

Press release

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TOWER HAMLETS' OWNERSHIP OF 'OLD FLO' CHALLENGED BY BROMLEY

Following discussions with the Art Fund, the London Borough of Bromley has written to Tower Hamlets Council to assert ownership of Henry Moore's *Draped Seated Woman* (known as 'Old Flo') following significant new evidence.

In October this year, Tower Hamlets Mayor Lutfur Rahman announced his decision to sell the sculpture after "unprecedented" budget cuts.

Despite calls and requests from lawyers acting on behalf of the Art Fund and others for Tower Hamlets Council to produce evidence of ownership, it has failed to do so. Lawyers acting for the London Borough of Bromley, the Art Fund charity and others now say new research shows Tower Hamlets Council's claim over ownership to be incorrect and the sale of 'Old Flo' cannot go ahead.

New evidence of ownership

Bromley's claim to the sculpture came to light following new research into the details of the transfer of ownership of the work from the London County Council (LCC) which acquired the work in 1962 so that the public could benefit from its display on the Stifford housing estate in Stepney Green. 'Old Flo' was a symbol of hope and regeneration after the devastation of bombings in the area caused by WWII.

When the LCC was abolished in 1963 and replaced by the Greater London Council (GLC), Stepney was incorporated into the newly created Tower Hamlets Council. Although the land and buildings comprising the Stifford Estate in Stepney were transferred to Tower Hamlets Council, the sculpture was not listed in the Order, and so remained the property of the GLC until its dissolution in 1985.

In 1985 all assets of the GLC were vested in the London Residuary Body, including 'Old Flo'. When the London Residuary Body was wound up in 1996, all of its remaining assets were transferred to the London Borough of Bromley.

Future display for public

Bromley Council has pledged not to sell the work but to display it for the benefit of the public, as Moore intended. The Council will be meeting with the Art Fund, Museum of London, Tate and Henry Moore Foundation in New Year to discuss plans for public display and news will be announced in due course.

Moore, a well-known socialist, sold the sculpture at below market value on the understanding that it would be displayed in a public space and might enrich the lives of those living in a socially deprived area. It was bought by the LCC as part of a wider regeneration programme to improve the lives and living standards of Londoners after the devastation caused by WWII.

Councillor Stephen Carr, Leader of Bromley Council said, “This sculpture must remain in public ownership which is line with the original principles of Henry Moore himself. The idea that selling this internationally recognised sculpture will somehow tackle the financial situation facing Tower Hamlets is flawed. Local authorities need to face financial reality and look at the longer term challenges. The monies raised would not protect frontline services for very long and would stop future generations appreciating this national treasure.”

Public support for ‘Old Flo’

Tower Hamlets had planned to sell the sculpture at auction in February 2013, despite opposition from within its own Council, from residents across the borough, arts organizations including the Museum of London, Tate, the Henry Moore Foundation, vocal support from artist Bob and Roberta Smith and a strong backlash from Art Fund members.

Rushanara Ali, MP for Bethnal Green and Bow, Jim Fitzpatrick, MP for Poplar and Limehouse, and Mary Creagh, MP for Wakefield, in whose constituency the sculpture is currently on loan, have opposed Tower Hamlets' proposed sale. Almost 3,000 people have signed a petition to "Save Old Flo", and to keep the sculpture in Tower Hamlets.

Leading figures from the art world, including celebrated film director Danny Boyle, Henry Moore's daughter Mary Moore, Director of The Tate, Nicholas Serota and Jeremy Deller have voiced their opposition to the sale. London Mayor Boris Johnson has also urged Tower Hamlets to reconsider the sale.

Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund said: “This new evidence that ownership of the sculpture rests with the London Borough of Bromley should bring to an end Tower Hamlets’ cavalier plans to sell it. This can only be good news and we look forward to discussing next steps in the near future with Bromley so that ‘Old Flo’ can stay where she belongs – in public ownership and on public display.”

Sharon Ament, Director of the Museum of London said: “This is really good news. Bromley Council are not only asserting ownership but are committed to the sculpture’s future public display. We hope this will be where the people of the east end can enjoy it.”

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About the Art Fund

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art, helping museums and galleries across the UK to acquire great works of art and develop their collections, and encouraging the public to make the most of all there is to see. Over the past five years we have given £24 million to enable over 200 museums, from ancient sculpture and treasure hoards to Old Master paintings and contemporary commissions, and supported a range of programmes which bring art to wider audiences. We also work with collectors to help place gifts of art in suitable museums and galleries. We are independently funded and the majority of our income comes from 95,000 members who, through the National Art Pass, enjoy free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off most major exhibitions. For more information please go to www.artfund.org

Museum of London

At the museum of London Docklands a new display [Henry Moore and the East End](#) opened earlier in the month. The display contains a series of scale models created by Moore to visualize and test the 'Old Flo' concept ahead of production.