

Frankophilia !

An exhibition of artwork by Frank Sidebottom fans

Reviewed by [Fat Roland](#) November 2010

I've followed Frank Sidebottom from his surreal infancy on Granada TV and his cartoon adventures in print (Frank's Fantastic Oink! Page) to his recent revival on Channel M.

Following the passing of his creator Chris Sievey earlier this year, Timperley's silliest export is now the subject of a comprehensive exhibition at Salford University. I visited the show carrying the whole weight of my Frank fandom: this was either going to be, as Frank would have it, bobbins or fantastic.

Frankophilia! is a labour of love for the university's art officer Suzanne Smith. Dozens of people have submitted a dazzling array of Frank artefacts, including portraits, models, photographs and some items that are so unusual, they're going to need more explanation in the paragraphs below. It is a room full of obsession with a man in a pretend head.

So what's there? Heads. Lots of heads. It's as if some kind of grotesque ancient Amazonian ritual has taken place in papier mâché form. This is not a subtle display, and because it is an exhibition about someone who has died, it may jar.

A model of the man greets you on entry and it's hard not to flinch with the thought that he's back from the dead. Seeing the awkward way the model sits on the chair, with his fat tie, cardboard arms and puffed-out chest, it's hard not to feel either grieved or aggrieved.

It brought to mind the same feelings I had at Frank's memorial in Castlefield when the organisers stamped on Little Frank's head so he could join his big brother in heaven. It's tasteless... but it's funny... and it's somehow uniquely Frank.

On first glance, you know this will be no ordinary exhibition. I'd recommend visitors skim round the exhibits once, give yourself a ten minute break, then start digging deeper because among the madness, there is sweetness to be found.



You'll notice the more professional pieces, such as Emily Gilhooley's film tributes (Frank 007, The Frankfather) and portraits by Kev Grey and Accent UK contributor David Baillie. An artist called Stewey offers his own thumbs-aloft Banksy Frank, which I wish he'd signed "Franksy".

There's a sofa and telly, of course, playing a live show. At the exhibition launch, two of Chris Sievey's friends watched the screen, laughing warmly at their memories of the performer.

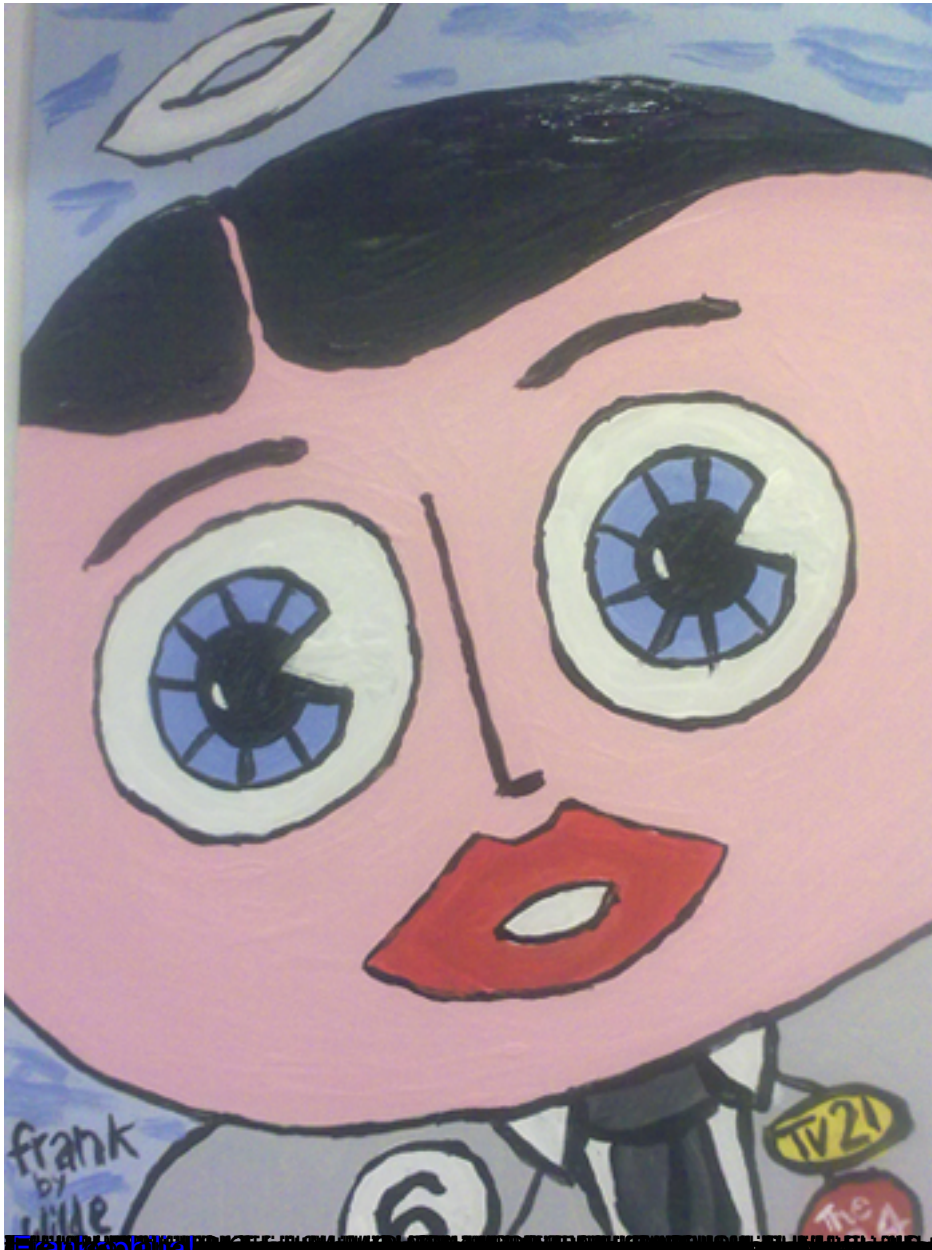
But it's the delightfully shambolic range of home-made pieces that offer the best insight into the character's cult status.

Sitting on its own plinth, almost apologetic in its smallness, is a birthday card from someone's grandmother with a glorious Frank's World picture on the front. At the other end of the size scale, three Guy Fawkes dummies with increasingly-Picassoed Frank faces offer suggestions of cold firework nights in a Timperley park.

A tiny papier mâché head was gifted by a nine-year old Jasmine Woods to a somewhat nonplussed mum. When it's not in this exhibition, it sits at home offering a dual memory: a memento of a daughter for a mum, and for when Jasmine visits, a treasured memory of Frank.

And there are Frank's lyrics to Urban Spaceman scrawled onto a column in playful blue and red, a 3D warning sign declaring "bobbins", Adrian Brown's head and scarf combo, David Brownlee's provocative tranny pose and Paul McCaul's 3D display with glasses. And so much more.

Then, the jewel in the crown, or to bring the metaphor to Frank's level, the hula hoop crisp in the party hat.



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