



Lucy
Orta

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Traces:
Stories of
Migration

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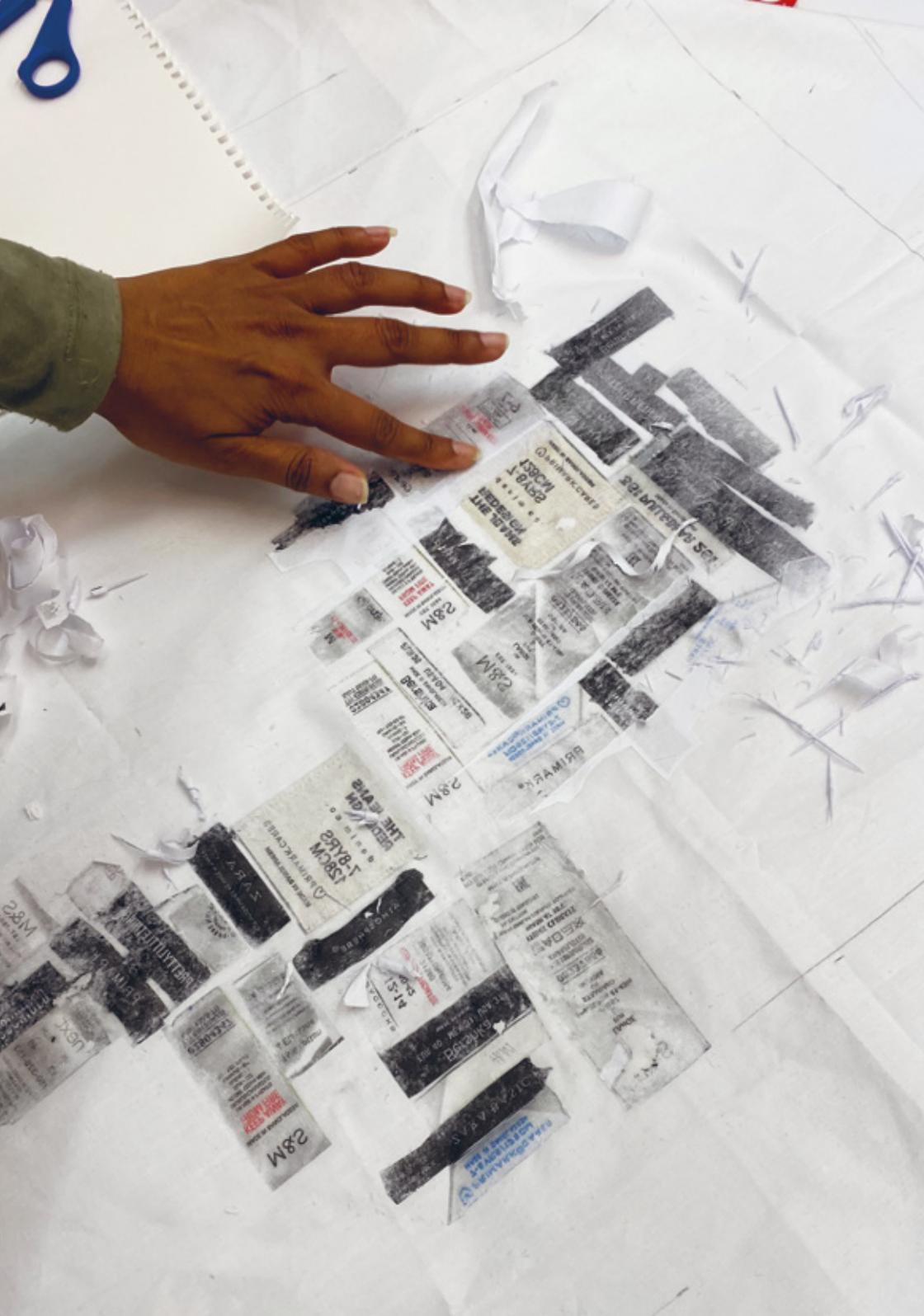
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Lucy Orta *Traces: Stories of Migration*

Traces: Stories of Migration, a new body of work by Lucy Orta, is an exploration of the migration histories that are woven into the history and fabric of east London. The project reflects the experiences of communities affected by migration and the memories accumulated as people journey from one place to another.

Traces: Stories of Migration, community workshops, 2021-2022.

Between 2021 and 2023, Lucy Orta engaged with communities across the London boroughs of Newham and Tower Hamlets with the support of Making for Change, as part of London College of Fashion's The Portal Centre for Social Impact. The programme of collaborative workshops was centred around storytelling and textile heritage, using the mediums of cloth and stitch as a common language through which multigenerational migration histories take form. Seventy-seven participants took part and created personal 'Story Cloths' in response to the process. Writer Nathalie Abi-Ezzi accompanied the project, authoring the poetry book *Needle Around Her Neck* inspired by the stories.

The locally rooted activities, the collaborative storytelling exchange, and the uncovering of traditional textile knowledge inspired Lucy Orta to create a new series of works – *Portrait Gallery*. In the *Portrait Gallery*, Lucy challenges the convention of portraiture using cloth, stitch, beadwork, fabric patterns and appliqué to reflect the unique characteristics of each person involved in the workshops. The portraits are expressive and inclusive, recognising a myriad of trajectories through life and the diversity of peoples' lived experiences.

This publication includes a selection of creative outcomes over the two-years engagement process that celebrate and pay tribute to the generosity and collaborative experience of Lucy Orta. *Traces: Stories of Migration*.



When Traces Become Stories

Camilla Palestra

“Life is a perpetual to and fro, a dis/continuous releasing and absorbing of the self. Let her weave her story within their stories, her life amidst their lives.” – *Trinh T. Minh-ha*

“Stories bring us together, untold stories keep us apart.” – *Elif Shafak*

While London and most of world was in lockdown during the Covid-19 outbreak, I was gifted a short book by the British-Turkish novelist Elif Shafak: *How to Stay Sane in an Age of Division*. The book was the perfect companion for those dark moments where divisions were exacerbated by enforced distancing. Individually and collectively, we felt deprived of agency over our own journeys. It was a time when we were locked in ourselves and locked out of our lives.

We are made of stories – those that have happened, those that are still happening at this moment in time and those that are shaped purely in our imagination through words, images, dreams and an endless sense of wonder about the world around us and how it works. Unvarnished truths, innermost reflections, fragments of memory, wounds unhealed. Not to be able to tell your story, to be silenced and shut out, therefore, is to be dehumanised. It strikes at your very existence; it makes you question your sanity, the validity of your version of events. It creates a profound, and existential anxiety in us.¹

Shafak’s words stayed with me. They resonated profoundly when I, later, joined a series of pilot workshops run by artist and researcher Lucy Orta at the beginning of 2020. *Traces: Stories of Migration* is a community project through which Orta and her collaborators brought together communities from across East London. These stories of personal or family migration are told through the artistic making of textiles; story cloths.

As the political ecology of migration in the UK has expanded into a hostile environment² where immigrants are denied access to work, housing, services, and education, and more generally exposed to discrimination and suspicion, *Traces: Stories of Migration* offers a space for people to share, recollect, give voice, and be heard. It is in the act of coming together. Here stories are experienced as a collective sense of shared history and are celebrated in their diversity.

Embroidery, stiches, crochet, ribbons, appliqué, all evoke a domestic and feminine environment that so quietly and yet so powerfully awakens a sense of belonging. A space to resist the hostile environment migrants are living within. To echo bell hooks, it is about ‘making home a community of resistance’³, while home is (dis-)placed, and reclaimed through shared



Traces: Stories of Migration, community workshops, 2021-2022.



journeys and shared stories, as reclaimed are the pieces that make up the story cloths.

Embroidery, stiches, crochet, ribbons, appliqué, all enable a new way of knowing – a way of holding what has been lost but is still present. They become a practice of listening to echoes, stories, imaginations, a practice of living with those stories, with “ghostly matters” as Avery F. Gordon has called them. The past and present inextricably intertwined, haunting us at every journey.

Traces: Stories of Migration thus become a journey in itself, a journey where fragments of memory take shape, voices are heard and in a collective sharing we, individually, make sense of who we are, where we come from and where we go.

Drawing on the tradition of the portrait yet subverting its historical significance and power relations between hierarchy and subordination, Lucy Orta’s response to and engagement with all the stories of migration take the shape of a meaningful ‘Community Portrait Gallery’. Here each portrait accurately reflects the singular personal trajectory through life, recognising the creative value of diversity through each persons’ lived experience. The process is collaborative: from the initial photograph taken, the translation into line drawing and pattern template, to the use of different textile and craft techniques. Each portrait is testimony of present lives and past stories. Layers of fabrics used by the artist to trace the features of each portrait and to capture their presence, are enriched in meaning by the inclusion of personal elements taken from the participant’s story cloths.

Lucy Orta’s portraits enshrine the traces of lives and loss, the traces of relations and resilience, and those traces must be honoured “because they provide a different sort of knowledge, a knowledge of ‘the things behind the things’”.⁴

1. Shafak, E (2020) *How to Stay Sane in an Age of Division* London: Profile Books, p.9

2. ‘Hostile Environment’ specifically refers to a set of policies introduced in 2012 by then-Home Secretary Theresa May, with the aim of making life unbearably difficult in the UK for those who cannot show the right paperwork. www.jcwi.org.uk/the-hostile-environment-explained

3. hooks, b (1990) ‘Homeplace: a site of resistance’ in *Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics*. Boston, MA: South End Press, p.42

4. Radway, J (2008) Foreword. In: Gordon, A. F., *Ghostly Matters. Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. (2nd edition) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. ix

We are but Shadows: Stories of Immigration in London's East End

Caroline Stevenson

“Paradoxically, our cultural identities, in any finished form, lie ahead of us. We are always in the process of cultural formation. Culture is not a matter of ontology of being, but of becoming.” – *Stuart Hall*

In the heart of London's East End, at the corner of Brick Lane and Fournier Street, sits the Brick Lane Jamme Masjid, a Mosque that serves the local Bangladeshi and Muslim community. The tall brick and stone building has been a religious home for almost three hundred years, established first as La Neuve Église, a Protestant chapel for the French Huguenots who settled in Spitalfields after fleeing persecution in their home country. The Huguenots - one of Britain's first refugee communities - brought with them master silk weaving skills, establishing the East End as a specialist textile industry, creating sophisticated gowns and beautiful fabrics. To this day, the Huguenot settlers are still referred to as the Spitalfields Silk Weavers. Although they have long since moved from the area, traces of their lives are still visible in attic workshops perched on top of the large Georgian houses lining Fournier Street. Their large windows, stretching from floor to ceiling, once provided the daylight needed to illuminate the silk weavers' looms and showcase the latest textile designs to their clientele.

From the 1600's to the mid-1800's, the Spitalfields Weavers inhabited the East End. Then, as silk and fabric became increasingly imported, they moved on, seeking employment and building new lives elsewhere. As they left, new communities of immigrants moved in. Following the decline of the linen industry in Ireland, Irish settlers arrived, picking up work in the rag trade and the nearby docklands. They were followed by waves of Eastern European Jews, escaping persecution and harsh conditions in their homelands. Drawn to employment opportunities through the textile industry, the Jewish refugees established a thriving community in the East End, creating new forms of commerce. The names of their shops can still be found, painted above window arches and door cases. The most famous, CH N. Katz, is the remaining trace of a paper bag and string shop. Further along the street, Jewish bakeries still serve salt beef beigels and, in some doorways, two single holes can be found where mezuzahs once hung. After the devastation of the East End during WW2, most of the Jewish community moved further North and into the suburbs, and the area fell into decline. Since the 1970's, however, it has been home to a growing population of Bengali Muslims. Once again, they have revived textile trade in Spitalfields, activating the street markets and shops, and introducing new restaurants serving traditional Indian food. They established the London Jamme Masjid in 1976, in the same brick building belonging first to the Huguenots, and

then to the Jewish community. A Chapel, a Synagogue and now a Mosque, this building has witnessed centuries of movement through the East End. Under the roof of the Mosque is a white, stone sundial pressed into the brick façade. Its radial clock is directed into the same sunlight as the Huguenots' attic windows. The year of its making, 1743, is written in black, along with the words 'Umbra Sumus'. Translated from Latin, they mean 'we are but shadows' – a reference to a line from the Roman poet, Horatius – reminding us that we are all a part of this ever-shifting and infinitely complex cultural landscape.

Lucy Orta's *Traces: Stories of Migration* pays homage to these layers of East End history. Over the last two years, I have followed her project as it has unfolded through community workshops, engaging over 70 local residents who, each in their own way, identify as an immigrant. Through the project, the participants shared stories of their migratory journeys, describing the complexity of making a home in a city marked indelibly by mobility and constant change. For some, coming to East London was a promise of opportunity, of new adventures and discovery. For others, an unspeakable experience involving trauma, nostalgia and loss; a process of leaving behind lives, families and memories. As I am also an immigrant living in East London, I heard myself in many of their stories. I come from the position of knowing two worlds, the United States and the United Kingdom, and many homes within them. I have not been displaced through force or persecution, but I do understand how home can exist in many forms - as a memory and a physical place.

I know the complexity of the immigrant identity and how it feels to simultaneously belong, but always as an outsider. Stories of migration are complex. They are often shaped through nostalgia and memory, and they are always located somewhere between past and present. For migrant communities, storytelling is a powerful tool. Our stories narrate us as much as we narrate them. They map out our journeys and bring our histories into existence. Living in a transitory area like East London, they can also be strategies for survival and opportunities to connect to others through our differences. Lucy's project is a collection of migratory stories told through a community portrait gallery. Each story has been carefully and attentively brought to life and, drawing on histories of the East End rag trade, they have been created using specialist and traditional embroidery and textile practices. The practice of portrait making, with its roots in nationalism, class and power, is profoundly challenged in the context of this project. Here, these portraits represent a collective social experience, providing a deeply meaningful testament to the fact that London is, in fact, a city made up

of many global trajectories. It is always on the move, it has no boundaries and its history belongs to us all. From the Huguenot weaver to the Jewish paper bag seller on Brick Lane, we all leave our traces on its landscape.

In his essay *Thinking the Diaspora, Home Thoughts from Abroad*, Stuart Hall reminds us that our cultural identity is something that can never be found within fixed geographical boundaries. As processes of migration proliferate across the globe, just as they always have done, he points to the fact that nation states and boundaries have always been pluralised and irrevocably changed through the diversity of their inhabitants and by flows of people as they continue to shape and reshape our world. These transnational movements are unstoppable, their connections decentre the boundaries of cultural belonging, transforming home into a process, or something that can be made and re-made wherever we might land. Through our cultural practices, Hall says, we can 'produce ourselves anew, as new kinds of subjects. It is therefore not a question of what our traditions make of us so much as what we make of our traditions. Paradoxically, our cultural identities, in any finished form, lie ahead of us. We are always in the process of cultural formation. Culture is not a matter of ontology, of being, but becoming' (1999: 16). For Hall, identity is not something found in the archaeology of written history. Instead, identity, as it is woven through the migrant experience, is mutable. We traverse multiple homes, moving between the margins and the centre. Returning to Horatio's words, we are but shadows in the landscape, writing our histories through the stories that we tell and the marks we leave behind. What *Traces: Stories of Migration* does is bring these stories to the centre, creating a restorative community through mutual sharing and the celebration of difference. The communal portrait gallery decentres histories that serve mythological notions of nationhood and hierarchies of belonging and, instead, shows how we can all make ourselves at home in a global world. The stories held within each of these portraits connect and intersect with transnational movements of people, past and present, who have taken refuge and found their home in London's East End. But most importantly, through imaginative cultural exchange, they engage us closely in the lives of others, carefully demonstrating how we can participate in the community we are all in the process of becoming.

PORTRAIT GALLERY



*Traces: Stories of
Migration, Thandi*

Canvas, silk organza,
diverse textiles,
beadwork, hand and
machine embroidery
Lucy Orta, 2022-2023.



Traces: Stories of Migration, JC

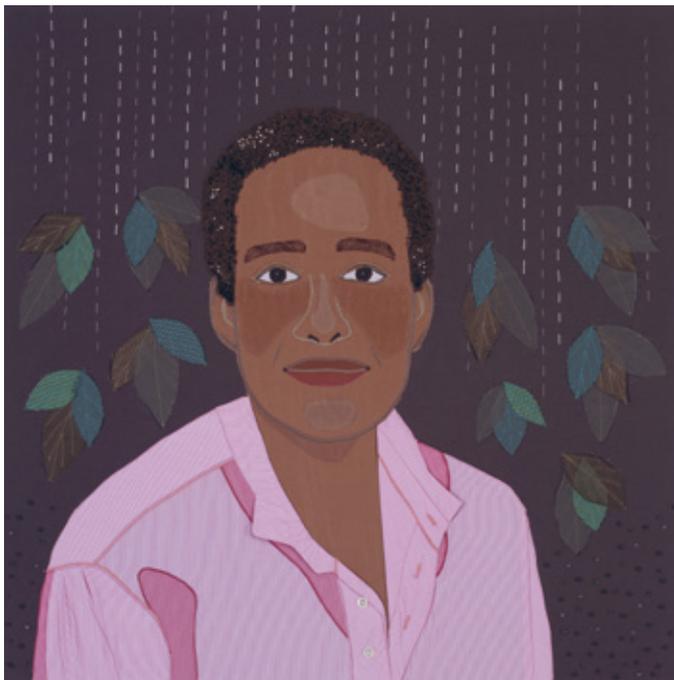
Canvas, silk organza, diverse textiles, beadwork, hand and machine embroidery
Lucy Orta, 2022-2023.





Traces: Stories of Migration, Nahis

Traces: Stories of Migration, Jess



Traces: Stories of Migration, Angela

Traces: Stories of Migration, Bilkis



Canvas, silk organza, diverse textiles, beadwork, hand and machine embroidery. Lucy Orta, 2022-2023.



Traces: Stories of Migration, Milou

Canvas, silk organza,
diverse textiles,
beadwork, hand and
machine embroidery
Lucy Orta, 2022-2023.



Traces: Stories of Migration, Alison

Canvas, silk organza, diverse textiles, beadwork, hand and machine embroidery
Lucy Orta, 2022-2023.



Traces: Stories of Migration, Nosira



Traces: Stories of Migration, Jeanmarie



Traces: Stories of Migration, Annette

Canvas, silk organza, diverse textiles, beadwork, hand and machine embroidery. Lucy Orta, 2022-2023.



Traces: Stories of Migration, Jas





Traces: Stories of Migration, Coral



Traces: Stories of Migration, Foujia



Traces: Stories of Migration, Carol



Traces: Stories of Migration, Juris Prudence



Traces: Stories of Migration, Peter



Traces: Stories of Migration, Caroline



Traces: Stories of Migration, Mitale



Traces: Stories of Migration, Layla

Canvas, silk organza,
diverse textiles,
beadwork, hand and
machine embroidery.
Lucy Orta, 2022-2023.



Traces: Stories of Migration, Hasna



Traces: Stories of Migration, Penelope



Traces: Stories of Migration, Sylwia



Traces: Stories of Migration, Aziza

Canvas, silk organza, diverse textiles, beadwork, hand and machine embroidery. Lucy Orta, 2022-2023.





Traces: Stories of Migration, Zoey

Canvas, silk organza,
diverse textiles,
beadwork, hand and
machine embroidery
Lucy Orta, 2022-2023.



Traces: Stories of Migration, Clare

Traces: Stories of Migration, Elena



Traces: Stories of Migration, Natalija

Traces: Stories of Migration, Christine



Canvas, silk organza, diverse textiles, beadwork, hand and machine embroidery. Lucy Orta, 2022-2023.



Traces: Stories of Migration, Arfa



Traces: Stories of Migration, Hajia



Traces: Stories of Migration, Iman



Traces: Stories of Migration, Cristiane



Traces: Stories of Migration, Keren



Traces: Stories of Migration, Husna



Traces: Stories of Migration, Pascale



Traces: Stories of Migration, Vanessa

Canvas, silk organza,
diverse textiles,
beadwork, hand and
machine embroidery.
Lucy Orta, 2022-2023.

“Processes are also metaphors. They are powerful containers of meaning.”
– Jeff Kelly

Traces: Stories of Migration builds on the practice research I have been undertaking alongside the broader practice Studio Orta over the last thirty years to bring attention to issues surrounding migration and displacement; and specifically, how cloth and stitch as a language are intimately connected to our personal identities, memories, and emotions.

In the early 1990s, in response to the social and political climate, I shifted my practice as a fashion designer to that of a visual artist. My first experimental works, *Refuge Wear and Body Architecture* explored ways in which the metaphorical property of technical textiles and clothing could express the vulnerability of the human body. In these textile sculptures, clothing transforms into shelters and the fabric architecture forms a protective skin to bear witness. These works were a response to the forced displacement of populations provoked by the Gulf War of 1991 where an estimated 1.5 million people were displaced from their homes in Kuwait, Iraq, and neighbouring countries. In the sudden and unexpected uprooting of a life with no belongings except for a few items of clothing that provide a thin wall against extreme and hostile environments, cloth is the membrane between life and death.

Throughout the mid-1990s I worked with small groups of marginalised communities, including homeless adults, migrant workers, hostel residents, and prisoners, to foreground issues of exclusion, discrimination, fragility, visibility and social acceptance to challenge the distance between artists and society and advocate for a more connected, engaged, and socially responsible approach. The American social practice artist Suzanne Lacy describes this form of making art as a “new genre of public art”¹. Over the following two decades with Studio Orta, in collaboration with multidisciplinary specialists, and diverse communities, we continued exploring broader social and environmental topics such as food distribution (*Hortirecycling and 70x7 The Meal*, 1996-2000), access to clean water (*OrtaWater and Clouds*, 2005-2013), freedom of movement (*Antarctica*, 2007), and biodiversity loss (*Amazonia*, 2009). We were making art with the unconditional belief that by rendering visible the challenges our planet was facing, devising participatory and collaborative ways of working, and *calls to action*, we could change the course of things. And the same unconditional belief underpins today, *Traces: Stories of Migration*.

According to the IOM, in 2015, over one million people attempted the journey from North Africa and the Middle East to Europe². In April the same year, the BBC reported the loss of 800 migrants off the coast of Libya. In response to the horrific plight of migrants crossing the Mediterranean, I developed the premise for an exhibition that would unite artists who have dedicated their practice to rendering visible the cultural and social experience of migrants, or those consistently engaged with refugees or asylum seekers. The exhibition created a network of resonance between the artworks originating from different contexts, recounting the stories of people directly or indirectly affected by migration, their journeys from one country, language, culture, and conviction; from one period in life to another, the movement across geological times; as well as the search for protection and shelter, and natural conditions such as a sense of place or belonging. The exhibition adopted the title *Passagens* a Portuguese word referring to passages or transitions, changes or shifts from one phase or situation to another, often with a sense of progression, and punctuated by pivotal moments or turning points. I would specifically like to acknowledge the research undertaken by co-curators Anne-Maire Melster and Camilla Palestra, which greatly expanded my reference points, introducing me to the work of my peers Ursula Biemann, Amar Kanwar, Bouchra Khalil, Emily Jacir, Bindu Mehra, Andrea Luka-Zimmermann and many more. *Passagens* prompted a shift in my practice, returning to the embedded approach of community engagement with a focus on the language of stitching and the medium of cloth as a means through which the human condition is discussed, shared, and expressed collectively.

The increase in migration into Europe that came to a head in 2015 greatly contributed to the rise of nationalist sentiments and anti-immigrant rhetoric in many countries in Europe and beyond and was a significant factor in the lead-up to the 2016 Brexit referendum in the UK. I had been living in France since 1990, and when the United Kingdom officially left the European Union on January 31st, 2020, I became a foreigner in my birth country, forcing me to sever the union with my home and family, my 'patrie'. I lost my sense of belonging. The question posed was how to combat the pernicious spread of xenophobia and advocate for an even more connected, engaged, and socially responsible approach to making art. Thus, *Traces: Stories of Migration* is not limited to the physical act of abandoning a home but also the psychological and emotional impact of the move, the indelible marks left as a consequence of the uprooting – the leaving behind of loved ones and familiar surroundings that can lead to feelings of displacement and disorientation.

In considering ways in which I could render visible these conditions, my research practice at the University of the Arts London (UAL) focused on the diverse community of London's East End with its history and heritage linked to the cloth and garment industry. Constant waves of immigration, from the Huguenots during the 17th and 18th centuries, to the Jewish communities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, followed by a wave of immigration from the Caribbean in the 1940s, and Bangladeshi and Pakistani immigrants who arrived in the 1960s and 1970s, brought unique cultures and traditions that have become woven into the tapestry of the East End. This rich and diverse heritage contradicts the campaign's negative stereotype of the migrant, exacerbated by Brexit and still resonant at the present time.

With the aim to challenge the negative narrative using my practice as a catalyst, I approached London College of Fashion's Making for Change, part of The Portal Trust for Social Impact (UAL). Making for Change had recently established a third training and manufacturing unit in the Poplar district of east London and was seeking to build on their outreach and develop new relationships with local community organisations. I drew up a methodology for engaging with migrant communities across east London which included oral storytelling, written and visual mapping, exchanging knowledge, formulating ideas, and realising creative outcomes. With Making for Change project manager Jo Reynolds, we devised a seven-week programme of workshops where participants felt encouraged to share their own stories and experiences, as well as listen and learn from others.

As Jeff Kelley has asserted, "Processes are also metaphors. They are powerful containers of meaning"³. *Traces: Stories of Migration* is as much about the relationship between an artist's voice and community voices expressed in their work as is a metaphorical process of a community of people, reflecting and shaping our understanding of the world around us. Building on learning from Studio Orta projects of the mid-1990s and the more recent 'Procession Banners 1918-2028' realised with women prisoners in the Making for Change unit at HMP Downview, in 2018, I would like to suggest that *Traces: Stories of Migration* presents a new model of social engagement. The dialogical structure of the community activities not only empowered participants promoting empathy, understanding, and connection among participants, helping to build a sense of shared identity; it also guided distinct individual outcomes. I value these outcomes as metaphorical containers.

Out of the eighty participants involved in the workshops, seventy-seven created a personal 'Story Cloth' an individual artwork in textiles, as a common medium. Author Nathalie Abi-Ezzi



Traces: Stories of Migration, community workshops, 2021-2022.

who was initially employed to assist participants with redacting personal or family stories has written a book of poetry inspired by the stories we shared. The portraits of each participant in the 'Portrait Gallery' are my response to the process. The unique characteristics of each person are rendered in organza layers, the machine embroidery tracing the contours, and printed textiles, hand embroidery and beadworks applied to give form to each person's 'passagem'. As artist Alice Kettle postulates, "Textiles, the use and production of cloth, tell the story of the everyday, of histories and of social and political structures. Textiles speak about lives through their formal qualities, their material substance, and their social context. They transmit the transformative potential of making, the enduring traditional stories, ..."¹⁴

Lucy Orta

1. Lacy, S. (1995). *Mapping the terrain: new genre public art*. Seattle: Bay Press.
2. International Organization for Migration. (2015). *Fatal Journeys: Tracking Lives Lost During Migration*. Geneva, Switzerland: IOM.
3. Kelley, J. (cited in Lacy, S. (ed.) 1995). *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*. Seattle: Bay Press, p. 45.
4. Kettle, A. & Koumis, T. (2022). 'Creativity'. In *Transnational Modern Languages: A Handbook* (pp. 77-86). Liverpool University Press.

I would like to acknowledge Dr Frances Corner OBE and my London College of Fashion colleagues, Professor Felicity Colman and Claire Swift.

STORY CLOTHS

ALISON

Portrait p22

My parents escaped from the People's Republic of China to Hong Kong, but then foresaw that after the 1997 handover, Hong Kong would change totally. So I spent half of my life in Hong Kong, and from time to time I took different journeys all around the world, looking for a place that could be my proper home. My story cloth visualises these journeys, and also my new adventure here in London.



The photo transfers show my feet on the ground in the various places I travelled to – the footprint I left, and a record of my memories. I've used a Japanese weaving method called Saori, which I learned during the pandemic, to show the sea in various conditions that represent life's ups and downs. During my travels, I found many common points between different ethnic groups, and that's why I've used coloured wool to link the journeys on the three panels together.



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ANGELA

Portrait p18

My story is made up of two cloths. The first is a tribute to my grandmother because I grew up hearing a lot of stories about her. She was a medicine woman in Dominica, and would collect plants from the rainforest and use them to heal people with; so the cloth shows rainforest, waterfalls and a black sand beach.

The second cloth represents my parents' migration from Dominica to England in the late 50s. They travelled by boat, and I've represented both countries – Dominica and its capital, Roseau, and London, where the streets are paved with gold. I've enclosed everything in a polka-dot ribbon, which is a replica of one I was wearing in a photo when I was little.



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I was born in a refugee camp in Macau. The little knots on the trees in my story cloth are inspired by the knots on my parents' favourite pieces of clothing when they were in that refugee camp. They now own a Chinese takeaway in Hackney, so that's a big part of my life, and is represented by the tin foil lid from a takeaway container.



I have grandparents in China, and the mountain in the image transfer represents the one I always see from their balcony when I visit them. My grandparents belong to a group called the Hakka people and speak a village dialect, but because the Chinese government is trying to get rid of all minority dialects, this dialect is dying out. So I've embroidered the name of it in both Chinese and English. The braid also represents my grandmother, who I miss dearly, and who used to wear her hair in long braids.

The second mountain on the cloth is Lion Rock mountain in Hong Kong, which represents the spirit and resilience of the people there. I moved to Hong Kong in 2019 during the protests, as signified by the yellow banner. The red, white and blue weave is part of a plastic bag that my mum hoarded. These bags are very popular in Hong Kong but the colours also represent the UK, so it stands for both countries.

My story cloth focuses on the crochet blanket that my great-grandmother made. Her best friend started making the blanket but when she realized that she was going to die of the Spanish flu, she passed it on to my great-grandmother and said, 'Please finish it.'

My mum was the only one among her siblings who had learned how to crochet so she inherited it. Recently the Covid pandemic made me think about what my great-grandmother must have gone through. In order to inherit the blanket, I feel that I need to learn to crochet as well, and this is something that I've been wanting to learn for a long time. I don't want the craft to get lost.



This project has been really special for my family. My mum had my great-grandmother's crochet hook but she had lost it for many years, and it was through trying to find the blanket for me that she found it again. She was so happy, and it felt like a sign from my great-grandmother to say, 'You're ready now.'

My story cloth explores how memories are constructed using the visual language of the construction of a shirt. It explores ways of retaining memories of a place that has been erased, exploring definitions of 'home' and the translation of a story across generations and borders.



The cloth focuses on the story of my late grandfather's displacement as a child from his home in Frögenau, East Prussia, now Frygnowo, Poland, when the family was deported in 1945. It builds on a previous video work, 'Wearing Opa', in which I used greenscreen to dress into an old photograph of my grandfather and his two brothers taken just before they embarked on a pilgrimage to their childhood home town of Frygnowo. Their cousin documented the family's history as well as this pilgrimage. During their trip, they discovered landmarks from their past, including the ruins of their grandfather's farm, the old potato cellar, the well they used to collect water from, an empty piece of land where their house once stood, and a baptism urn made by their grandfather.



I translated some of these images onto the story cloth, considering the parallels between the construction of memory and the construction of a garment. The cousin's piecing together of the story wasn't so different from the role of a tailor constructing a garment, since memory can also be cut, shaped and stitched together. The white shirt is a key part of my memory of my grandfather and was worn by all three brothers, so I decided to create a lay plan of the pattern pieces that make up a shirt. Pinned onto a length of white cotton shirting fabric, the pieces lie ready to be cut and stitched together to make up the story. They remain pinned in place, suggesting that memories are not fixed but can be rearranged by whoever is constructing the garment/archive.

The green pieces are a nod to the use of greenscreen in my video work, and refer to the digitalisation of analogue images, extending their life. On these pieces, I've embroidered parts or outlines from the photographs to suggest traces of memories. Yet there is potential for the cloth to become digitalised and transformed on screen too, where the green can be replaced by new images. The green pieces therefore represent blank spaces where the story can be continued, as I hope to go on my own pilgrimage to Frygnowo one day.

Rather than embroidering, replicating or dyeing an existing piece of cloth, I wanted to construct a piece of cloth myself using materials that draw on places which are part of my migration history. The migration stories associated with me have always been linked to my grandparents, but actually I also have a migration story, and wanted to think about things that were more directly connected to me. My heritage is Malaysian-Chinese, Polish and Danish, but I was born in Scotland and have also lived in Singapore and now in London.



My story cloth is a knitted piece of red cloth with an image of a pair of shoes knitted in relief, and then collage on top. To accompany that, there's also a pair of knitted red socks. I knitted the cloth because that's a practice that I have done for a long time, and which is quite personal to me. I've used wool from a Scottish mill, and red because in Chinese culture it's an auspicious colour meaning good luck. In Southeast Asia and Chinese districts, many doors and lintels are painted red, so it's also an evocative colour of community. The shoes on the cloth are Chinese clogs, which are very much associated with Malaysia, and they refer to the pathways and footsteps that I've taken on my journey. The foot-band of the shoe is a repurposed piece of latex, because through rubber plantations, latex is part of the colonisation of Malaysia and the deforestation of its rainforest.

I grew up in Islamabad, Pakistan, and because flowers and bright colours are important to me, I wanted to use them to depict my story. The buds represent my childhood in Pakistan, and the open flowers represent my adulthood. On one side of the cloth are flowers that you would find in Pakistan, and on the other side are flowers you would find in the UK. I also wanted to use colours from the flags of both countries on the cloth.



When I came to London from Morocco, I saw that there were many similarities. For example, my country had a king and the UK had a queen. The huge Koutoubia mosque in Marrakesh was similar to Big Ben. I loved the open-backed buses which you can jump onto, and the Queen's smile and colourful dresses, so I wanted to include these things.



On the other side of the cloth, we have the carpets and tajine pots that we make in Morocco, and its sea and sand. I used to have a fig tree at home, so I've made this into a family tree with the initials of my parents, brothers and sisters on one side, and the initials of my husband and sons here in the UK on the other.

My Story Cloth depicts my childhood home and school, as well as the Shaheed Minar, which is the independence statue of Bangladesh. My village was situated by a lake near the river Surma, which divides the embroidery in two parts. I chose embroidery motifs that represent elements of the natural environment of Bangladesh, as well as my early memories of swimming and fishing in the river on my journey home from school.

Creating this work allowed me to revisit my childhood in Bangladesh. The embroidery captures the beauty of the natural environment that surrounded me, and the Shaheed Minar is a symbol of the resilience and strength of the Bangladeshi people. I am grateful for the opportunity to share a piece of my culture and heritage through my art, and to highlight the rich history and traditions of my homeland.



My cloth shows images of St. Lucia, with its rainforests, fruit trees and pitons (volcanic mountains). The island is famous for its fruit and vegetables, its fishing and its botanical gardens. I also wanted to show something of the many festivals that are celebrated in St. Lucia – like Creole Day, the “la Rose” festival, the Festival of Light, the Jazz Festival, and Mardi Gras – which people might not be familiar with. The pattern along the border of the story cloth is one that’s used on textiles all over the Caribbean.



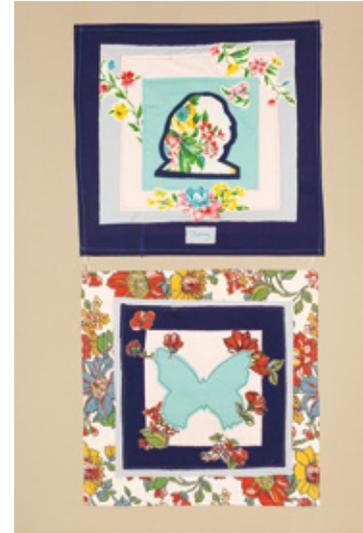
When I was small, my mum used to tell me stories about St. Lucia, and when I finally visited it, aged 55, I found that everything was just as she’d said.

My story cloth is mainly about my childhood. For many people living in East London when I was growing up, fruit and hop picking in Kent was a working holiday where they could earn a bit of extra cash. The cloth shows stitched hops, as well as some real ones that have been pressed and dried behind netted fabric. The pink ribbon is there because I’ve had breast cancer, and have also got multiple myeloma, a sort of blood cancer. But that isn’t the main factor of my life, my family is. There are my grandparents in the photo transfer, along with baby me on a potty.

Now I have four children and six grandchildren whom I absolutely adore. I’ve included pieces of fabric from articles belonging to them on the cloth. But the heart – in a cheery yellow – is mine, and is full of happiness.



My Story Cloth represents two framed portraits of my grandmother and is inspired by her journey and our Flemish heritage.



I wanted to explore the ways in which our heritage influenced my own childhood, so I incorporated floral appliques that were part of her visual aesthetic and embroidered her signature, ‘Bonma.’ Bonma is Flemish for ‘grandmother,’ and seeing it in her handwriting is highly evocative of who she was to me. The embroidered signature I replicated reminds me of the cherished personal letters she used to send me when I was young, which I have held onto all these years. I love that embroidery is a traditional craft that has been passed down through generations, and my grandmother’s love of letter-writing has had a profound impact on me. Keeping her letters all these years shows just how much they meant to me and how important it is to preserve our family histories and traditions. My Story Cloth is a way for me to honour my grandmother’s memory, the work becomes a testament to the power of art to connect us to our past and to our loved ones.

I named my piece IJEOMA, which means ‘good journey’ in my native Igbo language. The piece represents my gratitude to God for His providence throughout life’s journey. I wanted to tell the stories of three important journeys in my life: my father’s military service in the UK, my husband’s studies in Manchester, and my own journey to the UK for love and marriage. To illustrate the merging of my Nigerian and Scottish cultures, I used Nigerian Ankara fabric and Scottish Harris tweed embroidered together. The combination of these materials is a symbol of my unique identity and cultural background. Through my art I celebrate the richness of the cultures that have shaped me. Creating this Story Cloth allowed me to reflect on the important people and moments in my life, and to express my gratitude for the journey that has brought me to where I am today.



This triptych illustrates the Dutch heritage of my family and their forced migration to East London to escape the Holocaust. Through ghostly figures and weaving, I wanted to symbolize the lost or incomplete stories of those who survived by fleeing and those who stayed and lost their lives. The work incorporates non-biodegradable materials to represent generational trauma, but I also included family photos to highlight the strength, resilience, and togetherness of women in my family. The centrepiece of my artwork features a ring that has been passed down through generations of women in my family, just as Judaism is passed down. The ring is a symbol of the continuity of our family's traditions and values despite the challenges we have faced.



My Story Cloth is a 1960s camisole that belonged to my mother before she got married. As a child, I was fascinated by my mother's and grandmother's wardrobes, and this camisole is the only item that I have kept with me throughout my travels from Brazil to the UK and back. To me, it represents a journey from childhood to adulthood and holds a special place in my heart. I chose to focus on flowers in my artwork because they reflect the feminine aspects of my mother's journey. I hand-painted and applied the flowers to the camisole to add an individualized touch and to remind me of the beauty and elegance of the original piece.



Creating this artwork allowed me to pay tribute to my mother and to the strong, independent women in my family who have influenced my life. It also gave me a chance to reflect on my own journey from childhood to adulthood and to celebrate the memories and experiences that have shaped me.

Moving from my home town in Spain to London was a moment for me to get to know who I am. A bag felt like the right object for me to make as my story cloth because I always carry a bag, and when I don't, it feels as though I'm missing something. But this bag has a special meaning. I've put it together using strong, energising colours because that's what I want in my life, but without denying my vulnerability either. The inside is made using a transparent, silky material, but I've reversed the usual order of things to show all the work that's gone into making the bag on the outside. This is to express that we shouldn't always display only an external beauty; we can also show hard work, struggle and vulnerability.

The exterior of the bag is made up of various fabrics, items and designs that mean something to me. They're memories of who I am – links to particular people and places that I feel I carry around with me. They include a page from a book, dried leaves, recycled beads and found plastic. One piece of plastic, which I found on the beach, looks like a person. It represents waste, and also how lost humans are in the world. The coins are a reminder that money isn't important to me, but the heart, which represents love, is.



My story cloth is not so much about the process of becoming an immigrant, but rather about the state of being one – that tension between your roots and where you're going. The vines wrapped around the figure's leg represent my roots and heritage that made me how I am. These same roots that give us a sense of belonging can often ground us in place or pull us back from the path we have chosen to walk, which is symbolised by the ladder. I wanted to capture the feeling of being stretched between these two states – where you're from and where you're going – as well as between two geographical locations.



The background is inspired by the sun, mountains and desert areas of Israel, where I grew up, while the blue is a reference to the bright blue sky of the region.

“If I don’t know who I am, I don’t know where to go.”

I left my homeland, Romania, in 2018, bringing my heritage with me to London. My story is visualised as a column, which in Romanian symbolism represents vertical ascent, victory, the passing and transformation of the old into the new, a symbol which is found in the famous work of Constantin Brancusi, the Column of Infinity. The tapestry depicts my childhood, adolescence, personal development, migration to foreign lands and Spiritual Alignment.



In the first quadrant at the base are two significant symbols for my childhood: the Sfadilite (Romanian Yin-Yang, the unity of opposites: darkness-light, life-death, feminine-masculine) and the Bud (purity, gentleness, gentle cleanliness, childhood) which represents my earthly family.

The second quadrant shows the Hands on Hips symbol (femininity, power of seduction, protective mother), which represents the period of adolescence in which we transform both biologically and as an energetic and spiritual entity. It symbolises the transcendence from childhood to female maturity.

The third quadrant describes my personal and professional ascent in Romania, as well as fulfilment, prosperity and abundance on all levels of my life. The Tree of Life is the connection between material and spiritual, while the Spike represents abundance, prosperity, wealth, and growth, including spiritual growth.

The fourth rhombus shows the decorated Egg, which symbolises both the Orthodox Easter, the time when I arrived in London, and rebirth, which for me means a new beginning. On the left and right is the Easter Cross, a symbol of divine protection and guidance. At the top is the Nut Core, which expresses tenacity and strength of character, the power to move forward and persevere.

The Northern Star in the fifth quadrant describes the Spiritual Alignment with the Divine Self and the rediscovery of the creative personality. It expresses that I have crossed the border from the empirical to the creative side and become the creator of my own universe.

The crown of the structure is represented by the shape of a Majestic Bird with wings that symbolise infinity and air: the sky’s the limit.

The Tree of My Life, in which the central column is the pillar of stability in my life, can also be interpreted as a vertebral column – the DNA of my ancestors that gives me strength and energy. I have decorated the edges of the tapestry with a belt of Wolves’ Fangs, which represent protection against evil forces.

My story cloth is about my journey of faith. It’s in two halves. One half shows my family – my husband and four children – and the other shows the Kaaba, or House of God, in Mecca, where I would love to go. I’ve put a hand reaching out to show this desire, and have left the line between the two spaces open to make it possible. My brothers and sisters have all been, I’m the only one left to go, and I’m waiting for Allah to invite me – that is, to provide the right circumstances that will allow me to go. That’s my dream, and what I wanted my story cloth to be about.



I was born in Nigeria but my Dad is from the Republic of Niger so these are the two flags, as well as the English flag. My family comes from the royal family in Nigeria, but there was a revolution in which they were removed from power and went into exile. I just found out about this history. When my dad died, we tried to find out more about our background, and now we have lists and lists of family members – 25 pages of them! I’ve arranged them in colour-coded order and printed everything out for my kids. The family in Nigeria also want copies because they were confused themselves about who was who.



This piece reflects my childhood in Bangladesh and my life in London, where I have been living for thirteen years. Through the embroidery, I wanted to capture the happy memories of my childhood home, which was located near an international airport and an adventure world. This contrasts with the grey skies of London and the snow on the roof of the building that I saw for the first time. The snow is made with fish scales, home-made sequins that I learned to make in my village. The many plants that my family grew were also an important part of my childhood memories, and I wanted to incorporate them into my artwork as well. As a reminder of my grandmother and my heritage, I kept her silver bracelet. It holds a special place in my heart and serves as a memory of my past. However, after living in London for thirteen years, I now feel at home in this city and among my local community.



This cloth is about the Bengali Language Movement and all the Bangladeshi people who fought to keep their language alive. In 1952, when Pakistan threatened to replace the Bengali language with Urdu, the Bengali people retaliated, and on the 21st February, many political activists and students from Dhaka University were killed when the Pakistani police opened fire on the protesters. The cloth shows the Shahid Minar monument that was built in commemoration of this. Every year on this day, people in Bangladesh wake up early and go to the monument with bare feet to lay flowers and sing songs. The red circle symbolises the blood the protesters gave for the sake of their mother tongue.

In 1999, UNESCO declared 21 February International Mother Language Day, in tribute to the Bengali Language Movement.

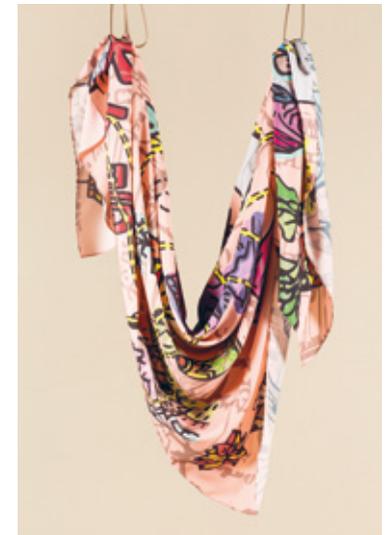


I was born and grew up in London, but my family is from Morocco. I say "my family" rather than "me" because when I go to Morocco I feel that I don't belong there. But in the UK I'm also asked where I'm from, so it's a confusing situation. My story cloth is a family tree, using scraps of things that I bought in Morocco that represent traditional crafts and textiles. The orange represents the oranges and fruits of Morocco, and the red stands for Marrakech, the Red City.



I also wanted to represent my husband and daughter, so I have some French knots and a fabric from France, where my husband is from, although he's also of Moroccan heritage. The ombré effect is to show that things aren't always one thing or another. There are also references to England in the blanket stitch, which I learned here and reminds me of this country.

I named my artwork Wearing My Heritage because I wanted to create a keepsake scarf that would hold all the memories of my journey. The illustrations on the scarf tell the story of two separate paths: my family's and my own. The key moments in our lives are represented in the illustrations, leading up to our eventual reunion in London. The illustrations can be read from the bottom upwards, like a journey.



As someone with Italian heritage, I incorporated symbols into the artwork that represent my family's culture. For example, the Etruscan dancer and the sugar pot hold special meaning for me and my family. The use of bright colours brings the memories to life and adds a sense of vibrancy and energy to the artwork.

My journey is about my marriage and my first visit to India. When I was a child, education was not on my mum's agenda. She wanted us in the kitchen learning how to cook and keep home. Even homework had to be done in secret. As soon as I turned 16, when I was still at school, I got married. It was an arranged marriage and my husband came from India. He took me there for a visit, and I saw the village my parents came from, where nearly all the children had green or blue eyes like mine. Peacocks roamed freely through rows of sugarcane, and the design on the corner pockets of the cloth is copied from the Taj Mahal marbles. The central lotus flower is a symbol of India but also a Celtic image for a grandmother's love, in memory of my grandmother who was so important to me.

My husband encouraged me to go into further education, and I designed lingerie for Marks and Spencers for 30 years, then found my role at London College of Fashion where I can share my experience in the industry with students. The images in the red ovals show my journey from no education to graduating with a PG cert. I'm now studying for my Masters.



I named my artwork Granny Boops to celebrate my grandmother's journey from Jamaica to London in the 1960s, where she worked as a nurse. My artwork explores memory and movement by using old family photographs and garments from my grandmother's wardrobe to create textile samples that transport me back in time.



Creating these different Story Cloths was a way for me to remember my grandmother, Emily 'Daisy' Brown, who passed away on March 31st, 2020. The artwork is a loving tribute to her and the impact that she had on my life and the lives of others. As I worked on these pieces, I felt a deep sense of connection to my grandmother and her journey. With textiles and photographs, I was able to capture her spirit and honour her legacy.

My Story Cloth is inspired by the notebooks that accompanied me on my migration journey from Panama to London. I am a professional photographer and have no experience in sewing, so I used cyanotype printing technique on silk-organza to create my Story Cloth. The transparency of the silk acts as a metaphor to reveal the stories of my family's migration across Latin America and Europe, with each layer representing a different journey. I opted to use Prussian Blue as the main colour in my artwork to symbolize the ocean that my family and I crossed. The embroidery in my artwork is a simple stitch that represents the red present in the flags of Panama, Catalonia, and the United Kingdom, all places significant in my family's history.



As I worked on this artwork, I felt a deep connection to my family's journey and the challenges and traumas that we experienced along the way.



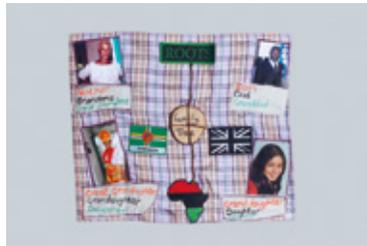
My piece is about the family trauma that we inherit, and I've visualised this as a spiral that has no beginning and no end. I wanted to pay homage to this inheritance from a grandmother whom I never met by reconnecting with her story. She was killed during the military dictatorship in Chile, along with her son, who was six at the time. My dad never found out what had happened, and was told by the authorities to stop asking questions. Although I wasn't born at the time, I've talked to relatives and looked through family photos to try to get an idea of who she was and what her life was like, and when I hear stories about her, I wonder whether I've inherited some of her character traits. She was very independent and owned a business, and I recognise that: wanting to do something different, to run your own life and business.



My grandmother was obsessed with cycling and was very supportive of my dad's cycling career. My grandfather was a cyclist in the Olympic Games and so was my dad, so this was a passion they all shared. I made prints of my dad's racing number and have incorporated this into my story cloth. The spiral is an inner tube from my own bicycle that, when I cut it, naturally fell into that shape. The dolls represent me, my dad, and my grandmother watching over us from the top: three interconnected generations. Even though we may never have met our ancestors, we still inherit their DNA, their story and their trauma, whether we like it or not, and it's up to us how we take that on.

JULIA

This is a family tree showing four generations of my family: my grandma, my dad, myself, and my daughter. My grandma's from Dominica, but we originally got there through enslavement from Africa, so this is why Africa is on the cloth, and the word 'Roots'. My grandma stayed in Dominica but my dad travelled and settled in England. My mum's white and my dad's black, so I've used these colours – which are both parts of myself – for the Union Jack.



I visited Dominica and met my dad's family, went to his school and met the teacher who taught him. My daughter's been learning about Dominica and her heritage, like the Dominican traditional dress that she's wearing in the photo. The story cloth's background material is similar to traditional Dominican fabric, and represents the foundation upon which my family lies. Hopefully my daughter will continue to add to this family tree, and may even be able to find out more than I have.

KEREN

Portrait p38

This story cloth is about my great-grandfather, and my grandfather. I'm a third generation immigrant. My great-grandfather came from Poland and was a tailor, so that's why I've recycled an old suit. My grandfather was also a tailor, and the phrase "schmatte business" is Yiddish for the rag trade. My great-grandfather arrived in Mile End Old Town, half a mile from where I live now in East London, which is pure coincidence. I didn't grow up in East London but I went to college in Aldgate East, so there's a link of area and trade that brings us together. I never met either my great-grandfather or my grandfather and I wasn't aware of their jobs when I went into the rag trade myself.



I've used the suit's lining as part of the story cloth, but the other pieces of material (literally schmatte or rags) are all my designs. The background is a curtain design that I designed for my mother's bedroom, and I've included test strips of different colourways and marks like the chalk-markings that you might see on a tailored suit, all references to the garment industry that connects generations of my family.

LAYLA

Portrait p29

The flowers and leaves on my story cloth each represent a family member from my maternal lineage: me, my mum, my grandma, and my great grandma. I chose the breadfruit leaf because I enjoy my great-grandmother's food. The cotton is there because my nan would pick cotton in the fields with her grandmother. The hibiscus is a flower seen both in the Caribbean and the UK, and while my nan only lived in St. Kitts until she was nine, she still has strong roots there and talks more about her memories of St. Kitts than the time she spent in England. Then And the red flower is a poinciana, which she remembers growing near her school in St. Kitts. And finally the pine cones represent me and my mother because we're both British-born.



MARGARITA

When I left Russia, I brought this puffer jacket with me. This was puzzling because I left plenty of belongings behind, and didn't feel at all attached to the jacket. It was given to me but I never wore it and didn't even like the design. But one day I realised that it reminded me of a vatnik, which is the sort of padded jacket that prisoners of the Gulag wore. Today, vatnik is also a derogatory name for people who support Putin.



My country is killing Ukraine and leaving behind terrible, dishonourable traces, so I've made the jacket into a version of traditional Ukrainian motanka doll. Motanka dolls are constructed with a single rolled-up piece of fabric, and knotted with a single length of thread to symbolise long life. I've added details from different points in my life: buttons from my mum's house, clay pipes found in the River Thames, pebbles with holes in them that I've collected. A traditional motanka doll has a cross where the face should be, and I've made this cross white to symbolise protection and blessing. Below the apron is a QR code. By scanning it, you can listen to 10 snippets of interviews with people who live or used to live in Ukraine.

MARIANA

This image represents me and how I'm connected to the world. The tree of life refers to Mexican culture, and a terracotta version filled with flowers is usually given to newlyweds for good luck and wealth. This is my own interpretation of this tree of life, because it's my roots that keep me grounded. Its branches represent members of my family both in Mexico and in the UK, so I've put in an English rose and a Mexican crocheted flower. The snake symbolises life and health because it resembles a DNA helix. The flowers along the bottom of the cloth represent people who have passed from my life but whom I still feel connected to. The stars in the sky suggest destiny, because my husband and myself believe that we were destined to meet and be together. I'm a Catholic, and somehow my family, my culture and love are all connected to my beliefs.



MARIE

The left side of the story cloth in yellow and blue is about my life in Mauritius before I came to the UK. There are coconut trees and palm trees, and there's sunshine, blue sky and pure white sand. I've also included pictures of traditional Sega dancers in their beautiful costumes, and a bow in the colours of the Mauritian flag: blue, red, yellow and green. At the top is a photo transfer of my grandmother, who brought me up and introduced me to Jesus.



The right side of the cloth is about my life in the UK. There's a picture of me graduating from university, and I love going to the theatre. During the Covid pandemic, I volunteered at a food bank, and am now involved with 'Havering Changing' in Rainham, which unites people in the community. I've also become interested in art, and there's a picture of a circular mural that I helped to make, and pieces of artwork that I made by weaving plastic, which are about recycling and caring for the environment.

MIGLÉ

I have a unique relationship with these rabbit pelts. They were about to be thrown away so many times but I always rescued them because, although they're nothing special, they represent an important connection with the past. To me, they're precious family artefacts that are around 25 years old. Most citizens of Lithuania produced their own vegetables, meat and dairy during Soviet occupation, and my parents bred these rabbits for personal consumption.

This story cloth is about grief not only for people, but also for places as they once existed. The farm and its buildings are no longer there, which means that I can't revisit this space unless it's through the artefacts, and these rabbit pelts are the artefacts through which I'm able to achieve the sensations I experienced on the farm as a kid. The photo transfers show my dad as a child, and my great-granddad, who I met when I was just a toddler on the farm. The four balls of fur also represent family members, and connect me to a place, to material belongings, and to a history that is no longer physically there.



MILOU

Portrait p21

The artwork I created is divided into three sections, each one representing a section of the Italian flag. The artwork is embroidered with symbols that depict my many physical and emotional journeys back and forth to Italy. The colours I used in my artwork were inspired by the contents of an old suitcase that I carried with me on my travels. I used everyday textiles like a bedsheet, a kitchen cloth, and scraps of clothing that I tore and mended to represent the resourcefulness of migrants. Through my artwork, I wanted to illustrate the transformative power of migration and how it shapes a person's identity.



This Story Cloth represents my nostalgia and longing for home and celebrates the life I left behind in Bangladesh. I spent countless hours creating intricate hand embroidery that contrasts the bright colours of my home country with the grey I found in London. Education is incredibly important to me, and I have represented myself walking to my school in Bangladesh. Here in London, I continue my education, focusing on practical fashion skills that will allow me to pursue my dreams. This piece is a reminder of where I come from and the journey I am on.



I created these two garments, a tunic, and a skirt, to represent the importance of fashion and making in my identity. I used appliqué flowers and ribbon work to contrast the cultures of my home country, Latvia, and my current home, London. The blue and gold colours used in the garments are symbolic of Latvia's national identity and history. The blue represents the country's clear skies and the vast bodies of water that surround it, while the gold represents the country's abundance of wheat fields and the prosperity of its people. By incorporating these colours into my garments, I pay homage to my Latvian heritage. The contrast between the blue and gold and the London-inspired designs on either side of the garments represent my journey from Latvia to London and the blending of cultures that continues to shape my story.



This artwork, created as a circle, is about introspection. When I close my eyes, it's dark, so that's why the background is black, but the colourful visuals represent different memories that have shaped me into who I am. I've lived in various locations in India, then in Glasgow, and now in London, so the cloth refers to these three countries. The blue wave represents the river that was nearby in my home town in Kerala, which become the raindrops that represent London. The Underground sign symbolises the opportunity I have found here, and the freedom to be myself. I worked for three years in the fashion industry, where I learned a lot about fast fashion and the exploitation that involves, but over this last year I've built my own brand, haav, which is a social enterprise.



I wanted to end the journey on the cloth with a quote in my mother tongue, Malayalam. It says that although we all live in the same world, we each see it from our own unique perspective. It's something I read when I was a small kid, but it's always stayed with me.

This piece is deeply personal to me, as it represents my life in both the UK and Bangladesh. The embroidery on the sheer silk at the top of the piece symbolizes a window looking out onto London, a city that has become a second home to me. The butterfly and feathers depicted in the embroidery are inspired by my children, who would often play together chasing butterflies and chickens at their grandmother's home in Bangladesh.



The colours I chose for this piece are also symbolic. The gold print on burgundy represents my wedding scarf, a cherished item that holds many memories of my special day. By including this in the piece, I am celebrating the love and commitment that is at the heart of my family's story. Overall, this piece reflects the distinct parts of my life and the people who have shaped it. It is a reminder of the joy and love that I have experienced both in the UK and in Bangladesh.

My work, titled "Bittersweet Symphony," is a political commentary on the stark North/South divide in the UK. As a student who moved from the North-west to London for university, I experienced first-hand the differences in the quality of public services, from transportation to healthcare. In my block-printed fabric zine, I juxtapose the blue-grey colour of North-western skies with the brighter blues and reds of train and bus seats in London, highlighting the unequal distribution of resources across the country. The title of my piece is a nod to The Verve's famous song and reflects the bittersweet feelings I have about my move to London - while I am grateful for the opportunities it has given me; I am acutely aware of the disparities in access to basic amenities that still exist in the UK.



This cloth shows my different journeys through symbols. The main symbol is the infinity sign, which is made from scraps of saris, because I was married to a Bangladeshi man, I became a Muslim and wore saris and salwar kameez for 10 years. The infinity sign has an opening because I wanted to represent that life is continuous. Things have changed and I've had to let go of many things, like the death of my parents and second husband, or letting go of my son so that he could carry on his life and have children of his own, or letting go of jobs (I'm retired now). So these changes can be happy as well as sad.

There's also a symbol of past, present and future which shows that all three are linked. I don't want to forget the past, even if it was traumatic, because it's part of my life and has made me into who I am now. Part of the cloth is made from the shirt my son wore in a dance at nursery school, which is special, and there's also a symbol of my second husband's favourite T-shirt, with the word in French for love. The partially hidden cross represents my faith, which I had when I was young and is now re-emerging in my life. 'Let go, let God' are words that are close to me because faith helped me to let go of a painful period of my life. The lace is from my mum's sewing kit, and represents the strong foundation she was for me, and the ribbons represent important events in my life's journey.



My work takes the formal, official texts that bind our lives and turns them into an animated experience. This piece is in three parts. The first section is made out of oilcloth, and hand-printed on it in letterpress font are two naturalisation documents. The first, in English, dates from 1947 when my grandmother was naturalised as a British citizen after being stateless for nine years. On the reverse side of the oilcloth is my own naturalisation document in German. I was born and bred in Britain, but following Brexit, I decided to get German citizenship.



The second part shows the identical words hand-embroidered on silk in my own handwriting. The formal document printed on stiff oilskin now becomes all about the motion, the drama and the delight of living with citizenship.

The third element is the coffee cups. My grandmother's house always smelled of coffee, which she drank as a ritual, with saucers and freshly-ground coffee. In the 70s, when most people drank tea, this really marked her out as being a foreigner.

The fact that the piece is suspended is important because it allows the three parts to move as a triplicate but also individually, and also allows the viewer to move around the piece. It's robust enough to be touched, and the air currents that act on it also change according to who's in the room, so it never stays the same.

I come from a very mixed background: I'm half Uzbek and half Tartar but grew up in Tajikistan with Russian as my main culture. Tajikistan is a Muslim country in Central Asia but was also part of the Soviet Union for many years. I moved around a lot as a child too, living in Spain and Austria, and now in London. Since I'm soon to become a mother, this felt like a good time to consider how to pass on this complicated cultural heritage without passing on too much of its trauma.



My grandmother was a crucial figure in my life. I work in the creative industry, and learned a lot of traditional handcraft from her. Historically, people have had to explore handcraft using whatever was available to them in terms of materials, and my grandmother's favourite technique was stitching and embroidery, which didn't require many tools. But she also taught my mum how to knit and taught me how to crochet. My story cloth is a jumper with a piece of my grandmother's hand-embroidery at its centre showing a Central Russian landscape of woods and rivers. My mother has knitted around this, and then I've added crochet details. The jumper is unfinished for my daughter to continue and make her own mark.

Generations of women in my family have gone through political uncertainty, inequality, and being part of minority groups, but handcraft has always been a way for them to feel at home away from home - a red thread running through the generations. So I wanted to showcase the crafts that kickstarted my own career in a European and British environment far away from home.

My story cloth is a grey linen vest. This is an item of clothing that I wear a lot and feel secure and safe in. On the front are elements of hand appliqué, embroidery, and painted elements. One side of the vest shows my Caribbean and Guyanese heritage, symbolised by cowrie shells, and the other shows my British heritage, symbolised by pigeons. I wanted to keep the message simple but I've included elements of reflective ink, which ties into my professional practice. I have my own knitwear brand and knit cotton pieces with reflective tape woven into them to make them visible at night-time. I also wanted this to be a "reflective" piece in terms of thinking about my heritage and asking questions about it, so there's a play on words too.



The knotted ties on the back of the vest show the complications of coming from a multiple heritage background. There's frustration in the way that the knots obscure the writing, forcing the viewer to investigate more closely. The questions in reflective ink are ones I've asked myself over the last few years to do with how I feel about being British while also having other heritages. This reflective approach towards my identity has also made me realize that it's okay not to know everything about your heritage, because often that information is difficult or impossible to retrieve.

I am a practitioner of Bangladeshi traditional handcraft. I travelled to Bangladesh and lived with artisans to learn the traditional craft, but while I was there I saw a darker side that changed my perspective. The women being exploited as cheap labour by the fashion industry have the potential to practice traditional handcrafts, but this is being ignored in favour of investment in fast fashion. This piece is dedicated to those garment factory workers and the struggles they're going through.



Everyone knows about the Made in Bangladesh campaign, which was triggered by the Rana Plaza disaster, but what I realized was that garment factory workers – the victims of this system – themselves know nothing about this campaign. So I decided to write "Made in Bangladesh" in Bengali, so that if they got to see the piece, it wouldn't be in an alien language, and they would know that we are thinking about the clothes they made and talking about their experiences. The words are stitched using the kantha stitch, a traditional heritage stitch that most women in Bangladesh know how to produce and will be able to relate to.

My story cloth began with one or two memories, but as I worked, more and more memories opened up. These involved things that were around me as a child, things that were said, I saw or heard. It was a way of seeing my childhood through adult eyes.

Trees feature a lot in my memory. I used to enjoy being outdoors and climbing trees. Even now when I see a particular tree, I get goosebumps, because in another life I know that I'd have gone over and climbed it.

The cloth is a homage to my mum, who worked so hard to bring us up. I have inherited my interest in arts and crafts from her. She taught me to sew and knit. When she was embroidering, I'd go and lean against her to watch what she was doing, and we'd have a chat. It was a way of being close to her when she wasn't busy looking after everyone. Something else that I get from my mum is an interest in upcycling. She would cut up hessian potato sacks and embroider on them, transforming them into beautiful bags. I like to make things that are useful, and recently I've introduced sewing repairs as a class at an adult education centre, so that people can repair and reuse instead of having to buy new items.

I practise some art or craft every day. It's uplifting, and stops me getting too carried away with the stresses of life. It's also important for me to look after others, and teaching allows that, but practising arts and crafts is some special time for me.



This is a representation of my mum's journey from Jamaica to England. I asked her questions about it for this project, and she told me about her trip over, how it felt being in a new country, how isolating it was. She missed the trees and the sun and the smells and the flowers and wildlife of Jamaica, as well as its food, so these are the things I wanted to incorporate into my cloth.



When I was growing up, we ate a lot of Jamaican food as well as British food, and you could see when it was tropical food coming into the house because of its bright packaging. My mum loves breadfruit, and ackee, which is the national fruit of Jamaica. I've included a drawing of the doctor bird, a species of hummingbird only found in Jamaica, a passport and photo of my mum, and a bottle of Jamaican rum. I've also recreated the red fabric print of a dress that my mum really loved, that was made from Jamaican fabric. It's been so interesting to delve deeper and find out more about my culture and ancestry.

VINCENTE

The corset is a modern representation of a traditional Bulgarian belt that's worn as part of the national Bulgarian folk costume. This would usually be embellished with embroidery and each symbol would have a meaning behind it. The cross stitches, like the ones I've included in red on the right hand side, would be put on at the end for protection, as Balkan cultures are very superstitious. I have both Bulgarian and Turkish heritage and wanted to honour both in this piece, so the triangles are stitched using a Turkish type of embroidery called "wings" in Turkish. I've used traditional colours, and at the top of the corset I've included the Eye of Fatima to protect against the evil eye and bad spirits. On either side of it are blue beads that belonged to my great-grandmother, who loved crafts like embroidery, crochet and knitting, and used to make complex jewellery out of beads. On the sides of the corset are various bits and pieces from my travels and from places where I've lived that represent my journey before I settled in London.



YASMIN

I was born in Bangladesh, so the first part of my cloth is my memory of my house there, which had a big tree next to it and a lake behind it. I've included various things that represent Bangladesh, like the royal Bengal tiger, a fish because Bangladesh is famous for its fish dishes, a jackfruit which is the national fruit, the water lily, the national flower, which we call the Sleeping Beauty of ponds, and the magpie robin, or doyel, the national bird.



The second image is about the time my family migrated to London. We lived in a hotel for four months then settled in Crouch End, near the clock tower. Me and my siblings used to walk to a nearby park, where we loved to play. I also have lots of good memories of my primary school. It used to have lots of roses, so whenever I smell them I always think of it.

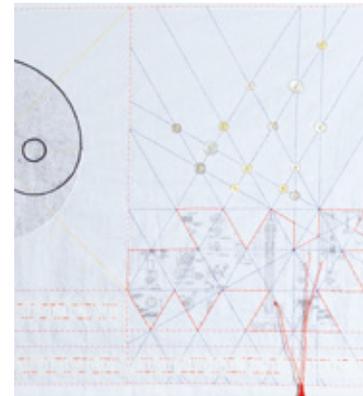
The third image shows Bromley-by-Bow centre, where me and my siblings used to come to learn to read Bengali. And a library, because every Saturday we used to go there, which was so peaceful, and where we could just sit and read books. The last building is my secondary school, and that's me standing outside with my friends, because those years are all about friends.

In the final image, I've used nature to express my adult life. The long road means a journey, with stops along the way – struggles, turning points and solutions – but most of all it's my journey to self-discovery. The mountain represents goals that I've found hard to reach. The tree stands for positivity because trees are tall and strong, and in the tree, the three flowers are my children, two girls and one boy. In this image I'm holding a protective shield and fighting against the challenges in my life.

YEN-YEN

I decided to use this piece of cloth as a site, because I trained as an architect and projects don't happen without a given site and without set parameters.

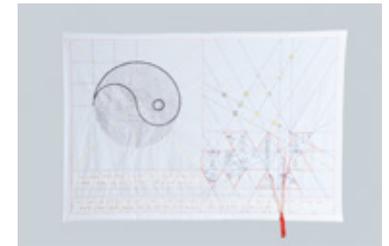
I came here from Malaysia in the late 60s, and at home I have my mother's old sewing box, in which I found some lace that I've used as the perimeter. On this I've stitched some words using Morse code. Some of them are my parents' responses when I asked them why they came to the UK and what they like about being here: "opportunity" and "studies" and "career" and "healthcare". There are also other words though, like "foreign", "English", "British" and "Londoner".



I've quilted a map of the moon because my name, Yen-Yen, means "very round". I was born during the Lunar Festival when the moon is at its biggest and brightest, so I'm named after the full moon. Part of the process of my work is about reclaiming and understanding identity. This particular map has got the Mare Orientale in the middle. The word "oriental" is a bit suspect when describing people's ethnicity, so I thought this was an interesting centrepiece for my story cloth. Beneath that is an outline of a Dymaxion map, a projection of the world in a mathematical way made of triangles that fold into a sphere. Everybody's more familiar with the map that looks like orange peel, but the inventor of the Dymaxion map, Richard Buckminster Fuller, was an architect, and I'm very interested in his way of looking at the

world. I've traced the folds of the pattern and the perimeter of the Earth, but I only traced the sea and left out the land.

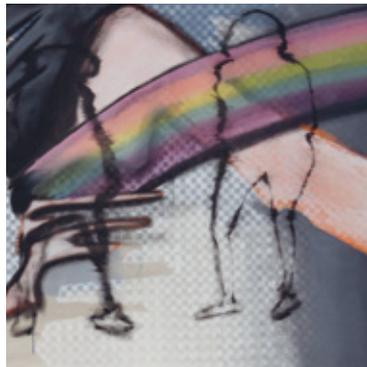
I've used colours from the flags of places which I'm related to: the Malaysian flag is red, yellow, blue and white, the Union Jack is red, blue and white, and there's a flag of London which is a variation of the English flag. Buttons from my mum's sewing box form a 14-pointed yellow star, which references the star on the Malaysian flag – although the flag also has a crescent moon on it!



My story cloth is about identity. The palm tree leaves are a reference to the joke that we have in Taiwan, which is that as soon as you see palm trees from the aeroplane, you know you're home. But in reality you don't see many, so in fact there's not a lot of solid ground beneath the identities that we assume for ourselves.

The cloth is a timeline, and the black line that cuts it in two is my first immigration, when I moved from Taiwan to China. It was a sad move, hence the black. I was 10 years old and didn't know why I was being sent away from home, but later I realised it was because of my parents' divorce, and because my mum wasn't able to care for me while also having a job, so I was sent to China where her parents lived. I was there for four years, and it was very difficult. I'm not from there, and because of the political situation and local climate, there was a hatred towards anyone who was foreign. This is where the chequered pattern begins on the cloth, which represents a kind of transparency – a quality of being without roots or any kind of belonging to a country. This feeling sprouted when I was in elementary school in China, but the chequers continue because when I went back to Taiwan, I had a Chinese accent, and it was the same game over again because now I was called Chinese.

I'm always flying, and not belonging feels like being in a cloud that's always changing shape and colour; that can be rain one minute then turn into cloud the next. The red stream that flows through my cloth is something that is consistent – something that I am. But because of my lack of longing and lack of identity, I'm still not sure what that is.



Because of this back and forth, I carry a sense of lack of belonging with me to this day. There's a name that my mum wanted to name me but didn't, which translates as "wings in the sky", and I feel that I belong to this name.



Biographies

Lucy Orta

Lucy Orta is a visual artist whose work explores the interconnections between the individual and community structures, highlighting diverse identities and cohabitation practices. She employs drawing, textile sculpture, photography, film, and performance to create works that reflect on human mobility, survival, vulnerability, and resilience. Her process often involves co-creation and inclusive methods, and she has collaborated with a wide range of individuals, including marginalised groups such as prison residents, asylum seekers, homeless individuals, and care hostel residents, empower people through creative practice.

In 1992, Lucy co-founded Studio Orta with Jorge Orta. Their work has been the focus of major exhibitions, including the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale in South Africa (1997), Secession in Vienna (1999), Gwangju Biennale (2004), The Curve at the Barbican Art Gallery in London and Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa in Venice (2005), Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam, the 9th Havana Biennale (2006), Pirelli Hangar Bicocca in Milan (2008), Natural History Museum in London (2010), MAXXI in Rome, and the Shanghai Biennale (2012), Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2013), Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art and Parc de la Villette in Paris (2014), Attenborough Arts Centre in Leicester, City Gallery Museum in Peterborough, Emscherkunst in Rhur (2016), Palazzo Vecchio, Museo Novecento in Florence (2019), Les Tanneries in Amilly (2020), Flughafen Tempelhof in Berlin, New Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow (2021), and Centre Pompidou-Metz in Metz (2022).

Lucy has been a professor at London College of Fashion since 2002 and currently holds the position of Chair of Art and the Environment at the University of the Arts London, where she founded the UAL Art for the Environment Artist in Residency Program.

Camilla Palestra

Camilla Palestra is a curator, researcher, and educator whose work centres on multidisciplinary and collaborative practices that critically engage with urgent issues of contemporary society and their connection to the socio-political environment and diversity. With over fifteen years of experience in curating and developing research-led projects for museums, galleries, and higher education institutions, including the Venice Biennale, Devi Art Foundation, Royal Academy of Arts London, Fashion

Space Gallery, and MART museum, Camilla has worked on solo exhibitions and commissioned projects for artists such as Lucy + Jorge Orta, Shezad Dawood, Rainer Ganhal, Wendelien van Oldenborgh, Annie-Marie Akussah, Hanae Utamura, among others.

Currently, Camilla is working as a Curatorial Associate at the Centre for Sustainable Fashion, University of the Arts London, where she has also held teaching positions. She has taught at the University for the Creative Arts, Goldsmiths University of London, London College of Fashion, and Central Saint Martins (UAL). Camilla received a MA Curating Contemporary Art from the Royal College of Arts London and is currently a doctoral researcher in the Advanced Practices program in the Visual Culture Department at Goldsmiths, University of London. In 2021, Camilla was awarded the Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy, in recognition of her commitment and achievements in learning and teaching through her curatorial practice.

Caroline Stevenson

Caroline Stevenson is a curator, writer, and Programme Director of Cultural and Historical Studies at London College of Fashion. She provides academic leadership for the Cultural and Historical Studies Department and the Fashion Studies Programme. Caroline works across the fields of contemporary art and fashion, producing projects and programming events for a variety of institutions, including the Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art, V&A Museum, ICA, The Fashion Space Gallery, the Barbican, Tate Britain, Tenderbooks, Kunstverein München, and Dutch Design Week.

In addition, Caroline is a co-founder of the Modus curatorial platform and network for expanded fashion practice. She is also a member of the Centre for Fashion Curation at University of the Arts London and serves as the editor of Fashion Practice: The Journal for Design, Creative Process, and the Fashion Industry.

Caroline's current research uses the concept of the curatorial to reconstruct conventional narratives of borders and belonging in contemporary art and fashion practices. She aims to form new alliances, affinities, and communities of interdisciplinary practice at local and global levels.

Colophon

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Studio Orta:

Jorge Orta, Cécile Barrault (Studio Manager), Margaux Lalanne (Head Designer), Susan Leen (Artist), Victoria Maira (Designer) assisted by Pauline Barbier and Manon Renault, and Internship Students Lolie Bernard, Victoire Donneger, Ophélie Ravonneaux, Roisin Spence, Bertille Zannis-Peyrot.

Workshop Participants:

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