture.

Sara: Wow that's even worse.

Meg: Ugh.

Rebecca: Whereas, broadly speaking, although some of that is still true for Babs, she's also carving in wood and stone and plaster much later. She's also making monumental Bronze but not to the scale of production. See the thing people say about Barbara Hepworth is in the same way that Ginger Rogers had to do everything Fred Astaire did backwards and in heels, Barbara Hepworth had to deal with two marriages, a son from the first one, triplets from the second one - to Ben Nicholson, a bit of a baddun. So she's got four kids, four little tiny toddler tiddlers.

Meg: Toddle tiddles.

Rebecca: And.

(laughter)

Meg: Are they still alive?

Rebecca: Some of them are yeah. I mean her son Paul died I think in the 1950s quite tragically and really changed her life quite dramatically as you'd imagine. I think he was in an air accident.

Meg: Oh god.

Rebecca: Er so yeah she, in a way, has to deal with all the problems of being an international artist and being a woman.

Meg: God, isn't just being a woman a right ballache.

Sara: Isn't it.

Meg: Ugh god.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Um so Babs and Henry

Rebecca: Yep

Meg: Are they, so we know alot about them, they are very prominent in Leeds and Yorkshire, but on, like, an international stage are they as prominent, like, are they, like, internationally good and renowned sculptors?

Rebecca: Yeah absolutely. I think at any one time, somewhere in the world, there is a Henry Moore exhibition. He's in collections all over the world as is Barbara Hepworth, and they're synonymous with modern British sculpture. In a way that's also an effect of the time in which they were rising to prominence, especially in the way that post war British confidence on the new Elizabethans, you think about the Festival of Britain in 1951 and let's move Britain forward and become a post-colonial, international...

Sara: Is that er, also known as the boomers age?

Meg and Rebecca: Ok boomer.

(laughing)

Sara: Mmm ok.

Meg: Are we at that time?

Sara: Yeah I think so. So we ask each a couple of questions at the end so we've not so far had the same answers.

Meg: We're personally rating them out of 10.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Based on the best one so...

Rebecca: Pressure

Meg: Better give us some good content.

Sara: The first one we ask is 'what's been your favourite day at work?'

Rebecca: Ohh

Sara: I'm trying to think, I don't know what mine is, I think it's nice to... no, because that's a really awful interview answer when you're like 'do you know what, they all have their ups and downs and the days that I enjoy most are the days that I'm with.. You.

Meg: Me?

Sara: Meg. No. Sometimes.

Meg: I'm gonna clip that.

(laughter)

Sara: Damn it, it's on record.

Meg: That's sick.

Rebecca: I think my favourite days in my previous role were during the reopening of Leeds Art Gallery. So it was closed for nearly two years for roof refurbishments between 2015 and 17 and we got to see all the transformation of the building from the inside out.

Meg: Was it that facebook live?

Rebecca: Yeah!

Meg: Oh my god so I am Rebecca Wade's best one, yeah.

Sara: There we are.

Rebecca: It was very good. And I was walking around in filthy dungarees for a good couple of weeks, cleaning sculptures and everyone pulls together in those last days of a massive project and it's just a really exciting thing to be involved in.

Sara: That is exciting.

Meg: That is exciting.

Sara: I came to the opening.

Meg: Did you? Did, were you there?

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: You were there?

Sara: And we didn't know each other. Crazy.

Meg: Oh my god it's like the start of a film. It's like when Bridget Jones meets Colin Firth and she doesn't know that they are gonna get married.

Rebecca: What was your meet cute?

Meg: What does that mean?

Rebecca: You don't know, what?

Meg: What does meet cute mean?

Rebecca: For someone who watches so many rom coms. A meet cute is where the two titular characters meet for the first time and it's cute.

Sara: Oh my god. I don't know that we had one. What did we do, I can't remember.

Meg: I remember the first time I saw you.

Sara: Wow.

Meg: Are we getting a bit emotional?

Sara: Like a dream? It's because it's nearly Christmas, we're getting all emosh.

Meg: I know. Yeah you just walked into the Discovery Centre and I was like oh that girl's wearing a nice necklace. And you were wearing a green dress.

Sara: Probably definitely almost accurate.

Meg: Yeah

Rebecca: Glowing aura?

Meg: Glowing aura yeah. Angelsong.

(laughter)

Meg: I remember what I was wearing actually when I first met you because I thought about it for a really long time.

Sara: Did you?

Meg: Yeah, I told Yvonne, me and Yvonne like planned it.

Sara: Oh that's so adorable.

Meg: I wore my white jeans with...

Sara: I was gonna say white, I think I remember...

Meg: With a white Rolling Stones t-shirt cause I wanted you to think I was cool. And then I think I wore my Dr Martens.

Sara: It's a classic Meg outfit, isn't it.

Meg: I wanted you to think, white on white, this girl is wild.

Rebecca: Full on stick of butter.

Sara: Yeah, absolutely.

Meg: Anyway, this is all about you. So right, our next question is - 10 seconds, based on everything that you've said, what is the main thing that you want our listeners to take away. So what's your main takeaway from this. And immediately following that, what is your favourite take away?

Rebecca: Oh, actual take away? Oh so it's like two different meanings of takeaway..!

(laughter)

Sara: Isn't it, aren't we clever? We're good at words.

Meg: We thought about that for a really long time.

Sara: Yeah we did.

Rebecca: What I would like listeners to take away is that sculpture is relevant to everyone's lives, everyone has experience of making sculpture and of objects being in their environment.

So everyone immediately understands on an instinctive level, on an emotional level, on an intellectual level what sculpture is. And that it's not something that you need pre-existing training to understand or appreciate or engage with. And that you can bring to it what your life experience is and it can mean whatever you want it to mean.

Sara: I love that.

Meg: Cute.

Sara: That's great because sometimes you when you like can't be bothered, a bit, and you go around a gallery because you think I just should because I haven't been in a while...

Meg: And it's raining and it's free

Sara: And I can go for a wee in here, yeah. And some days I just like to play the ratings game where I'm like yeah 4 out of 5, no 2 out of 5 and that's all it needs to be but I still had a great time. I still got something out of it, and I felt good about it.

Meg: Yeah it doesn't matter.

Sara: And I think that's quite interesting that it can still make you feel good even if you don't understand it. Or you don't think you understand it.

Rebecca: And sometimes the artist themselves are the absolute worst people to ask about their intention for a work of art because there isn't a linear, straight forward relationship between an object and its meaning.

Sara: That's a good learn.

Meg: There you go.

Meg: Now what's your favourite takeaway mate. Do you even eat takeaways, you probably don't?

Sara: Oh yeah your body is a temple wah wha wha

Meg: Do they do chia seed takeaways? With like lentils?

Sara: No, it's probably like Japanese.

Meg: So what is it, how often do you get a takeaway?

Rebecca: Well, never.

Meg: Too busy swimming and doing exercise and stuff and eating chia seeds and thinking about Henry Moore.

Rebecca: Well again it's a two part answer, I would say got to be a classic fish n chips.

Sara: Do you know what, that was gonna be my gut.

Meg: We've had fish n chips together.

Rebecca: Chippy tea.

Sara: What are you going on about, all your dates.

Meg: Chippy tea, we had it on Blue Monday. You're jealous.

Sara: No.

Rebecca: But also there used to be a nice Thai place that doesn't exist anymore, near where I live, and they used to do an amazing beef and ginger and jasmine rice situation which I was very..

Sara: I am hungry.

Rebecca: Very sad to lose.

Meg: What have you got for lunch?

Rebecca: You mean you're not taking me for lunch?

Sara: We totally can, it's payday.

Meg: Yeah we totally can yeah. I've got a pitta bread upstairs.

Rebecca: Oh no.

Meg: And I toasted it this morning and I don't know why I toasted it. I don't know why I did that, thinking about it. Yeah we could go for lunch actually.

Rebecca: Yeah.

Sara: Let's take her out.

Meg: We could get a mezze.

Sara: Ooh yeah they're good.

Rebecca: A smezze.

(clapping and exclaiming)

Meg: Oh my god.

Sara: Why did we not think of that before?

Meg: We've literally talked about mezzes loads. Smezzel!

Sara: Yes.

Meg: Let's get a smezze. Right.

Rebecca: Brilliant.

Meg: Well let's just cut this short right now I need to get my mezze on. Anyway thank you for coming on Rebecca Wads.

Rebecca: Thanks my dudes.

Meg: Right, let's do this quickly cause I want my smezze.

(laughter)

Sara: How exciting.

Meg: What are you gonna get, will you get a veggie one?

Sara: Yeah cause it's really good.

Meg: Uh I feel like we need to do a really good conclusion but I also feel like all I can think about is halloumi.

Sara: Ooh yeah. Oh and that marinated feta.

Meg: God. That was good wasn't it, what was your best learn?

Sara: My best learn was 100% about plastic and science. I love learning science things because I'm so bad at it. But learning how the sculptors used materials that were a bit rubbish and we've come along and gone pfft nah this ain't going to work we need to do it better. I like that.

Meg: You like being better than everyone don't you.

Sara: I like things that melt so cheese, plastic...

Meg: Babybells. Have you done it?

Sara; No.

Meg: Babybell. Alright everyone listen up.

Sara: Make sure it's outside the plastic surely.

Meg: Yeah. 100%. If you take away one thing from everything that we've ever done. Babybell, take it out of its wrapper and out of the wax.

Sara: Yeah

Meg: Put it on a plate, in the microwave for 10 seconds.

Sara: Wooohhhaaahh

Meg: 10 seconds.

Sara: It's all you need.

Meg: You're welcome. My best learn?

Sara: Yeah, what was your best learn?

Meg: Back to the podcast we just did yeah. Erm my best learn was about Babs and Henry, I thought that was really interesting. Didn't know that Henry Moore had been gassed.

Sara: No, no. Although it makes sense what with him being in the war.

Meg: Yeah.

Sara: A bit.

Meg: Bloody war.

Sara: I know. Bad.

Meg: Yeah, really bad. So that was our podcast, hope you enjoyed it. Erm so big thank you to Tim Bentley who did our theme tune for us and a huge thank you to Alex Finney who designed our cover artwork.

Sara: Yes.

Meg: Very good.

Sara: Excellent work, as always.

Meg: Excellent. 10 out of 10. Do love.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: Please subscribe to this podcast and leave us your review, we'll love you forever but only if it's nice.

Sara: Yeah. We don't like sad ones.

Meg: No, that would be mean.

Sara: There's enough heartache in the world.

Meg: Tell us nice things.

Sara: Yeah.

Meg: And all our transcripts are available on our website. If you want those. Where do people follow us?

Sara: Oh they can follow us on socials!

Meg: Go on what's your address?

Sara: My handle...

Meg: Address?

Sara: My handle is...

Meg: Go on tell everyone your home address.

Sara: My home address is Leeds. My handle is @saralmerritt. Is that right?

Meg: Yeah.

Sara: Oh my god I did it right.

Meg: Well done that you remembered your own handle.

Sara: Well to be fair I don't ever tag me in it, I go from it, I just log on and there I am.

Meg: But you created it.

Sara: What are you?

Meg: I'm @MuseumMeg

Sara: Yep

Meg: That's a good one isn't it? To be fair I was quite proud of that handle.

Sara: Yeah that was very good.

Meg: Museum Meg. Good yeah rolls off the tongue. Also you can tweet us @LeedsMuseums.

Sara: Yes. That's the main gig.

Meg: Tweet us any questions you want and we'll answer them, probably. So, who have we got on next time? God I don't know.

Sara: Let's ask Carl.

Meg: Haha ok.

Sara: Carl - great guy, tell us who you think he sounds like.

Meg: Yeah let's not say anything.

Sara: No spoilers.

Meg: Cause sometimes when he's talking to us we close our eyes and we just imagine that it's this person.

Sara: Yeah

Meg: That's boring chat cause you don't know who we're talking about but tune in and you'll see what we mean. Right, have a good crackin' week.

(Theme music)