

Bronzed AND beautiful

As Brixton's famous sculptures turn 20 years old, *Voyage* explores their fascinating history

If you've ever waited for a train at Brixton Station, chances are you might have done a double take. Perched on three of the platforms are some startlingly life-like bronze sculptures, depicting three young people waiting for trains.

They stand at the west end of the station. On the London Victoria-bound platform, a casually dressed man leans against the station's brick wall. He folds his arms and flexes his right leg to rest his foot on the brickwork. By his left foot, his bag stands directly on the platform. Opposite him, near the edge of the Orpington-bound platform is a woman, shopping bag in hand. On the third platform a woman with her sports bag at her side stands with her back to the

middle figure.

The three statues are positioned in a straight line running at a right angle to the track. Unfortunately, an eight-foot high blue metal fence, which encloses an area between the figures of the two women, now disrupts the unity of the composition.

The sculptures, collectively named 'Platform Piece', were created in 1986 by Kevin Atherton, and were commissioned by British Rail at the suggestion of, and with advice from, the Public Art Development Trust. They formed a focal point of the £1 million Brixton Station Improvement Scheme, a collaboration between British Rail, the London Borough of Lambeth and the Department for the Environment.

After Atherton's idea had been approved, advertisements were placed to find artists' models. The three successful applicants were Peter Lloyd, Joy Battick and Karin Heistermann, one having signed up at the station and two at a local community centre.

An old ticket office on the station platform

was converted into a studio and here Atherton made plaster moulds of his three volunteers. The moulds were then cast in bronze.

Local residents and schools were invited to watch the sculptor at work and in addition there was an accompanying exhibition at the Brixton Recreation Centre opposite the station.

The unveiling of the artwork in June 1986 by artist and author Sir Hugh Casson officially marked the completion of the station's renovation. Not only this, 'Platform Piece' earned its place in history as the first sculpture of black British people in the UK. It was awarded the 1986 Association of Business Sponsorship of the Arts Industry award for the best commission in any medium.



Here's looking at you: Brixton employee Rita Duggan with the statue of Peter Lloyd