

# STILL LIVES

## An Exhibition of Embroidered Intimacies from Around the World

24 January – 28 February

Janina Bacchetta, Oliver Bliss, Alice Bowen Churchill, Jane Colquhoun, Gary Dickins, Nina Gronw-Lewis, Sandra Meech, Joy Merron & Lydia Needle.

The exhibition features intricately hand-stitched works created by women artisans in Karachi, Pakistan, on loan from Alice Kettle, and invites us to slow down, notice the beauty in the ordinary, and find connection in the rhythms of daily life.

### Life Stories 2024

#### Ra'ana Liaquat Craftsmen's Colony (RLCC)

The four panels were commissioned by Alice Kettle from Ra'ana Liaquat Craftsmen's Colony (RLCC) in Karachi, Pakistan.

RLCC is an organisation set up to empower underprivileged communities through innovative women-centric programs.

Alice met these extraordinary women in 2019 and collaborated with them on an embroidery project. She has continued to work with them including works for *Threads Breathing Stories into Materials* at the Arnolfini, Bristol 2023, *Common Threads* at the British Textile Biennial in 2023 and *Create/Elevate, Common Threads* Harewood Biennial 2024.

These new works describe the women's everyday lives and inspirations, using their expert embroidery skills and traditional Pakistani techniques.

The stitchers are:

Afsana, Amna, Adeeba, Husna, Zainab Shahzadi, Saira, Asma Ishaq, Nusrat Hafeez, Atisha, Anisha, Zahida, Qoudsiya, Musabiha, Jameela, Maryum, Musarat, Nazia, Ayesha, Raoufa, Nazia Knwal, Ghazala, Azra Abbas, Samina, Shabana, Sumera.

The team of RLCC:

Zareen Rashid, Naila Rathore, Afshan Waheed, Rabia, Ruqaya, Saima, Dania, Shabana, Ayinum - without them, this project wouldn't have been completed.

### **Still Lives Artists' Statements**

## Joy Merron

### **1 . Reflections in Water**

The viewer is invited to take a moment of calmness and stillness to immerse themselves in this waterscape.

Water has always held a fascination for me. Reflections quietly mirror their surroundings, changing with the weather. A ripple from a pebble, a splash from a fish. Playful flashes of colour.

It is one of the elements most vital to life.

While it reflects what is above, it also has a depth that holds many secrets and memories.

*Hand and machine stitched embroidery on Japanese netting and wool, embroidery thread, beads, foil, plastic sequins (laser cut and donated by Maggie Powell) printed foiled fish (screen printed and donated by Simon Cooper)*

£950

### **2 . Identity**

These heads hint at the profile of a person or people, individuals or part of a group. Devoid of features and hair, they take on their own identity. Disembodied from the expected but holding themselves on upturned vessels, they have an enchantment of their own.

Through the process of building and moulding, subconsciously I found myself embracing my Welsh roots and African birth, leaving me to ask the question who am I?

*Found and needle felted wool fleece, machine stitched garden twine and salvaged fabric.*

Small x 1 £45

Medium x 2 £55

Large x 2 £65

## Jane Colquhoun

Themes of belonging and connection are at the core of my stitched textile practice, and I have been patching, mending and making with scraps since childhood.

Leftover fabrics and threads ('orts'), are layered and held together with stitch as tiny, quilted figures or constructed into repeated forms, grouped together (an action reminiscent of patchwork).

The collections of figures represent the shape of community - family, friends, strangers or aspects of my own identity. Fabric motifs, text and other scraps transform the figures into hybrid creatures: strange flower maidens, mermaids, dancing queens or goddesses - a celebration of nature and kinship.

Other motifs, like the ubiquitous house delve into imagination or memory of a place to return to.

### **3 . The walls give back to me**

My current work explores interior space as both a physical and psychological idea of home. The house is approached not simply as shelter, but as a site of memory, dreaming, and poetic wandering shaped by lived experience. Home appears as a place of safety and retreat, yet it can also be restrictive, marked by habit and containment.

Using textiles, I construct small houses from scrap materials gathered within my domestic environment alongside prepared elements such as printed brick patterns. Images of my own home are embedded within the work, blurring autobiography and fiction. The houses function as fantasy dwellings, imagined as a castle, a garret, or a hut, reflecting shifting feelings of security and status. As an extension of the body, these constructions explore how domestic spaces shape identity, hold dreams and reminiscences, and simultaneously protect and confine.

NFS

### **Janina Bacchetta**

As a textile artist I am interested in using cloth as a means to narrate my own stories and the lived experiences of others. I am conscious of the responsibility that I have in what I contribute to the world. I draw upon my values that are imperative to my creative practice. I look for the joy in what I create, the authenticity and the possibility to entice positive social and cultural change. Taking my inspiration from photographs, I create conceptual portraiture quilts that carry material meaning, encapsulating my subject's character and emotion. To do this, I use hand embroidery, appliquéd and natural dye techniques, which express my need to create work that uses traditional processes in new and subversive ways. The familiar remains an integral aspect of my practice, where the domestic theme is my foundation and an inspirational method that I have embraced.

### **4 . Time for Reflection**

A conceptual quilt portrait of the Glass Artist, Christopher Day Hand embroidered onto coffee-stained cotton, using the brown cotton thread from the historical cotton reel with a racist slur as its colour label. Materials have been found and hand stitched using a technique called appliquéd on the front of the quilt, which is made up of three layers. The back of the quilt is a hand embroidered water plumbing diagram to represent a family tree with the words, Mother, Father and the Child written in Welsh.

The textile piece is part of an ongoing, project titled 'The Power of Words'. centred around conceptual quilt portraits that are bold and celebrate Black people. The project aims to change the narrative of the historical threads that are steeped in racism and have a connection to the history of the cotton industry in Britain. By highlighting the threads negative narrative, Janina creates a positive perspective by showing the viewer what beauty can be created from using the

thread and in doing so, celebrates her subject's character that is tenderly stitched within each quilt.

NFS

### **Nina Gronw-Lewis**

Nina Gronw-Lewis is an artist whose practice centres on materials, slow processes, and a commitment to ethical production and craft. Her work reflects a deep respect for traditional techniques, reimagined through a sustainable lens. Recent projects explore the power of storytelling through textiles, highlighting how making can connect people, places, and ideas. Nina's practice bridges heritage skills with contemporary thinking, aiming to inspire more conscious and collaborative approaches within the textile field.

### **5 . Dance till your slippers fly off**

A simple dance in our kitchen becomes a moment of metamorphosis - an ordinary space transformed by movement, growth, and the evolving bond between father and daughter. Made using a punch needle technique traditionally associated with rug-making on an open-weave fabric base, the work uses donated waste yarn, echoing the theme of metamorphosis through the transformation of discarded materials into memory and touch.

Yarn and fabric

£ POA

### **Sandra Meech**

### **6 . 7 Dresses**

These dresses were inspired from past memories - as a teenager in the 60's from a family of stitchers, I was able to 'run up' a simple 'A-line shift or 'mini skirt' for a weekend with friends. These abstract shapes are a reminder of paper pattern shapes with the surface inspired by sketchbook drawings of sewing machine parts. The 7 dresses represented the days of the week in the planning and making of a new outfit.

Transferred sketchbook images on cloth with machine stitch.

£225 each or £1500 for whole series

### **Gary Dickens**

Gary Dickens is an interdisciplinary artist based in Somerset. His stitched works embody deconstructed embroidery featuring raw edges and visible threads.

The ethos of make do and mend inherited from his Grandad Bert (a fellow stitcher) inform Gary's freestyle and imperfect stitching which brings to him a welcome and cathartic release, this in an increasingly pressurised and frenetic society.

### **7 . Please don't discard me**

Evoking fond memories of grandparents' past, this heavily damaged antique photograph has been saved and reimagined with visible mending. Now reinvigorated to treasure for years to come.

£ POA

### **Lydia Needle**

Lydia's work is an invitation to reflect on our impact on the earth and each other. Using waste, vintage, and sustainable materials, she create pieces that explore regeneration and interconnectedness.

### **8 . 'Grand' Mother and Child**

Magic moments with grandchild, a spark, connection, closeness. Grandparenting is so different to parenting, but no less special.

Waste paper bags, vintage threads, wheat paste

£ POA

### **9 . Life ain't always empty**

Life can kick us around like a football.  
The magic lies in the bounce back.

This dodecahedron was created in honour of my grandson, celebrating his knowledge and love of shapes. I stitched together scraps of fabric with threads of joy, plus happy memories - moments etched on my brain.

Thanks to Fontaines D.C. for the title, taken from A Hero's Death

*Life ain't always empty  
Life ain't always empty*

*Don't get stuck in the past  
Say your favourite things at mass  
Tell your mother that you love her  
And go out of your way for others  
Sit beneath a light that suits ya*

And look forward to a brighter future....

...Sink as far down as you can be pulled up  
Happiness really ain't all about luck  
Let your demeanour be your deep down self  
And don't sacrifice your life for your health  
When you speak, speak sincere  
And believe me friend, everyone will hear....

...Never let a clock tell you what you got time for  
It only goes around, goes around, goes around  
Take your family name for your own great sins  
'Cause each day is where it all begins...

...And  
Don't give up too quick  
You only get one line, you better make it stick.....

Waste fabric, vintage threads, wool

£ POA

### Oly Bliss

My practice centres on slow, attentive making as a way of responding to landscape and lived experience. Working with reclaimed and scrap materials, I explore how acts of stitching can hold memory, care, and time, allowing fragments to come together into quiet moments of meaning.

#### **10 . When the Heron Calls**

Within the context of Still Lives, this piece considers stillness as an active state - one of reflection, listening, and connection. It invites viewers to pause and engage with the subtle, often overlooked moments of peace that emerge through attentive observation of the natural world.

When the Heron Calls was developed during a residency with Gloucestershire College through the AA2A (Artists Access to Art Colleges) programme and is inspired by time spent at Bodenham Arboretum. The work responds to an encounter with a heron—both as a physical presence and a symbol of patience, solitude, and attentiveness. In observing the heron, I experienced a shared moment of stillness, a sense of solidarity between human and environment where attention replaced action.

Using free motion embroidery, I draw directly with thread, allowing the marks to remain fluid, intuitive, and responsive. This process echoes the rhythms of nature and the experience of being present within it. The reclaimed materials carry traces of previous use, reflecting how natural spaces are layered with history, growth, and quiet transformation.

Scrap materials, free motion embroidery

£1,400

### Alice Bowen-Churchill

Alice Bowen-Churchill is a Bristol-based artist and designer who creates interactive artworks, participatory projects in both Galleries and Music Festivals. She collaborates with diverse groups to promote creativity through play, believing that artistic practice should be accessible to all. Alice has worked with The Wellcome Collection, Oxfam, RWA, Arnolfini and LFW.

#### **11 . The Milaya – Centre of the room**

I was commissioned to design a collaborative stitch project as part of Oxfam's No More Radio Silence campaign, aiming to platform global humanitarian crises that don't grab the headlines. The textile panel is inspired by the South Sudanese bedspread called a Milaya - a traditional hand-sewn bedspread that tells powerful stories of resilience, home and hope. The Oxfam Milaya opens a discussion about the humanitarian crises worldwide that are not discussed in the media today. The artwork leans into the conversation about textiles being perceived as innocuous and disregarded as purely functional rather than for their content. I was inspired by the coded messaging used in socks during World War II and 'quipu' knotted cords used for record-keeping and communication in ancient Andean South America.

I wanted the audience to help reveal the words of a hidden poem and imagery in the panel through stitch. Each stitch amplifying the story and shining a light on the hidden humanitarian crises of South Sudan, DRC, Yemen, East Africa, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Sudan.

So far, around 500 people have contributed stitches to the artwork at three music festivals, inside art galleries and with a refugee art collective. I invited the AUB students to make their mark on the Milaya to help the panel work towards completion.