

The Herald

"Frederick Douglass artwork goes on display at Perth Museum"

By Craig Williams

October 9, 2026



A staged scene from *Lessons of the Hour* (2019) by British artist and filmmaker Sir Isaac Julien (Image: Perth Museum)

An artwork celebrating abolitionist Frederick Douglass has gone on display at a Scottish museum – on the exact site where he spoke 180 years ago.

Lessons of the Hour opened on Friday, October 9, at Perth Museum as part of wider Black History Month celebrations.

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At the heart of the exhibition is Turner Prize-nominated British artist Sir Isaac Julien's immersive film-based artwork *Lessons of the Hour – Frederick Douglass*, which explores the life and times of the anti-slavery campaigner and his time in Scotland.

The artwork is displayed on the exact site where Douglass himself spoke on four occasions in 1846 at the former Perth City Hall and has been brought to Perth in partnership with ARTIST ROOMS, a national touring collection of modern and contemporary art in the UK.

The artwork is contextualised within a wider exhibition exploring Perthshire's links to slavery, featuring never-before-displayed archival documents and two celebrated examples of black portraiture on loan from Angus and Stirling, brought together for the first time.



A visitor reads interpretation in the museum (Image: Perth Museum)

The *Pipe of Freedom* was painted by Thomas Stuart Smith, founder of what is now the Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum. Submitted to the Royal Academy Exhibition in London in 1869, it was rejected on political grounds, with Smith later exhibiting it elsewhere alongside works considered unsuitable or too risqué by the Academy. Painted from life, the work depicts an empowered black man whose identity, like those of many black sitters portrayed during this period, was not recorded.

It is displayed alongside *Louis Black* by James Irvine, on loan from the collections cared for by ANGUSalive Museums & Galleries. This painting is an incredibly rare example of a portrait of an emancipated black person living in 19th century Scotland, painted from life. Black's remarkable

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story is explored in the exhibition, alongside other powerful anti-slavery figures linked to Perthshire including Joseph Knight, Olaudah Equiano, and of course Frederick Douglass himself. The exhibition invites visitors to reflect on the life and legacy of Frederick Douglass, who played a critical role in anti-slavery and human rights movements in Scotland and around the world.

Ashleigh Hibbins, Head of Audiences and Learning at Culture Perth & Kinross, said "Like much of Scotland, Perth and Kinross had close links with the horrors of chattel slavery and its impacts are still with us today.

"I cannot think of a more fitting location than Perth Museum for the first and only Scottish venue to host Lessons of the Hour as part of the inaugural ARTIST ROOMS UK tour.

"Our museum stands on the very spot where Frederick Douglass himself would have spoken to packed-out crowds as part of his powerful anti-slavery campaigning across Scotland.

"Julien's poignant artwork re-energises Douglass's life and legacy for a new generation, and we are proud to play our part in sharing this story with the people of Perth and Scotland."

The exhibition Lessons of the Hour runs until April 11, 2027. Admission is free. A ticketed programme of associated events, talks and workshops are now on sale.

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