



Stages #12

Being In The World

Liverpool
Biennial

Editorial

Care Requirements

James Harper

Stages #12 takes ethics surrounding modes of care as a central theme from which to expand. Care as a focus has been adopted from the wider themes of Liverpool Biennial 2023 – *uMoya: The Sacred Return of Lost Things*.

Curator Khanyisile Mbongwa creates space for emancipatory practices, joy and play within the framework of her exhibitions. Utilising Mbongwa's vision for *uMoya*, we can draw upon how the gallery or a Biennial reflect the way society impacts and responds to the ethics of care through language and architecture.

The four contributions to this issue of *Stages*, although not all directly acknowledging, are each reimagining the framework of a Biennial through a different distribution of time, care and consultation, based on need.

The title of this issue, *Being in the World*, is taken from Martin Heidegger's interpretation of the Greco-Roman myth 'Care'¹. The myth outlines how Roman goddess Cura created the human form, with contributions from Jupiter and Tellus.

Heidegger explains how the human being has its origin in care: 'this being is not released from its origin, but is held fast and dominated by it, as long as this being' is in the world. 'Being-in-the-world' has the character of being of 'care'.²

The myth also explains how the name 'homo' is derived from being made of the earth – humus – and thus returning to earth. As 'beings in the world', we are at once of the earth and carers of the earth.

'The multiplicity of these (being-in) is indicated by the following examples: having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, giving something up and letting it go, undertaking, accomplishing, evincing, interrogating, considering, discussing, determining.... All these kind ways of Being-in have care as their kind of Being.'³

In this journal, the text *In the quest of understanding paper*, Shivangi Bansal explores the sustainable production process of *Lokta* paper-making through the practice of artist Junu Maya Tamang. Sustainable production is a cyclical process.

Cyclical processes continue to inform, as Roo Dhissou writes a personal account of being overwhelmed by care work, reimagining care and support for disabled artists and communities.

(Please be aware Roo Dhissou's article contains references to forms of abuse)

Of course, the etymology of the verb 'curate' is also intertwined here. The act or process of curating is inherently an act of care.

Where a curator's practice does not involve working within a collection or archive, the practice then becomes one of caring for people as much as caring for artworks. Dominic Bilton's ongoing research project *Queering the Whitworth* and his writings on archives and collections

demonstrate a process of care and a creation of space for care that considers everybody who is included in, or who may need to access, collections databases.

Artist Leah Clements⁴ refers to hospital architecture and its poetic relationship with the architecture of gallery spaces, something which manifested in Benoît Piéron's installation at Bluecoat for Liverpool Biennial 2023.

An important aspect of Khanyisile Mbongwa's curatorial thinking was to allow or make space to care – both physically and metaphorically

Shivangi Bansal was a member of a cohort of international curators convened by Liverpool Biennial and the British Council and who attended Liverpool Biennial 2023. Writing in this journal represents an opportunity to reflect on that visit. Bansal references Piéron's installation when talking about making joy and lessening pain.

Another member of that cohort, Greer Valley, has used this journal as a platform to reflect on the themes of *uMoya* in a different way. Through a series of conversations with the artist, Valley has drawn upon Lungiswa Gqunta's *Sleeping Pools* (2023) to examine care, healing and repair through the lens of colonial violence.

The history of Liverpool will forever be interwoven with the brutalities of colonialism. As an ambassador for the city, Liverpool Biennial has a responsibility to handle that history and its reverberations with respect and care. Reparations began with Liverpool Biennial 2021 – *The Stomach and the Port* and have continued with the presentation of Khanyisile Mbongwa's *uMoya*.

¹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh, (Albany: State University of New York, 2010).

² Heidegger, p. 199.

³ Heidegger, p. 57.

⁴ Leah Clements, Taraneh Fazeli and K MacBride, HOLDING SPACE ACROSS CRIP TIME (2021), *Serpentine Galleries* <<https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/art-and-ideas/holding-space-across-crip-time/>> [accessed 30 October 2023].

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In the quest of understanding paper

Shivangi Bansal

'We are fragile beings just like the process of paper-making is a fragile one.' Junu Maya Tamang, an artist and a healer shares with me as we explore the thickets of a neighbourhood community forest in Kathmandu.

Born in the picturesque district of Dhading in Nepal, Junu is a visual artist whose artistic practice is inspired by her close connection to nature, strongly reflected not only in her art, but also in her daily living. I came across Tamang's practice through our residency programme, EXCHANGE¹, where I learned first-hand about her journey.

In a world where each of us strive to become more aware about our environmental footprint, Junu's approach urges us to think about a future that acknowledges the traumas of our environment and finds ways to collectively heal from it.

This article will further unpack concepts of care in times of catastrophe, through understanding the processual nature of Junu's artistic practice and how it addresses the ecological urgency of our times.

An artist formally trained at Sirjana College of Fine Arts in Kathmandu and the Shantiniketan school in West Bengal, Junu Maya Tamang holds a deep sense of responsibility for her environment. As a visual artist still exploring the different nuances of her practice, her work is primarily centred around hand-made paper-making and natural pigments as she attempts to maintain an environmentally conscientious practice.

The age-old craft of paper-making in Nepal has originated from the process of making the wildcrafted, hand-made artisan 'lokta' paper, or 'nepali kagaj', and has been a common subject of artistic exploration for artists, thinkers and travellers across the country.

Lokta paper is made from the bark of two of the species of the Daphne² shrub. The paper was used historically in Nepal for religious scriptures and government documents. Today, the paper is used to make notebooks, decorative items and is exported around the world. The long-standing traditional skill of lokta paper-making emerges during the delicate window following the harvest season of the Daphne shrub, after which the bast fibre from the phloem of the shrub is carefully removed, ensuring that the roots stay intact, and that the plant continues to grow. The bast then is boiled for eight hours, breaking down its fibres before being pulped into smooth paste. The pulp is then mixed with water and spread over a wood and mesh frame to form a sheet. Natural dyes may be added, and leaves, plants, and petals placed on the surface to create the natural patterns as the sheets dry in the sun.

Junu's paper-making practice has also been borne out of an admiration for lokta paper, among other things. During one of her early explorations, she trekked to the mountains during the Daphne shrub harvest season to source her materials and learn more about the craft. However, making the arduous journey each time was not feasible and she decided to find raw materials from her immediate surroundings.

She explains that her selection of raw materials is based on the seasons. Recently during the residency, her initial idea was to work with sugar cane fibre, but because it was corn harvest season she instead used corn husk fibre for moulding the pulp.

Her choice of corn husk as the raw material was also driven by a challenge she set for herself as she had attempted to use this fibre in the past, but had failed to achieve the desired results.

‘The procedure to reach until the pulp keeps you on your toes and many things are learnt with each different fibre that is used. The waiting time during the boiling of the fibre allows some time to pause but demands constant stirring and adding of water. This phase of the process is crucial and after grinding the fibres, the satisfaction of seeing the softness of the pulp that comes out is a joyous milestone for me’, explains Junu.



*Snippets from Junu Maya Tamang's Process - creating paper through corn husk and grass,
EXCHANGE 2023, Danfe Arts [Photo Courtesy: Artist]*

Each element of the paper-making process holds equal significance and is carried out with a sense of discovery and curiosity. ‘Although it may seem repetitive and tiresome’, Junu says, ‘it brings a great sense of calm and peace and serves as a therapeutic time.’

She adds unique visual textures and patterns through embossing old flowers in her garden, as an attempt to give permanence to their temporariness, and she also sows her most-loved vegetable seeds during her process. Junu identifies herself with the paper and claims to embody its fragility and resilience to her own identity.

As we finish the last round of our forest walk, we get tea and discuss other methodologies about her practice and Junu takes out her notebook and shows me her experiments with creating natural pigments.

I am intrigued and fascinated by the love and empathy for nature that Junu embodies in her

practice. She says: 'We are totally dependent on commercial materials where we almost forget that human beings are one of the largest groups of destruction. So I looked for alternative ways to create my work. With the idea of reducing my carbon footprint, I decided to create my own paper and colour. Paper-making being a process-based and longer technique, I got to know myself more closely in this journey.'

She goes on to explain how the paper-making process has been meditative and has also helped with mindfulness: 'When I was creating artwork through waste materials and renewable resources, I felt like I was healing myself and nature. It brought me and nature together as "us". It's like being healed together as I create my work to lessen the harmfulness.'

I noticed that Junu spoke a lot about 'lessening the pain of nature' in our conversations which reminded me of an artwork at Liverpool Biennial 2023 by Benoît Piéron, where Piéron describes his work as an attempt to make 'life more suitable for dreamers'. The artist draws on the medical environments and materials that surround him, such as used hospital sheets and gowns, IV drips and furniture from hospital waiting rooms, using them as inspiration to create something new and full of joy and life - perhaps also with the idea of 'lessening the pain'.



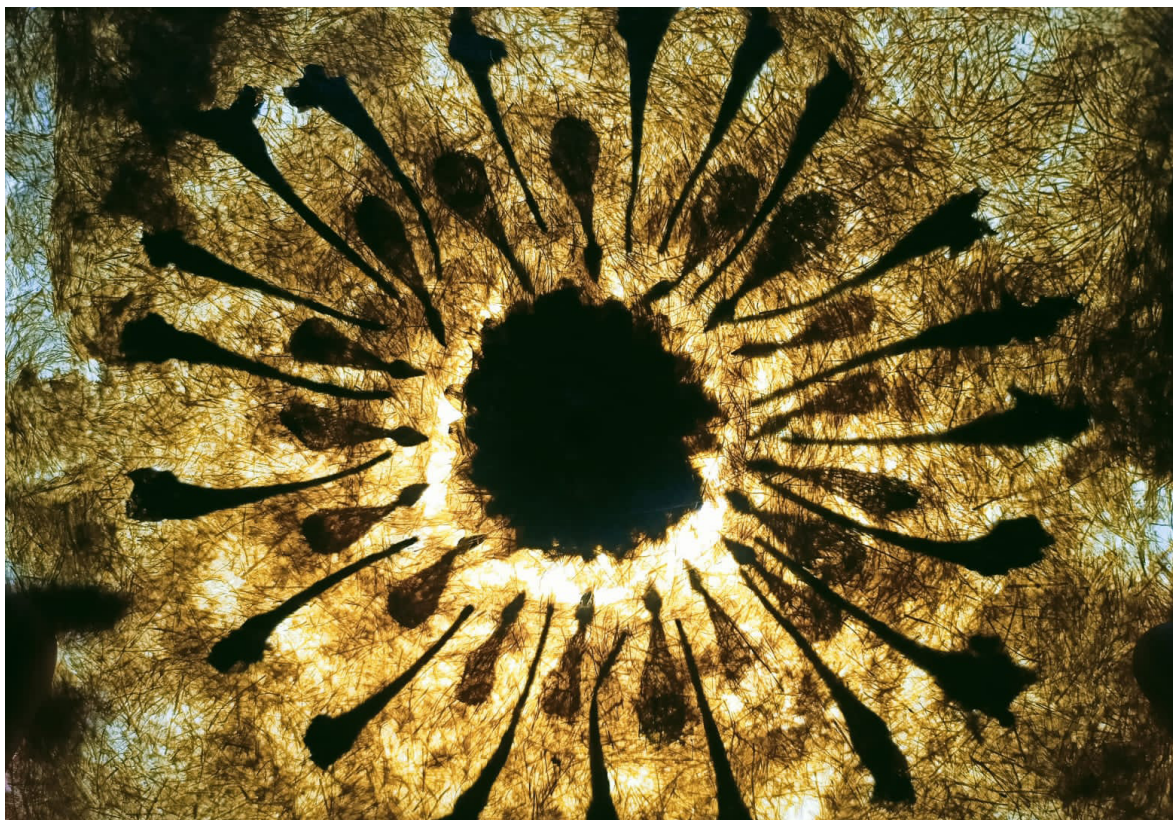
Sepideh Rahaa, Songs to Earth, Songs to Seeds, 2022, Liverpool Biennial 2023 at Cotton Exchange.

Photography by Stuart Whipps..

During my visit to Liverpool Biennial 2023, I also came across a video installation entitled 'Songs to Earth, Songs to Seeds', where the artist, Sepideh Rahaa, shows the invisible and inaccessible process of rice cultivation and invites us to consider how this complex farming of a global food staple is intertwined with contemporary cycles of consumption. Rahaa's work also shows an earnest sense of care and passion by the farmers in the rice fields, who prefer to physically handle the rice harvest instead of allowing machines to take over their toiling roles.

A similar emotion is also seen in Junu's process when she touches the minute fibres that form

intricate textures on the paper and feels a sense of reward. Her process also explores a similar theme to Sepideh in that she lays bare the invisible labour of lokta paper-making manufacturers living in extreme conditions in the Himalayas and working tirelessly to sustain themselves in commercial markets. Both Junu's and Sepideh's works urge us to pause and rethink our roles in the vicious cycles of commercialisation.



'Less Harming' by Junu Maya Tamang as part of EXCHANGE 2023, Danfe Arts.

Courtesy the Artist.

As Junu and I continued our discussion on natural pigments and paper-making, we noticed a spider web resting on a tree and I realised that our first instinct on seeing a spider web is to get rid of it and that we almost forget — we are removing a spider's home. It was a revelation of some sort to understand that ethics of care is primarily finding ways to live consciously and with empathy for one another.

Junu's practice is a reminder for each of us that understanding ethics of care is not only an act of healing, but also a powerful statement of who we are and that employing methods of care in our own practices is indispensable and perhaps the only way forward through any catastrophe.

¹ *EXCHANGE* is a peer-learning program organised by Danfe Arts which invites emerging visual artists and writers from across Nepal for a two-month residency in Kathmandu. The residency aims to facilitate the creative exchange of ideas and skills while also making space for contemplation, experimentation and collaboration.

² *Daphne bholua* is a species of flowering shrub in the genus *Daphne* of the family *Thymelaeaceae*. It grows at altitudes of 1,700–3,500m (5,577–11,483 ft) in the Himalayas and neighbouring mountain ranges, from Nepal to southern China.

Shivangi Bansal (she/her) is an independent curator and art consultant based in Kathmandu, Nepal. She is the Founder and Creative Director of Danfe Arts, an art space supporting the practices of emerging visual artists in Nepal. Her curatorial practice stems from exploring the nuances of 'pause' and 'slowness' in the processual nature of an artist's practice. Her curatorial approach explores methods of collaboration and community engagement and its contextual differences.

Bansal was a member of a cohort of curators from Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, convened by the British Council for their Biennial Connects programme which attended Liverpool Biennial 2023. She was also part of the Curatorial Intensive South Asia Fellowship in 2021, organised by KHOJ Delhi.

Care Work

Roo Dhissou

Care work is nourishment.

Please be aware this article contains references to forms of abuse

This text imagines care as growing food, cooking, eating, dining, feeding, tending to and nurturing. As such, it is composed as a framework of food, from soil to stomach, from stomach to soil.

Who is hungry?

Who is hungrier?

Who can cook?

Who can grow?

Who can eat?

Who can taste?

Who can digest?

Who can and who cannot?



Who does it differently?

I do not believe we need metaphors for care work. I have chosen to think about it in relation to food and the land because I believe care work is inherently woven into land justice, community justice and climate justice. So, while reading my writing, imagine disability justice with me, in the context of food, feeding and the feeder. Writing this way, thinking this way, promotes an entire picture of disability justice and care work without making invisible or erasing black, brown, indigenous, queer and trans bodies. Medical, Latin and Western terminologies and frameworks work to eradicate intersections and junctures of oppression by forcing categories, systems of domination, saviourism and hierarchies.

A disability justice framework understands that all bodies are unique and essential, that all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met.¹

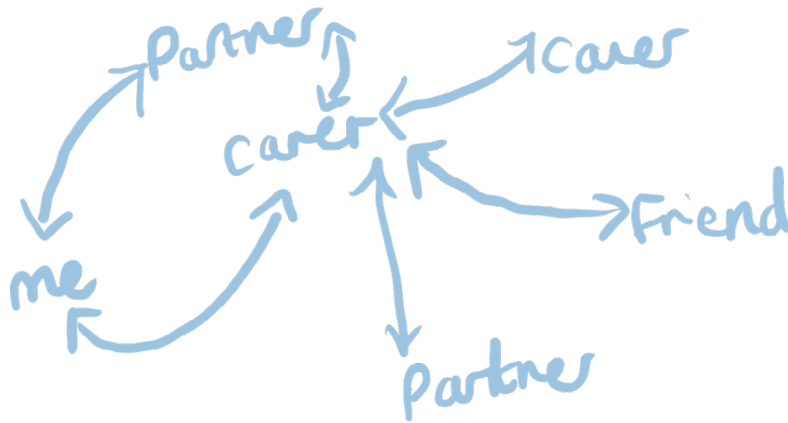
I am writing this in a tropical rainforest in Goa. I am grateful for my surroundings and for a clear head to think through concepts of care work. I have been clouded by care work and making for much of this year. That work was vital and forms part of a long-term project and life ambitions. *Stages #12* focuses on the ethics of care. I recount this and share this while composing this text in an effort to be grounded within my writing. My name is Roo Dhissou and I am dreaming. I am dreaming of disability justice.



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Reciprocal Care

From soil to stomach, to soil again. Care is a cyclical system.



It only gets messy if you are not asking questions. Moreover, if you are not asking the right questions. Earlier this year I tried to build myself a mutual care-based team. For the most part it worked very well. I also failed myself and my friend and was failed by a friend and care worker. It made me question whether care work as paid labour works. Now I question: can care be reciprocal if someone is being paid? Often care work in our capitalist world is thought of as an isolated, begrudgingly done task that is hardly ever a site of pleasure, joy of community building.² It never seems mutual. Perhaps the exchange of money makes them feel as you're managing them. No one likes that feeling despite the exchange of finances. A job with money can only ever be seen as a paid chore. Who really loves their job? You can love what you do, but it will still feel like work. Work requires exertion and effort to pay the bills. The pressure of being paid is exactly what separates the job from play, mutual care, love, and appreciation. It's what draws the boundary, which in most cases can be useful.

I received some funding from Arts Council England with a generous access budget. The budget helped me employ a PA and a Studio Assistant aka Job Aid to take some of the pressure away so that I had time to rest, process and be present. A PA in disability work is a Personal Assistant. The reason we use this term is because often carers are giving up their time to care for someone. There is a form of guilt in this space. So, I decided to use the model of Personal Assistance for the role. PAs allow for a more flexible tailor-made role, to support our care and needs, and can encompass a range of activities other than admin. These can include applying ointments, helping one get in and out of bed, day-to-day tasks and errands such as collecting laundry, driving around, making teas, collecting dinner, preparing dinner, just about anything that we need as disabled folk to help us function that bit more. Ultimately, as the disabled person, we are in control of our own PA to carry out the tasks with which we need assistance. A PA role is less emotive than a carer and gives the person receiving the care ultimate control. As a brown, queer woman with disabilities, I wanted control. I wanted control and I wanted to offer mutual care and support. This kind of approach involves asking questions. Us both asking questions of each other and constantly checking in. Asking the right kind of questions to ensure that each of us is comfortable with what is being asked of us and our approaches to care.

I believe my mistake in wanting control over my own assistance is what may have hindered the process of reciprocity in our care relationship. Moreover, my PA did not know what a PA was. They believed all the 'additional' tasks that they carried out for me were exactly that – additional. I ought to have explained that a PA in disability terms is not an administrator. I spoke about the social model of disability – I was sure I made a huge effort in outlining the support I required, but I still failed. We together as a team failed one another, in our inability to ensure each other was ultimately ok with what was being given as care. The fundamentals of it are that one of us was being paid to carry out a role and one of us was vulnerable and needed help. We both masked, we were both disabled and we both needed more from one another. Yet, despite all the measures of care, including a financial care package, constant check ins, training, a healthy rate of pay, people to speak to in case of worries, and a reciprocal approach to care giving, neither of us felt comfortable enough to voice what we needed and how we felt we were being failed. I think it means we both cared too much. So much that we did not want to upset the other one.

As a brown, queer woman with disabilities, I wanted control. This makes me now question the ethics of that care. In contemplating these roles and the entire project I have been working on this year, I know I have a lot to learn about care and the ethics of it. I want to be accountable. Yet, I cannot help but feel let down, cheated and hurt either. I believe this is systemic. As a vulnerable person of colour, I am naturally positioned precariously. I am hoping for care with an intersectional approach to the injustices I face daily. Is it ethical for a disabled person to take care of another disabled person? Who cares for them? If control is required from the disabled person, does that mean control from the disabled care giver is being taken away? What does financial compensation take away from the care giver? Does money remove the ability to have fun, to love, to learn and to be open? Does money mean more responsibility and therefore less love? I do not think the answers to these questions are straightforward. I believe that all of this is entirely relational, its learning, its trial and error.

It is also extremely sad that mistakes must be made and that people are hurt in this process, and that accountability also becomes less mutual. Reciprocal care is radical and that is sad.

Many bodies are required, constant questioning, much love and time, a removal of hierarchies and many failures are required when using DIY methods of caregiving – especially in reciprocal care. *From soil to stomach, to soil again. Care is a cyclical system.*

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Desi and Disabled

Intersectional notes on being chronically brown.

WARNING MAY CONTAIN NUTS

I have never experienced rejection from other disabled people; however, I often face rejection from other people of the same racial community as me. What I mean by this is that I have way more disabled comrades than I have comrades in brown, Punjabi or Sikh communities with or without disability. Historically, in many South Asian countries disability is taboo and shameful. Unfortunately, such attitudes have endured and have been passed down through generations

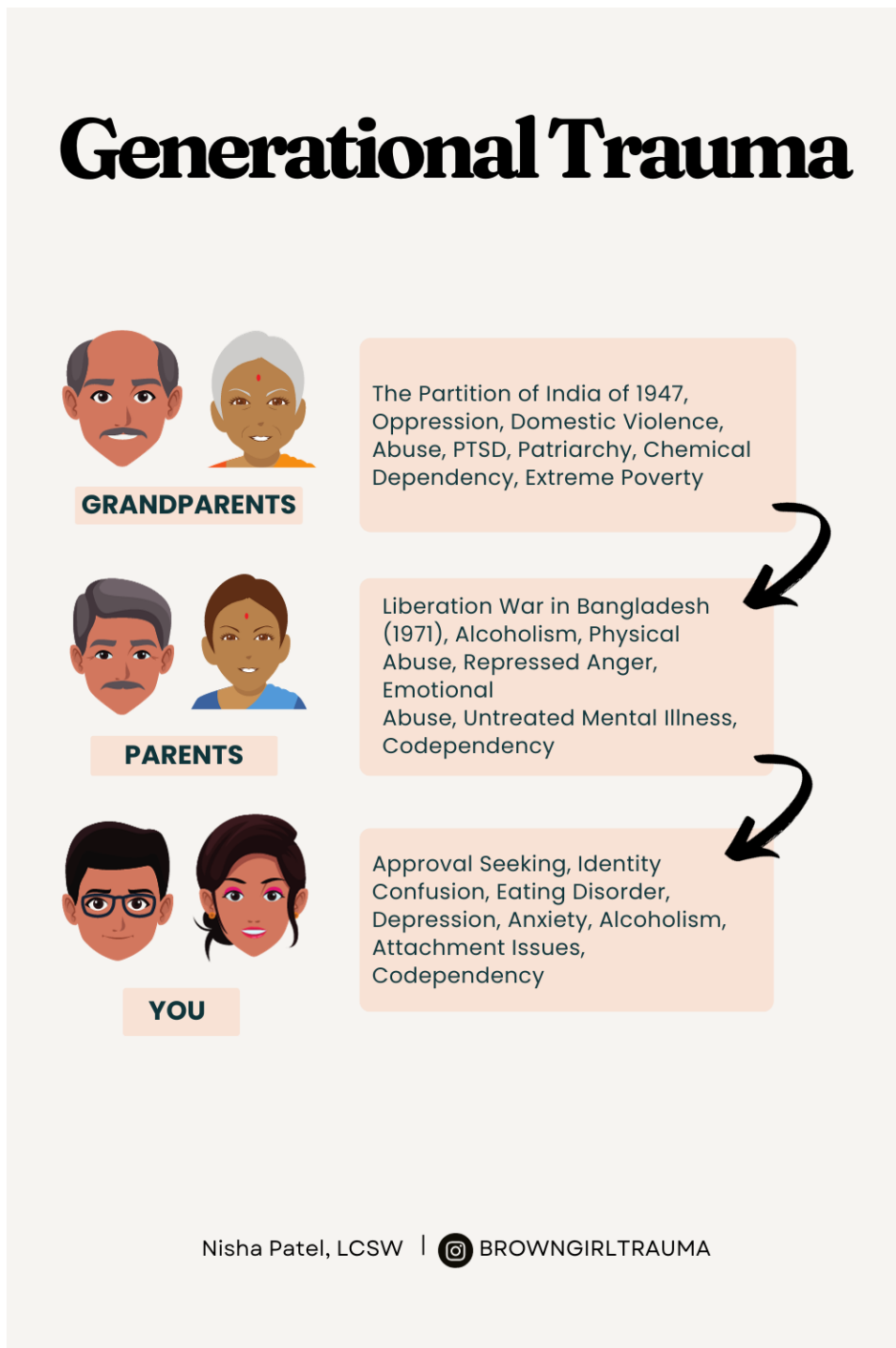
and across borders. Disability inclusion within the South Asian community is therefore a rarity. It pains me to say this, but what also pains me is the lack of solidarity of South Asian community members altogether. I believe a lot of this is related to the way many South Asians were pitted against one another during colonial rule, or perhaps a general attitude pre-colonial rule. This learnt behaviour was then passed down through generations and as a result the vast majority of South Asian folk are taught to undermine, compare and compete with one another to gain majority favour and/or social status. I do not intend to generalise or homogenise experience, so I am writing this in view of my own experiences and those of friends and family around me.

I grew up in a very toxic household. Although I have emancipated from family, I'm sure they will all agree with me entirely. I am in touch with two of my cousins and we connect over this shared lived experience together, very often. Validating one another in our experiences. Growing up, while my experiences were 'normal' to me, I often felt that we were one of the only families that experienced such violent, hateful, competitive and emotionally repressed relationships. Later I came to realise we were not the only ones. Issues extended to the South Asian diaspora, and beyond. Yet commonly, we are told that these issues are pertinent to South Asian culture. Where they do exist in parts of South Asian culture, they are not an inherent part of it, they are in fact the result of generations of abuse and trauma by others onto people within the culture. I am constantly told that abuse is part of the culture and that women being treated in certain ways is also part of the culture. Eight years ago I went to see a therapist, he was a white man perhaps in his 60s. Although he was instrumental in my first diagnosis of CPTSD (Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and he facilitated the help that I needed at the time, he was also the cause of a lot of internal conflict. When I told him about some of the experiences I had, he replied, 'Forgive me, but isn't abuse normal in your culture?'. Imagine being told by a therapist that all of the terrible things that have happened to you are 'normal', better yet, imagine being told that they are part of your culture. Although it seemed like a question, it was more of a statement, one that I never knew how to respond to, especially as a South Asian woman who was taught not to talk back or question anything.

Now imagine growing up in a toxic household where they constantly told you that 'this is how Indian families are', 'this is our culture', 'you're becoming too Westernised', and this one was my favourite, 'ok, we'll just kick you out at 16 and you can go and live your life on the streets like the white people do'. The last one is my favourite because growing up made me want to be like 'the white people'. They represented a freedom that I was unable to experience in my own home life. While this statement is problematic, I will return to it by the end of this text. My family acted like they were doing me a favour, allowing me to stay at home as long as I wanted (until I got married) as long as I did what they asked. I was living in a conditional setting. Everything was based on transactions; this is the way I grew up.

Take both those situations now, that of the white oppressor, the so-called therapist normalising abuse, and the other of the familial support unit, the ones that are supposed to teach you right from wrong, love and compassion. Imagine both of them telling you the same thing. That all of the things causing you grief, hurt, pain are a perfectly normal part of your identity. Yet, there was something inside me that refused to believe that the culture I am so fond of, that makes me who I am, is also the reason that I am in so much pain. Both these 'trusted' institutions, one of therapy and one of family, perpetuated abuse without ever getting to the root cause. Now I am going to make a general statement: I believe that nearly all migrants have some sort of

undiagnosed mental illness. I believe that every member of my family definitely has some sort of undiagnosed mental illness. I believe that a lot of this is down to generational trauma, the inability to defeat the oppressor and, most importantly, the shame that comes with seeking help and identifying as disabled. Those who have had to migrate are more susceptible to mental illness because of the trauma involved in their relocation, the racism they experience, the oppression, violence, war, and familial separation. Would it be bizarre then to say that the majority of the diaspora, their families, first and second generation migrants, have some sort of undiagnosed mental illness? For reference, I have added this diagram created by Nisha Patel, Licensed Clinical Social Worker and the founder of the Instagram account Brown Girl Trauma. This too is a sort of generalisation.

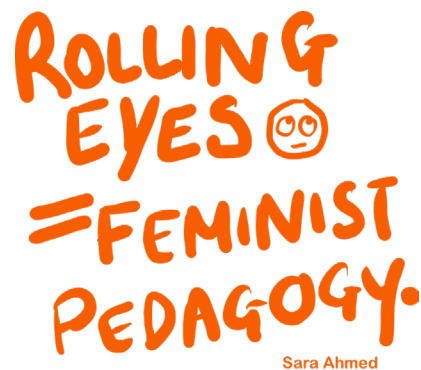


Now let's think about shame. 'What will people say?' is a phrase that is very well known to those of the South Asian diaspora. It makes me writhe with simultaneous feelings of shame and vulnerability. When I had severe depressive episodes with suicidal ideation, instead of seeking the help I needed I was taught to bury it. After all, what will people say if they found out I was struggling? What would that mean for the family? These now intrusive thoughts are carried with me, and I constantly fear not being believed or when being vulnerable I worry about what that says about me, my professionalism, my commitment to work, etc. The shame and stigma attached to both interior and familial stresses outwardly contribute to how we present ourselves. I have therefore never identified as a disabled artist. I think there are enough categories projected onto my arts practice due to the colour of my skin and my gender, let alone any other category that would seek to define or reduce what I produce to identity politics. I am an artist with a disability, who happens to be a woman, South Asian, and Queer. Career aside, there are not many people with whom I outwardly share my disability.

Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or CPTSD, is often misunderstood. Many media representations of the condition focus on those affected by war. The condition can in fact arise from any traumatic event that is repeated, and often stems from childhood and continues into adult years. How many of us know that CPTSD is a type of neurodiversity? CPTSD, unlike PTSD, is prolonged and involves a betrayal of trust by someone who perpetrates or perpetuates the abuse (for example, someone who is supposed to look after you, a parent, medics, or a system) and is usually impossible to escape because you are too young, too afraid, or were compelled by the legal system. My CPTSD was perpetuated by those around me who never even knew I had it. It is important to mention that I too didn't even know I had it at this point. My abuser would call me dramatic when I had a panic attack and would say that I was seeking attention when I felt low or depressed. When my CPTSD began to manifest physically, leaving me with an autoimmune condition, I was told that I did it to myself. No one would ever believe that I was sick.

In 2011 I suffered my first anaphylactic shock. I cannot remember much of this, other than the fact my mom had guests over for dinner so refused to come to the hospital after I had nearly died. (We move.) My second anaphylactic shock led to a series of allergy tests being carried out. I was not born with allergies, so all of this felt very alien to me. Both events occurred during very stressful years for me, so although there is no proof, my therapist and my GP believe that my allergies and my new autoimmune condition are what we would call psychosomatic. That does not mean that it was all in my head, but rather that my brain was no longer able to cope with the amount of trauma it was suffering, and therefore had to find new ways to alert me to said trauma. The end result was a laundry list of conditions triggered by stress and anxiety and leading to more stress and anxiety. I was diagnosed with an allergy to nuts. I grew up eating almonds (they are supposed to be brain food in Desi culture), throwing them up hours later and being told as a child that I was too fussy. So, I may have always been allergic. It was odd to my parents that someone of Indian descent could ever be allergic to nuts, as most of our recipes use nuts. When I was sick, I was often given a Pini. A Pini is made from whole wheat, jaggery, Desi ghee, nuts and milk, and is loaded with nutrients such as calcium, iron, and vitamins E and C, which all help in boosting immunity. Pinis also help the body fight off colds by increasing the body temperature. The indigenous Desi recipe meant to promote immunity could kill me. I was Desi and now I was disabled, disabled from *being* Desi and *disabled* from being Desi. How can I truly ever be Desi if I cannot eat Desi food any more? No more butter paneer, no more bombay

mix, no more chaat masala, in fact, every spice packet in the house stated MAY CONTAIN NUTS.



I felt like I did not belong, my own body rejected the Desi recipes passed down through my family. Rejected by my family, rejected by my food and rejected by others in my community. All of the familial recipes I learnt I have had to adapt for myself, I did not have elders to fall back on.

Throughout my life what I lacked was community. To bring us back to my initial point, I have never experienced rejection from other disabled people, however I often face rejection from other people in the same racial community as me. I believe this may be because of their own suppression of their own mental health, perhaps I remind them of something they wish not to acknowledge about themselves. Or perhaps they are conditioned to believe that I am the one who is the problem. Either way, I think there is a great intersectional problem with being Desi and disabled. There are certain things that I know only my Desi community will be able to understand, and certain things I know only my disabled comrades will be able to understand. I am yet to find community between both of those communities, who accept and understand the intricacies and nuances of abuse in the South Asian culture, and simultaneously embrace my fluctuating condition and my ability to be a total mess at times.

Community is everything, and through my arts practice I strive to build it because so much of that desire comes from my own longing for community. To return to a statement I made earlier, 'the white people' represented a freedom that I was unable to experience in my own home life. This statement is problematic for the following reasons.

1. It assumes that my experience of being South Asian is inferior to the experience of being white.
2. It places whiteness on a pedestal and assumes that my experiences are oppressed due to my ethnicity rather than to abuse within my family.
3. It adds to the rhetoric of white saviourism.
4. It was both delivered and perpetuated by an abusive parent.

What I actually dreamt of was not a desire to be white or to do as 'the white people' do, but to be happy, to be accepted, to be loved, and to experience the world beyond the limited boundaries that were drawn for me. Most of all, to be able to seek help when I needed it and not be afraid or ashamed of my disabilities.



- ¹ *Patty Berne, 'Skin, Tooth and Bone – The basis of our movement is people: A disability justice primer', Reproductive Health Matters, 25, 50 (May 2017), 149-50.*
- ² *Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 'Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice', in Care Webs (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2018), pp. 45-46.*

Roo Dhissou (she/her) is an artist and doctoral researcher based in Birmingham.

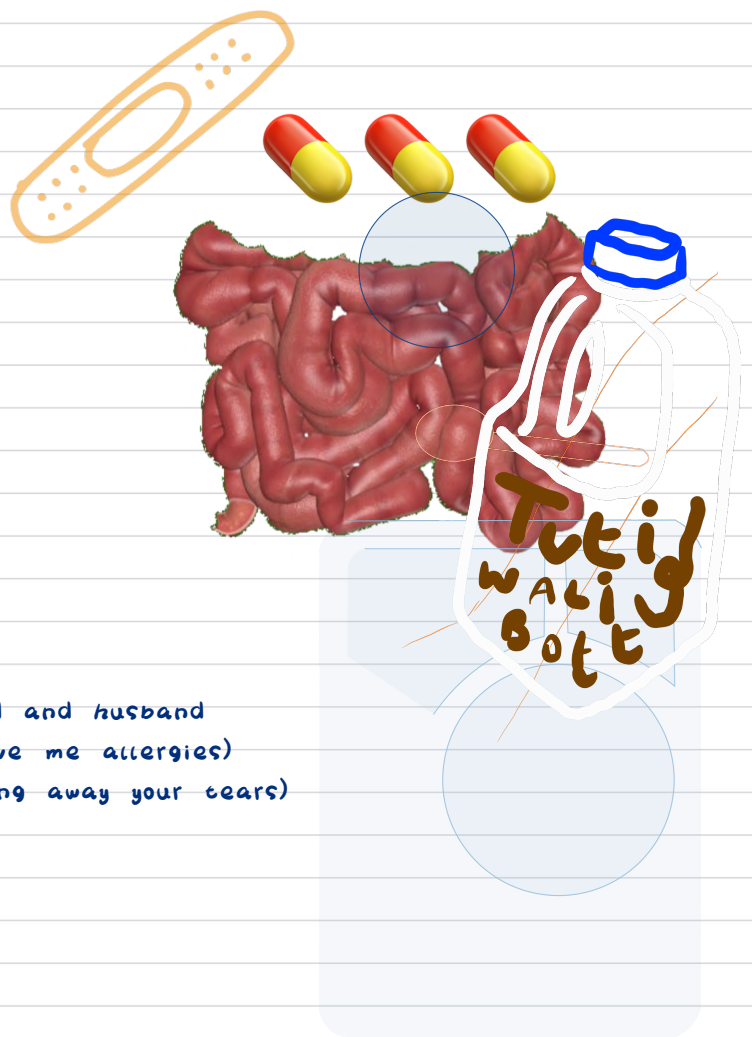
INGREDIENTS

BOOKS

- Crip Kinship: The Disability Justice and Art Activism of Sins Invalid by Shayda Kafai
- The Future is Disabled: Prophecies, Love Notes and Mourning Songs by Leah Larshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
- Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice by Leah Larshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
- Experiments in Imagining Otherwise by Lola Olufemi
- The Body Keeps Score by Bessel Van Der Kolk
- Health: Documents of Contemporary Art by Whitechapel Gallery
- The Care Manifesto: The Politics of Interdependence by The Care Collective
- Take Care of Your Self: The Art and Cultures of Care and Liberation by Sundus Abdul Hadi
- On Being Included by Sara Ahmed
- Complain! by Sara Ahmed
- Be Like Teflon by Jasleen Kaur
- Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good by Adrienne Marie Brown

Objects

- Medicine Pack
- Sensory Toys
- Plasters
- Moisturiser
- Vaseline
- Allergen Free Soap
- Bob (The Bear)
- Soft Blanket
- Fluffy Socks
- Ribena (Blackcurrant)
- Lindt Sea Salt Dark Chocolate
- Lumi Sunset/Sunrise SAD lamp



People / Pets

- Fred, my support worker, best friend and husband
- Claude, my cat (Most other cats give me allergies)
- Bill, our family dog (Great for licking away your tears)

METHODS

Educate Yourself

Reading helps me be aware of my own biases, my own lack of knowledge, and reminds me to continue to work towards disability justice that works for each and every one of us. When I have capacity, I read and write about this work, it forms my everyday experience.

Practice Active Listening

Active listening is REALLY listening. When someone is talking to you and you can hear them and you are visualising in your mind what you will reply to them with — this is not listening. That is to say, it is listening, but it is listening to reply. So, you are not actually hearing the person, because you can also hear your own opinions, presumptions, suggestions, experience. It's not your fault. Active listening takes a lot of hard work, training and skill, and is not always possible. The brain automatically tries to draw from memory, details of what another person is describing, so naturally one relates to someone else's experience through their own lens. This is not helpful to someone in need of care as we are unable to set aside our pre-conceived judgements about the person or their situation.

Listen, really listen, by moving your own thoughts to one side to make space to hear another person and their experiences, ask them open questions to find out more, pay attention, look at them, and allow moments of silence to be exactly that — silence. This allows them room for thinking. By repeating back to them what you have understood, you can demonstrate how well you have understood something, or question whether you have misunderstood. Providing a non-judgemental ear allows us to really open up.

Comfort or Advice?

A really great friend and disabled comrade of mine, Charlie Fitz, once told me about something her and her husband practice. Charlie's husband also cares for her, so we have similar experiences. When you are feeling overwhelmed and trying to communicate needs 'Comfort or Advice' is a great method to help with support. If you or someone you know is sharing a problem they are dealing with, respond with "Would you like comfort or advice?" Comfort is a hug, an acknowledgement of your pain, listening openly and actively, or validation, advice could be practical support, a referral, a number to call, a solution, or steps to get help. Sometimes we don't always need advice and just want to be listened to, offering unsolicited advice can be frustrating and sometimes triggering for someone seeking support. This tool from my friend Charlie has helped Fred and I have better communication, but it's also helped in work situations, with studio assistants and personal care assistants too.

Self-care isn't a bath with candles

To suggest that self-care is a bath with candles suggests it is something you do with your spare time, to indulge yourself, a luxury, selfish, laziness, idleness, and often unproductive. Self-care is the ability to say no and the ability to have your access needs met. It is self-preservation. It is a necessity. Self-care is having enough time to take rest breaks, to take medication, to apply ointments, take toilet breaks, eat healthily, drink enough water, anything you do that allows you to function in the healthiest way for you. To suggest that self-care is self-indulgence is an extremely capitalist point of view, that focuses on productivity. For the capitalist readers, productivity is enhanced when we are at our best. Genuine self-care promotes practices that positively influence our well-being. Essentially, it is the idea of the long term preservation of one's mental and physical health, whilst a bath can be among these things, remember not to feel guilty for replenishing your own resources. When money is a barrier to self-care, see your own ingredients list, and write down your own methods that replenish your resources, this could be taking a walk, a phone call, bingeing tv, an extra nap, or having your favourite snack.

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha states "A lot of times, just being able to make community online is the support people need. And the more disabled media we make, the more we can find each other" — so consider this and the texts before it, my contribution to disabled media, I hope to connect with more disabled comrades and allies through this writing to continue to promote and support disability justice and care work within and beyond our communities.

This text is dedicated to all my Comrades from DIS, to Charlie and Oscar for their constant support, to Lucy Lopez and Hannah Wallis, Jade Foster, to Tziporah Feiga Johnston, Larissa Shaw, to my studio support worker Kavitha Balasingham, to art workers and change makers including Colette Griffin, Becky Beinart, Stu Burre and Vicky Sharples and finally my biggest supporter Fred Hubble.

Individuals within Collective action

Disability is as complex, sticky and individual as a Talebi. No two jalebis are the same. We all have our own individual needs despite similarities in conditions and experiences. Sara Ahmed puts it well:

**SOLIDARITY
DOES NOT
ASSUME THAT
OUR STRUGGLES
OR OUR PAIN IS
THE SAME.**

Sara Ahmed



Here is a blank ingredients and methods list for you to promote your own wellbeing:

INGREDIENTS

Books

Objects

People / Pets

METHODS

Queering as care

Dominic Bilton

Queering as care

This research arises from a project I initiated at the Whitworth called *Queering the Whitworth*. The project looks at re-narrating the University of Manchester's art gallery's collection through a queer lens to address historic and contemporary omissions of LGBTQIA+ narratives from its collection. By queering the collection, we began to identify the potential of linking queer theory and LGBTQIA+ activism to develop a form of care and kinship through queer representation.

As a queer practitioner who began working at the Whitworth in 2015, I noticed the lack of LGBTQIA+ representation within the gallery. As part of my own queer practice, I decided to centre participatory museum practice at the centre of *Queering the Whitworth* as a form of queer kinship, care and representation. Krasny, Lingg and Fritsch write in their essay *Radicalizing Care*¹ that curating as caring works against the challenges you face, but it also works towards hope, joy and the ability to create community across social struggles. It was through the queering of the Whitworth that we started to create and curate care through community.

When I refer to 'queering' as a verb I use it within a museum context to represent a process that enables the user to challenge the dominant, heteronormative policies, practices and positions of the museum. I use it as a form of queer care, queering as curating care. Queering as an alternative form of practice uses queer theory as a method to theoretically trouble the dominant understandings of the museum.

My research builds upon *Queering the Whitworth* and in close collaboration with the Whitworth as a Constituent Museum under former director Alistair Hudson it enables me to use Constituent Museum Practice to de-centre the normative institution in order to open up representation. My research examines how this form of participatory practice will enable my work to do this and will offer other cultural institutions a richer range of curatorial techniques for LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

Queering is also a practice without a fixed goal. It is an open and fluid process, beneficial and achievable within constituent museology because, as John Byrne writes, '...museums have a key role to play in this social reimagining of our futures: and that new forms of fluid, flexible, and collaborative institutionalization are necessary...'² Constituencies are fluid and mutable. They grow, change, adapt and reform according to circumstances and need. As such, constituencies are always in the process of both becoming and un-becoming: constituencies result from a process of social production whose mediums and vehicles are, of necessity, collaborative.

Centred around the use of language, and building on the success of *Queering the Whitworth*, the exhibition *(Un)Defining Queer* has interrogated LGBTQIA+ histories and narratives within the Whitworth's practice and collections, and has been a process in the gallery's overall decolonizing work. As part of this work we have been seeking to redress historic omissions, resulting in a 'Queer Glossary' that is relevant for multiple voices.

Spanning thousands of years, the art collection at the Whitworth contains a selection of works where artists have used their creativity to acknowledge their sexual difference or to question

gender identities. Following an initial period of research, the gallery now has a collection of over 800 artworks that have been given a queer reading. As part of the Whitworth's ongoing decolonizing process, the gallery has been interrogating its collection still further through a queer lens. By doing so, we have spent time developing an 'archive' of artworks that have warranted an LGBTQIA+ connection. We also produced the participatory-led exhibition *(Un)Defining Queer*, which opened on 26 January 2023.

The queer connection given to artworks often relates to the artists, the artwork's subject matter, or the history connected to the artwork itself. This process has helped the gallery to think through what it means to decolonize the institution by recognizing the destructive influence that white, heterosexual, cis-gender, Christian Western thought has had on minority communities. The gallery is fully aware that labelling historic artists with contemporary notions of gender or sexuality is problematic because these concepts are nuanced, complex and individual. However, without labelling artists or artworks, how do we make the LGBTQIA+ community identifiable within our collection or archive?



(Un)Defining Queer, 2023, exhibition installation view at Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester. Image courtesy the Whitworth. Photography by Michael Pollard

*

Why has this project been important to the LGBTQIA+ community?

This project is important to our LGBTQIA+ community because it is about giving representation and visibility to often marginalised people. Manchester has a long queer history. It was the first city in the country to have a 'gay village', a collection of bars and shops specifically for the

LGBTQIA+ community. The village came out of a recognition by the city council that the queer community needed safe spaces to gather. This recognition of safe space led the city council to provide money for the regeneration of the Canal Street area through the city centre regeneration fund. Since the 1980s, the city council has been transformative in supporting and electing gay and lesbian officers to city office, as well as in facilitating LGBTQIA+ committees in the council. Manchester has also had the first out Lord Mayor and it currently has an LGBTQIA+ advisor to the regional Mayor of Greater Manchester, advising on social and cultural policies relevant to the region. This history supports the fact that Manchester has a large and developing LGBTQIA+ population - a community of people that has been drawn to the city, in part through Manchester's artistic and cultural offering. As a large cultural institution within the city, the Whitworth has a role to play in supporting the cultural and diverse needs of both Manchester's residents and the people that are drawn to the city. As such, it is important to our communities that their representation within the Whitworth, and within the collection, is something that can be seen and acknowledged.

By developing a glossary of queer language, we have gained more interest and support from our local communities as we embed their heritage within the Whitworth's programmes. I believe that this project will be of great interest to the LGBTQIA+ community because they have the opportunity to influence how they are represented within the gallery for future generations. This representation is spread across our historic, modern and contemporary art collections. The museum has often excluded members of the LGBTQIA+ community because of the heteronormative positionality within which the institution finds itself. As such, we feel that the representation of marginalised communities within the gallery is something about which our communities care deeply. This is evident from our support from our community partners, such as the LGBT Foundation, George House Trust and the The Proud Trust. Our partners and the wider community know that the heritage of collections needed to be re-narrated so that their representation could be acknowledged. Our often-excluded history can now be told and the heritage of the works queered for future generations.

*

Queering as a continuous process

Queering the Whitworth is already influencing queer museum practice within the United Kingdom. Leading museum practitioners from institutions such as Tate, Queer Britain and Lancaster Arts are looking to the Whitworth for guidance. Leading academics in the field, such as Margaret Middleton, Richard Sandell and Jon Sleight, have worked with the gallery on various queer projects, such as film screenings, workshops and tool kits exploring our unique and always developing queer practice. The impact that the exhibition has had on LGBTQIA+ visitors has been astonishing, with record numbers of people attending the Private View. Every queer tour has been fully booked with a waiting list of attendees. Programming around the exhibition has also seen record engagement figures compared to other Whitworth exhibitions. In part, the work at the Whitworth has put representation and visibility within an important collection of historic artworks for the LGBTQIA+ community. This has happened with care and attention where we as a gallery have taken our lead from the queer community itself. We have listened and slowed down our practice to nurture a safe and supporting environment.

We have also built a glossary of queer language that has been developed with the LGBTQIA+ community. This is a resource that other cultural institutions will be able to utilise – for example, Manchester Art Gallery is currently interested in our model of working. The 'Queer Glossary' will be available to download from the Whitworth's website and will have its own dedicated webpage.

*

The Problematics of Queering a Gallery's Collection Management System.

Queering the Whitworth is a project that researches the Whitworth's art collection from a queer perspective in order to attribute LGBTQIA+ narratives to artists, the artworks or their subject matter. However, users of the Whitworth's electronic collection management system, EMu, are currently unable to assign this research to any artworks because of the limitations placed on the system by previous gallery employees. These employees had taken the decision to not expand the search term fields to include non-normative terms. This decision could have been taken in order to make searching the collection as simple and efficient as possible. However, this has led to EMu having a uniformed way of viewing the collection, one which omits those who do not fit within the assumed and normal search terms. The omission of people who do not fit into this normative positionality are thus 'othered' by default because users interacting with the system learn that heterosexuality is normative by default.

In order for the gallery staff to challenge heteronormativity's positionality within search systems, it is important to first acknowledge the need to be able to attribute fixed vocabulary to artworks in order to challenge and give visibility to the LGBTQIA+ community within the gallery's collection. Indeed, Drabinski, when referring to attributing fixed terms within the scholarship of library studies, acknowledges that the normalised and stabilised language of controlled library vocabs are in fact required for the production of identities³. However, attributing fixed and stabilised identities runs the risk of limiting our understanding of sexually marginalised communities to within the field of lesbian and gay studies - an area of academia which is concerned with the study of gender and sexual identities.

In his essay *Architectures of Use*, Byrne states that 'the ultimate aim is to conceive of the museum space as a site of constituent practice that is capable of accommodating relational discourses between process, discourse, object, and archive as a living producer of histories and futures'⁴. It is here within queer care that we must facilitate a continuous open dialogue that listens carefully and slowly to the ongoing discourse around LGBTQIA+ language, from the LGBTQIA+ community itself. Queering with care means to change language within society when discourse changes from within it. Collections management systems must adapt and become the living producers of histories and futures as and when needed.

While gay and lesbian studies can afford collections the ability to fix descriptive labels onto artworks, which can then make them searchable and give them place within the collection system, this can also prove problematic because it can limit and define gender and sexuality, thus normalising those categories within the system, making them fit into an already established definition of binary terms. This definition of terms could also become particularly problematic and limiting for those people whose sexualities are fluid or non-conforming, and who sit outside of any defined binary classification system. Defining terms can also limit the

possibilities of what the LGBTQIA+ community can become because, like queer, it is constantly in flux. Since the category is defined mostly by being outside the norm, it is naturally going to be subject to a high degree of change, upheaval and redefinition. As previously mentioned, however, in order to make visible the LGBTQIA+ communities within collections' online searches, practitioners need to affix defined terms to perceived notions of gender and sexuality in order to produce identities. However, incorporating queer theory can help us to move beyond identity labels such as lesbian and gay and enable a critique of the binary. It is here then, by incorporating queer theory into our thinking that queer can enable us to think about the open mesh of possibilities that queer can encompass, allowing us to think more freely about how people self-identify.

Queer theory then has the ability to enable the gallery to expand on the limitations of its online collection management system by engaging with its users 'to shift its approach from one of fixing, toward an effort of engaging its users in a critical reading of the catalogue itself', to quote Drabinski in *Queering the Catalog*⁵. Engaging users in the practice of critical engagement while they use the gallery's collection system highlights the problems to the users of attributing fixed terms to artworks and invites resistance to the information provided. It is here within this critical discourse that queer theory can enable the gallery to move beyond its fixed classification systems and enable a queering of the LGBTQIA+ collections. Queer theory can also facilitate a change in responsibility for gallery staff, one which can enable them to engage in the shifting positionality of its LGBTQIA+ constituents.

In Bowker and Star's *Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences* (2000), their practice enabled the creation of a new space to think critically about the work of classification and categorisation, and it is through this discursive practice that an understanding of the museum's collection emerged. Bowker and Star's practice is an example of how the Whitworth can engage with its constituents in order to develop LGBTQIA+ search terms for its collection management system, by critically engaging users in dialogue to continually develop queer practice. However, while queer challenges the idea of classification systems, it is apparent that the work of defining search terms can never have an end, as the constant flux of queer and of the LGBTQIA+ community will require the Whitworth continually to engage in critical thought and conversations with constituents, in order to queer the gallery.

By initially examining *Queering the Whitworth* in this paper, it enabled me to address the issues that emerge from affixing classifications to the LGBTQIA+ community, which sees itself outside of a binary classification system. While Drabinski states that attributing fixed terms to gender and sexuality normalises and stabilises language in order to facilitate the formation of identity, this practice still raises many issues. Examining how the incorporation of queer theory into museum practice, specifically around the use of the collection management system, enabled me to explore how opening up a critical dialogue with users can enable them to think critically about the gallery's interpretation. Finally, I gave some examples of engagement practices with the LGBTQIA+ community that the Whitworth can facilitate in order to enable a continuous open form of critical user-ship, either within the gallery or online.

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- ⁵ Drabinski, p. 97.

Dominic Bilton (*He/They*) is a Project Producer at the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester where he currently leads on the project *Queering the Whitworth*. Dominic also initiated and co-curated the participatory exhibition *(Un)Defining Queer at the Whitworth*, which opened on 26 January 2023 in partnership with the LGBT Foundation.

Lungiswa Gqunta's 'Sleeping Pools' and the quest for healing and repair in the wake of colonial violence

Lungiswa Gqunta's 'Sleeping Pools' and the quest for healing and repair in the wake of colonial violence.

The following article was produced following a series of conversations with the artist about her work produced for the Biennial and on the influences on and approaches to her artistic practice.

Two vast pools of green liquid held within moulded bed-frame containers, placed on the floor of a darkened room and aptly titled 'Sleeping Pools', constitute Lungiswa Gqunta's installation at the Cotton Exchange building. At first glance, they appear innocuous, particularly given the aromatic scent of the liquid. Upon further inspection however, the pools allude to water bodies that hold the traumatic histories of colonial violence. At the same time, the water's green colour highlights its healing capacity, as Gqunta poses the question, 'how does one bring healing to the water?' This query becomes especially pertinent when considering that, in the 18th and 19th centuries, the waters of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, aided by wind, transported countless vessels laden with enslaved individuals, dehumanised and commodified, to colonised outposts of the British Empire. By referencing this harrowing history of forced migration – which connects with curator Khanyisile Mbongwa's concept of *uMoya* – Gqunta considers the nexus between the human body, spirit, and the earth's elemental forces. These forces reveal the often subtle yet ever-present violence that has shaped the landscapes and terrains scarred by colonial horror.

In 'Sleeping Pools', Gqunta draws our attention to the often subtly insidious ways in which the afterlives of colonialism show themselves. Although state-sanctioned slavery and segregation have been eradicated in most of the contemporary world, their enduring effects, entangled with neo-colonial power structures, persistently construct, and reconstruct them. Liverpool's imperial past and the industries founded on human enslavement, resource extraction and the pillaging of cultural and material wealth in the territories colonised by the British, propelled it to significant wealth in the 19th century. The catastrophe of this violent past and the quest for repair and healing in its wake is a core thematic concern of the 2023 Liverpool Biennial, *uMoya: The Sacred Return of Lost Things*. Recognizing Liverpool's own historical ties to the transatlantic slave trade and colonial enterprises, the Biennial embraced its role as a platform to foster dialogue and restoration. Curators worked collaboratively with artists from diverse backgrounds, particularly those from formerly colonised nations, ensuring that their narratives, histories and perspectives were foregrounded. Artistic installations were strategically placed in sites resonant with Liverpool's colonial past, juxtaposing historical contexts with contemporary artistic reflections, thereby creating a space for visitors to confront and engage with the complex web of the British colonial past.

The haunting afterlives of colonialism are something with which we are familiar in South Africa, as they continue to reverberate throughout the socio-political fabric of the country. New Brighton, Gqunta's hometown, is situated in Gqeberha, previously named Port Elizabeth, in South Africa's Eastern Cape province. Port Elizabeth began as a British settlement in 1820 and was named after the deceased wife of acting Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Rufane Donkin. Gqunta's art practice is deeply rooted in her experiences growing up in New Brighton, a place recognised for its invaluable contributions to the South African art and culture scene, having fostered luminaries such as modernist painter George Pemba and actor John Kani. Gqunta's early years were spent in her grandfather's house, which doubled as a shebeen – a South

African localism for a bar or tavern typically found in 'townships' created by the apartheid regime. The shebeen as a community-organised social space has a long and complex history in the South African context, which can be traced to restrictions on the sale of alcohol to black people during apartheid, and thus declared 'illegal', but nevertheless commonplace in many black neighbourhoods. As Gqunta recalls:

I kind of grew up with the home being a very public space. I guess it became, you know, a private space at very short intervals when no one was there, like during rest it was, you know, then it was just a family. But soon after, I guess my home for those seven years was like home to everybody else.

She further adds:

And so I guess it allowed me to witness the community and its relationship to family. I had different women, who worked in and around the house, take me to school and I was raised by many women. Which I think influenced a lot of my work later.

Notions of public and private space, collective organisation of space and the privatisation of public space are recurrent concerns in Gqunta's practice, and in addition to her background, this is further informed by her move to Cape Town to study at the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Fine Art. The move from the Eastern to Western Cape provinces is exemplified by Gqunta's first impression of suburban Cape Town as a 'rude awakening' with its high walls and 'ticking of electrical fences'. She recalls what it was like to live in Cape Town as a new resident:

I'm, like, feeling kind of out of place. Like, I shouldn't be here. It was strange. Between the frustration of every single year having to find a place because everything is unaffordable and everyone needs space.

During her first year in Cape Town and struggling to find a home in the city close to the university's campus, Gqunta lived with her mother's friend in KwaLanga, a historically black suburb, a 30-minute drive away from central Cape Town where the Michaelis School of Fine Art is located. Because of the nature of the city's segregated spatial planning according to race and class, a 30-minute drive into a different part of the city can be experienced as a portal into an extraordinarily different world. Studying at UCT and residing in KwaLanga meant traversing Cape Town's racialised spatial borders to move between home and the university campus. This process required waking up at early hours of the morning, which allowed her to witness patterns of localised migration to which she otherwise might not have had access. Gqunta recalls this time as difficult and frustrating:

I couldn't find a place to stay, so I lived with my mom's friend and she worked as a cleaner in Parliament, so we would be on the train at like 5:00 AM to arrive in town at 6:00 AM. And I'm arriving on campus at the same time as the workers on campus and at the same time there is not a student in SIGHT and it's early. It was really quite a special time, but also a weird orientation that changed my orientation to the campus. And you know, trains getting stuck and things like that. And how

exhausting the daily commute is and how separated this place is and how it insists on that separation. And I guess between struggling to navigate that while in Cape Town and going back home, having to do a mental transition in my head also was just quite difficult and angering.

These experiences profoundly influenced Gqunta's art practice, which she characterises as a 'refusal of type'. During the nationwide #FeesMustFall protests of 2016, she became intrigued by the possibility of bringing the hazardous materials used by police to quell dissent into a new context to dissect them and explore their potential for transformation. Gqunta is drawn to these materials as they shed light on the everyday tensions and challenges faced by black people in settler colonial settings like Cape Town. Reflecting on this, she comments:

I was like trying to, you know, form an understanding and be like, OK, this is the thing that is used to ignite fear by the police. I'm like, OK, let's get this material inside and figure out what it's about, how it moves, how it feels, how dangerous it is.



Lungiswa Gqunta, Sleeping Pools – Brewing, 2023. Liverpool Biennial 2023 at Cotton Exchange. Courtesy of Liverpool Biennial. Photography by Mark McNulty.

Revisiting Gqunta's installation at the Liverpool Biennial, an interesting revelation emerges during conversation with the artist. The 'Sleeping Pools' were originally envisioned to be filled with petrol. She describes her initial concept:

The liquid in there was supposed to be this large, very dangerous, very intense smelling, headache-inducing flammable thing that was supposed to make it feel like an incredibly dangerous environment to be in.

The original concept for this installation reflects Gqunta's deliberate intention for her work to evoke discomfort and unease. This intentionality stems from her acute awareness of the privileged spaces her work often occupies, juxtaposed against the relentless adversities faced by working-class black South Africans, who continue to form a significant segment of the informal and physical labour force in the contemporary nation, and who form part of the continued impetus for making the work. In often having to alter the nature and conceptual underpinning of the work because of concerns around the dangers of its materiality, she expresses:

I keep dealing with this everywhere I go and it's as frustrating every damn time, you know. So then I'm left with the question of do I share the work or do I not? You know, do I make compromises in order to share the work and then I always insist on text so that people know that what the intention is.

Gqunta's practice, as evident in the installation 'Sleeping Pools', extends beyond mere representation. It delves deeply into uncomfortable truths, revealing the enduring legacies of colonial trauma and challenging audiences to confront their own complicity. The tension between Gqunta's original vision for the installation and the adjustments she has had to make act as a metaphor for the broader tensions inherent in addressing colonialism's painful history. Drawing from her personal experiences and historical understanding, she offers a poignant critique of colonial afterlives that continue to haunt and terrorize the present. While some aspects of our collective past are too volatile to be handled without caution, Gqunta's insistence on textual context ensures that her intent remains undiluted. Her work thus prompts a pivotal question: how can we, as a global community, navigate the delicate balance between acknowledging traumatic histories and pushing forward towards a future of healing, repair and reparation? The answer, while complex, finds a starting point in engaging with works like Gqunta's that demand urgent introspection and action.

Greer Valley (PhD) (*she/her*) is a lecturer in the department of Curatorial, Public, and Visual Cultures at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa, and an independent curator and writer.

As an independent curator, Greer has curated several notable exhibitions, including "Unsettled" at the Dak'art Biennale in Dakar, Senegal in 2022. Additionally, Greer serves as the vice president of the KwaZulu Natal Society of the Arts and as chairperson of the Africa South Arts Initiative (ASAI). Her research investigates curatorial practices that represent the afterlives of African colonial histories, both within and outside museum institutions.

Valley was a member of a cohort of curators from Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, convened by the British Council for their Biennial Connects programme which attended Liverpool Biennial 2023.

Colophon

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