

BRITISH
TEXTILE
BIENNIAL

02 OCTOBER–02 NOVEMBER

**Student
Learning
Resource**



IMAGE: DR JOHN C TAYLOR OBE

BRITISH TEXTILE BIENNIAL

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British Textile Biennial (BTB) is a free festival of contemporary art, commissioning artists and designers from all over the world to make work inspired by the context and legacy of the textile industry in East Lancashire and its global impact, often in the places that were created by it.

This Autumn, British Textile Biennial (BTB) explores invention and innovation in textile production; through indigenous knowledge to space-age technology, from the earliest form of shelter, the tent, to space suits, and from plant-based dyes to the first polymers.

With artists and designers, BTB25 revisits the textile pioneers of 20th century Lancashire inspired by a bold vision of the future that revolutionised our lives, with companies such as Grenfell in Burnley creating innovative materials that clothed explorers in extreme environments and new, synthetic fabrics such as Terylene made in Accrington that modernised ordinary lives with easy care clothing. However, these developments pushed the planet and its resources to extremes, so any future advances must look at ways to reset it and learn from a distant past that is almost lost to us.

Through exhibitions at partner venues, commissions in public spaces, artist residencies and long-term projects with local communities, as well as our year-round education programmes, BTB plays a key role in the cultural development of the area, offering a range of inspirational creative experiences and opportunities for everyone.

Each Biennial casts a new perspective on the role that textiles play in the past, present and future of our world.

These educational activities aim to provide participants with the background knowledge and history of the textile industry in Lancashire and help you debate the complex problems currently facing the global textile sector, as well as provide starting points to explore and propose innovative potential solutions influenced by extensive global and historical awareness.

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Aitor Throup

FROM THE MOOR

THE EMPIRE BURNLEY



IMAGE: LEO CORFU



Internationally renowned artist/designer, Aitor Throup, presents an immersive multi-media event on the British Textile Biennial's final weekend, offering visitors a chance to experience and explore the genre-defying multi-disciplinary work of this globally acclaimed artist/designer whose beginnings in Burnley inspired him towards an endless path of exploration and innovation.

This career-spanning retrospective is presented against the dramatic backdrop of The Empire, Burnley, featuring his iconic designs from the reimagined C.P. Company Goggle Jacket to his costumes for the Hunger Games and Ash sci-fi films as well as his latest collaboration with Umbro, that is set to rewrite the design rulebook not only in football, but the world of performance apparel.

A smaller exhibition of Aitor's sculptures and drawings will take place at OneTwoThree – a building which once housed the designer clothing store where the young Aitor was inspired by C.P. Company and Stone Island – two brands with whom he has since collaborated.

An immersive installation of the work of renowned sportswear/outdoor clothing designer, Aitor Throup, originally inspired to be a designer as a boy by the Burnley football fans' fashion of the 80s and sci-fi films such as Star Wars and The Matrix, describing them as 'just dramatic and poetic and beautiful. I was creating worlds'.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- How do you imagine clothing will change in the next 50 years?
- Do you think men's clothing is due an overhaul? Why?
- What role do you think science fiction plays in predicting and prototyping fashion and design?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Design a "Future Wardrobe" inspired by Aitor Throup's multidisciplinary approach.
- Choose an extreme environment (e.g., deep-sea, outer space, a post-climate change city) and create three conceptual garment designs that incorporate elements of protection, functionality, and artistic expression.

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Alexis Maxwell

MEMORY FABRIC

THE TECHNOLOGY CENTRE

IMAGE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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Alexis Maxwell uses a blend of sound, projection and animation to investigate how communities shape the stories of the places they inhabit, and how looking at the past and present can inspire speculative futures that celebrate what already exists.

Memory Fabric imagines a textile of the future - one that can hold the memories of a place and its people. The fabric structure rises like something that has grown there over time; part plant, part shelter, part visitor from another world.

Developed with artist Emmie Shaw-Peake and supported by Faith Bebbington, it uses recycled and upcycled materials to build upon the fabrics already present in the space, reflecting how memory in a place is layered; never erased, but carried forward.

Animated projections play across the surface, combining a patchwork of 3D rendering, stop-motion, and hand-drawn techniques with contributions from the local community. Drawing on Nelson's nature, streets, architecture, and the voices of its people, the work incorporates material developed during sessions with Nelson Library and Keeping East Lancashire in the Picture, as well as co-creations with the Positive Voices group during a workshop led by the artist. Together, they form a speculative, moving portrait of the town; a version of Nelson imagined through more-than-human eyes.

A soundscape by Andrew Hillock and Matthieu Wibaux merges field recordings of Nelson with community voices; entangling visitors in an environment that invites reflection how textiles might be reimagined as vessels of memory.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- What memories of places and people would you weave into an imagined fabric?
- What fabrics would you like to see recycled? What would you make?
- Who would you record for future prosperity and why?
- What groups would you like to work with to create an artwork?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Using Ai prompts with words, places and things that are personal to you, create a visual image of an imagined fabric.

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Dhaqan Collective

THE AQAL (HOUSE OF
WEAVING SONGS)

THE TECHNOLOGY CENTRE

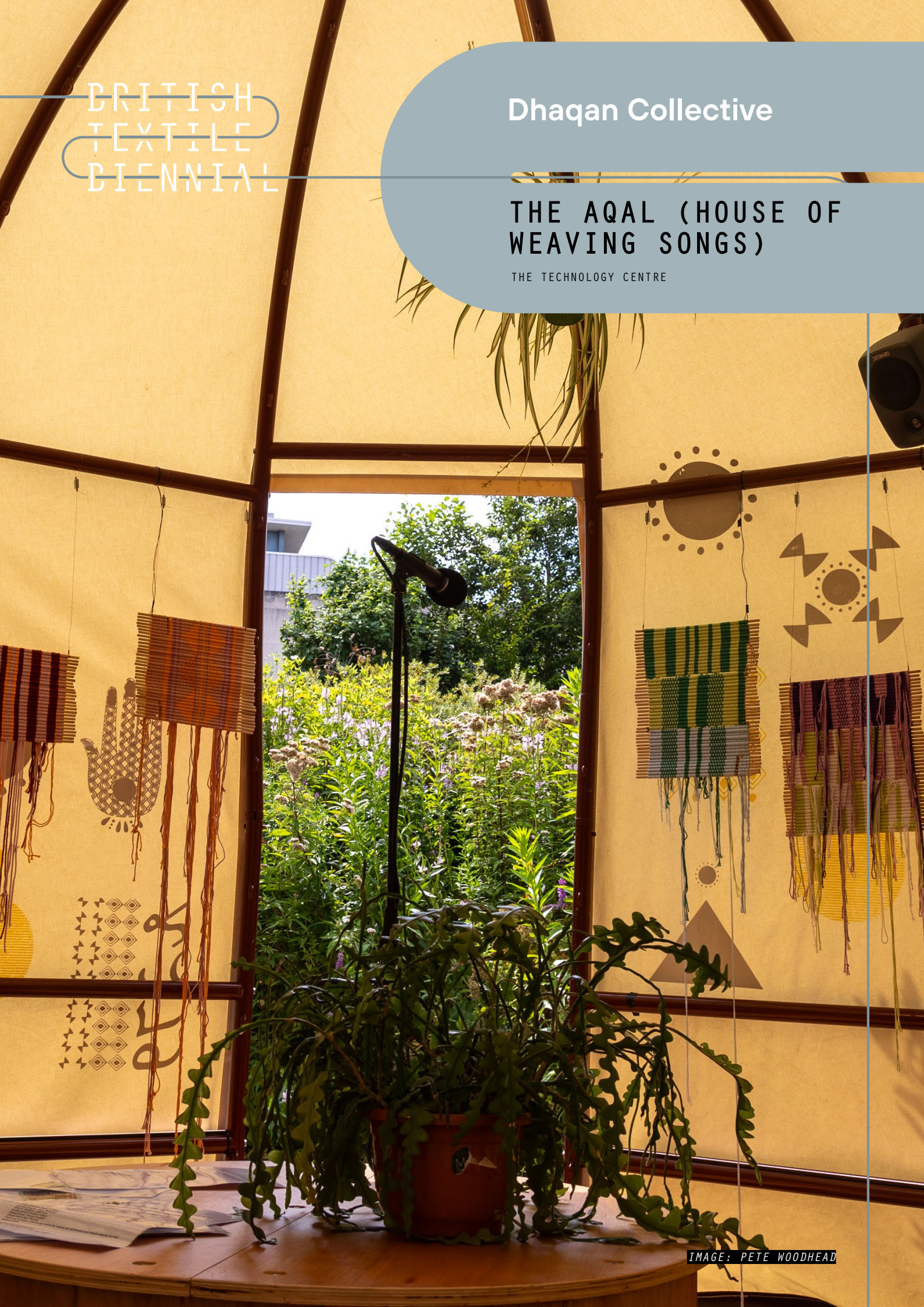


IMAGE: PETE WOODHEAD

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An Aqal is a nomadic home found in the arid landscapes of Somalia, a structure vital to Somali life, built to endure a harsh landscape with limited resources. Constructing one is a communal effort, with women weaving the structure together while singing songs that have been passed down through generations. Each aqal, therefore becomes a tapestry of multiple hands, histories and sounds, reflecting the lives and dreams of its creators.

The Dhaqan Collective is a Somali feminist art duo, Ayan Cilmi and Fozia Ismail whose practice seeks to find ways of building imaginative futures that support Somali people in the UK and East Africa, to resist threats over their cultural heritage. The collective uses everyday materials, discarded cassette tapes, food, and textiles, to create spaces of community, joy and healing that centre the full range of Somali diasporic experiences to connect us to ancient cultural practices that can inspire us to build new futures.

The finished Aqal is a space where audiences and collaborators can gather, listen and reflect.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- What is an Aqal and where are they found?
- What are the benefits to society of communal building and creating?
- What space would you create or design for listening, talking and reflecting? Have you seen examples of other spaces for reflection?
- Do you have any traditional songs that are personal to you?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- What materials could we recycle for a communal weaving installation? Look on the internet for simple ways to make your own cardboard loom to create squares of your own fabric.
- Consider sewing them together to make a structure using canes to prop it up or push into the ground.

FURTHER READING



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Football and Flax

TURTON TOWER



IMAGE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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In 1835 Turton Hall hall was owned by James Kay, who developed a wet spinning process for flax which helped industrialise linen spinning in the UK. His grandson, John, went to Harrow School in 1870 and brought the school's form of football back with him to the local village team; these rules formed the foundation of football as we know it today.

Flax and football both sit at the heart of the textile history of Lancashire, as they also do in Northern France.

åbäke & Le Cercle du S226erpent bleu

RROOUUBBAAIIXX 2033

Roubaix is a small town situated in Northern France. åbäke & Le Cercle du Serpent Bleu present a fictional story that explores the enduring power of collective action in football, that rises above bitter rivalry.

Their story traces a vanished football team from Lancashire to Northern France, weaving together parallel histories of textiles and sport in both regions, from flax to Jacquard. Through this alternative map of memory, community, and shared passion, they not only revisit the past but also envision the possibility of new futures.

Christian Jeffery

COMFORT YE ONE ANOTHER

Christian Jeffery creates beautiful hand-painted football shirts. This design was partly inspired by the floral wallpaper in the Bradshaw Bedroom, and he took the words 'Comfort Ye One Another' from a wooden chair in the Drawing Room.

Various artists

100% UNOFFICIAL:
THE FABRIC OF FANDOM

From early homemade garments that embody working-class ingenuity, through to bootleg culture and the emergence of textiles as a form of protest on the terraces, this exhibition is an exploration of how innovative football fans have shunned the official club shop to reimagine football aesthetics. Curated by OOF, this exhibition features the work of over thirty contemporary artists and designers alongside artefacts from public and private collections, including the National Football Museum and the Westminster Menswear Archive.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- Do you know of a recent football shirt controversy?
- What memories, traditions and images would you paint on a football shirt?
- What does a healthy version of rivalry look like?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Write your own fictional story of lost rivalry.
- Design your own logo and football shirt for a football club whose motto is everybody is welcome omnibus gratissimum

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Godfrey Katende &
Salford Slow Fashion

WOVEN WORLDS

BLAKEY MOOR

LOW RESOLUTION

IMAGE: MUKISA KIBUUKA



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Salford Slow Fashion (UK) has partnered with Godfrey Katende of IGC Fashion (Uganda) to launch a unique collection that highlights bark cloth, an ancient and culturally significant Ugandan fabric, which often comes from the Mutabu tree.

The tree is never harmed in the production of bark cloth, its bark is carefully removed, and the tree is then wrapped in banana leaves to protect it. After about nine months, the bark regenerates and can be harvested annually for up to 100 years. This remarkable process ensures a continuous and renewable resource with the tree itself at the centre of a healthy ecosystem.

Bark cloth is the very first fabric, it symbolized power, spirituality, and resistance historically. It was used as royal attire, a form of currency, and even a symbol of protest against colonial rule. However, due to the pressures of colonialism, globalization, and modernization, this ancient craft now faces significant challenges. Many in Uganda associate it with burials, witchcraft, and evil, creating a stigma that threatens its survival.

Godfrey is leading vital work to revive and modernise the cloth, starting with two innovative outfits. One garment is made from cotton naturally dyed using bark cloth and rust sourced from the infrastructure of historic Lancashire cotton mills, while the second is

a quilted jacket crafted with bark cloth and repurposed textiles from Owino Market in Kampala and Oxfam in Manchester. The fabric was then pattern-cut and constructed at the Salford Slow Fashion Studio, Islington Mill, employing a zero-waste approach. Offcuts were reintegrated into the design as a visible feature.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- What does it mean to revive ancient textile traditions in a modern world?
- What tree is used for bark cloth?
- Which materials would you repurpose to create a new garment ?
- How do you create zero-waste when making garments?
- What objects and plants can be used as a natural dye on existing fabrics and garments?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Create a new garment from clothes you currently own, consider unpicking and removing sections to create a new outfit, try quilting using two or three fabrics together to give it bulk, tag the [@britishtextilebiennial](#) into any samples you make!

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Hannah Robson

TRANSFORMATION

THE HARRIS



IMAGE: LUCY FORRESTER



Hannah, an artist and weaver, explores how textiles and architecture interact and how textiles can highlight changes in environments. *Transformation* is a new sculpture commissioned by The Harris and the British Textile Biennial. It celebrates Rayon, the first commercially successful artificial fibre, created in Preston in 1905, using museum archives for inspiration.

Rayon is made from cellulose (from wood pulp or plants) which was chemically changed into yarn at the Courtaulds factory in Preston until its closure in 1979.

In the factory, wood pulp went through many stages (steeping, shredding, aging, xanthation, ripening, and extruding) to become rayon. Each stage changed its properties through chemical reactions. The material changed between solid and liquid as it moved through the factory. When it chemically becomes rayon, it is a bright orange liquid before being stretched into yarn and then bleached.

Hannah has sought to capture the idea of material transformation and celebrate the magic of yarn in this 20 metre long textile sculpture. Most of the piece is made from paper yarns – another material made from cellulose. The sculpture has been created through hand-weaving and knotting threads. Precise, three-dimensional woven shapes are connected by continuous threads which shift and twist in space, reorganising into different formations for each three-dimensional element.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- How many steps are required to transform cellulose into Rayon?
- What positives and negatives are associated with the use of Rayon?
- How do you think the artist felt about reusing these processes in her work?
- How long and how many processes were involved in the production of this work?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Design a small-scale textile sculpture using various types of thread and yarn.
- Experiment with different knotting and weaving techniques to create three-dimensional shapes.
- Consider how these shapes can be connected with continuous threads that allow for shifting and re-forming into new arrangements. You could use a simple frame, found objects, or even your hands as a loom. Document your process through sketches, photos, or a short video.

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Studio Lucy + Jorge Orta

HOMO MONDIALIS
(GLOBALISED MAN)

BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL CRYPT

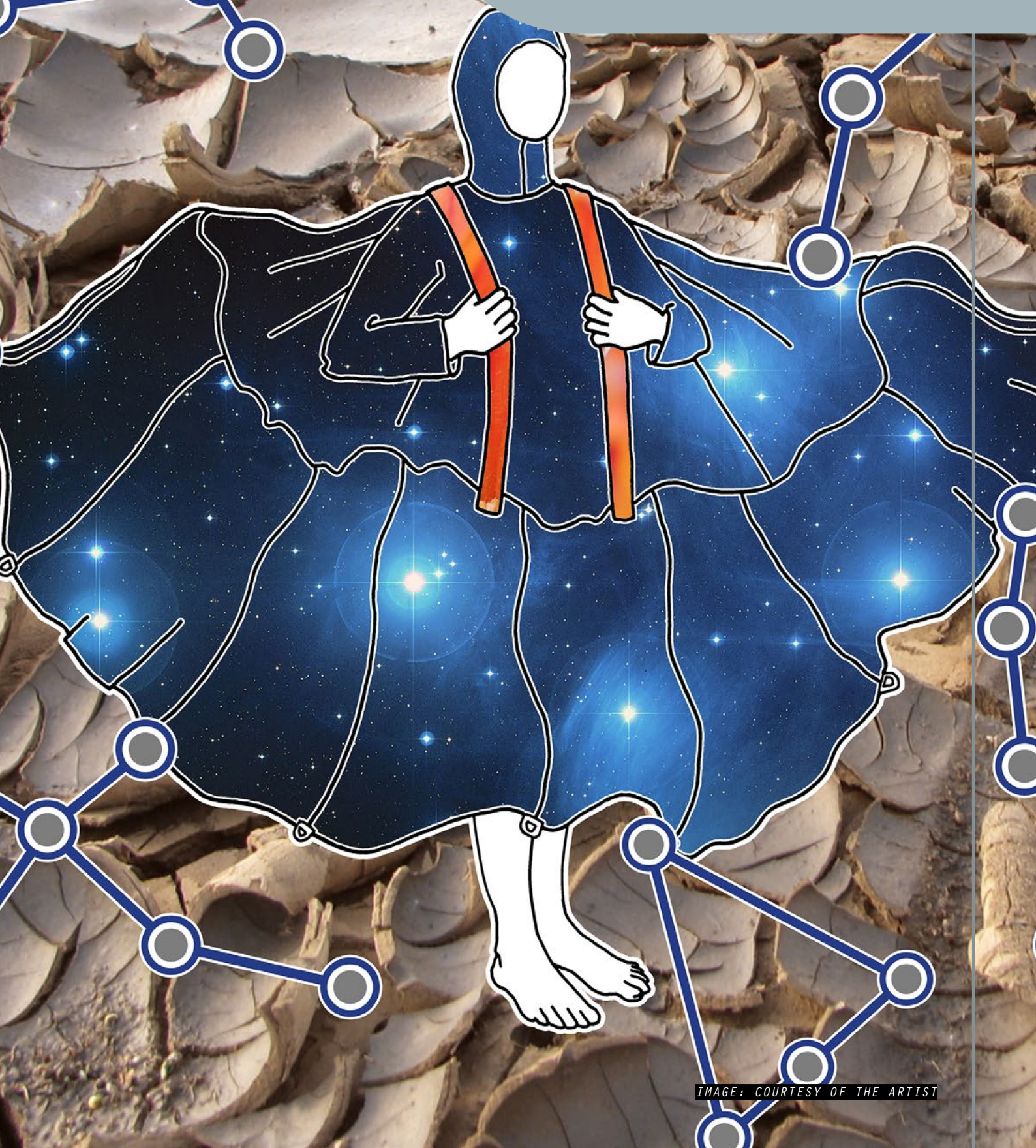


IMAGE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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Artists Lucy and Jorge Orta are explorers and storytellers who collaborate with environmental scientists to understand humanity's impact on natural habitats.

Antarctic Village No Borders envisions a peaceful future for Antarctica. The domes, made from second-hand clothing and glove extensions, symbolise diverse cultures. World flags display silkscreened text proposing an amendment to the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

The wall poem, **Gaia Meets Progress**, comprises forty framed embroideries depicting a conversation between Mother Earth (Gaia) and Progress. Written by eco-poet Mario Petrucci, this poem also accompanies the film **Amazonia**. The film prompts reflection on our actions, as Gaia reminds us, "Tug at any one thing. The rest will move."

Lucy started hand-embroidering **Trajectories** after learning that 500 tonnes of marine debris originating from an earthquake made a five-year journey over 5,400 kilometers. Embroidery became the technique through which she represented these complex global patterns of movement in relation to climate change and migration.

Wadi Hanifah Embroidery Landscapes

depicts plant species unique to the Wadi Hanifah, a desert valley in Saudi Arabia. House of Hair, inspired by traditional Bedouin tents, was created using 21st-century digital Jacquard loom technology, which envisions a future drastically altered by climate change.

The immersive installation, **Symphony for Absent Wildlife** draws on the history of European colonial trade and its impact on indigenous culture and wildlife in North America to recount a story of loss, using wool felt as a medium and motif.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- What does it mean to you to be a globalised man?
- How does the UN Declaration of Human Rights affect us?
- Does the planet have rights? What should these be?
- What changes could you make in your own life to have a positive impact on the planet?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- What personal or local environments would you use to inspire your own work?

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Ivan Forde

ETERNAL SEAS

HAWORTH ART GALLERY



IMAGE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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Born in Georgetown, Guyana, then relocated to Harlem at the age of ten, Ivan is a contemporary artist based in New York City, working across photography, printmaking, collage, sound performance, and installation.

Ivan grew up in a hilltop rural village and, as a child, he watched the roaring airplanes lifting off and landing at the international airport located nearby his home, seeing people going on or returning from a journey which he knew had immense value.

By crafting new visual epics, often depicted in shades of blue cyanotype, Forde intertwines the personal and the global to offer a transformative view of current narratives that unite us across cultures, geographies and time.

Eternal Seas

Artist Ivan Forde uses waste from coastal communities and marine ecosystems, repurposed by textile company Bionic Yarn, to create new artistic visions of real and fictional bodies of water worldwide.

The Bionic Yarn company rescues recyclable waste that's been dumped into the world's oceans and waterways (or is on the way there) and then turns it into high-performance textiles and polymers. It has become a sought after and highly sought after product, used by high performance companies like Goretex.

Eternal Seas considers connections between historic sites of manufacturing, synthetic textile innovation and trade in New York City, Northern England and beyond.

Following Ivan and Bionic Yarn's first collaboration presented at the New York Cotton Exchange in 2023, this installation comprises three works from Ivan's ongoing series of seascapes.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- Would you consider using your free time to participate in waterways clean ups? Do you know where you can do this?
- What material can you repurpose that is found in the seas and rivers? How?
- What type of artwork would you create that highlights pollution issues of the waterways and sea?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Have a look on the Bionic yarn website and the fascinating processes they use to repurpose items dumped in seas and waterways: bionicyarn.com/our-process
- Make your own cyanotypes using images photocopied onto acetate and utilising the sun to develop the image



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Jamie Holman

MACHINE MADE FABRIC

THE FUSEBOX

IMAGE: JAMIE HOLMAN STUDIOS

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In the 1960s, Blackburn engineer and inventor Brian Mercer developed a revolutionary process for extruding molten plastic into mesh structures. Branded as Netlon, the material was sold worldwide and became the foundation for further innovations, including Tensar, a plastic grid as strong as steel, which transformed civil engineering and continues to be manufactured in Blackburn today.

Mercer's innovations extended beyond industry. Through a business encounter in New York, he developed a friendship with the surrealist artist Salvador Dalí who painted a portrait of him in 1973 which Mercer bequeathed on his death to the Royal Society of which he was a Fellow. Inspired by Mercer's futuristic vision and his engagement with the visual arts, Jamie Holman has collaborated with young people at Blackburn Youth Zone to produce this new film that celebrates his creativity.

Drawing upon the patterns and repetitions of Netlon, the work merges archival material with artificial intelligence generated patterns, presenting a collaborative artwork that shifts between invention and imagination. Best experienced lying down and looking upwards in the Fusebox, the film invites viewers into a dreamlike, immersive space where history, technology, and creativity converge.

Created with young people at Blackburn Youth Zone alongside Matty Hall and Devon Rea. Sound by Miles Berry.

Brian Mercer's legacy has continued, rewarding innovation and creative endeavour as his grants are still awarded to schools, colleges and organisations across Lancashire enabling many young people to benefit from his gift. You may have benefited from this!

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- Where have you encountered Netlon in use?
- What has been the environmental impact of fabrics made from plastics?
- What archival materials would you incorporate into your own work?
- If you could leave a funding legacy to the next generation, what projects would you support?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Pick one these problems, then use free AI tools to come up with a solution: for example Fresh Herbs wilt quickly in supermarket packs or Curtains fade in sunlight!

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Ninon Ardisson

LOAM

THE SALON



IMAGE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



Ninon is an artist and researcher working in digital data and installation. Her work combines various techniques including video, textile and computing. She is particularly interested in multimedia, collaborative assemblages as a means to amplify marginalised narratives.

Ninon speculates how textile production in the 20th century might have developed differently if informed by local environments rather than military and industrial demands and how biological materials could shape a different trajectory for innovation.

LOAM combines sculpture, foraged and found objects, speculative drawings, sound, moving image, and an explorable game world that invites people to imagine environments that grow from the same ground and climate, but which nurture different relationships between industry, ecology, and community.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- How would design be different if our most important and foremost consideration was the environment instead of cost?
- How would you change game designs to reflect a softer, more caring environment, with a utopian aspiration?
- Which groups would you like to work with to create a collaborative piece of work and why?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Using collage and images from magazines, create your own utopia (perfect world)

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FUTURE FASHION
LANDSCAPES

Anna Clough
FOLD ANEW

PENDLE HERITAGE CENTRE



IMAGE: MILA BURCIKOVA



IMAGE: JOHN JONES

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FUTURE FASHION LANDSCAPES

The exhibition reveals long lost connections between caring for the land and caring for ourselves, centring wool as a tangible carrier of this story.

Future Fashion Landscapes is a collaboration between the Centre for Sustainable Fashion, University of the Arts London and the South East England and South West England Fibresheds, focusing on fibre production and biodiversity enhancement. It explores the potential of farms operating landscape-specific grazing and restoration programmes with native and rare breed sheep. The exhibition brings together the results of collaborations between farmers and designers, exploring how our local landscapes can inform and inspire what we design and wear.

Our relationship with local landscapes has become recreational. Few of us live on and with the land, though we like to visit it. Likewise, our relationship with the clothes we wear has become one of great distance. We rarely know what our clothes are made of, let alone where they came from. Yet all clothes come from the land, often many thousand miles away. Cotton, linen, leather and wool come from farms across the world. Even synthetic clothing, derived from fossil fuels, ultimately comes from the land.

Wool, unlike plant fibre, is still produced in abundance in the UK. However, despite the rich history of sheep farming with over 60 sheep breeds native to the UK, wool's potential for textiles and fashion are not appreciated. This means that a large proportion of the annual wool production is sold for mattress stuffing or carpets, rather than knitwear, or even gets burnt.

Anna Clough

FOLD ANEW

Anna Clough's outdoor sculpture, based on the traditional sheep fold, celebrates sheep farming and fleece that have a long legacy in Lancashire. The work is made using traditional local methods; dry stone walling and cob clay, a mixture of soil, sand, water, hay and wool, celebrating the material life of wool and investigating how historical crafts and production can be harnessed to create more sustainable ways of building and farming in the future.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— How does an interactive exhibition enhance the experience of the visitor?

— How much wool does your clothing contain, read your own clothing label!

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

— Have a go at knitting or crochet, find a video tutorial on the internet to help you, start with something small and easy, or simply make a small square. It's a great activity for journeys by coach or train, it's a good mindful activity that lowers stress levels.

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PIONEERS OF THE MATERIAL WORLD

A story of invention, adaptation,
and the power of textiles

TOWNELEY HALL



IMAGE: © AL ROUSE, COURTESY OF MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT

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This exhibition explores how Burnley's innovation in high-performance outdoor clothing has shaped - and been shaped by - Lancashire's people, influencing what we wear, where we go, and who we are. All were woven in Lancashire's mills, where skilled workers produced the textiles that enabled these endeavours. Yet the destinations reached by these garments remained far beyond the lives of those who made them.

On the 50th anniversary of the 1975 British Everest Southwest Face expedition, *Pioneers of the Material World* traces Burnley's role in creating fabrics like Grenfell, Wyncol, and Ventile. These textiles protected explorers, soldiers, and scientists in extreme environments, enabling ambitions of empire, science, and adventure.

Over time, these materials were adapted and reimagined by communities in the north of England, finding new meaning in the hills, terraces, and streets where they were made. Outdoor clothing then transitioned into everyday wear, appearing on football terraces, in nightclubs, and on city streets. What started as protection became an expression of pride, identity, and resistance.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- What outdoor brands do you associate with particular groups of people?
- What problems are associated with branded garments?
- Which clothes help you to achieve your own goals?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Your task is to design a new textile product or garment that represents pride, identity, or resistance.
- Consider the material choice: What materials would you use? Upcycling or new, sustainable fabrics?
- What ideas of pride, identity, and resistance would you explore in your design?
- Would your creation be for everyday wear or an artistic statement?
- What symbols or patterns represent pride, identity, or resistance?
- Describe your textile product/garment, materials, and design story. Sketch or detail your idea.

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Crystal Bennes, Sarah
Rosalena and Tim Smith

QUEEN STREET MILL TEXTILE MUSEUM



IMAGE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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Crystal Bennes

WHEN COMPUTERS WERE WOMEN

These four woven works were developed from a residency at CERN (the European Organisation for Nuclear Research) where Crystal was struck by the resemblance of old computer programming punch cards to Jacquard loom punch cards. The programme stored on these computer punch cards was made possible by the large numbers of women who worked as data analysts or 'computers'.

Bennes had them translated into Jacquard weaving punchcards in order to produce this series of four wall hangings which were hand woven by an all-women team at Dash & Miller in Bristol, translating one form of binary data into another.

Sarah Rosalena

STANDARD CANDLE AND EXPANDING AXIS

These works were made during a residency at Mount Wilson Observatory in California drawing parallels between the use of so-called 'low skill' labour - women in weaving as Jacquard pattern readers and women in physics as 'computers' who were poorly paid and had little chance for promotion.

The *Standard Candle* works are handwoven from graph data of stars used by female 'computers' to generate units of measurement to map outer space.

Tim Smith

WEAVING THE FUTURE

This multi-media installation, including a photography exhibition in the Weaving Shed and a film in the community space, by photographer and filmmaker Tim Smith, explores how the innovative spirit that powered the textile industry over the last three centuries is driving a new revolution in the 21st century. Presented alongside the backdrop of cards that manually 'programmed' the Jacquard looms in Queen Street Mill, Tim's film was made in collaboration with musicians and performers from the Balbir Singh Dance Company to explore the link between the analogue and digital worlds.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— How might the "innovative spirit" of the textile industry, as described by Tim Smith, be applied to current challenges and revolutions in technology and art?

— How do the works by Sarah Rosalena, and Crystal Bennes highlight the often-overlooked contributions of women in scientific advancements, particularly in fields historically dominated by men?

— When recently did we learn to truly appreciate the roles of those in low paid labour and why?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

— Look for beads and fabrics in charity shops to create your own beaded yarn.

— Slice the fabrics into strips and thread the beads onto the "yarn" knot at the side of each bead to stop it from slipping.

— Consider using your yarn to create your own woven fabric or alternatively use it to knit or crochet with.



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Sally Hirst

WARPED

HELMSHORE MILLS TEXTILE MUSEUM

IMAGE: VENTURE ARTS

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Sally Hirst presents work here exploring experiences of disability within mill worker communities through the stories of William Dodd, Bridget Lyons, Mary Brown and Sally herself.

Born in 1804 William Dodd worked in a textile mill from the age of five and became disabled at a young age. Dodd wrote a powerful book based on the experiences of workers, which helped push for reduced hours in the mill.

Bridget Lyons left Ireland for England in search of a new beginning but while picking waste cotton, a sudden accident left her with a wooden leg and she ended up living in a workhouse.

Mary Brown worked long hours on the throstle frame until her left arm got caught in the wheels - a result of exhaustion from overwork. So, instead of factory work, she earned a small living selling cakes—her life forever changed by the lack of proper rest and breaks in the mill.

Artist Sally Hirst became disabled as a teenager, and started to make art - a choice she calls the best decision she ever made. Through her creative work, she has become a proud disability advocate. Though she once felt shy about using mobility aids, she has grown in confidence and now speaks up for greater visibility and inclusion. Sally says, "I no longer want to be cured or fixed, but better access for my wheels and sticks!"

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- How do you think William Dodd's personal experiences influenced his writing and advocacy for mill workers?
- What impact do you think his book had on the lives of other factory children and the broader movement for reduced working hours?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Imagine you are a designer tasked with creating a "future mill" that integrates AI technologies.
- How would you design this mill to be inclusive and accessible for people with diverse abilities, drawing inspiration from the histories of disability within mill worker communities?
- Create a drawing, a written description, or a small model of your future mill. Include annotations or explanations of your design choices.

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THE MATERIALS LIBRARY

BLAKEY MOOR



IMAGE: CARMEM SAITO



The Materials Library explores the origins of fibres that have long clothed and connected us. Developed through a collaboration between British Textile Biennial and The Making Rooms, it lays the foundation for a future Fabric Lab in Blackburn, envisioned as a space for shared experimentation and making with new materials.

While only a small number of materials might dominate our wardrobes, alternative sources of fibre and ways of making invite us to imagine otherwise. This exhibition presents both well-known and less familiar materials, what they are made of, how they are made and what is made with them. From seeds to samples, as well as finished products, the materials on display unfold stories of world making, reflecting a diversity of practices that are simultaneously ancestral and emergent, offering different ways of thinking with and through materials.

The exhibition invites a reflection on the practices, labour and care involved in making and transforming materials. It highlights the tension between abundance and limitation, revealing the many factors that shape what is worn and valued as well as possibilities for more relational, localised, and sustainable approaches.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- What would be in your own materials library?
- How and where would you curate your own exhibition of materials, what layout, which objects, what type of style would the ?
- What other food stuff do you think could be used to make new materials?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Try dyeing fabrics or old clothes using turmeric, curry powders, crushed fruit and beetroot juice, be careful it stains!!
- Make your own paper from pulped toilet roll inners and dye with turmeric and other spices, there are plenty of youtube videos showing you how to do this.
- Make your own washing powder from raw ingredients, look up Nancy Birtwistle for inspiration!

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THE SYNTHETIC REVOLUTION

HAWORTH ART GALLERY

IMAGE: JACK BOLTON

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From its laboratory inception, this exhibition investigates how synthetics became part of everyday life, from the intimacy of the home - where they transformed women's domestic labour - to the shops which sold newly fashionable silhouettes. It also considers how synthetics became both global and intergalactic, as a crucial technology for Cold War competition and conflict.

This exhibition follows the development of the first polyester Terylene in Accrington (1941), and the adoption of it in mass markets from the 1950s, heralding a revolution in fabric composition and production. The impacts of this invention remain global and wide ranging, transforming domestic labour and social life, fashion and cultural arenas and our environment today.

Marketed as 'Fibre made by man with woman in mind', these fabrics did indeed contribute to the unshackling of women from the laundry and allowed designers like Mary Quant to reinvent women's fashion, catapulting them into space age chic and mini-skirts. All too quickly the white heat of this technological revolution burnt out the planet and today we face the consequences of the processes required to transform North Sea crude oil into pristine white polyester school shirts.

Today, new innovations are steering the landscape of textile production towards a more ecologically sound future. New fabrics are currently being developed, such as the prototype, MycoTEX. Based on mycelium and manufactured in a lab, it is 100% biodegradable and after use it can simply be buried in the ground where it will decompose.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- What are the environmental challenges associated with synthetic fabrics?
- How can consumers contribute to a more sustainable fashion industry?
- What role do innovation and technology play in addressing the environmental impact of textiles?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Imagine you are a fashion designer in the year 2050. Your challenge is to design an outfit that addresses the environmental concerns of today while maintaining style and functionality.
- Look on YouTube for old Tomorrow's World TV programmes. What has come true and what do you think the mood of the time was?

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LEARNING FROM
THE LAND

THE WHITAKER MUSEUM & ART GALLERY

PURPURA
COOPERATIVA DE ARTESANAS



PINOTEPA DE DON LUIS



IMAGE: JULIEN DEVAUX AND MARIE-JO PEREZ SALAZAR, COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS

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Dhara Mehrotra

FILAMENTOUS:

Filamentous, by Dhara Mehrotra celebrates the mycelium networks that are the circulatory systems of earth. Found in the soil, the mycelia are not only intelligent conduits of exchange within the ecosystems of landscape, but also are potentially revolutionary material of the future, offering a range of sustainable solutions in material manufacture

Melanie Smith & Patricio Villareal

COLOUR WALKS:

Artists Melanie Smith and Patricio Villareal, both based in Mexico City, spent time with the community in Pinotepa following this age-old, seasonal ritual with two elderly members of the village who make the annual journey to the coast to find the tixinda which is the Mixtec word for the purple snail that secretes a rich purple dye used across the centuries for ceremonial clothing in the Oaxaca coastal village of Pinotepa de Don Luis.

The elusive snail lives in tide pools along the rocky coast and is incredibly hard to find; only a handful of older men now climb the rocks to 'milk' the snails of a smelly slime that magically turns purple when exposed to light. Not only is the practice under threat of extinction as the younger generation is less willing to make the painstaking trip but the snail itself is under threat from poachers who collect it for local restaurants as food tourism is a booming industry in Oaxaca.

Emelia Hewitt

AS IT HAPPENS

Emelia Hewitt undertook a summer residency at the Whitaker to develop work within her photographic and image making practice, inspired by the natural forms in the beautiful grounds of the museum, using natural dyes with anotype printing methods in an innovative process that aimed to explore natural mixtures in developing while limiting the use of photographic chemicals.

Emelia is one of three early career artists from Venture Arts, Manchester, who have developed new work in response to the BTB25 themes, presented across three different venues.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

— What are circulatory systems of earth?

What decisions would you make about how people can live in harmony with nature if you were in charge?

What is a mycelium network?

What native plants can we use for natural dyes?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

— Use spices, plants and beetroot to dye some of your own existing clothing.

— Find youtube videos of how to make inexpensive looms from cardboard or bits of wood and string to create your own weaving samples.

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Porfirio Gutiérrez

AGENCY

THE WHITAKER MUSEUM & ART GALLERY



IMAGE: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

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Based in California, Zapotec artist Porfirio Gutiérrez creates work that explores the contemporary and evolving experience of Native Americans. He identifies himself as American and Zapotec and Spanish, and these identities and histories are woven through his work.

He maintains the ancestral practice of processing and dyeing with cochineal for his woven artworks, reinterpreting his inherited weaving language by subverting and reimagining its symbols and forms to create a contemporary indigenous identity.

Central to this deeply personal installation is a textile hanging, *Tree of Life*, hand-woven and dyed using natural dyes created in his family's workshop in Oaxaca, featuring the deep red colour of cochineal dye, particularly in the central plait. Braids are a traditional hair style worn by indigenous women in Oaxaca and carry cultural, social, and religious meanings. In *Tree of Life* the braid symbolises women who are the carriers of the ancestors and all their knowledge and experience through the millennia. Gutierrez brings the hanging to life as he enacts a traditional dance in the video, as if to evoke his female ancestors.

The sculpture, *Absent*, is a free-standing warping board, using the traditional symbol shape of the cycle of life. This installation asks how context shapes the way we consume cultures and traditions. Gutierrez wove this piece in situ.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY:

- What traditional crafts do you think should be highlighted and preserved? How can we do this?
- What subjects do you think should be on the school curriculum that are not currently? If you were in charge what knowledge do you think young people should have?
- What knowledge do you have of the First Nations of the Americas?

CREATIVE ACTIVITY

- Use fabrics from discarded clothing from friends and family to create strips of fabric which you can weave to create the history of your family or friendship groups.
- Find videos from the internet of how to make inexpensive looms from cardboard and bits of wood and string.
- Research natural dyes, make your own and create a library of colours from your research.