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David R. Harper: Zodiac

October 12, 2022 – February 11, 2023

The word zodiac describes an astrological system or, perhaps more often in popular context, the twelve regions that make up the system and identify as “signs.” These signs, associated with different animals or symbols, are also linked to personality traits and the specific day someone was born.

David R. Harper: Zodiac features a series of sculptural works based on the zodiac signs. Harper uses imagery and metaphor to encourage people to think about how an object’s meaning can change based on who is interacting with it. Further, he hopes viewers will reflect on themselves, in his words: “to see themselves, based on their zodiac characteristics, in some way in the work.”

RAM’s exhibition marks the first time the *Zodiac* series has been shown together. Originally commissioned by the Gardiner Museum in Toronto, the twelve works/ installations were shown spread throughout their galleries and in relation to pieces in their permanent collection. Per the direction of the artist, RAM is able to show the work as a whole or broken down into various groups or individual works.

Excerpts below are from an interview with Harper conducted by Gardiner Museum staff:

What’s your sign?

Harper: I’m a Libra, but a Virgo/Libra cusp. I undoubtedly have the typical traits of both, and think about them often as they relate to my work and personal life.

Can you tell us about the inspiration behind the exhibition?

Harper: I was commissioned by the museum [the Gardiner] to make twelve new works, and I have in the past referenced imagery of the zodiac and astrology in my work so thought it would be a great opportunity to fully explore the idea and make the complete zodiac—twelve pieces, twelve signs. I’m interested in the relationship between the object and viewer, and how one’s own personal history can shift an object’s meaning—so this project was especially challenging because I was tasking myself with making objects that “are” the viewer. I want people to be able to see themselves, based on their zodiac characteristics, in some way in the work.

Each of the twelve installations are such a unique reinterpretation of the traditional zodiac symbols. Can you tell us a bit about your creative process for this project?

Harper: I created a map for each object based on one or two people that I know personally and started to pull out their traits. My goal was to create a particular visual, not based on what we typically read for a certain sign but how those characteristics translate into the world. This process allowed me to take even the traits that may be seen as negative and reframe them. For instance, Libras are indecisive, and it’s infuriating to try and pick a restaurant with a Libra! However all the Libras I know use that indecisiveness to take great care in their lives—whether it’s the work that

R|A|M

they do, or how they see their decisions impacting others. Looking at both sides of a sign allowed me to be more intuitive with my aesthetic choices, nothing was fixed, and ultimately it was about how to care for each other without expecting them to change. All my friends who are Scorpios are all powerful and intense, but they also need protection and nurturing, so softer personalities are drawn to them.

All the pieces changed and evolved through the making process, I worked on all of them at one time, not in any order—which allowed for moments to reveal themselves. Material decisions were made based on the successes or failures in experimentation. Those successes and failures informed other choices, and the whole process became generative. There is a lot of material crossover, because I want to relay that connection between seemingly incongruent signs.

The full interview is available on the Gardiner Museum's website at:
<https://gardinermuseum.on.ca/conversation-david-r-harper/>

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The Signs of the Zodiac

Aries (March 20–April 19)

Symbol: Ram

Element: Fire

Personality Traits:

- Chooses to do things that they want, in their own way.
- Possesses a strong desire to prove their strengths and themselves.
- High energy leads to quick decision-making.

Taurus (April 19–May 20)

Symbol: Bull

Element: Earth

Personality Traits:

- Views the world through a grounded and logical perspective.
- Enjoys having a routine and puts comfort first in their lives.
- Can lean towards stubbornness.

Gemini (May 20–June 21)

Symbol: Twins

Element: Air

Personality Traits:

- Intelligence is evident, especially seen when learning new things.
- Unique talent of understanding another person's personality within the first few minutes of meeting.
- At ease at being an extrovert or an introvert.

Cancer (June 21–July 22)

Symbol: Crab

Element: Water

Personality Traits:

- Enjoys spending time at home with family.
- Excels at nurturing others.
- Has a strong empathetic nature.

Leo (July 22–August 22)

Symbol: Lion

Element: Fire

Personality Traits:

- Easily and eloquently speak on nearly any subject.
- Ambitiously pursues everything they do.
- Often considered performers—they enjoy placing themselves at the center of attention.

R | A | M

Virgo (August 22–September 22)

Symbol: Virgin

Element: Earth

Personality Traits:

- Can be considered a perfectionist with a keen eye for details.
- Known for their intelligence, but have trouble expressing themselves due to their introverted nature.
- Has a desire to feel useful and productive.

Libra (September 22–October 23)

Symbol: Scales

Element: Air

Personality Traits:

- Consistently occupied with the idea of embodying “goodness.”
- Endeavors to be viewed as the responsible figure.
- Can be simultaneously introverted and extroverted depending on who they are spending time with.

Scorpio (October 23–November 22)

Symbol: Scorpion

Element: Water

Personality Traits:

- Possesses a devoted, determined, and observant nature.
- Committed to studying and researching—hard workers.
- Creates strong relationships with those that they care for.

Sagittarius (November 22–December 21)

Symbol: Archer

Element: Fire

Personality Traits:

- Does not fear change.
- Fiercely independent and pursues adventures within their lives.
- Believes knowledge comes from within.

Capricorn (December 21–January 20)

Symbol: Sea goat

Element: Earth

Personality Traits:

- Does not want to be the center of attention.
- Endeavors to be a rule follower.
- Strives to be entirely self-sufficient.

R | A | M

Aquarius (January 19–February 18)

Symbol: Water bearer

Element: Air

Personality Traits:

- Humanitarians—philanthropic and intensely interested in making the world a better place.
- Visionaries with the ability to think abstractly to solve abstract problems.
- Naturally curious and inquisitive.

Pisces (February 18–March 20)

Symbol: Fish

Element: Water

Personality Traits:

- Behavior changes based on who they are around.
- Places great importance on what they're feeling, allowing them to be naturally compassionate and empathetic.
- Associated with having an otherworldly quality to them—a sense of innocence.