

BRITISH
TEXTILE
BIENNIAL

STUDENT

LEARNING

RESOURCE

STUDENT

RESOURCE

29 SEPTEMBER

29 OCTOBER 2023

STUDENT

STUDENT

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TRANSFORMED EAST LANCASHIRE FROM A QUIET COUNTRYSIDE AREA INTO A MAJOR TEXTILE PRODUCTION HUB THAT HAD A WORLDWIDE IMPACT, IN A NEVER-ENDING CYCLE OF WORK, MANUFACTURING AND TRADING, THAT WE NOW KNOW IS UNSUSTAINABLE AND IS AFFECTING THE PLANET. The industry that has been a huge booming part of our area for the past 200 years has now almost disappeared, but it has left its mark on both the people of East Lancashire and the places they live.

The British Textile Biennial 2023 explores what it could look like to have a more sustainable relationship with the land, people and our clothing. Our exhibitions are showing work by artists who explore different ways to make clothes and materials including; traditional ways of making textiles, such as weaving with wool sourced from the animals that they farm; trialling modern ways to farm cotton in Benin; recycling garments in Ghana; and growing flax in Blackburn.

Using the empty buildings and spaces left behind by the textile industry as venues to show our artists' work and ideas, we ask "can the making of materials ever become friendly to the planet?"

More can be found out about the British Textile Biennial programme at here britishtextilebiennial.co.uk

The British Textile Biennial is made possible with funding from Arts Council England.

With thanks to the Cotton Industry War Memorial Trust for their ongoing support.

f @ X d #BTB23 #britishtextilebiennial #politicsofcloth

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EQUILIBRIUM WIND

THIERRY OUSSOU

THE EXCHANGE



PHOTO: THIERRY OUSSOU

>>> The Cotton Exchange was a significant building in 19th century Blackburn. It was built to sell raw cotton to mill owners in Lancashire which was picked by enslaved African labourers in the plantations of the Caribbean and American colonies. It is the perfect place for four installations by artists from Benin, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and the UK who use textiles to explore the long term damage of colonisation in Africa.

In the installation *EQUILIBRIUM WIND* Thierry Oussou presents a pile of raw cotton from his plantation in his hometown in Benin, where he farms with workers from the local area; creating an industry that offers a better livelihood than they would have in the big plantations that dominate the country.

Benin is Africa's biggest producer of cotton, but local people receive very little benefit from this state controlled trade. The flag, designed by Thierry, is proclaiming his plantation's separation, called *EQUILIBRIUM WIND*, uses the red and green of the Benin flag with an image of the cotton plant. Thierry creates a new flag in each country his work is shown, this one being made locally in the UK.

Most of Benin's cotton is sent to Bangladesh to be made into 'fast fashion' clothing for big brands based mostly in Europe and America. This simple piece by Thierry asks us to think about the complicated relationships that are involved within the fashion industry, the environments and people it affects, both now and in the past.

Through textiles, the artists in The Exchange show the stories and struggles that have shaped and continue to impact their countries, starting conversations about global justice for people and the communities.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— How can art and textiles be a tool for raising awareness about historical injustices and modern world wide problems, such as exploitation in the fashion industry?

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OFONG UFOK

VICTORIA UDONDIAN

THE EXCHANGE

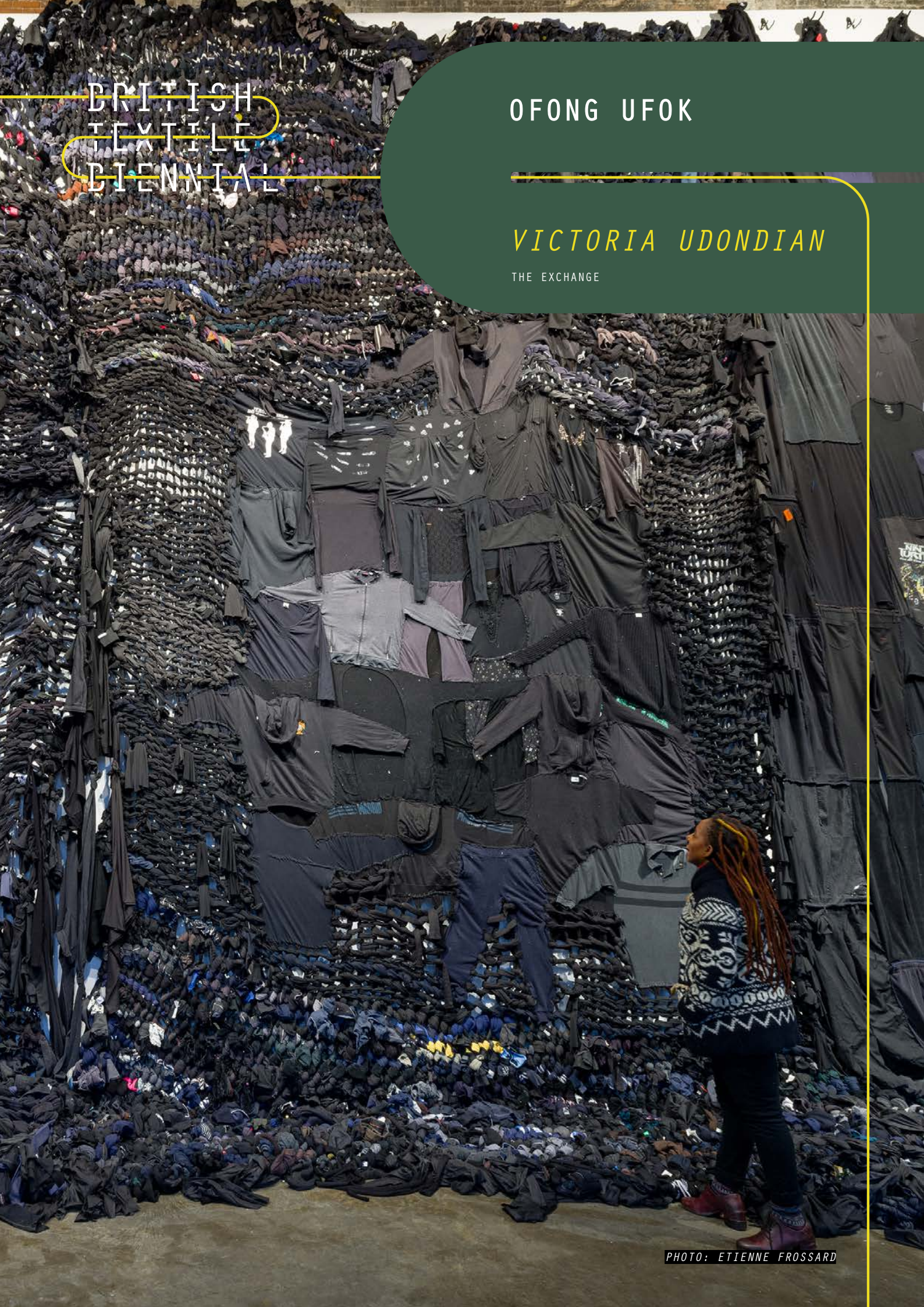


PHOTO: ETIENNE FROSSARD

>>> *OFONG UFOK* is a monumental artwork that has been developed by the artist Victoria Udondian with immigrant communities in New York. One of the key partnerships is Stitch Buffalo, a textile centre located near the artist's studio; who empower refugee and immigrant women by giving them opportunities to create handcrafted goods and gain independence.

Victoria has collaborated closely with the community members and has ensured that they are fairly compensated for their contributions. Each piece of clothing holds a unique tale, allowing the participants' stories to become a part of the collaborative artwork. Victoria says "I was interested in questioning notions of labour, and the role of immigrants in labour productivity. The piece took us about 3000 hours to produce across the period of 5 - 6 months. Working with used clothes was also significant as I began to consider how fast fashion is produced mostly in the global south under repressive conditions. These clothes end up in landfills, having a huge impact on the environment." Coming from Nigeria, Victoria has seen this impact first hand in the many used clothing markets and landfill sites.

Through the combination of art, collaboration, and storytelling, *OFONG UFOK* celebrates the strength, resilience, and vibrant cultures of the immigrant communities in New York. It shows the immense talent and spirit of these individuals while providing them with a platform for economic empowerment and the chance to have their voices heard.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— How can these creative opportunities help people to feel part of a new community? How can they help them share their stories? What other impact may this have on individual groups?

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RETURN TO SENDER

*THE NEST
COLLECTIVE*

THE EXCHANGE



PHOTO: SUNNY DOLAT

>>> *RETURN TO SENDER* is a film presented by The Nest Collective, from Nairobi, housed in a structure made entirely from bales of used garments. These bales, known as 'mitumba' in Kenya, are discarded in huge quantities by people in Europe and America and shipped to Africa for sale or disposal. These bales first go to the many markets in various countries in Africa, notably Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya. However, much of the clothing in the bales is unusable, often up to 40%, and as a result is disposed of in huge clothing mountains of landfill that pollute the environment. This installation sheds light on this issue, raising awareness about the impact of excessive consumption and the resulting waste.

To pull you further into this experience, the installation is accompanied by a film and ambient soundtrack, sharing the stories of and sounds recorded at various second-hand clothing markets across Nairobi.

RETURN TO SENDER raises our awareness of our consistent fashion waste affecting the planet, it invites us to reflect on our role in this and look at our own buying/clothing habits; encouraging us to seek a more eco-friendly way of buying and maintaining clothes. The Nest Collective use creativity and activism to tackle these pressing global issues.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— How often do you buy clothes?
What do you think happens to them when you no longer want them? Where do you think your old clothes end up?

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FAST, FAST, SLOW

COMMON WEALTH

THE EXCHANGE



PHOTO: KAROL WYSZYNSKI

>>> **FAST, FAST, SLOW** by Common Wealth, is a catwalk performance piece that has been created with local designers and performers from East Lancashire and The Revival Collective in Ghana. They have built a catwalk stage on which to present *Fast, Fast, Slow*, a performance which will take place on the last weekend of the Biennial. This fashion show will explore our personal relationship with clothes and waste, and how many of our impulsive fashion decisions end up in staggering landfills in Ghana.

The audience will see complex relationships to fashion and our clothes buying habits; how people feel pressure to buy things new and wear them once; how clothes can sometimes make them feel uncomfortable and heighten body confidence; as well as mental health issues. The performance will help us to understand the whole picture and what happens to the clothes we all wear and throw away.

By telling us these individual stories, **FAST, FAST, SLOW** is a powerful way to raise awareness about the different impacts of the fashion industry. It asks us to think about the end result of fast fashion and the throw away culture that has become normal in our society.

You are invited to pose on the catwalk and share an image on social media with the following information:

Our model @*(yourname)* wears an outfit
 Made in _____ (CHECK THE LABEL)
 Bought from _____ (WHICH STORE)
 Worn _____ times (HOW MANY)

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— **What would your collection be called?**

In *Fast, Fast, Slow* our local co-creators have created 'The Worn It Once' collection, 'Urban Protection', 'Clothes Are My Worst Enemy' and 'Fashion Begins At Home'.

What is your personal relationship to fashion and what would your collection say about you?

— **What is your 'Imagine Sey'?**

In *Fast, Fast, Slow* The Revival who are based in Accra, Ghana teach us a game about imagining how things could be different or better in the future.

For example, 'Imagine Sey everyone wore the same colour', what do you imagine could be different about the fashion industry?

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DEAD WHITE MAN

JEREMY HUTCHISON

TONY'S BALLROOM



PHOTO: DANI PUJALTE

>>> Each year, millions of tonnes of our used clothes are shipped to sub-Saharan Africa, where they are sold in huge street markets. In parts of West Africa, these are called Dead White Men's Clothes, as the people there assume that their original owners have died if they no longer use them. The truth is that these clothes are sold so cheaply here that they are deemed disposable by consumers of fast fashion and can often end up in charity shops after only one wear. The charity shops here cannot use much of this clothing so it is put into bales and shipped to East and West Africa and on arrival a huge amount cannot be used so it ends up in toxic mountains of waste which pollute whole areas.

In *DEAD WHITE MAN*, Jeremy Hutchison creates sculptural zombies - the walking dead - made from this discarded clothing destined for Africa. These zombies come alive to haunt us in performances, billboards, and exhibitions across Blackburn.

Over the summer, Jeremy undertook workshops with 500 children in East Lancashire to create an army of 'effigies' with fabric taken from garment bales intercepted on their way to Africa; this mini army can be found in an empty shop in the town centre as a haunting reminder as we shop.

The project began life with a residency in Dakar, Senegal, and evolved to focus on the huge second-hand textile market, known as Kanatamanto, as Jeremy developed his work with THE OR Foundation, an activist group based in Accra, Ghana. The Foundation focus on helping the women who carry the massive bales through the market on their heads and Jeremy aims to share their voices; shedding light on the social, economic, and environmental impact of this trade.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— Look at the installation, what type of garments can you spot? How does it make you feel when you look at it? What do you think the artist is trying to tell us?

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MATERIAL MEMORY

THE CRYPT, BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL

PHOTO: JACK BOLTON

>>> Nothing holds memories better than fabric. Passed down through generations for celebration or passed on for safe care in dangerous times, it is mobile, mendable and holds memories within its threads.

MATERIAL MEMORY is a display of textile items, loaned by members of the public, alongside the stories they tell. Made precious by the care taken to keep them safe, the value placed on them by those who have prolonged their life and the deep connections they have created, sometimes across centuries and continents. Challenging the throw away culture of our time, this exhibition demonstrates the deeply human desire to hold the simplest things dear.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— What personal objects or heirlooms do you or your family possess that hold special memories or sentimental value? How does the act of preserving and passing down items like textiles connect us to our past and the people who came before us?

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COMMON THREADS

THE CRYPT, BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL



PHOTO: ALICE KETTLE

>>> In this exhibition, showcased in the crypt of Blackburn Cathedral, artist Alice Kettle facilitates a conversation that transcends borders and cultures. Through the art of embroidery, she brings together women from Karachi, Pakistan, and various groups of women hailing from the South Asian diaspora in East Lancashire. Together, they embark on a collective exploration of themes of home, belonging, and the connection between people and the land they inhabit.

As these women move across the fabric, a symphony of shared experiences and intertwined narrative unfolds. The resulting embroidered cloths become the tapestry through which stories of rich landscapes and enchanting environments are vividly conveyed.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— Why do you think it is important for these groups of women to create these pieces of artwork?

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FUNUFACTORY

IBUKUN BALDWIN

PRISM CONTEMPORARY

PHOTO: DANIEL ALLISON

>>> Ibukun Baldwin is working at Cookson & Clegg with their deadstock fabric and redundant equipment to create an immersive, interactive space transformed with textile sculptures. The installation demonstrates the creative potential of clothing production methods and provides a space where the public can learn and practice textile mending techniques.

Throughout the commission Ibukun will be working with the local refugee community to provide training and opportunities within the factory to demonstrate the unique power the textile/fashion manufacturing industries have to bring about positive socio-economic change.

A co-commission with The National Festival of Making.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— What does 'deadstock' fabric mean? Why is Ibukun Baldwin using deadstock fabric? What are the benefits of learning and using mending techniques?

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FRAGMENTS OF
OUR TIME

UTHRA RAJGOPAL

THE WHITAKER



PHOTO: GURJEET SINGH

>>> The relationship between land and people has been a delicate balancing act for centuries, yet with the growing demands of consumption and industrialisation this balance is now in a fragile state.

This exhibition brings together 17 artists from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh alongside South Asian artists based in the UK and the USA who explore and expose our impact on the environment today. Using natural fibres and dyes, discarded plastic washed up on our beaches, human hair and left-over cloth from Punjabi suits, these works deal with our relationship to textiles and the fragments we leave behind.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— What are the ways that industry today has a negative impact on the environment? What happens to all the 'things' we no longer want or need? How is the exhibition making others aware of this?

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LARKSONG

*NICK JORDAN &
JACOB CARTWRIGHT*

GOODSHAW CHAPEL

PHOTO: NICK JORDAN & JACOB CARTWRIGHT

>>> Nick Jordan and Jacob Cartwright dive deep into the rich stories of Goodshaw Chapel, discovering the importance in the history of textiles in East Lancashire. By looking into the Chapel's past, they not only show the histories but show connections with modern sustainability, and the urgent need for a symbiotic relationship with nature.

Through this co-commission with English Heritage, the artistic vision is brought to life within the walls of this chapel. Standing as a testament to the history of its nonconformist parishioners who once met regularly on the moors, Goodshaw Chapel stands as a link to our past in an era where handloom weaving served as a way of supporting the parishioners' income, a trade which in mid-18th century was growing with the arrival of imported cotton to Liverpool.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- 'Symbiotic' means the relationship between two different things, such as industry and nature. How has industry impacted on nature?
- What can be done to try and make this relationship better?

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SOFT ACID

TENANT OF CULTURE

HELMSHORE MILLS TEXTILE MUSEUM

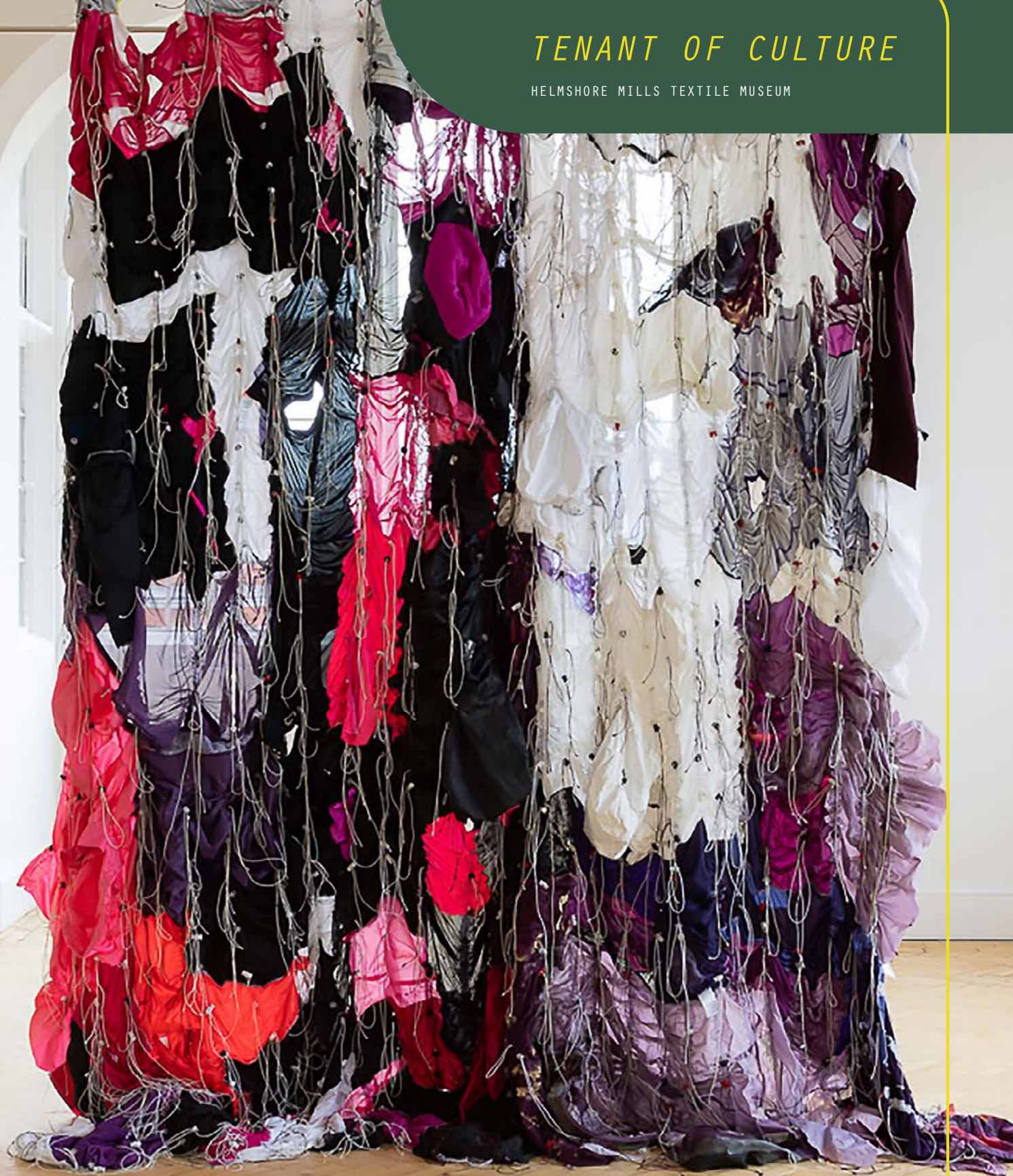


PHOTO: CAMDEN ART CENTRE

>>> This exhibition draws on and extends the artist's long-standing exploration of consumer culture and the vast and problematic waste accumulated via the fashion industry. Repurposing discarded garments and accessories into new sculptural forms - alongside an exploration of material possibilities - fabrics are bleached, boiled, dyed, twisted, torn and meticulously reassembled. The resulting works nod to former relics simultaneously desirable and monstrous, a reminder of the fickle cycle of trends and fashion, and the exploitative and often invisible economies of supply and demand.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— Look at the artwork - what garments can you see? What has happened to them? Think about the clothes you own - do you wear them all? Why not?

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GAINING GROUND

*CURATED BY
LIGAYA SALAZAR*

HAWORTH ART GALLERY



PHOTO: TINKU KAMAYU

>>> This exhibition draws on the British Council's Crafting Futures programme with work by artisans and researchers from countries across the world, including Bangladesh, the Philippines, the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, Argentina, Nicaragua, Guyana, Brazil and Indonesia - places where colonialism and extractive capitalist processes have disrupted craft knowledge being passed onto future generations.

Through a display of films, photography, audio, handbooks, raw materials, and craft objects, Gaining Ground explores craft as a form of living knowledge that shapes global cultures and our relationship to nature. Each project, although geographically and socially distinct, questions what we can learn from craft to inform climate action and in our quest to build a more sustainable future.

In partnership with Crafts Council UK & The British Council

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— Considering the global challenges we face, like climate change and environmental sustainability, how might a renewed surge for craft and this kind of knowledge benefit us as a whole?

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THE PENISTONE CLOTH

BLACKBURN MUSEUM & ART GALLERY



PHOTO: THE GUARDIAN

>>> **THE PENISTONE CLOTH** is a small, fragile piece of ancient indigo woollen cloth that is slightly moth-eaten and so tiny that few would give it a second glance. A 1783 note on its reverse tells us that it is the only surviving fragment of its kind; used to clothe millions of enslaved African people on the plantations of the Caribbean and North America for almost 200 years. This coarse fabric, known as “slave” or “negro” cloth, was woven in West Yorkshire, close to the town of Penistone, from which it derives its name.

Its 18th century label reads: *“Penistone sent for negro clothing 1783 which for substance strength and unchangeable colour is best adapted to that purpose.”*

Very little is known about how the millions of those who were enslaved were clothed. This small sample, believed to be the only surviving such cloth, begins to unravel that story and tell us that it wasn't just the rich in Britain,

Ireland and Europe who benefited from slavery, but also handweavers and spinners in cottages and farms, possibly without knowing where their cloth was going. When emancipation came, demand for these fabrics absolutely plummeted. No-one who had a choice wanted to wear them because they were extremely coarse and uncomfortable and had become uniforms of enslavement.

This historic object is accompanied by a timeline and projection.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— What lessons can we draw from this small piece of cloth, about the importance of acknowledging and learning from our past, even when it involves uncomfortable or painful truths?

WARNING - The language in the exhibition is drawn from original documents and is repeated only where strictly necessary for sharing historical documents and accounts - not least written on the object itself.

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LIFE IN CLOTHES

MILA BURCIKOVA

HAWORTH ART GALLERY



>>> What would fashion look like if it developed alongside natural seasons rather than the market driven seasons of the fashion calendar? As part of her *LIFE IN CLOTHES* project, Dr Mila Burcikova from Centre for Sustainable Fashion, London College of Fashion presents her *LIFE IN CLOTHES ALMANAC: THE SEASONS OF GARDEN AND FASHION MAKING*. The Almanac is a continuous conversation between gardening and fashion making. It is a work in progress, a learning journey on how working with the rhythms of natural seasons throughout the year can inform and reframe the process of fashion making.

The Almanac explores and probes how fashion centres and priorities may be shifted when fashion making is truly grounded in connection to nature and a rural space. The process unfolds a whole new pattern for fashion, through a conscious choice of a lifestyle that is better attuned to the rhythms of seasons as well as to our own creative cycles and wellbeing needs.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— How might lining up fashion with natural seasons change the fashion-making process, and the priorities of the fashion industry?

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CONDITIONS
AT PRESENT

REBECCA CHESNEY

TOWNLEY HALL PARK

PHOTO: JACK BOLTON

>>> Tents provide shelter in times of crisis of displacement, but they perform a very different role at music festivals where it is more common for them to be discarded than taken away by their owners. With more and more charities collecting discarded tents for reuse, more and more tents are being left behind as people think they will be going to a 'good home', without thinking about the environmental costs of producing them so cheaply. Using the fabric from discarded tents, in collaboration with FWRD (Festival Waste Reclamation and Distribution), Rebecca Chesney's field of windsocks, serve as an indicator of current conditions; a barometer of the climate crisis of our own making.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- Festival goers have brought tents and other equipment to the festival. Why do you think these people have left their belongings behind?
- Do you see this in other areas of society? Is it someone else's responsibility to 'clean up'?

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LITMUS

*COTTONOPOLIS
COLLECTIVE*

QUEEN STREET MILL



PHOTO: JOE SMITH

>>> This exhibition of work at Queen Street Mill, presents the archival material from the Cottonopolis project; materials gathered from polluted and impacted environments from both nearby (Manchester) and far (India & Australia). The work explores how working collaboratively with cloth, colour and environmental materials might begin to unearth and unpick the local and global environmental consequences of the North West's cotton industry.

This project seeks to build responsibility for the impact and passing down of the cotton industry, on lands, water, animals and people all over the world, and to show the power of artists who have begun to take the approach of repairing in sciences that go beyond the laboratory.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— How might textile production have a negative impact on soil, water and plants? What could be done differently to lessen this impact? How can we consider people in all of these areas of production?

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THE SURPLUS BADGE

ARTIST A & ARTIST B

TOWNLEY HALL



PHOTO: DIANE MULDOWNEY

>>> *The Surplus Badge* was developed in three stages working with East Lancashire Girl Guides, Brownies and Rainbows. The resulting film and artworks are being exhibited in Towneley's Family Dining Room for the British Textile Biennial.

The artworks are made from a cargo parachute, which has been cut down, screen-printed and re-sewn into two large scale tent-like dresses. Artist A & Artist B's response to the fast fashion theme of this year's Biennial gives an antidote to the built-in way fast fashion makes things already obsolete, by repurposing and re-imagining uses for the masses of fabric of decommissioned parachutes.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- What is upcycling? What has been upcycled in this installation?
- What other things can we do to use such big amounts of fabric that can be used again like the decommissioned parachutes?



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PROJECTION CLOTH

CHRISTINE BORLAND

THE CRUCK BARN, PENDLE HERITAGE CENTRE

PHOTO: JACK BOLTON

>>> In Christine Borland's installation, four films are cast onto a Projection Cloth of a material called fustian, which is a mix of linen warp and cotton weft, woven into the very structure of this mediaeval cruck barn. Developed through the artist's growing, spinning and weaving of plant fibres, the films reflect on the lives of women through handworking, moving past industrialisation to the digital age.

The work touches on symbolism of the spinning wheel and the demonised image of women as witches, which resonates deeply in Pendle, where 10 women and one man, some of whom were handloom spinners, were some of the last people to be hanged in England for witchcraft in 1612.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— Women's roles in the workforce have changed vastly over the years - what does this installation tell you about these changes? Why do you think these women were classed as witches? How might society see them today?

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#END_OF_EMPIRE

EVA SAJOVIC

NELSON TECHNOLOGY CENTRE

PHOTO: JACK BOLTON

>>> *#end_of_empire* is an interactive, site specific large scale installation of knitted photographs with built in touch sensors and an AI generated musical score.

The project explores themes central to the artist Eva Sajovic's work; colonialism; the climate and ecological crises; the role of the artist in imagining alternative futures; and the need for collaboration with the "more-than-human" - including Artificial Intelligence.

By taking symbols of imperial power, commonly set in imposing stone, and translating them into soft fabrics to be interacted with, the project alludes to a future transformed. Artist Eva Sajovic has been working with local participants and musician Nicola Privato and during the exhibition (October 2023) a programme of events will be delivered around the project's themes.

#end_of_empire is commissioned by In-Situ and British Textile Biennial.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— Why is the artist using creativity to highlight climate issues? What is she trying to achieve?



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INDIGENITUDE

*CURATED BY
VANCCI F.C WAHN*

PR1 GALLERY, UCLAN

PHOTO: HANA KELIN

>>> Curated by Vancci F.C Wahn, *Indigenitude* features three textile artists and four documentary filmmakers from three different Indigenous nations in Taiwan. This exhibition explores Taiwanese Indigenous participatory textile practices, demonstrating how the ancient craft of collaborative textile weaving in communities using homegrown fibres like ramie and banana fibre, mixed with chemically dyed materials woollens and cotton to make durable colourful textiles, was transformed by colonialism, capitalism and globalisation during the 19th & 20th centuries. This practice is now a source of creativity for contemporary Indigenous artists to embody their cultural values within new participatory artworks.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— What does 'homegrown' mean? Why do these people continue ancient ways of textile weaving? What does 'durable' mean? Why is it important to create durable textiles? What impact will that have?