



# SHIFTING NARRATIVES

## Reciprocal making and learning through fashion and textiles

The exhibition celebrates the work of 'Decolonising Fashion and Textiles – Design for Cultural Sustainability with Refugee Communities', a collaborative project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and led by Dr Francesco Mazzeola (Centre for Sustainable Fashion, London College of Fashion, UAL) across three east London boroughs (Newham, Tower Hamlets, and Waltham Forest) from 2022 to 2024.

With the mass displacement of people on the rise, *Shifting Narratives* responds to the urgent demand to address the diverse needs and aspirations of refugee communities, whilst valuing and sustaining their cultural heritages and craft skills. This exhibition challenges dominant design practice and brings to the forefront the stories of refugees and their collective visions for a more equitable and sustainable future.

In the fashion industry, the textile heritage of minorities has often been 'othered', appropriated or undervalued as 'non-fashion'. Instead, the project offers a safe space for refugee participants from different walks of life to meet with each other, learn new skills, and use fashion and textiles to build a new life in their place of resettlement. The works in the exhibition were created by refugees and asylum seekers from both the UK and Indonesia and students from University of the Arts London, Institute of Technology of Bandung and University Gadjah Mada. They contribute to shifting prevailing narratives, highlighting the socio-cultural practices of refugees who play a crucial role in shaping the diverse social fabric of a place, whilst building resilient communities and fostering cultural sustainability.



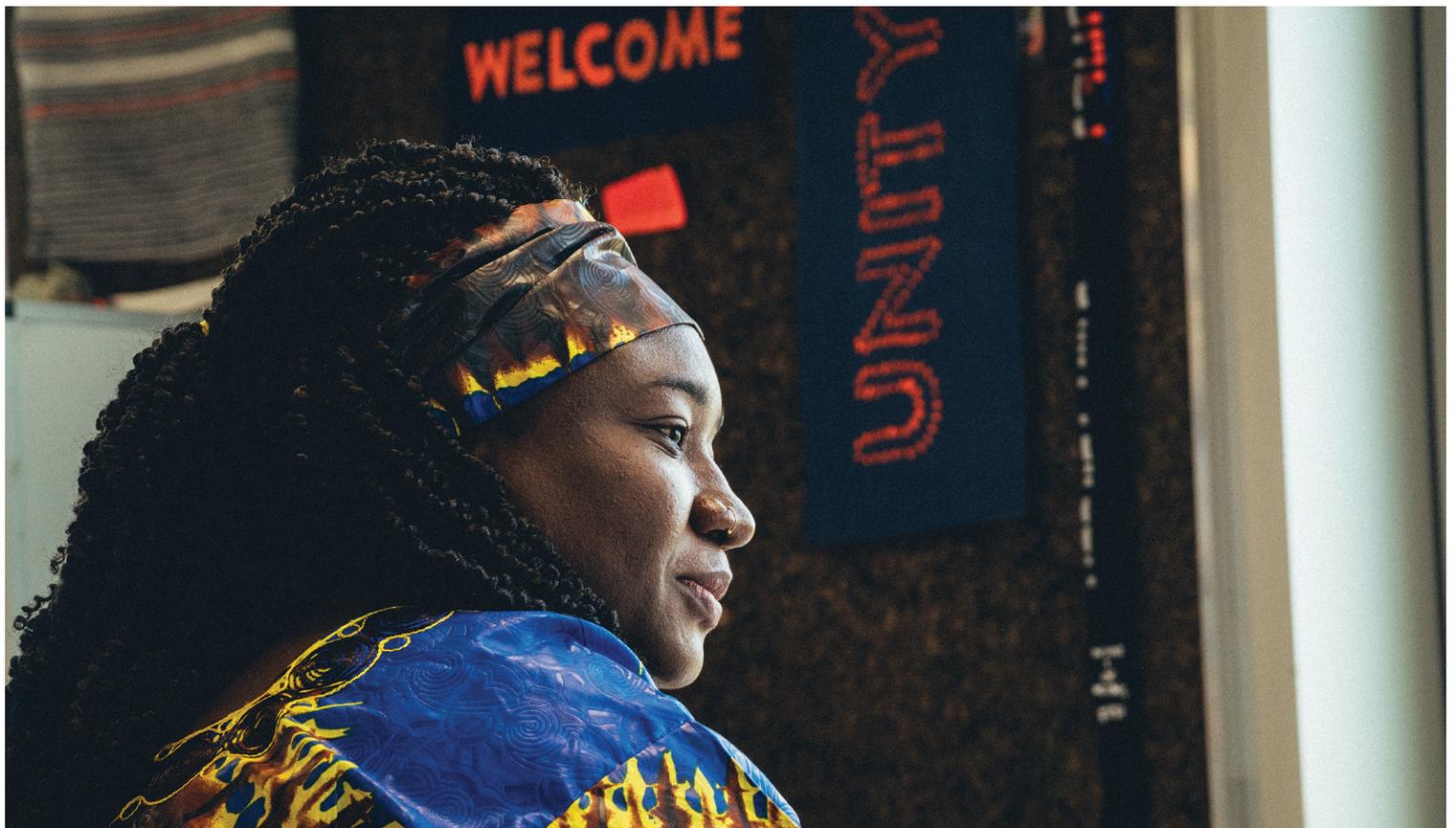
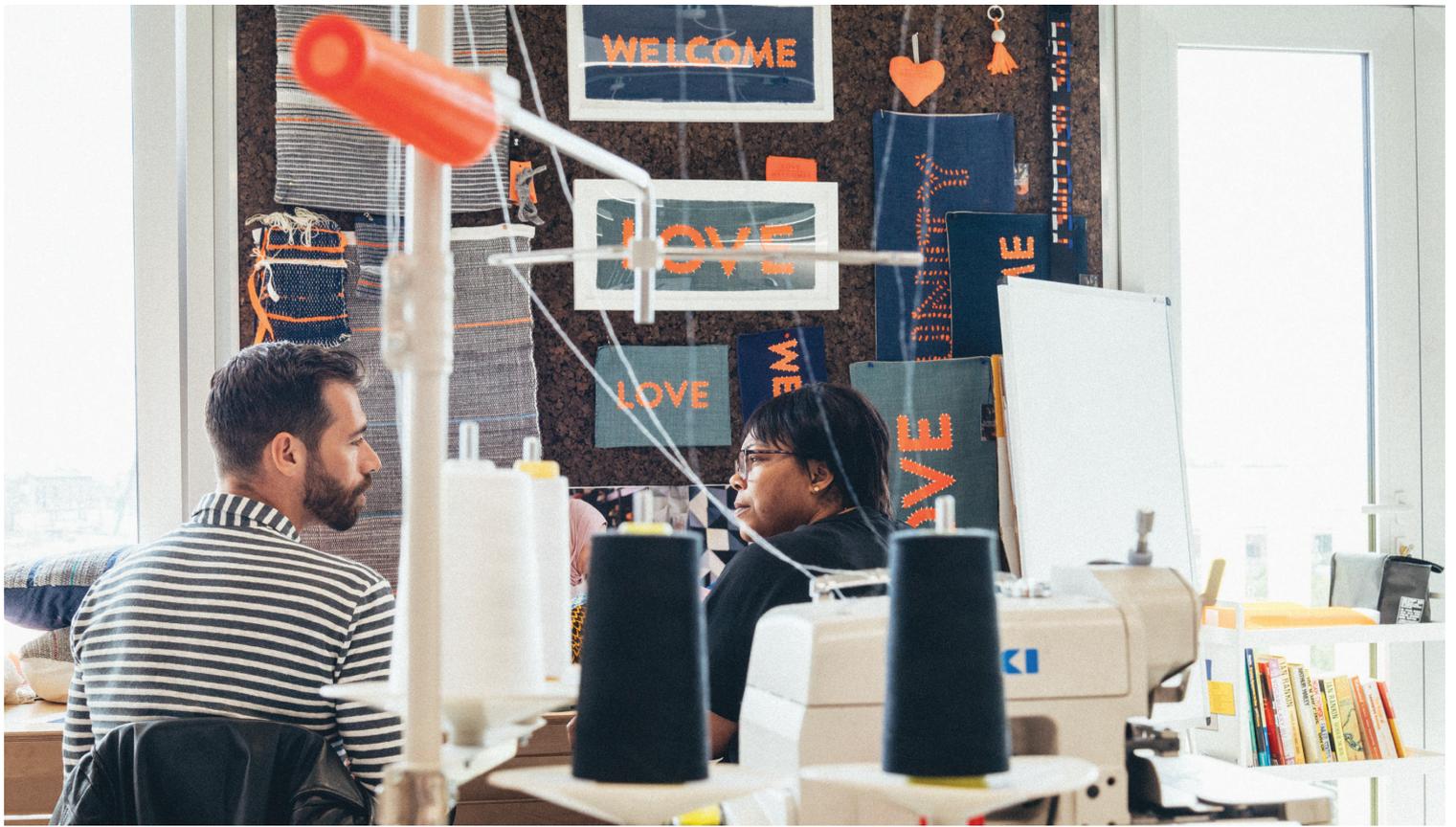
*Storytelling* describes the process of textile making through which refugees, asylum seekers and project collaborators shared and reflected on important aspects of their identities, cultures, and lived experiences. In the initial storytelling sessions, the participants brought textiles, clothes, and accessories meaningful to them, which became the starting point of conversations unravelling their diverse cultural heritages, migration journeys, fashion skills as well as employment aspirations.

The *Textile Autobiographies* presented in the exhibition were created by each participant using photo portraits printed onto fabric, then enriched with painting, beadwork, hand stitching, appliqué, fabric collage, to tell their stories and express their shifting identities as they rebuild their lives in a new place.

To accompany the storytelling process, a *Textile Map* was developed with the participant groups in the London boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets, and

Waltham Forest. The map serves as a visual representation of the diverse experiences of refugees and asylum seekers in London, as they access services or training programmes, engage with fashion and textiles, volunteer in community centres, and develop meaningful connections with specific places while rebuilding their lives here. Ultimately, the information shared in the map contributed to building a support network and fostering community resilience.

The collaborative storytelling process helped reframing what *fashion* and *textiles* mean in the context of design for cultural sustainability with refugee communities. Fashion here is not defined through the Western lens of the clothing industry that dominates mainstream narratives, but it refers to the social and cultural practices and related material objects created in the peripherals where diverse multi-ethnic communities flourish.



# Textile Autobiographies

Embroidery hoop,  
textiles, mixed media  
32.5 cm x 15 cm



**Abdel Aziz**

*The Symbols of Success*  
2023

*The corn and wheat depicted here remind me of when I was young. Wherever I looked, there were corn fields, cows, camels, and caravans. I asked my father why I didn't go to school and study, and he told me to work in farming corn and make money this way. After I grew corn, my father said that I should buy a cow also as that could generate money too. Then, my father advised me to buy a camel, which could go far and return on its own. These are my favourite symbols of prosperity and success.*



**Adeola**

*My Culture is my Pride*  
2023

*I am an African woman who believes so much in preserving her cultural heritage. My culture is my pride. Batik made from tie and dye is a form of dressing which the Yoruba tribe in the Southern part of Nigeria (precisely Abeokuta, in the Ogun state) cherishes so much. These batiks are made for commercial purposes as a means for survival. I so much love any form of traditional wear compared to putting on jeans and tops. The use of flowers to decorate my portrait proves that I love being surrounded by people, friends, and family, despite the diversity in their cultures. I also used beads to make a heart (as a love design) on my portrait. This implies I love people, holding them close to my heart, and I also want to be loved.*



**Alisa**

*Belonging*  
2022

*Having left Russia 10 years ago, I feel that my identity has grown larger than what my homeland can hold. Hence, I've found belonging in the fragments, the little dots that constitute the totality of me, in places all around the world. UK, Panama, India, Mexico, and Russia - all of these have been my home. But most importantly I know that I am in every wave of the rolling sea, the breeze knows me personally, the leaves whisper their secrets to me daily and I am deeply rooted in nature, no matter what culture I am submerged in. I belong to this Earth. For this portrait, I've recycled hand-dyed and screen-printed fabrics scraps from my previous projects. The flowers share my inner resonance with nature. The planetary globe as the background represents the numerous cultures that have adopted me and shared their wisdom with me, and the dotted outline around my silhouette represents my ever-expanding, absorbing, and saturating identity.*



**Azizullah**

*My Handmade Tradition*  
2023

*By creating my portrait in this project, I intended to showcase my handmade tradition of crafting and using textiles for making dresses both for the Afghan men and women. I found this is a unique opportunity to be part of this great project and meet other people from other countries.*



### **Basma**

*I Dreamed a Dream*  
2023

*I have been away from my home country for 4 years now. My dream was to leave and leave behind all memories. The only thing I realise is that I cannot erase memories, but I can build new ones. I am moving on and achieving things I dreamt of, but the learning process is the hardest, especially in my new host country. The quote surrounding my portrait is part of a poem from my Arabic heritage that expresses the love I have for Egypt, that love that pushes me to go on here and keeps my strength and power. I dreamt to start my own life somewhere away from home and ending up being a refugee is making my experience unique and I am proud of it.*



### **Benita**

*Shining Like a Rose*  
2022

*The beautiful piece of fabric that I am holding in this photo means a lot to me as it reminds me of where I am from, and it's the only item that I have from my sister and mum back home who love me. I customised this printed portrait of mine with glitter pieces and small pink balls to make it look fun and more beautiful even if inside me I was completely sad and broken because my dad passed away. But I believe that he's proud of me and I will shine like a rose.*



### **Bilal**

*My Ancestors, My Rhythm,*  
*My Freedom* 2023

*My piece shows the immigration journey and the flags that define my life. My long hair is my symbol of rebellion as the toxic mentality of my community and those around me frequently told me that men should not have long hair. The flag of India represents the origin of my genetics and the home of my ancestors. The flag of Trinidad and Tobago looks a lot like a fingerprint; this is the rhythm that runs through my veins and the culture and country that raised me and make me feel most alive. The flag of the United Kingdom symbolises the country that accepted me, the land that reassured me that nothing is wrong with me, and I am free to be who I choose to be. The strings and beaded tassels (Latkan) are part of traditional Indian women's attire and are commonly used to fasten the back of a blouse. This heavily embellished string symbolises the tying together of all the aspects of my life.*



### **Dave**

*Colour* 2023

*My artwork is about the colour of explosion that happened unexpectedly in the project workshop. Creating my artwork made me think back to the time when my nan used to make clothes and I was so curious not to leave her side. My nan was my hero and without her, I would be zero. She told me: 'be your best in whatever you do, and always keep it real.'*

*I love colours and textures, so I tried to make my piece vibrant, colourful, and positive, in the hope it will be a conversation starter that would inspire others. Colour has the power to convey moods and feelings. We can also associate memories and thoughts with certain colours. It is a powerful communication tool and can be used to signal action, influence mood, and physiological reactions. A rainbow is made of a myriad of individual spectral colours that are overlapped and mixed. Just like any community is made of many different people, elements, and components. Humanity should be our race and love should be our religion.*



**Esther A.**

*Wearing my Culture*

2022

*This portrait is a full expression of myself, being happy wearing my culture. I have used colourful beads – typical of my home country – to add a necklace and a watch to my portrait. I also stitched a crown on top of my head to represent that I feel like a queen, while the beaded hearts represent my love for myself. Overall, I want this portrait to communicate the colours of my country, that make me feel good.*



**Esther E.**

*My Identity*

2023

*I am fondly called Queen Esther. In my artwork, I used a fabric called Ankara. This is generally used in Nigeria, but this particular type of Ankara is mostly used by the Ibo women in the Eastern part of Nigeria. Every married woman in Ibo land usually has a collection of this Ankara in her closet because it signifies them as a married woman. The flag which I stitched on my artwork, the green, white, green using fabric, reminds me so much of my home country, Nigeria. I have represented a crown on my head because the crown depicts royalty, and it reminds me of the story of my birth. According to my mum, I was unique right from my birth, and I was given the name Esther, which was after the biblical queen Esther. I stitched ornamental beads around my neck because a queen is usually adorned with expensive ornaments, so I designed my necklace with gold and diamond. A queen spreads love amongst her people. Anywhere she goes, she shows love to her people, and in turn she is usually loved by all.*



**Francesco**

*Crafting Journeys*

2023

*I am a craftsman of my own life, which looks like a patchwork of the diverse cultures which I have absorbed from the countries where I have lived. This artwork represents my migration journey in my search for better education and employment opportunities. I have chosen different materials to represent the fabrics of my life: from the red velvet of the elegant Italian interiors to the orange flannel of the Netherlands, the floral Chita fabric from Brazil, the knitted fabric evoking the cold weather during my stay in Hungary, the blue of the South African ocean, through to the Nottingham lace which welcomed me in the UK initially to pursue a PhD and where I feel settled. A blue thread (representing the water of my beloved Mediterranean Sea) stitches all these life experiences together. A crocheted heart represents the love of my grandma, who used to crochet blankets when I was young. At the core of my artwork there is the tree of life, a symbol of the synergies with all the people in my life. A reminder of my role, seeking constant change, and crafting – my and other people's – life journeys.*



**Ghonche**

*Woman, Life, Freedom*

2023

*My textile artwork reflects the situation in my home country, Iran. It's very difficult for women to live there because, with the forced hijab issue, we have been scarifying a lot, and many have died. A few strands of hair in Iran appear to carry a death sentence. Our life slogan has become 'Woman, Life, Freedom' and, unfortunately, we have to die for this freedom, for speaking openly. We're considered second class citizens – with no rights to speak our mother tongue (Kurdish), wear our traditional clothes comfortably to go to the bazaar, reach our aspirations, speak our truth, etc. Freedom for us is to speak your mind and heart. We are sacrificial women living in a patriarchal country. I'm grateful to now be in the UK, not to be in a country with so many losses – tomorrow it might be me or someone I know. But in the same breath, my heart is there, because there's no difference between me and them – we are all humans. They are the future of my country. They go towards freedom, our freedom. Woman, Life, Freedom!*



## Halima Aro

*Resilience and Hope*

2023

*My textile portrait represents the life I lived before my migration to the UK and the life I am living now. I made this by using Ankara, a fabric which is deeply associated with my culture to demarcate the very dark side of my past life and the life I live now. The dark side represent what my journey has costed me so far, that is the separation from my family and the vibrant nature of my culture. In the lighter part, I represented a pigeon as a sign of freedom and hope. This is because the only animal I felt close to after my mother's passing was a pigeon that kept perching on the window of the hotel room where my son and I were housed after seeking protection in the UK. I created my artwork in this way because I see life as a journey through 2-sided tunnels. The dark side and the light side. Even when we get to the light at the end of the tunnel, every moment we experience in the dark will reflect in the light to show the resilience I have built, and my identity shaped by these experiences. Through my artwork, I want to communicate to the world a message of resilience and hope.*



## Helen

*Respect for Every Culture's Beauty*

2022

*I have used different fabrics, different ornaments, and hand embroidery in my portrait. Most of the decorations and colours that I have used represent the culture, belief, and system where I come from. Our culture and belief systems go hand in hand with our dress code; all colours have their own contribution to our cultural system. For example, we use bright colours to express happiness and dark ones for sadness. Therefore, in my portrait I have chosen bright colours such as white and I have used a golden thread for a traditional embroidery to embellish the t-shirt I was wearing in this photo. The jewellery I have added to my forehead is what I use in my parents' country. There, it is common to use different types of jewellery for different events. These clothes and decorations help us to be more visible and enhance the beauty we had. Finally, every culture has its own beauty and I feel that everyone should love and respect each other.*



## Hope

*The Future*

2023

*The central embroidery is based on a portrait of myself, taken from an unusual angle. I like pink and fluffy dresses, but I couldn't wear them in my hometown. I would have drawn unwanted attention and there would have been dire consequences. I can now choose to dress in whatever way I want. It's a small sign of freedom, but freedom, nonetheless. I like lavender - that's my base colour. The pink bow is shaped like wings and symbolises the boundless freedom of the sky. The primary fabric is silk - my home province is renowned for the production of silk for centuries. The grid pattern of the other material represents the rigidity of the restrictive education system under which I laboured in my teens and the green fabric represents the life in spring. My colour palette was always dark and gloomy. Choosing bright colours is liberating. My life at this point has taken a turn for the better and for the first time in a long time, I can see a new future.*



## Jacob

*Angel of Justice*

2023

*I love birds because they are very important creatures in this world. Without them we cannot survive. It is our duty to protect all living beings. That's why I have painted one bird on my head, and I see it as an angel. The background colour of my artwork evokes an evil force that is spreading in the world little by little. It is the colour of the flag of the Hindutva forces in India. I have added two wings to my portrait to represent things that are completely defunct. On the left wing, I wrote that India is not a democratic country. On the right wing, I wrote that law and order are completely broken. If you act honestly there, they will destroy you, because they have all the power in their hands. You can't go anywhere and complain because if you do so, they will kill you. I wonder: Why did the British come to India, gave us education, medical help, good food and culture, the sense of equality, and then left us in devil's hands and went back to their country? We are suffering every day. We are crying and crying and there is no one to help us.*



**JC**

*Pineapples and Snails*

2023

*As a child, my family owned a cabin in the forest atop a hill in Panama. On one side, a gentle slope led down to a creek where we would often bathe. On the other side, hundreds of pineapple plants dotted the landscape, their sweet and succulent fruits resembled crowns. In the 17th century, pineapples were introduced to Europe and quickly became a symbol of opulence and prestige. For me, however, they are a connection to my roots and a reminder of home. In my portrait, you will find other plants native to Latin America that were transported across the globe during the colonial era, ultimately contributing to the development of new cultural identities in the Old World. The two snails in my artwork represent a traditional dish from my grandmother's hometown in Catalonia. It's a playful nod to the intersection of my two ancestries and a testament to the enduring connections that exist between seemingly disparate cultures.*



**Jess**

*Stitching my Heritage  
through Floral Patterns*

2023

*For my textile artwork, I selected two floral fabrics that subtly reference my heritage. Rose – the national flower of the United Kingdom – and lavender – the national flower of Portugal – the nationalities of my mum and dad respectively. I attached the patchwork fabrics on the artworks using a chain stitch, taught to me by one of the project participants. I spent most of the time in the workshops practising this stitch, but I didn't feel the frustration I usually do when trying to perfect a new skill. It was a joy to learn something new without any pressure.*



**Joy**

*Resilient Like a Palm Tree*

2022

*I am from West Africa, Nigeria. I am a mother of two African British children, and I am so proud of my culture and heritage. I love our traditional clothing called Akra. One of our traditional clothing that I like is called 'bubu gown'; you can wear it on any occasion, like at weddings, to go to church, etc. We also have traditional beads like cowrie shells and coral beads which we use for our traditional marriage. Cowrie shells are used for sacrifice by the idol worshippers. The beads are kept safe because they are very precious and expensive to buy. In this photo, I wrapped around my head a traditional African printed fabric, which I used to cover myself when feeling cold at night when I first arrived in London. I have then customised this portrait by using coral beads to make myself a traditional necklace and to represent a palm tree which, in my culture, is a symbol of resilience. I have also embellished my portrait with sequins as a wish for a brighter future, grounded in my cultural roots, and made of good health and a long life.*



**Karuna**

*Smiles and Pain*

2022

*The main premise of my artwork is to invite the viewer to question and unpack what it means to judge asylum seekers and refugees. Many of us are born into dangerous places and living a fruitful and fulfilling life can be impossible due to the amount of violence, instability, and danger we go through. Though many of us might be wearing a smile and are resilient, behind these smiles and resilience lies inexplicable amounts of trauma, pain, and thoughts of death. We deserve to be treated with tenderness and gentleness, just like everyone else, and that is often forgotten by people who do not have to go through life altering violence. Amidst rising inequality and insidious asylum policies, I hope to share an insight of what it means to be truly vulnerable and human, and to see the helpless child longing for love and safety, in everyone alike.*



### **Karuna**

*Compassion 2023*

*The bottom golden part of my artwork signifies my Chinese roots. Gold is commonly used by the Chinese to signify prosperity and success. The middle part signifies the trans flag, a huge part of my identity. I face a very harsh reality being trans, which other people will never go through. The top part represents my mum, who owned a flower shop. She is a strong single mum, and the most resilient, yet compassionate woman I know, apart from myself. The red dress I wear signifies power and radical love. Love cannot be in silence, must be radical, and you must fight for what you believe in. The batik cloth on my arm represents my nanny, who raised me. Her undying love for my family always inspires me to do better. Her last words to me were to chase my dreams, no matter how hard that may be. The cloth with an Indian pattern on my wrist signifies the influence that India had on me at a time when I was suicidal. Practising yoga and meditation saved my life and helped me learn more about suffering as well as impermanence. The pearl on my neck signifies my mother's love. She gave me her pearl earrings after accepting me as trans, and her name Margaret also stands for pearl. I'm always carrying her love in my heart.*



### **Kemi**

*Proud of my Beautiful Culture  
2022*

*The textiles I am wearing in this portrait are from my home country, Nigeria and are called Adire. This is my traditional dress; it shows my culture and traditions. I have customised this portrait by using beads which are typical of my home country, and mixing light with dark colours, to represent that life is a journey, made of positive and negative moments. I have added pink flowers to it to bring beauty to life. I am proud to be part of this project because it gives me an opportunity to show how beautiful my culture is.*



### **Lexi**

*On the Outside Looking In.  
On the Inside Looking Out  
2023*

*A heart of scars, but deep red with love to give.  
One person in darkness, a mere shadow  
of themselves  
Standing in a doorway.  
A doorway of hope.  
Glimmer of light.  
The bad dreams of the past drift away.  
A pond of white and yellow evaporates into  
the sky...  
Will the person inside looking out ever turn their  
head to see?  
Turn their focus from the bad dreams The  
Catcher catches.  
From the outside looking in...  
Contemplation, various cultures, history, fear.  
So much darkness...  
Looking in...  
Outside looking in.  
Inside looking out.  
Will any of the three of them notice?...  
The hope.  
The future.  
The daisies floating to the sky... the possibilities.  
To begin again.  
Inside the open door...  
Inside walking outside to the light.*



## Lucy

### *The Seed Manifesto*

2023

*There lies hope in the most miniscule of things.*

*The seed is more than a simple reproductive unit, it is a carrier of hope.*

*Some might sprout crop of delicate raspberries that never touch our mouths, others a majestic oak, trees capable of traversing time, memorising the droughts and rainfalls, and compressing 2000 years of knowledge into an acorn DNA.*

*They hold memories, wisdom, encoded into a minute vessel.*

*Seeds speak of resilience through these journeys they make*

*They provide the keys for unlocking buried history, yet they bear no grudge.*

*Seeds are generous.*

*Seeds carry ceremonies, songs, lineages, and migration stories. Containers for tales that travel, locked in a husk for generations, waiting to surface.*

*How is it that seeds can pass through gaps, holes, burst open tarmac?*

*A seed can re-wild the most barren of terrain.*

*Seed freely! Let them loose and they will rule the world!*

*But seeds also need care.*

*Plant a seed and a latent feeling emerges, ideas flourish.*

*A seed is a process.*

*The seed is a bridge between birth and death, our offspring so*

*what do we want to leave behind for future generations?*



## Madusu

### *I'm Here to Find Myself*

2023

*I'm here to find myself, I'm here to find myself.*

*I pray for this to happen every day and night.*

*In my artwork, I wrote 'Freedom for Madusu' because back home I didn't have freedom;*

*I painted the flag of my home country, Sierra Leone, for people to know that the freedom I am asking for is not there. I am asking the British people to rescue me from my own self, from my country. Through this artwork, I want to send a message to the audience. If someone sees this,*

*they will know that this lady is fighting for her freedom, and I am still working on this. I painted*

*some orange lines to express a sense of light; I am facing it right now and walking through it.*

*If I have my freedom, I can face so many things, the brightness of me will shine.*



## Mahlet

### *From Life Struggles to a Bright Future*

2023

*I used different techniques, colours, and materials to represent my journey from Eritrea to the UK. The two bold background colours indicate my past life struggles and my bright future. Yellow stands for hope, and the dark black indicates the hopeless nights passed in my life. I have also used unique characters of my traditional alphabet. The green, yellow and red fabric stripes attached to my artwork represent the Ethiopian flag which is the second country where I spent most of my life.*

*In the bottom part of my artwork, I sketched some touristic places in Ethiopia. Finally, I used bold bright colours in the back of my artwork to transfer a message to the community: "Don't judge a book by its cover."*



### **Mehrdad**

*Peace and Hope, Let's Find it!*

2023

*In my artwork, I show my country flag, which originally has in its centre a lion with a sword in his hand. I painted the colours of the flag to show what is happening in my country, Iran, what the government did to all the innocent people who just asked for freedom. So many youths were hanged and so many people killed. The red heart on my chest represents my soul, which I left in my home country. In this portrait I show the camera that my friends Francesco and JC gave to me, thanks to donations from members of the Association of Photographers. They really helped me rebuild my career in photography in the UK. In front of my camera lens, I drew a dove holding an olive branch in its beak. Through my photographic work, I want to show peace and hope to the rest of the world. Some flashes are stitched on my artwork, coming in and out of my head. The blue flashes show how energetic I am, while the red ones represent my sensitivity. I react to everything which happens around me, and this really affects me; this is a weak point in my personality.*



### **Michele**

*Together We Stand*

2023

*My textile photo-story is about love. I drew a heart as a symbol of love linked by chains because I believe that, if we love each other, we will be able to progress in everything we do and there will be no hatred in the world. I believe in this slogan that says, "together we stand and divided we fall". We need to stick to one another no matter what our status in society is. The sign of cross symbolises the blood Jesus shared on the cross of Calvary to set us free. My photo also symbolises a smile because smiling keeps us young and healthy.*



### **Moqaddas**

*A Little Story of My Life*

2023

*This artwork represents a little story of my life. I am a professional squash player. The small boxes represent my racket. For 18 years I was playing squash for Pakistan in national and international tournaments. I represented the squash court using a red ribbon. The black circle represents the time when my parents passed away; at that point, my life became harder. I used some beads to represent the world because I travelled a lot for my tournaments. To represent my country, I used the green colour, which signifies peace. In this picture, I was wearing a green dress. Green and white are my national colours, and whenever I'm wearing something green, I feel proud. In my artwork I also included a dress to show that now my life is very bright and shining. After my marriage, I feel very blessed. I also want to learn about fashion and do something new. I really like participating in this project where I am learning many things. I added to my artwork also an oil lamp, as an homage to my husband and my son who are the light of my life.*



### **Munir**

*Water, Source of Life*

2023

*In my artwork I have painted a lake from where I grew up near my house, and that is very important to me. I have also painted a cow and a dog. I would take my cow and dog to the lake. I have also represented a Baobab tree, which is an important resource in my country. In the Summer, we store water inside the trunk of the tree. We also grow corn, we watch tv and eat popcorn. In the morning, we ride towards the mountains with the sunrise and return in the evening.*



### **Mursal**

*My Afghan Culture*

2023

*In creating my artwork and using textile and creative embroideries, I maintained to present my Afghan culture and tradition, as an Afghan girl. In this process, I loved meeting other people and learning about other cultures and traditions.*



### **Nahed**

*Gratitude*

2022

*Thank you for what you have done for us. I wrote 'Thank you' in white because white means peace. I hope to see peace in this world. I also used embroidery with pink thread in my artwork because this colour means love and hope to me.*



### **Nicole**

*The Counsel of Nikas*

2023

*The Counsel of Nikas' is an exploration of the fusion of cultures from my family's and my own Jewish ethnicity and spirituality in combination with my Venezuelan nationality. Spanish and Hebrew are the languages of my heart. I am wearing an AJ Bari jacket – the same designer my mother wore to her civil wedding in Caracas in 1992 – with my great-aunt's Magen David. I am holding a card with a prayer for travellers written in Hebrew, as well as several Hasidic symbols (which represent Kabbalistic practice). I stitched some leftover laser-cut sequins from my BA collection at CSM to represent a major moment in my years in London, as well as one of my brand's garment labels made from recycled polyesters to represent my present and future. The laser-cut "shattered glass" technique is a recurring motif in my work, inspired by the Kabbalistic principle that there is nothing more complete than a broken heart.*



### **Olukemi**

*There is Always a Light*

2023

*In everything we go through, there are always rays of light. Even when the sky is dark, it gives us hope and that hope brings smiles to us. The ribbon flower I wear as a brooch in my portrait symbolises my achievements, which I have close to me. It represents something you cherish after you struggles, so you want to cherish it with all your heart and protect it. The spirals signify the cycles you are going through; they are not closed, but open, because there is always a way through; in every tunnel, there is always a light.*



### **Seher**

*We Are The Sum of Our Experiences*

2023

*This piece signifies that we are the sum of our experiences. My artwork through the different patterns and textures of textiles chosen depicts the life experiences I have had and how they have shaped me, each one teaching me something, leaving its mark. Mainly natural fabrics were used to symbolise my way of being my natural self when interacting with others while the hand stitching depicts how different experiences etch indelible memory and learning. I have also made a feature of imperfect stitching, a mistake, to show that we all have flaws and weaknesses. While working on this piece in a collective workshop space, my embroidery ring caught JC's fabric (with printed pineapples) who was working alongside me. This led me to stitching a pineapple into my artwork – providing the perfect and most apt material metaphor for how we absorb and assimilate and thus learn through all our interactions and experiences with others.*



### Shaista

*Loving Life and Dreaming a  
Shining Future 2023*

*A person's eyes reflect their feelings of joy, fear, love. I have expressed these feelings in every colour. As an artist, I find all colours very beautiful because each colour has its own language, message, season, story. I love natural beauty such as a flowing waterfall or mountains. Natural beauty, sharp colours, the stars, and the stairs leading to the moon indicate the future. I am a Pakistani Muslim woman. Our culture is also related to our religion, and tradition is evident from our clothes and our way of life. In my artwork, I have made some mehndi/henna designs and decorated them with beautiful colours which represent happiness. These beautiful colours are symbols of love and of learning to love life. This life is very beautiful. In my artwork I painted pink flowers – a colour which is liked by many women – and is also a symbol of happiness. The stars represent my hope and my dream that my future shines bright like these stars.*



### Sheida

*Melancholy and Spring of Hope  
2023*

*The dress I wear in this picture is a symbol of self-actualisation for me. I wrapped the melancholy feeling of being away from my homeland – Iran – and my loved ones like a dark net and sewed the sadness and sorrow of the women and men of my country on it. Behind this heavy sadness, two blue treasures, not so hidden and not so obvious, try to keep the spirit of life alive in my conscious memory. The purple thread in the middle of my chest is the representation of the spring of hope which flows endlessly from my heart and feeds my mind and soul through this journey.*



### Sidorela

*Sparkle of Faith Amidst  
Darkness 2023*

*My artwork represents me and my life. The purple flowers represent my favourite colour. In the portrait I'm holding a rosary which represents my faith in Jesus. The piece of cloth that I'm wearing represents my culture, my country. The little flowers represent my childhood as they were the first thing my precious mother taught me to draw. She's a great painter but, unfortunately, I'm not. The rainbow represents Genesis 9:11-17, which is my favourite verse from the Bible. I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it is the sign of the covenant between me and the Earth. I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. This Bible verse became a hope amidst my dark times. Life it's beautiful if we learn to submit ourselves to righteousness of God.*



### SK

*Breaking Barriers  
2023*

*My artwork is about breaking barriers. The lines (representing prison bars) are a metaphor for different difficulties or barriers that women face. Some of the lines are broken, meaning that we have been successful at breaking them and shining through them. My face is covered because – no matter who you are, where you are, or what problem you face – you will always be you. The tiara is a reminder that you will always be a true queen. Being the first or the "only" one in the room is never easy. There is no defined roadmap, lessons learned or insider's tips to provide guidance for successful women, particularly Asian Muslim women.*



## **Sophyat**

*Creating a Brighter Future*

2023

*This textile photo-story portrays my personality. It represents a sense of attracting happiness and creating a brighter future for myself. In creating this artwork, I have used African prints to show my culture and how it is important to me. My morals and traditions shape who I am today, and even though some may seem unpleasant, they help me identify what's right from what's wrong, and help me become a better person. I have used the colours yellow, brown, and blue as they represent warmth, hope and happiness. The coral and pearl beads express a sense of originality as they are used in different cultures and ethnicities. Through this artwork, I would like to communicate that, regardless of the struggles and challenges we face, there is still a light at the end of the tunnel, even if we have to squint to see it. Stay hopeful!*



## **Suzanne**

*Colours of Tradition*

2023

*In my artwork I have used the colours of a traditional dress from my home country that I really like. The green, red and yellow are the colours of the Cameroonian flag. I have used a traditional type of embroidery and a fabric from my country that people wear but I never had the opportunity to have one. I really love it when I see people wearing them as it reminds me of my country, of my hometown in the North-West of Cameroon.*



## **Sukhwinder**

*Be Like Water*

2023

*We all stand in the same boat, our goals are the same, but everyone's problems are different. We want to settle down here and we want to stand on our own feet, but our journey is long and hard. We face so many problems and miss our country, our home, and our families. I know at the moment we all have so many problems in our life, but I want to say: don't think too much, don't look behind, just look forward. The reason I made my portrait with a happy face and why I wrote 'be like water' is because before I was weak, and I would always be crying as I didn't see any hope, but one day I was sitting and looking to the water. So many big stones, high and low places come in the path of water, but water does not stop and still makes its way. Our life is the same as water: many big and small problems come into our life, just be ready to fight with full power.*





# MAKING

*Making* celebrates the collection of twenty-one fashion artefacts made by refugees and asylum seekers to express their personal identity, stories of migration, cultural heritage, and visions for the future.

While the dominant fashion system often disregards or misappropriates the textile heritage of cultural minorities, these artefacts draw on the participants' personal identity and cultural heritage as well as new cultures they have encountered in their migration journeys. What we can loosely define as a 'fashion collection' doesn't follow the value of the Western commodified fashion industry, rather it amplifies the peripheral fashion systems embracing 'othered' identities.

Resulting from a series of workshops, this 'collection' evokes feelings of uncertainty as well as hope, exemplifying a process of unlearning inherent knowledges, and relearning of new viewpoints, as well as gaining new skills, becoming a source of confidence and pride to be shared with others. These artefacts also act as a statement of resilience and empowerment, a call for social justice, a manifestation of a vision for a freer and fairer society, where people can express themselves without fear or judgment and reclaim their agency and identity, through fashion.

Previously used in a fashion show at London College of Fashion, and for interactive performances at the V&A during Refugee Week, the garments tell stories of positive change, shaped through fashion.





### **Anonymous**

*The Colours of Me* 2023

Coat made of fabric, threads, metal beads and cord

*My piece represents my journey through life and the countries that have been part of my being. The Indian map/flag represents my origin, the roots of my DNA, my genetics, and the land of my ancestors. The Trinigonian map/flag represents the land that raised me, my land of birth, the source of my energy and the rich culture that nurtured me. The Union Jack represents the land that has accepted me, the land that gives me the opportunity and freedom to live a life true to myself. The decorative mehendi designs that adorn the coat represent my culture and the Mahamrityunjaya mantra is a prayer that I've known and heard growing up all my life. It is a prayer that asks the Hindu god Shiva for unforeseen and untimely death. It was played every day on a local radio station at midday where they pray for world peace in the three major religions of Trinidad and Tobago, Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism.*



### **Dave**

*Just Another T-Shirt* 2023

Cotton t-shirt with appliqué and paint

*Change is inevitable. The world is constantly evolving, it is part of growth and evolution. I worked with materials I found in the workshops as the fabrics I had ordered didn't arrive, so I had to adapt with what was around me. As I didn't know any tribal/traditional stitches, I chose to write a message with a modern twist. When some of my design didn't go the way I wanted, I just adapted with materials that were around at the time, and the current political climate in Palestine. This is why there is a last-minute addition which was unplanned: a watermelon, to show solidarity and amplify my voice for the voiceless. For my t-shirt I used paint, patches, bondaweb and glue. It was all sewn to bring all the different elements together to create or decolonise the t-shirt. These are important steps in unlearning toxic stereotypes and historical lies and in changing dominant structures of decolonisation by truth telling or speaking the hard truths of colonialism.*



### **Daniel**

*Peace up Mixed Africa* 2023

Cotton t-shirt with appliqué and a cotton bag with leather strap

*A t-shirt and handbag designed for my wife, using African prints and contemporary colours showing the blend and mix of cultures in Africa, as well as the yellow and blue of the Ukrainian flag where I lived before having to flee again because of the war.*



### **Ghonche**

*Dress for Peace* 2023

Dress made of orange fabric with appliqué flowers and earrings

*My dress is fairly similar to the clothes traditional in my culture. Our dresses are plainer than all other designs. This dress gives me peace and is modelled on our Kurdish culture and authenticity. Such dresses are our culture and for us they represent peace. The Kurdish belt warms the waist and back, and it is used in silk shawls, waists, and various types of fabrics and models, and can be worn at any age.*



## Jacob

*Don't Abuse Power Against Innocent People 2023*

High visibility vest made of yellow fabric and paint

*My design is about the fact that those who have power should not abuse it to crush and destroy poor, innocent people who want to live honestly. In my personal life I have been severely affected by abuses of power, in India but also here in the UK. Now I am standing in front of this congregation, and all those who have seen me and who are familiar with me know me very well. You say that I work hard in my volunteering, that I am very honest and sincere, and that the world needs me. You greet me with respect and admiration because every day I work with different charities, helping them and preparing food for the homeless. I travel all over to save and help innocent birds that are suffering. People from all walks of life are eager to praise me. They say I am a very necessary person in this world. But my life is completely broken. I am living as a walking corpse, carrying my broken heart, because those in positions of power have tried so many times to destroy me.*



## Karuna

*Beauty in Brokenness 2023*

Film

*Beauty in Brokenness is a performance encouraging people to appreciate imperfections, using the Japanese art of kintsugi to fix broken things with gold. It also draws on the Butoh 'dance of darkness' which is about accepting and appreciating darkness and pain. Although originally from Singapore, while reflecting on my shifting identity, I am embracing the Japanese philosophy of Wabi Sabi, as a way to accept and embrace ourselves, including the bad parts of ourselves; it is a worldview centred on acceptance, transience and imperfection, which aligns well with me being trans and from a cultural minority. My message is: what is seen as broken, different, or wrong by society can be beautiful too.*



## Katherine

*Flag, Blue and Me 2023*

Dress made of orange fabric and lace

*This dress represents the typical clothes of my country, El Salvador. It is made of satin, which is a cheap fabric but with beautiful and bright colours, and it reminds me of my country. It is the smallest country in Central America, but you can find many beautiful places and warm people to welcome anyone. The blue stripes represent the blue of the flag of my country. The white lace represents the white clouds of a sunny day in my country, which is something I truly love. I love my country. When someone flees their country as a refugee, it is not because they do not love their country, but because it is a matter of necessity. However, our identity and cultural manners are always present in our journeys and new life.*



### **Lexi**

*A Mile in My Shoes 2023*

Pair of shoes made of cork, threads, rubber, and mixed media

*Nope, not an hour or a minute.*

*Not a suggestion, wish, or even a learning experience.*

*Yet the shoes and the journey mean so much.*

*All the products except for the glue come from something used or discarded, set aside, not wanted,*

*No purpose, waste...*

*Yet within the heel of the shoe a smiling face,*

*A dreamer reaching for the stars as they fall from the dream catcher above filtering the bad...*

*The years 2021, 2022 – some of the hardest I've walked through.*

*Colours of hope (white),*

*New beginnings (yellow),*

*The ocean (blue),*

*The threads entangled via surgical knots to hold it all together,*

*Creating / securing the bond and strength to hold the dream catcher in place...*

*The amount of vacuum... Negative dreams, thoughts, and experiences create a black hole (representative of my native American heritage) where the void can capture even the most unsuspecting.*

*And at the bottom, under all the beauty of the shoes is the tread,*

*A discarded bicycle tire, yet it maintains its integrity to be worn for more miles on the bottom of this shoes... The sturdiest point, the most secure, yet wrapped in blackness, covered in the pains of yesterday, but carrying "one step at a time" into the future.*

*Hope.*



### **Moqaddas**

*Stop Honour Killing 2023*

Cotton t-shirt with embroidery and skirt made of lace; earring and leggings made of stretch fabric with embroidery

*The garment I have designed and made is a sportswear dress. I made this because I am a squash player, and I spent my whole life practising sports. For this project, I used sportswear materials, did some hand embroidery, and added some beads on it while making a long skirt. I picked green and white because they are the colours of our Pakistani flag. The message on my leggings says, 'Stop killing women in the name of honour, there is no honour in killing women'. This is because in Pakistan some people might kill women because they consider them as family disrespect or dishonour for the family.*



### **Noor**

*Threads that Connect 2023*

Belt and a small hat made of fabric and mixed media

*My design is inspired by the hard-working and resilient women from Pakistan. Despite their hard work, they are often not recognised and paid well. They are exploited by big brands which pay them small wages for their handicrafts and sell them 3 times more the price they pay! The materials I used are all upcycled fabrics with embroidery which I had; I stitched them by hand to create the patchwork, and I designed the tassels which are hugely used in Pakistani crafts. I used the concept of a belt which has been a huge part of our traditional clothing; this kind of belts has been used by men and women to keep the swords or knives, and it's the symbol of protection, dignity, and resilience. I am from Kashmir, the Northern region of Pakistan, where this type of craft is hugely celebrated.*



### **Princesse**

*The Vulnerability of Congolese Women*  
2023

Two dresses made of fabric and paint

*These dresses are a reflection of the powerless Congolese women, victims of rape. I created an African loincloth dress mixed with a white t-shirt. I decorated the t-shirt by hand using red, blue, yellow, and black paint. I first used a sewing machine to sew the bottom of the dress and then joined it with the t-shirt. I used a white t-shirt to symbolize the innocence of women and loincloth to symbolize the cultural heritage of Congolese women. The hand painted in red on the front of the t-shirt is a call to put an end to violence against women. Behind the t-shirt, I drew by hand an eye and decorated it with blood with the flag of the Democratic Republic of Congo to signify the deep suffering of Congolese women.*



### **Sammy**

*Fight for Freedom* 2023

Cotton t-shirt with appliqué and paint

*The picture on the front of my t-shirt represents Queen Sheba, a symbol of Ethiopian beautiful women. On the back, I have painted Fano; historically, this term referred to irregular soldiers who voluntarily participated in military campaigns. The term carries a strong nationalistic connotation, referring back to fighters who defended Ethiopia during the Second Italo-Ethiopian War in the 1930s, often overlapping with the Arbegnoch.*



### **Sana**

*The Blue of Freedom* 2023

Dress made of blue fabric and necklace made of metal wire

*My dress expresses freedom. Blue, the colour of the sky and the sea, cannot have borders. It is everywhere. Even if you have power, you cannot control it. Passion in life. Expression without fear. Gentleness in the soul. Optimism. Defending your opinion. Love without conditions or standards, despite the difference in colour and gender. Express your opinion without fear of society and people's judgments. Life is full of beautiful and bad experiences that leave an imprint on yourself and your heart, and sometimes they leave a wound that may be deep. Here comes the turn to look at the sky and try to imagine your world freely.*



### **Shaista**

*Old Culture, New Style* 2023

Waist coat made of cotton with embroidery and paint

*I have created a short waistcoat and designed it keeping in mind my culture and its crafts from Karachi, Pakistan. I am very inspired by my culture, and I have tried to create a new design by changing many features in it. I have added some beads, some stars and used block printing. Boys and girls like to wear similar kinds of waistcoats in Pakistan. This is my little attempt to design it as well as I can. I hope everyone likes it.*



### **Sheida**

*Rebel in Black* 2023

Trousers made of chiffon

*My design is a tribute to my mother and all the women who have suffered and struggled under the oppressive regime of the Islamic Republic in Iran. I chose to sew trousers as a symbol of defiance and liberation, inspired by my childhood memory of my mother being harassed by a brainwashed child for wearing socks that were deemed provocative. The trousers are made of black chiffon, a fabric that represents elegance, complexity, and professionalism. Black is also a color that evokes night and death, the moments when love and madness coexist. The design of the trousers is influenced by the idea of sloppiness and carelessness, mixed with rebellion and individuality. The trousers are a statement of empowerment and emancipation. They are a celebration of the women who have reclaimed their agency and identity through fashion. They are a manifestation of my vision for a freer and fairer society, where women can express themselves without fear or judgment.*



### **Sidorela**

*Purity and Peace* 2023

Necklace

*My necklace is a representation of who I am, my faith, my belief, my past, and my hope for the future. I am a Christian and the purple colour symbolises royalty. Because I am a Christian, royalty is for Jesus my saviour, who was there in my darkest times. The white colour symbolises purity and peace. I decided to create a necklace because I thought it would be good to have something that I can carry, and I can put on. What's better than a necklace can do that? At the same time, it is meaningful for me.*



### **SK**

*Blooming Through the Cracks* 2023

Top and skirt with flower decorations and beads

*My artwork is about women. I believe that women are always asked to do more. To perform more, to achieve more and also have the pressure of looking pretty. I represented women through a material that is like broken skin. Our dreams are broken because of forced marriage or childbirth. The beads show the flexibility of women who are asked to adjust everywhere and compromise. The sequins represent the tough nature of women: no matter how we feel inside, we put on a strong face, and we can fight anything. The flowers show the beauty and fragility of women. The different types and colours of flowers show how many emotions we have. No matter what the situation is, we look good; we can easily be broken but we always regrow just like a flower.*



### **Strawberry Popcorn**

*Sketch on Air: Dancing Post Cataclysm*  
2023

Necklace made of entangled woolen yarns

*I pull threads from their yarn-ball homes, knotting thoughts through earthly domes.  
Blue, tangled with white, peach, and olive's sheen, interlacing a fabric where God's love reigns supreme, oceans traverse, nurturing every hue, beyond time's grasp, a world map, a tale anew, Nature evolves, a canvas we depict by our hand.  
Olive green witnesses in forests' keep, peach cradles the newborn's soul, illumined by light amidst shadows and strife, silent blooms whisper of enduring life.  
Life's journey flows in threads exchanged.  
May nature echo divine love's embrace, healing spaces in every earthly place. May justice find its way. May kindness guide each day. May natural texture bring comfort, sheltering needs. May God's love prevail in each deed that succeeds.*



### **Sukhwinder**

*Pankha of Connection 2023*

Dress decorated with embroidery

*Pankha means hand fan and Pake means parents. There is a lot of blessing and love associated with this in a family. In the past, when there were no modern facilities and connections, married girls were rarely able to meet their families after marriage. This is why women used to make things such as hand fans in the past before marriage to take them to their marital home, so that they could reduce their heartache of missing their family. Along with the colourful threads, the fan also contains care for the family, blessings and love, so that the girl would always remain connected with her family. Therefore, the hand fan has a very important place in our life and is associated with all kinds of emotions.*



### **Suzanne**

*My Personal Touch 2023*

Dress decorated with appliqué  
and embroidery

*I have designed a traditional dress from the North-West region of Cameroon. I made it in my own way, and I put my own personal touches in. It may not be exactly what people are used to see, because I made it in my way, and I am proud of it.*



### **Zeej**

*Emerging Identities 2023*

Jacket customised with embroidery

*For this project, I customised my own jacket, which I have been holding for a long time. It was with me in good and bad times. I am very attached to it. When I arrived in the UK, it was Autumn, the trees started to take off their leaves, they were in shades of orange and yellow. I used the sycamore leaf as a symbolic start of my asylum claim journey. I created these leaves on linen patches and used chain and straight-line embroidery. I represented two faces by drawing them first, then embroidering them. These two faces represent the phases that I have been through during my stay in the UK as an asylum seeker – evoking feelings of uncertainty and loneliness. I drew the prophet Mohamed's Mosque which is located in Madinah, Saudi Arabia. It represents my identity as a Muslim. Besides this, I drew European houses. The green plants are rooted in both buildings; they show that a new chapter has been opened in my life. In addition, I attached an embroidered Saudi flag on one sleeve, and on the other a beech leaf tree.*



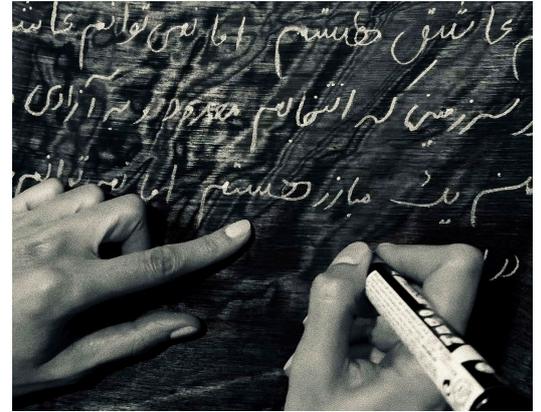
# LEARNING

*Learning* presents the transformative work realised by students from University of the Arts London (UAL) who participated in the Collaborative Challenge brief 'Decolonising Fashion and Textiles' and in the 'Transition Living Lab'. The projects brought together 30 MA students from London College of Fashion (LCF), 32 MA students from London College of Communication (LCC), 10 MA students from Bandung Institute of Technology and University Gadjah Mada in Indonesia.

The Collaborative Challenge at LCF invited students to work in six multidisciplinary teams with refugee collaborators to co-create design interventions aimed at fostering cultural sustainability and contribute to a process of decolonising fashion practices. The students were encouraged to adopt an activist approach while reflecting on their own privilege and prejudices to address power imbalances in collaborative making practices. Their works include fashion and textile artefacts, an ethical storytelling campaign, a social enterprise model, and advocacy for policy change to overcome some of the barriers faced by UK-based refugees.

The Transition Living Lab was a proposal for a training course for displaced people interested in becoming change-makers in their own communities. Using the Design Council Systemic Design framework, students from LCC worked in teams and designed sessions (as building blocks) to introduce the main activities and roles of the framework, informed by ideas of Utopia as a method, Transition Design, and Pluriversal ways of knowing. The sessions were delivered adopting future-oriented, co-creative methods and a 'learning by doing' ethos, and included making scents, more-than-human empathy maps, utopian paper dolls, and more.

Through their collaborative work, the students built new connections, exchanged cross-cultural experiences, developed new skills and mindsets, and explored the potential of their creative practice as a force for social change.



Works by London College of Fashion (LCF) students:

**Shaikha Al-Ayoub, Yvonne Foley, Dian Kou,  
Shivani Rath, Kathy Udaondo Lennon**

In collaboration with: **Daniel**

*Craft Your Story* 2024

Fabric book

*For the 'Craft Your Story' project, the team delivered a workshop which was a celebration of crafts, culture, and creativity. The primary goal of the project was to empower refugees, giving them agency over their crafts and celebrating their cultural heritage. The workshop fostered connections among people from diverse backgrounds and provided a platform to learn new crafts and appreciate the diversity of skills and traditions. In the workshop, each participant created a fabric page using textiles and techniques from their culture and displaying their own unique creativity. The pages were assembled to form a fabric book showcasing and preserving the skills, stories, and traditions of refugee makers, while also serving as a bridge between artisans and those who appreciate their talents, as well as an innovative educational tool. The fabric book also serves as a directory for those interested in collaborating with or hiring artisans, fostering creative partnerships.*

**Lyuba Bessarab, Aditi Gupta, Rhea Lobo,  
Maahirah Sadiq, Gim Wong**

In collaboration with: **Dave**

*Shifting Identities* 2024

Jeans and mixed media

*This project explores the evolution of identity and decolonisation through the medium of fashion, cyanotype prints, paint, and embroidery, finalised through a collage-like layering of patches onto a pair of jeans. This was carried out in collaboration with asylum seekers based in London through a workshop to facilitate discussion around identity and migration. The team used the vehicle of jeans - something so common in our everyday lives, yet also a result of globalisation, colonialism, and slavery - to entice people to rethink fashion colonialism and reflect on how it manifests in today's world. Through this artefact, the team encourage the viewer to reflect on their shifting identities, embrace it as ever evolving, recognise the multitude of factors influencing their identity, and furthermore, to use identity as a way to form deep rooted connections.*

**Janhvi Chopra, Manvi Jainth, Ana Oliveira  
Da Cunha, Sylvia Shoshan, Congye Zhang**

In collaboration with:

**Noor and Sukhwinder**

*That Flavour Exchange Project* 2024

Tablecloth (fabric and mixed media), recipe book (paper)

*The team created a storytelling campaign aimed to shift narratives around refugees, share stories, and honour the diverse backgrounds of displaced individuals. Recognising food as one of the crucial factors that connects people to their roots, uniting individuals, and building empathy through shared experiences. A workshop was facilitated with the focus of sharing stories about special and traditional recipes, to support integration and appreciation of each participant's distinct cultural heritage. By translating the shared recipes into textile art, the project enabled a space for participants to explore their creativity and create a tangible output that became part of a symbolic 'tablecloth' artwork honouring diverse cultures. Each recipe shared during the workshop brought about personal stories etched with joy, nostalgia, and fond memories, which were collated into in a 'recipe book', a keepsake of this project aimed at preserving these stories to be shared with many more people.*

**Jingyi Bai, Eugenia Galeeva, Josefa  
Lavandero Olivares, Abigail Rigby,  
Yi-Ching Wang**

In collaboration with: **Karuna**

*The Creative Legacy Collective* 2024

Video

*'Beauty in Brokenness' is a performance encouraging people to appreciate imperfections, using the Japanese art of kintsugi to fix broken things with gold. It also draws on the Butoh 'dance of darkness' which is about accepting and appreciating darkness and misery. Although originally from Singapore, Karuna - reflecting on her shifting identity - is embracing the Japanese philosophy of Wabi Sabi, as a way to accept and embrace ourselves, including the bad parts of ourselves; it is a worldview centred on acceptance, transience and imperfection, which well aligns with her being trans and from a cultural minority. Her message is: what is seen as broken, different, or wrong by society, can be beautiful too.*

**Xinghan Chen, Zichen Huang,  
Daria Nguyen, Aashi Shah, Gerui Zhang**

In collaboration with: **SK**

*The Feeling of Home* 2024

Textile patchwork (fabrics and mixed media)

*This textile piece emerges from a profound exploration of cultural identity and the shared experiences of displacement and belonging. Through collective efforts within the team and the refugee collaborator, the project aims to honour and celebrate diverse cultural heritages. The artwork is a testament to the intimate connection between personal narratives and broader themes of international migration. As international students, the team grappled with feelings of nostalgia and homesickness, prompting a deep reflection on their identities and cultural diversity. In 'The Feeling of Home', the team intertwined individual perspectives, weaving a tapestry that speaks to the universal human longing for a sense of belonging. Each stitch represents a moment of self-healing and introspection, as we navigate the complexities of displacement and cultural assimilation. Through this creative process, the team invites viewers to contemplate their own experiences of home and belonging, fostering a dialogue that transcends borders and celebrates our shared humanity.*

**Boyuan Dou, Sanjana Ghosh, Daniella**

**Klaus, Tanishq Pokriyal, Masa Takada**

In collaboration with: **Sheida**

*Our Song* 2024

Video and fabric veil

*Tens of thousands of people are displaced every year owing to armed conflict and hostilities in their native countries. Many people are forced to abandon their homes, families, professions and even sense of identity in their search for safety and a place they can call home. 'Our Song' inverts the lens onto the viewer to showcase how anyone can be a refugee and eliminate the unsettling feeling of 'otherness' that comes with the refugee label since, at the end of the day, we are all human. The soliloquy of the refugee collaborator and the creative use of Farsi poetry in the film is an attempt to depict the strength and steely resolve of anyone who finds themselves on this tumultuous journey. The refugee collaborator's act of writing on the artefact – the Hijab, the traditional Middle Eastern headscarf, which has been sized up to nearly the size of a flag – is a symbol of the spirit of resilience against oppression as much as a reflection of her unwavering resolve. This is a force from within that transcends all grief, anguish, trauma, and pain, and is common to all refugees who are on this difficult journey.*



Works by London College of Communication (LCC) students:

**Anuya Desai, Aysesu Celik, Chung Yin Leung, Divya Elizabeth Charlie, Jamilet Yalan Mendez**  
*Connector and Convenor: Celebration 2024*

*Celebration is a workshop to learn and reflect on the role of Connector, one of the four roles of the Systemic Design Framework - alongside the System Thinker, Maker, and Storyteller. Connecting people includes building good relationships among relevant stakeholders to amplify the impact of transition actions and interventions. It is an essential skill to ignite systemic change and builds strength among communities and unlocks the collective power of people.*

*The workshop delves into the concept of celebration. From team events to cultural gatherings, Celebration brings people together around a common purpose and the experience of memorable moments.*

*In this 1.5-hour workshop, participants collaborate in a team setting, examining essential elements of celebrations and co-design a celebration step by step. The takeaway of the workshop is a framework and easy-to-apply tools to create celebrations for their teams and communities.*

**Ashmita Radhakrishnan, Yinghang (Billy) Luo, Carlos Pilares, Vicky Worrall, Yuchen Jiang**  
*System Thinker: Kneading Conversations 2024*

*Systems Thinking encourages big picture thinking by mapping and exploring the relationships across different parts of a system and between systems. It supports sensemaking of complex problems and allows identifying the areas within the systems, in which transition actions can be made with minimum effort to achieve maximum impact. Kneading Conversations workshop offers a hands-on way to explore how to map systems and think systemically. In this workshop we system think while knitting bread! We see the kneading activity as a sensual meditation that supports thoughtful creativity to explore the topic. The conversation forms the basis of a system map. Every workshop is unique, and it follows the conversation wherever it leads us. Themes may include culture, education, economy, or health... or anything else that we talk about. The workshop ends with baking and eating the bread. We are building a community of systems thinkers, one loaf at a time. Let's dough this together and toast to positive change!*

**Adyanissa Kirana, Lewis Baylin,  
Morrigan Lian, Sakshi Mathur, Zhixi Wang**  
*Leader and Storyteller: Crafting Stories with Food*  
2024

*Crafting Stories with Food is a workshop to explore stories as knowledge and uses food to bring together stories from different lands. In this workshop we craft stories around food, drawing from participants' lived experience and knowledges.*

*Participants recreate a meaningful dish using colourful paper scraps. Using the memory of this dish, they explore experiences, traditions, and practices. These becoming building blocks of a storyline that participants build into a new story in their own unique way. Stories are a way to exchange and preserve knowledges of personal context and culture, with the potential to bring about agency for changemaking.*

*The activities in this workshop intend to support empathy and connections by recognising knowledges in other stories. By taking charge of their own narratives, participants explore ways to express what they are and what they bring to their communities, highlighting the power of their own value systems.*

**Constance Chen, Disha Rathi, Gerarda Dina Tolino, Maria (Yuxuan) Ma, Muzi (Emma) Yang**  
*The Garden of Your Dreams* 2024

*This workshop focuses on the third phase of the Systemic Design Framework: Create. The objectives of the workshop are to practice some key skills used in the Create phase:*

- *Co-design: through hands-on activities, participants experience effective teamwork and collective decision making.*
- *Ideas Generation: participants learn to bring together and build on each other's ideas to foster innovation and how to transform them into tangible prototypes.*
- *Rapid Prototyping: by crafting a model garden using clay, the workshop practices skills of shaping ideas into materials and exercise reiteration on these tangible ideas to reveal conflict and bring consensus.*
- *Effective Communication: learn how to convey ideas through your creations.*

**Arohi Dhore, Zhiang Zhou (Eric), Thananya Vatchanasoontorn,  
I Keng (Jenny) Wu, Jasmine Chou**  
*Create Explore: Nature Explores* 2024

*Nature Explores is an interactive session that focuses on the initial Explore phase of the Systemic Design Framework, an approach that support the planning of transition actions in complex systemic challenges. The session was informed by concept of Pluriverse, which honours diversity and interconnectedness among various perspectives, fostering mutual learning through collaboration.*

*In the session, participants learn and practice collecting information about how people understand their reality through diverse perspectives and experiences. By analysing the gathered knowledge, participants will identify patterns and connections that reveal the underlying dynamics. This skill is crucial for pinpointing key leverage points – those areas within the system where focused efforts can create the most impactful change.*

**Aydan Dincer Kosger, Belen Molina,  
Lindsey Lewis, Sharvari Joshi, Yidong Sun**  
*Reframe: More-than-human Empathy* 2024

*The Empathy: More Than Human workshop aims to introduce participants to the tools and methods used in the Reframe phase of the Design Council's Systemic Design Framework in a playful and relaxed way to maximise learning. The Reframe phase builds on research carried out in the preceding Explore phase by identifying problems and opportunities to be addressed, defining a focus for the subsequent Create and Catalyse phases. To introduce methods to create this focus, the workshop asks participants to take the perspective of an animal persona in a fictional scenario to explore and map 'more than human' viewpoints. Participants then work with these viewpoints to identify problems and opportunities and use these as a basis to develop possible 'How Might We...' questions to address. The workshop ends with a period for participants to reflect on the process, what they have learnt and how they might use this back in the real, human world.*

**Amritha Sreekumar, Sahar Zafar**

*Design and Maker: The scent  
of the future 2024*

*The workshop focuses on the Designer Maker role from the Systemic Design Framework. It guides participants to experience the design process by actively engaging in the exploration, ideation, and creation of fragrances. The session rehearses designer-maker skills while also explores recipe creation and processes for scent-making. The making space becomes a safe space where imagination roams free among memories triggered by scents and together imagine what the future could smell like based on those scents you love. Then, make and take home the scent of your future! But it's not just about perfume; it's about dreaming beyond today and telling your future's story through scent.*

Works by University Gadjah Mada students:

**Abdul Masli, Asbudi Zamsan S,  
Aninidya Lakshmi Larasati**

Works by Bandung Institute of Technology students:

**Ahmad Tayfiq, Al Muhamat Fatahudin Saifudin,  
Fabian Akhmad Sembirng, Aulia Akbar, Qonita  
Afnani Firdaus, Muhammad Arfan Achmad**



Decolonising Fashion and Textiles (LCF) team:

**Dr Francesco Mazzarella,**  
Centre for Sustainable Fashion,  
London College of Fashion, UAL

**Dr Seher Mirza,** Centre for  
Sustainable Fashion, London  
College of Fashion, UAL

Transition Living Lab  
(LCC) team:

**Dr Malé Luján Escalante,**  
LCC: Design School, UAL

**Meher Shiblee,** LCC: Design  
School, UAL

**Dr Silvia Grimaldi,**  
LCC: MA Service Design, UAL

**Michael Martin,**  
LCC: MA Design Management, UAL

**Revoke, London**

Transition Living Lab (Institute of  
Technology of Bandung) team:

**Dr Meirina Triharini,**  
Design Ethnography Lab

**Amira Rahardiani,**  
Design Ethnography Lab

**Dr Prananda L. Malasan,**  
Design Ethnography Lab

**Dr Arianti Ayu Puspita,**  
Design Ethnography Lab

**Emplace, Indonesia**

Transition Living Lab  
(Universitas Gadjah Mada) team:

**Dr Realisa Darathea Masardi,**  
Department of Anthropology

**Dr Jun Kitazawa,**  
Department of Anthropology



*Activating* aims at challenging the *status quo* and empowering refugees and asylum seekers to build connections and voice their concerns for our collective uncertain future, while advocating for positive policy change.

The project participants wrote postcards to the future, grounded on their personal and collective values, as well as manifestos for a more compassionate future, which were then translated into three textile banners. The banners on display were used in a public action delivered in Parliament Square in London on 27th June 2023, in partnership with Citizens UK and Together with Refugees, advocating for the protection of children's 'Freedom to Play'.

Drawing from a series of listening activities to elicit the systemic challenges faced by London-based refugees and asylum seekers, the project team brought together fashion professionals, policy makers, and charities

working with refugees, to advocate for good work for new refugees in the fashion industry. This became the starting point for a policy paper and a lobbying campaign.

As part of this campaign, visual artist and co-investigator Lucy Orta created a *Lifeline* activation using soft textile objects, crafted in calico fabric, that can be interacted with. Collaborating with project participants, *Lifeline* were used as prompts to discuss their lived experiences and the challenges they face upon arrival in the UK, as well as the opportunities to rebuild their life in the place of resettlement. The *Lifeline* zine on display has been created in collaboration with participants that took part.

*Shifting Narratives* invites you to join our call to action to build collective power and shape together a more equitable and sustainable future, in and through fashion.

# Threads of Opportunity: Good Work for Refugees in the Fashion Industry

- 1 Grant asylum seekers the right to work within 6 months and connect them with relevant employment opportunities in the fashion industry.
- 2 Add relevant 'fashion and textiles jobs' to the UK's Immigration Salary List that includes jobs which are in short supply within the UK resident labour market.
- 3 Build creative / fashion safe and welcoming spaces for asylum seekers and refugees.
- 4 Develop and deliver 'skills training while you wait' programmes for asylum seekers and recent refugees.
- 5 Develop traineeships for recent refugees paid at a real Living Wage.

## Call to Action

London-based refugees and asylum seekers face systemic discrimination based on their origin and reasons for seeking refuge. Temporary accommodation further hinders their ability to secure stable employment. Efforts to address these issues are fragmented, occurring in silos through Local Councils and charities.

Additionally, fashion and textile jobs are not listed on the UK's Immigration Salary List. The UK fashion industry is experiencing a skills shortage that could be alleviated by tapping into the talents of skilled refugees and asylum seekers. This would not only contribute to their wellbeing, financial independence, and social integration but also benefit the economy.

Sign and share this petition by scanning the QR code below to urge policymakers to grant the right to work and enable access to good work in the fashion industry for all refugees in the UK.





Published on the occasion of the exhibition

# SHIFTING NARRATIVES

Reciprocal making and learning through fashion and textiles

5–29 July 2024

Barbican Library, Barbican Centre,

Silk Street, London EC2Y 8DS

## 'Decolonising Fashion and Textiles' Project Lead

Dr Francesco Mazzarella, Centre for Sustainable Fashion, UAL

## Exhibition Curator

Camilla Palestra, Centre for Sustainable Fashion, UAL

## Exhibition Design

Yen-Yen Teh, Emulsion Architecture

## Graphic Design

Seeing Things

## Works by project participants

Azizullah Afschar, Mursal Afschar, Joy Aghahawa,  
Esther Akhigbe, Nahed Al Bostan, Shaista Amber,  
Suzanne Ambith, Halima Aro, Moqaddas Ashraf, Abdal Azez,  
Michelle Dimou, Katherine Duran, Esther Ezugwu, Hope,  
Adeola Ilori, Sophyat Jimoh, Princesse Kambayi Bayamba,  
Sukhwinder Kaur Chandi, Basma Kamel, Madusu Koroma,  
Benita Iyemba, Lexi, Sidorela Lleshi, Karuna Marsh,  
Sheida Mokhtari Khojasteh, Noor, Daniel Oboagwina,  
Kemi Ogunlana, Sana Ouadad, Olukemi Owoyemi,  
Mehrddad Pakniyat, Jacob Peter, Ghonche Saeedi, SK,  
Munir Sliman, Dave Sohanpal, SP, Sammy Teka,  
Helen Tekle, Mahlet Tesfay, Zeej Alhajj

## Project Team, Centre for Sustainable Fashion, UAL

Dr Francesco Mazzarella, Principal Investigator

Prof. Lucy Orta, Co-Investigator

Dr Seher Mirza, Post-Doctoral Research Fellow

Nicole Zisman, Project Administrator

## External Project Team

Jess Amaral, Assistant Cultural Producer

David Betteridge, Filmmaker

JC Candanedo, Visual Artist

Froi Legaspi, Policy Advisor

Mehrddad Pakniyat, Photographer

Alisa Ruzavina, Workshop Facilitator

## Advisory Board

Dr Erica de Greef, African Fashion Research Institute

Almir Koldzic, Counterpoints Arts

Dr. Cory Rodgers, Refugee Studies Centre,  
University of Oxford

Nadja Romain, Everything I Want

Professor Helen Storey, Centre for Sustainable Fashion,  
UAL

Professor Stuart Walker, Manchester Metropolitan  
University

## Project Partners

Arbeit Project Ltd

Bow Arts

London Borough of Newham

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

London Borough of Waltham Forest

Poplar HARCA

Rosetta Arts

Victoria and Albert Museum

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

## In Collaboration with

### 'Refugee Transition Network'

Led by Dr Malé Luján Escalante,

London College of Communication, UAL

Funded by AHRC, LCC Design School and  
LCC International Office

This exhibition was made possible with the support  
of the Barbican Library

Discover more about the project, download  
the online catalogue and book your place at  
our events by scanning the QR code below

