



## 1 November 2021

### **New Crafts Council exhibition *We Gather* features five female makers of Black and Asian heritage whose work shares a commitment to craft and its cultural value, 17 November 2021 – 5 February 2022**

*We Gather* opens at the Crafts Council Gallery on 17 November and features five female artists of Black and Asian heritage. Whilst their chosen materials and disciplines vary, their work shares a commitment to craft and its cultural value. The makers are Shaheen Ahmed, Lorna Hamilton-Brown, Omeima Mudawi-Rowlings, Francisca Onumah and Onome Otite.

The title *We Gather* refers to the gathering of ideas, skills and emotions embedded within these five craft practices, and the gathering of perspectives that have been underrepresented in the industry. It is also a symbol of gratitude towards the communities who gathered their courage, bodies, and voices in support of justice for Black lives, which instigated deeper conversations between the UK's Black makers and the Crafts Council.

*"This exhibition has offered us a unique opportunity to curate in honour of women who share similar experiences and frames of reference to our own, but also within a mainstream cultural organisation that we haven't traditionally seen ourselves reflected in. We are excited to bring together their collection of works, which offer audiences fresh visibility to crafts that has emotional depth, space and social resonance."* Curators of *We Gather*, Rosie Ross & Griffi.

The *We Gather* exhibition came out of *Craft Expertise*, the AHRC-funded UKRI/RCUK Innovation Fellowship led by Dr Karen Patel of Birmingham City University, in collaboration with Crafts Council. The research aimed to raise awareness of inequalities in the contemporary craft economy in the UK and highlight the various challenges faced by women of colour in the sector.

Commissioned by Dr Karen Patel as part of her research, each artist in the exhibition will present new and existing work.

Birmingham-based artist **Shaheen Ahmed** uses maps to reflect narratives of statelessness and disparagement. Her work is layered with a multitude of craft processes and motifs including calligraphy and Islamic geometry. She wore a blindfold while making them as a way to connect with the emotions and experiences of oppressed societies.

East Sussex-based artist **Lorna Hamilton-Brown**, known for her subversive textile works that challenge preconceptions of knitting and crochet, has created a knitted magazine cover - 'We Mek Magazine' - full of symbolism with a central figure

inspired by political activist Angela Davis and with her watch set to 9.25, the time that George Floyd lost his life to police brutality.

British-Sudanese textile artist **Omeima Mudawi-Rowlings** will present a new light installation. Incorporating dying, screen-printing and Devoré techniques, the work explores themes of identity, communication, heritage, and womanhood. The artist is influenced by her Sudanese heritage which is reflected in her use of Arabic geometry, colour, and form.

Ghanaian-born silversmith **Francisca Onumah** has created three emotive and figurative vessels in her new work 'In our sKin' (2021) that reflect family, relationships and historical images of Ghanaian people in everyday life. Their abstracted patterns are deconstructed from traditional Ghanaian motifs, fabrics, and crafted objects. Marks and textures are repeatedly hammered into sheet metal to mirror and resemble the patterns found in textiles and fabrics.

London-based artist **Onome Otite** has created a new textile work inspired by the support network between women, the group of figures in her piece are based on close friends of hers, that have inspired her. She has also intentionally chosen five figures to mirror the relevance of the five women taking part in the *We Gather* exhibition. She has hand-stitched loose-folded fabrics across her hand-drawn figures, which have been donated by each of her subjects.

At the centre of the exhibition is a gathering space, where material from the commissioning artists will be displayed alongside work by other pioneering female makers whose work celebrates craft within everyday contexts. Among these will be works by artists Jasleen Kaur and Magdalene Odundo DBE from the Crafts Council Collection. *We Gather* is a site for learning and reflection, with books, reports and images encouraging visitors to engage in discussion around visibility, cultural traditions, and the value of women's contribution to craft within everyday contexts.

The exhibition also features a selection of objects and portraits of female artisans from The Black Artisans, a photographic project by Jo Sealy that celebrates Black artisans in traditional sectors of UK heritage crafts and gives visibility to making practices derived from African and Caribbean cultural heritage, including steel pan making and calabash art.

The exhibition graphic design is by Rose Nordin, co-founder of OOMK (One of My Kind).

We Gather  
Crafts Council Gallery  
44a Pentonville Road  
London  
N1 9BY

Wednesdays to Saturdays  
11.00 – 17.00

17 November – 5 February 2022 (closed from 19 December – 4 January 2022 for Christmas break).

**Press preview 9am on 17 November.** RSVP to [jenny@jhoughtonpr.co.uk](mailto:jenny@jhoughtonpr.co.uk)

- Ends -

#wegatherexhibition

For more press information, including images, contact Jenny Houghton PR, [jenny@jhoughtonpr.co.uk](mailto:jenny@jhoughtonpr.co.uk)

For more information on the Crafts Council visit [www.craftscouncil.org.uk](http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk) and follow @craftscouncil on Instagram and @CraftsCouncilUK on Twitter and Facebook.

## **About the artists**

### **Shaheen Ahmed**

Shaheen Ahmed is a Birmingham-based artist whose practice is driven by empathy, reworking maps to share narratives of statelessness, crippling infrastructure, and disparagement. Shaheen creates Kirigami map art along with brush, ink, and thread work. This unique style evolved whilst studying book binding and gestural mark making in Italy, as part of a residency with the National Trust.

Shaheen's recent collaboration at the Lapworth Museum of Geology enabled her to experiment with scientific research relating to geometry formulations and geological maps around plate tectonics (movement of a place). Shaheen uses a multitude of techniques and approaches that are layered within her work, from calligraphy to digital and Islamic geometry.

*"I am humbled to be invited by Crafts Council to exhibit alongside a group of like-minded women. Craft has always been a part of my heritage and culture which I embrace as a maker with an acute awareness of social justice that I try to reflect within my work. We Gather consolidates my established artistic practice with a fresh curatorial approach that I have immense pleasure to be included in."*

<https://www.shaheenahmed.com/>

Instagram: @shaheenkahmed

Twitter: @shaheenkahmed

### **Lorna Hamilton-Brown**

Lorna Hamilton-Brown is a UK-based artist who loves to subvert people's associations and preconceptions of knitting and crochet to engage audiences with challenging issues. Her artwork is about more than just the idea. It is imbued with symbolism – sometimes autobiographical, but always issue-based.

She wrote the seminal dissertation, 'Myth: Black People Don't Knit - the importance of art and oral histories for documenting the experiences of black knitters,' which questions the lack of visibility of black crafters and documents their hidden histories, as part of her Masters' Degree in Knitted Textiles from the Royal College of Art.

*"I'm so honoured to be a part of 'We Gather.' As someone who has been very vocal about the Crafts Council's failure to tackle the lack of representation and racism in crafting, this show feels like a measurable milestone in their commitment to do better. I'd like to thank Dr Karen Patel for her outstanding research and for commissioning me and the other artists."*

[www.lornahamiltonbrown.com/](http://www.lornahamiltonbrown.com/)

Instagram: @lhamiltonbrown

Twitter: @lhamiltonbrown

### **Omeima Mudawi-Rowlings**

Omeima is a British-Sudanese combined textile artist, crafts maker and independent curator who has exhibited both nationally and internationally and received the runner-up prize for the Arab British Centre Award for Culture (individual award) 2019. The Award for Culture celebrates organisations and individuals whose work has significantly contributed to the British public's understanding of the Arab world over the last two years.

Omeima is a Clore Cultural Leadership Fellow 2019/20, a creative consultant, accessibility consultant and trainer and a leader in creating Deaf and hearing integrated activities that promotes both equity and professional development opportunities.

*"I'm honoured to take part of this incredible experience. For me, it is so important to have increased the diversity of craft makers who are so often unheard and unseen; it is a great moment to have our work and voice recognised, and in such a wonderful setting."*

<https://www.omeima-arts.com/>

Instagram: @omeima.arts

Twitter: @Omeimaarts

### **Francisca Onumah**

Ghanaian-born and Sheffield-based silversmith, Francisca Onumah creates ambiguous vessels and jewellery that reflect vulnerabilities and strengths through their anthropomorphic forms. The forms of her vessels reflect family, relationships and historical images of Ghanaian people in everyday life. The grouping of these anthropomorphic vessels depicts the importance of community and support from others. Abstracted patterns are deconstructed from traditional Ghanaian motifs, fabrics and crafted objects and translated into Francisca's signature texture covered surfaces. Francisca is one of five artists selected for Jerwood Art Fund Makers Open 2021:

*"Being involved in We Gather has opened up important conversations of the importance of representation in the craft sector. Craft, to me speaks of community, coming together and sharing stories and experiences through making. Through the conversations we have had as a group, I've not only been able to hear the concerns that I have reflected in the experiences of others, but also been exposed to diverse points of view."*

[www.franciscaonumah.co.uk/](http://www.franciscaonumah.co.uk/)  
Instagram: @franonumah

### **Onome Otite**

Onome Otite is a London-based artist. She uses textiles and mixed materials to create three-dimensional figurative collages. Onome has built her profile exhibiting and selling in specialised art and craft markets and has reached international audiences through art residencies and exhibitions. Mentoring from the British Fashion Council led to a successful collaboration with Stella Jean for Milan Fashion Week SS19. In 2018, Onome took part in the British Council's Arts Exchange Programme in Ghana and led an art textile workshop guiding participants to create their own collage using mixed materials. Since then, she has brought this expertise to a series of similar events in the UK. This includes curating a workshop programme for Black Minds Matter UK to promote wellbeing and craft.

*"I'm so pleased to be showcasing amongst an outstanding group of female artists of colour. My intention is to celebrate the female black expression in the arts, as we too have something to say and contribute. It's important to get our point across, share our stories and give our perspective – long may it continue!"*

[www.onomeotite.com](http://www.onomeotite.com)  
Instagram: @onomeotite

### **About Rosie Ross and Griffi**

Rosie is an award-winning Creative Producer and curator she has led on a range of complex multi-artform projects and events. Bringing together multiple partners, artists, and stakeholders to achieve successful and accessible creative outcomes across public spaces. She works on freelance projects as well as being Senior Creative Producer, at Studio 3 Arts in Barking.

Griffi is a practising artist, whose work integrates craft-oriented technique and intricacy. Working as a curator for others, alongside organising exhibitions, residencies, and sharing's. Griffi works as a Creative Producer facilitating a range of engagement led events and workshops for Create London at The White House in Dagenham.

Instagram: @griffi2468 and @rosierossprojects

### **About Karen Patel**

Dr Karen Patel is a Research Fellow at Birmingham City University. She leads the Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project, Craft Expertise. Karen has been working with Crafts Council since 2018 on projects looking at inequalities and diversity in craft. She is author of *The Politics of Expertise in Cultural Labour: Arts, Work and Inequalities* and co-editor of *Craft Entrepreneurship*, both published by Rowman & Littlefield.

*"We Gather emerged out of the Craft Expertise research project, in which I have been working with the Crafts Council to try and address the lack of diversity in UK professional craft. I'm really thrilled that We Gather has emerged out of this*

*project, and I'm looking forward to celebrating the work and stories of these five wonderful artists." Dr Karen Patel, a Research Fellow based at Birmingham City University.*

[craftexpertise.com](http://craftexpertise.com)

Instagram: @craftexpertiseresearch

Twitter: @KarenPatel

## **About the Crafts Council**

The Crafts Council is the national charity for craft. We believe craft skills and knowledge enrich and uplift us as individuals and can change our world for the better. Through our activities we inspire making, empower learning and nurture craft businesses. We do this by championing craft and its positive impact on society, increasing levels of craft education and participation, growing the market for craft, and by building a sustainable and inclusive craft sector.

*"These artists have used sewing, knitting, sculpting, and welding as listening and storytelling devices to foreground the perspectives of bodies, voices, and narratives that are not always heard. I am delighted that the Crafts Council has invested in this urgent exhibition, and I am beyond grateful to the artists for their critical and multivalent work. Collectively, their work represents the myriad of cultural identities shaping our understanding of craft in this country."* Sumitra Upham, head of public programmes, Crafts Council

[www.craftscouncil.org.uk](http://www.craftscouncil.org.uk)

Instagram: @craftscouncil

Facebook and Twitter: @CraftsCouncilUK