



Creative
Lancashire

Conversations in Creativity

Explorations in inspiration

Contagious Acts Edition



BRITISH TEXTILE BIENNIAL

02 OCTOBER
— 02 NOVEMBER
2025



PIONEERS OF THE MATERIAL WORLD — from sea snails to Star Wars

In October 2025, the British Textile Biennial explores invention and innovation, past, present and future, through indigenous knowledge to space-age technology from the earliest form of shelter, the tent, to space suits, and from plant-based dyes to the first polymers.

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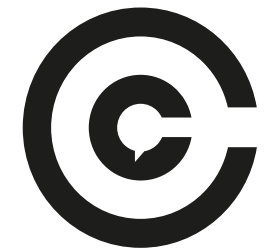


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Conversations in Creativity is a publication, series of events and interventions where practitioners from around the world and across disciplines explore how creative inspiration informs process.

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Cover Image

Saba Bibi by Jamie Holman



This latest edition of Conversations in Creativity comes at a critical time for Lancashire. There is increasing scrutiny on plans looking forward with Lancashire considering its devolution options and the opportunities it will bring.

There is also a new focus on devolution in terms of cultural strategy, investment and support for the sector. Across the wider North there is the development of new creative corridors, emerging networks of micro clusters and multi place strategic visions such as One Creative North.

This provides the ideal context for the two days of policy discussions at Convention of the North. It will be the first time that the annual convening of Mayors, Leaders, Local Authority Chief Execs and Leaders of industries, all gather in Preston, Lancashire to explore ways to unlock the region's full potential to deliver sustainable, healthy and inclusive growth.

This will be the first Convention to take place in a non-metropolitan city – a reminder that there is a richness of culture and commerce beyond the urban context! In another first, Place & Culture is a new theme for the 2025 Convention, with its own dedicated programme of curated conversations co-curated with Creative Lancashire. It will consider the unique cultural and heritage assets of the North, emphasising their importance in social inclusivity, environmental sustainability and growth in all forms, and across places.

There are several flagship projects in the County coming on stream– including Eden Project Morecambe and the reopening of The Harris in Preston – alongside the continual development of established cultural programmes and mega-cultural events such as Super Slow Way (p.42) Festival of Making (p.25) and the British Textile Biennial (p.32).

Also launching hot on the heels of 'Convention' is Contagious Acts, the largest solo exhibition by multi-disciplinary artist Jamie Holman at the Whitaker Museum in Rossendale. The exhibition forms part of Jamie's ongoing dialogue drawing on ideas related to Northern and working-class identities. Read more about the exhibition and Jamie's creative inspiration in an extended essay article by Fergal Kinney (p.7).



Breathing Colour: Margo Selby & Standfast & Barracks – Art in Manufacturing



Contagious Acts

By Fergal Kinney

Ahead of a new solo exhibition at the Whitaker Museum, the visual artist Jamie Holman speaks candidly for the first time about the life and experiences that informed the work he has been producing since 2014.

When inspiration strikes, it isn't always convenient. When visual artist Jamie Holman realised that it was time to return to visual art, he was stood observing a riot in 1970s Belfast. The hush of an everyday terraced street had suddenly been broken by flames, smoke, armored cars, exploding debris and panicked screams. "I just thought," he says today hesitantly, "I need to make something." It was, he concedes, "a strange experience."

Why? Because 1970s Belfast was happening in the northern England of the 2010s: it was a film set, and Holman was observing his Blackburn College students taking part in the filming of a fictional nail-biter set at the height of The Troubles. "The Daily Mail had celebrated Blackburn as the town that looks most like 1970s Belfast," says Holman today, "people had really made it into this virtue. I thought it was appalling!" A pause. "But here were all these kids dressed up. And the main character looked a lot like my Dad." What did it mean, that Holman's hometown in the austerity era was a dead ringer for wartime Northern Ireland half a century earlier? What did the recreation reveal about the past, never really dead, but being acted out alive and well in the contemporary present? In the decade since that lightbulb moment, the art of Jamie Holman has looked at those questions and more, exhibited internationally and celebrated by The Face and The Guardian for his work which asks ink black questions about identity and belonging during our present moment of upheaval and political instability.

Jamie Holman was born in Inverness in 1973, but raised in a terraced house in Blackburn where his mum and grandmother were both born before him. "My Dad was a Protestant soldier," says Holman, "and my mother from an Irish Catholic background. That sectarian thing didn't really exist in our family home, but it did when they met."

Holman's father, Stan, had been shot on duty in Belfast's Falls Road when he was an eighteen year old soldier, shortly before Holman's birth. When Jamie was ten, Stan died suddenly with an unexpected brain tumour. "That was as a result of the shooting," says Holman of his father's passing, "they didn't know in those days."

Holman drifted, entering a spell in foster care and leaving school without any GCSEs. At this time, Blackburn was undergoing one of Europe's largest, earliest and most vital party scenes at the turn of the 1990s. "The acid house stuff was really visible," says Holman. He kept his distance. "Some of those people were genuinely not safe to be around at the time if you liked the bands that me and my friends liked," says Holman - which was the psychedelic sounds of The Jesus and Mary Chain, Spacemen 3 and the ever present guiding light of New Order. Instead, Holman experienced it at a remove, which turned out to be more useful. "We were spectators, we'd go and watch the convoys and these gatherings of people. We used to have conversations about the punkiness of it all, all the self organisation and self realisation that was actually really apparent."

Holman is an archetypal case of a working-class boy radicalised into art by the mass pop culture of post-war Britain. "It's not uncommon in the British psyche," offers Holman, "that people who get involved in the arts from a working class perspective tend to get engaged via Top Of The Pops. I definitely learnt about art through being obsessed with music." The foundational example for Holman would be Factory Records. "Factory was gateway stuff," he points out, who he credits with "introducing Situationist language into record collections and then into working class bedrooms."

Something cohered for the teenage Holman in the early 1990s when he enrolled on an art course at Blackburn College. Whilst others were discovering the latest possible nights and blissed-out mornings, Holman at college was realising the vocational allure of the twenty-four hour art life. "The college was great," he says, "like, incredible. I sort of became activated creatively." Some of that activation was down to Brian Nicholson, who ran the Ikon video wing of Factory Records. "He was incredible and into all of this early video art, and the college was willing to do it." Soon, Blackburn College was pioneering bizarre community cable television. Holman remembers being encouraged to watch the September 1993 transmission of Derek Jarman's Blue film as it was simulcast on Channel Four and BBC Radio Three. "And here's another trope," he grins, "absolutely life changing, like a real punk rock moment for me."

It's never really been documented - and gets written off in reductive and clichéd 'left behind' narratives - but 1990s Blackburn was propelled by a thriving bohemianism and DIY nightlife. So much so that when Holman enrolled at Chelsea College Of Art and Design, the move to London was in some respects a comedown from what he had experienced on his doorstep in the North West. "I'd been spoiled," he says, "it sounds really romantic now, but I went expecting the world and I was at times disappointed." Instead, once studying at Chelsea, Holman knuckled down. The best bits were working on the Kings Road, passing teenage hero Malcolm McLaren on the street, and being part of a crew of northerners in exile in London's still just about affordable bedsit land.

"I went every day, I went on Saturdays," says Holman of his Chelsea education, "I worked really hard when I was there. I loved it, and it very quickly felt like anything was possible because all of those other YBA artists were doing it."

Today, there's a contemporary debate about working class access to arts being limited by things like imposter syndrome or low ambition, arguably easier to point to than the dismantling of the welfare state that once poured working class people into all areas of creativity in Britain. It was on graduating his M.A. degree that Holman realised exactly what economic barriers were in place compared to some of his peers.

"At the end everyone asked what was your plan," he says today, "and I didn't really know what they meant. Everyone was like, I'm going to Prague. Come to Berlin!" Holman recounts a meeting with a well-known London gallery. "They said to me that what I needed to do was get a studio in The East End," says Holman, who pointed out that he did not exactly have the resources for that.

Something unexpected happened. "Accidentally," he says, "I ended up forming a band." Tompaulin were named after the Northern Irish poet and critic Tom Paulin, and became an unexpected indie success in the early 2000s for their literate, pastoral and abrasive take on post-Belle and Sebastian indie, winning acclaim from NME and The Guardian. It shouldn't really have worked. "We were split across London and Blackburn," says Holman of the band's unconventional commercial formula, "and we had ten minutes of press, a couple of John Peel sessions, a few little tours. But all the things I was writing about, it was a shorthand way of saying what I would later say with my artwork."

Around this time, Holman began working at Blackburn College, returning to the institution as a teacher. It was a moment of coming full circle with a place that had been so formative to shaping his creative life. "I went in there as a young artist who wanted to learn how to teach," says Holman, "and the better, the more accomplished I became as a teacher, the further away I moved from being an artist. There is a definite tension for lots of people in that stuff." Holman raised a family, and taught hundreds of teenagers as the Blair boom hardened into the brutal austerity era.

It was through Blackburn College that Holman came to be on the film set of a thriller about Northern Ireland. The film production company had turned up at the college to scout for young people willing to work as extras. "They began recruiting students to be in the riot scenes," he remembers. After that day, Holman quietly set about producing visual art for the first time in decades. "I made one thing," he says, "and then I quietly made another, and then I had a body of work. It was thinking about place and class again, but with no video work. Sculptures, prints and photographic works."

From the mid 2010s onwards, Holman began working once again as an artist. Suddenly, the themes that had preoccupied Holman throughout his life - and that he had lived across the 1970s to the 2020s - were erupting into work that examined masculinity, class and the complex legacies of violence and the British state. Holman is keen for his post-2015 work to speak for itself - wherever you may encounter it - but crucially its roots are in Holman's unique journey to this point



"It felt and it still feels very live and important to consider what artists should be looking at if we're talking about class," says Holman, "often we have a very nostalgic notion of what working class means. And all of this complex, contradictory thinking is manifesting in this ongoing sort of collapse of identity. That's a lot of the things I'm interested in, and really excited by, in British culture."

What it comes back to, though, is work. "I'm prolific because I work a lot. A lot of artists will come and talk about the work in terms of it being research now," he says, "and I see it very much as, and I still do, going to the studio, keeping work hours, because that's the expectation." A pause. "And I think that it's hopefully got a depth to it, that it's got value, because it isn't a vocation or some notion of being talented or special. I make a lot of work because I go to work a lot, I go to work and make it happen. I can't really imagine it being anything else other than a job, other than work."



Fergal Kinney writes about music, culture and society for publications such as The Guardian, The Quietus, The Face, Tribune and US political magazine Jacobin.

The contagious Acts exhibition at Whitiker Museum and Galleries is open from 28th February - 1st June 2025.



Gaynor Seville



Jamie Holman

Artist Jamie Holman sat with Gaynor Seville at Whitaker Museum to discuss the ideas and inspirations that inform the work and creative decisions for the new solo exhibition.

GS: Talk to me about the show, Jamie. Tell me what we're going to see.

JH: You're going to see quite a lot of new work, some of which responds directly to the collection of The Whitaker, and some of it is more broadly developed around collections in general. Many collections in museums, particularly in Lancashire, have a context that is often post-industrial, colonial or Empire facing and very class specific in terms of who established and contributed to the collections or acquired and bequeathed the works or objects you encounter as a viewer. There's also the question of why particular pieces from certain times make it into collections, and why there is an absence of others. I'm interested in broadening that out, to understand objects, artifacts and the collection itself, and even the building as part of a larger conversation about place.

I'm interested in how the collections speak to each other across this small geography, when we talk about class and heritage it tends to be a generalised narrative. For example, in terms of industry, does it change across Lancashire, and if so how does that reflect the communities, architecture, cultures and behaviours of that place? Lancashire is a mix of coastal, rural and industrial, so how does that affect the collections? In

contrast to the permanent collection at The Grundy, Blackburn's collection is extremely cotton-centric, with gifts from mill owners who collected and bequeathed incredible items and complete collections to the town. It's an interesting context in which to create contemporary artwork.

I've been zooming out, making works that locate place itself as part of the collection, the buildings, and people as part of the collection.

GS: Do you start off with an idea, a theme, and then go and research and try to find collections to work with as part of that, or do you let the collections guide you first? Is it about exploring the collections and letting them inspire and lead you?

JH: I think themes emerge that I want to pursue and interrogate, particularly around how culture manifests in these places. Collections are a great way to confirm or make visible ideas about culture—its manifestations, its origins—that haven't been visible before.

Alongside broader themes like colonialism/Empire and class, there's also this lens through which contemporary communities are often viewed: low engagement in arts, being left behind, and so on. From the 1980s onwards, these narratives have framed places like Rossendale in a very specific way. My work contests that and positions



these places as cultural origin points. Football, for example, started in working-class spaces in Lancashire and is now a global culture.

That said, I also like to encounter things that trigger a response. Often, it's small details—in the case of the Whitaker, a line in a letter, a newspaper report—that help unlock the collection. There's a difference in responding to collections and unlocking collections. I'm interested in unlocking narratives rather than just responding or confirming collections, principally because my intention is to make contemporary art works that function independently in a contemporary context.

GS: Who do you want to reach with this work? Who is the ideal audience for you, and how does that align with a place like The Whitaker?

JH: It's plural. Initially, our own audiences—the people in these places. But at the same time, the work should be as strong as anything shown anywhere, and the works and artists we bring to our museums and galleries should be as good as everywhere else. No apologies for ambition to originate high quality works, or to bring high quality works and artists to Lancashire. It's about striking a balance: engaging our extremely literate and engaged local audiences, while also making work that can travel beyond the region.

There's often a hierarchical, derogatory notion of "local" artists and "local" audiences, but I reject it completely. Everywhere is local to someone. I want my work to resonate with the people here but also be recognized on a national and international level. I'm making work for you at the moment that I hope engages existing audiences and attracts new audiences.

GS: Arts venues and museums often have an elitist perception. Some people still feel like coming into an art gallery is intimidating, like it's for 'others' and not for them. At The Whitaker, we want to challenge that. I respect peoples desires to encounter challenge or provocation. I don't have to dumb exhibitions down just because we're not in Manchester City centre. What's your perspective on that?

JH: I completely agree. There's this prevailing data led audience segmentation that often positions people, regions, towns, even by gender and ethnicity; as disengaged, but that's based on narrow definitions of what constitutes art and culture, and what constitutes engagement. White working class men in particular are vilified in terms of arts metrics and the wider culture. A lot of my work interrogates the impact of these narratives, which feels particularly prescient at the moment.



Painted Balls photography by Clive Lawrence



Jamie Holman
Contagious Acts.
The Whitaker
28/02/25
Until
01/06/25



THE SECOND ACT



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What are we talking about when we discuss art and culture? If you consider the cultures and making traditions of sport, music, cinema, and workplace traditions of painting and poetry etc, its immediately evident that our communities have always been highly engaged in cultural activity, in fact these are the places where culture is made.

Much of my work is about contesting these narratives. Places like Rossendale aren't culturally dormant; they are important sites of cultural production. In fact I've seen really challenging, internationally significant art in Lancashire over the last few years and in comparison have found the work emerging from the Cities, or the work being brought to the cities, as a bit pedestrian, self referential and in some cases a bit parochial. This tells you a lot about the ambition and appetite for risk from our festivals, museums and galleries – but also about the appetite for challenge from our audiences.

GS: Artists are finding that we have a lot to offer in terms of the quality of our collection, and the impact that it can have on a range of practices, but also the benefits of showing in a place like the Whitaker in terms of what we can offer to support artists to make ambitious works.

JH: It's all about perception and those hierarchies again isn't it. If you are commissioned to work with the collections at The British Museum than the perception is obviously amplified – but as an artist you are as likely to encounter equally exciting or valuable collections in these industrial revolution collections in Lancashire because of the high level of spending and collecting that the industrialists engaged in – and bequeathed to local museums. When I work with collections in Lancashire, the access and appetite for risk from curators and commissioners is remarkable.

GS: Thinking a lot about your work recently and about what we do here at The Whitaker – what we're about – and our strapline: "exploring the past, meeting the present, creating the future." With our collections, we're always thinking about how to use them not just to look back nostalgically, but to ask: how do these collections help us think about where we are now, where we're going, and what we want?

I was thinking about your work, particularly the themes of resistance and challenging authority. It feels like your work isn't just about looking back or representing the past. Instead, it feels like part of an ongoing cycle of resistance that continues today and into the future. That's something I find really interesting in your work. I don't know if you want to talk more about that?

JH: I completely share that idea, and I often say my work considers "who we were, who we are, and who we might yet become." In Contagious Acts, I started developing and testing ideas about how things are made, where they're made, and what their content might be to reflect these exchanges. This was on my mind during your first studio visit with me, when I first showed you some of the ideas for the police horse paintings. That was long before we got to the big sculpture pieces that emerged later, when we confirmed what the response to the collection would be.

By the time I started painting family portraits with balaclavas, we were talking about how to run that engagement with people in Rossendale, to initiate the photography that informs the paintings. Since that work emerged there's been a real swing toward the rise of the right, riots across the country, and I'm creating work ex governance and football gatherings. When we first met I was worried it might feel nostalgic. But now it feels prescient rather than nostalgic.

I think this demonstrates how collections—and responses to them—can appear dormant, depending on the cultural or political climate. But when we're living through times of extreme change, collections and artworks can become activated differently, unexpectedly. I've been having conversations with Alex (Zawadzki) about how my work dialogues with the collection in a current context. What do these works do when placed together? How can we avoid nostalgia, fetishism, or exoticism? There's a lot of potential for that in the museum collection and in my own work, if it's not curated in the right way.

GS: That makes sense. I'm also thinking about resistance and the future. Where might future resistance come from? How will fast-changing technologies influence how we continue to rise up and resist? Are there specific works in the show that touch on this?



JH: Yes, there are some big propositions. One of the centerpiece works, *The Forlorn Hope*, is the largest thing we've ever made. It's a monumental sculpture—a huge vitrine filled with marbles, with a full-scale resin horse mounted on it, above head height. The title comes from military history, where the term “forlorn hope” described soldiers who led the first wave of an attack on a castle or town siege. Their chances of survival were slim, but if they succeeded, it was the only way a working-class soldier could become an officer. It became a highly sought-after role in terms of guaranteed social mobility. Its horrific really, but I find the term poetic—it mirrors how the future often feels, particularly at the moment, but this work is about class. So, *The Forlorn Hope* is symbolic of class resistance but also examines the dominance of governance by horseback, which goes back to the Bayeux Tapestry and is unbroken right up to the football this weekend and any mass gathering that will take place anywhere in the U.K. Additionally, the audio works with Chris Eccleston and Jane Horrocks remind us of the relentless nature of state sanctioned violence in this country, from 1800 – 2000. Two hundred years of resistance. Nostalgia often softens history, making movements like trade unionism, the suffragettes, abolition of slavery, gay rights – you name it; feel inevitable when, in reality, they required relentless effort and collective action to be removed from law. These audio pieces narrate the galleries and remind the audience that when we gather, we become powerful. This show focuses on those moments of gathering—both in workplaces and in leisure spaces, the two principal spaces that we inhabit in terms of class. It's through gathering that resistance manifests.

GS: In your show, you've got film, installation, and paintings. I wonder if you'd like to say anything about the future of artists working in traditional methods? There's a lot of talk at the moment around AI, issues of ownership, and so on. In your show, you've worked with many other artists and people who contribute to the creation of the work. For example, some of the paintings were created in China. Would you like to speak about that?

JH: It's a simple answer for me, but one that's complex to articulate. First, the way I work—through production—isn't quite collaboration because that implies equal authorship, but I don't want to undermine the contributions of the artists and makers who contribute to the work. This way of working isn't new of course, it's rooted in a classical Renaissance model of studio production and is common in monumental sculpture for instance. This model extends into contemporary art forms

like filmmaking, which is inherently collaborative and involves a multitude of skills, and the history of the ready made, collage, etc etc – I could go on. I use A.I. as a tool to communicate visual propositions, it was really useful in Pakistan where there was a language barrier. Like all of us I'm learning about the environmental implications and the ethical conversations as they emerge.

The authorship element is complex in terms of how A.I. can be used is on my mind a lot – but again it's not new. Photoshop, collage, the internet, sampling in music and 'ready mades' in art have all been the focus of similar conversations in the recent past. A.I. is emerging beyond these examples though and I'm considering it as I learn more about it.

I've used industrial processes of course, as I often do, as it's a legacy appropriate to Lancashire. But that language has extended for this show. For example, the marbles were made in China—three tons of them, in fact. Similarly, some paintings were also made there as a response to engagement, an approach that speaks of the migration of manufacturing and industrial skill sets globally, as well as to how art is made now.

Lancashire's industrial history fascinates me, particularly in terms of the often problematic historic relationships with the Southern States of America, South Asia and increasingly how much contemporary manufacturing moved to China in the 1980s.

I've interviewed people about their experiences in factories, discussing how those processes migrated. This isn't about outsourcing something I can't make here—it's about intentionally engaging with the global movement of labor and making that visible in the work.

GS: That relationship between labor, migration, and art is fascinating. How does that play into the broader themes of your work?



Chira women portrait photography, Jamie Holman, produced by Zara Saghir in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Painted footballs, thanks to Mehr Javed. 'Destriers'- animated collage of police horse, Mark Aspin.

Ceramics produced at Darwen Terracotta and Faience, Colour tapestries produced at Panaz Contract Fabrics.





JH: A lot of the work in this show explores the intersection of these themes. For instance, footballs have been made in South Asia since the 1870s, but those communities are often invisible in the cultural narrative of football's history and in the contemporary landscape. By placing these works next to portraits of white working-class families painted in China, I'm creating a complex dialogue between the objects, the collections, and the places they come from.

I want to move beyond the nostalgia that often surrounds craft and industry. Nostalgia can simplify or sanitize these histories, making them seem benign or "old-world." Instead, I see craft as part of a dynamic, ongoing dialogue that includes A.I. new technologies and the migration of goods and people. For instance, trade tariffs and cultural identities associated with 'making' are very much alive today. These tensions are present in my work.

GS: This exhibition feels like a culmination of a long journey for you. It brings together many themes, ideas, and production techniques that you've been working on for years. With the significant investment from Arts Council England, this feels like an important moment in your career. What does this show mean to you?

JH: It's two things. Firstly, it's deeply about place. When Lancashire bid for City of Culture status, it forced me to see the county and its towns differently. This region, often dismissed as "left behind" or having low engagement in culture, is actually a place where I can make work to the highest standard—work I might not be able to make anywhere else.

Secondly, this show ties together years of smaller commissions and projects. It's about unlocking collections and places and connecting them in meaningful ways. The Whitaker offers a unique space to do that. The scale of this solo show would have been unthinkable here ten years ago. It's also a shop window for high-level commissioning and curating in the Northwest.

My work has developed through various stages—smaller ACE grants, festival commissions, DYCP funding, private commissions and my relationship with my gallery The Second Act. This show represents an extended body of work, connected across geography and collections. Having the space and support to realize this work at The Whitaker is important—not just for me, but for how Lancashire is seen in the cultural landscape. It proves that ambitious, challenging contemporary art can emerge from places like this.



Gaynor Seville is Creative Director at The Whitaker Museum and Galleries in Rossendale, Lancashire, UK.



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THE SECOND ACT is a young contemporary gallery established in the North of England in 2020. Expanding to East London in 2024, the gallery offers year round exhibitions in its London space, and a programme of touring exhibitions to Northern partner venues.

We deliver a programme with an emphasis on the inclusion of artists for the North; and also those from working class backgrounds to support the growth of a diverse ecosystem of British artists.

We choose to work with artists who make contemporary art with challenging concepts, narratives and research; creating a roster of individuals who we believe, should all have the opportunity to write their own Second Act.

THE SECOND ACT is primarily located at 29 Sunbury Workshops, Swanfield St, London, E2 7LF.

Pat Flynn | Juice
The Second Act, London
Until 08.03.25

Jamie Holman | Contagious Acts
In partnership with The Whitaker, Rawtenstall
Until 01.06.25

John Tiney & Kieran Leach
The Second Act, London
27.03.25 - 12.04.25

People in Pubs
The Second Act, London
15.05.25 - 31.05.25

www.secondactgallery.com

THE SECOND ACT



Edge Effect



By Josie Warden

Edges, the transitions between one ecosystem and another, have a special role to play in ecology. They are spaces of increased productivity and biodiversity, where the characteristics of each ecosystem exist together, along with ones unique to the boundary space itself. Novel interactions take place here, energy and materials flow and microclimates can support variety. These qualities are known as 'edge effects'.

In culture and industry, edges are similarly spaces of innovation, creativity and emergence. They are the natural habitat of the artist, the designer and the activist. Each equipped with the ability to harness the special qualities of edges to shine a light on what is really going on, to establish bridges between spaces and to reimagine and prototype new ways of living.

Regenerative design is an emerging approach to sustainability, rooted in the teaching and patterns which nature has established over 3.8 billion years and through which, in the words of biomimicry expert, Janine Benyus, "life creates the conditions for life". The Regenerative Textile Futures roundtable at this year's British Textile Biennial brought together artists, designers, educators and industry-folk to explore this topic, including those from the UK and six artists visiting from Africa, supported by the British Council.

It was a rich and wide-ranging discussion, providing an opportunity for those working at different parts of the fashion and textile ecosystem to connect, learn from one another and see how their collective work is pushing against the edges of today's industry, and its devastating environmental and social impacts, to challenge practices and inspire new possibilities.

One man's waste

A significant theme of discussion was the problem of textile waste. Each year UK citizens discard around one million tonnes of textiles. Some used clothing is recirculated within the UK and Europe, but much is exported abroad to countries in Asia and Africa, with nations like Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana collectively receiving millions of tonnes of bales each year.

Traders buy these bales blind, with no idea of what is inside. As the quality of clothing in the West has declined so has the value of these second hand garments. Kenyan artist Sunny Dolat explained that traders now find they need to discard 50-60% of every bale they purchase, meaning that this textile waste is almost immediately landfilled. As Sunny put it, "We are now responsible for the waste management of the global North, in addition to our own waste." His work, as part of Nest Collective, highlights the enormous pressure that this puts on the environment and its effect of undercutting local industry. In 'Return to Sender' a film and installation of used textile bales, exhibited at the Biennial, viewers are confronted with the reality of what happens to the clothes they throw away. In an ironic twist, Sunny shared that they were unable to bring bales from Kenya for the installation, as they originally hoped, as they were told this would contravene laws covering imported waste.

Attendees wondered whether we, as UK consumers, need to see or physically experience the impact of this waste first hand in order to prompt us to change our behaviour. Panellist Jeremy Hutchison shared his rather surprising way of doing this in his work 'Dead White Man'. This work, shown at the Biennial, sees piles of discarded clothes come to life as giant cloth monsters which return, zombie-like, to the UK to haunt our streets, shopping centres and consciences.

Both legally and psychologically, once textiles are determined as waste, it seems very difficult for them to cross back into being a resource. Roundtable attendees felt that there needs to be a greater awareness of what happens to textiles once they become waste and more support to help people extend the life of their clothing, rather than offshoring it as waste for others to deal with.



Textiles Futures at British Textile Biennial - Photography by Jack Bolton

Innovation space

Creating a regenerative future for textiles will only be possible if we reimagine the whole ecosystem, and this includes what fibres are grown and where. Many initiatives around the world, such as the Fibreshed network, are looking at the potential for diversifying and relocalising fibre production in an attempt to integrate fibres into a more holistic agriculture system which responds to the varying climate, landscapes and cultures of different regions. Just as different species establish in these niches, could our fibre system follow suit?

Fantasy Fibre Mill and Mournie Textiles were two attendees at the roundtable looking to help create the infrastructure which might enable flax production to return in earnest to the UK. A fibre which could have significant carbon sequestering benefits, flax once played a significant role in the UK textile industry but is no longer grown commercially for fibre here. This has resulted in

the loss of a wider ecosystem of skills and equipment. Mournie Textiles from County Down, are aiming to not only preserve but breathe new life into the flax heritage of Northern Ireland by restoring antique flax processing and spinning equipment. Fantasy Fibre Mill are also interested in the equipment needed and are working on 'micro-mill' infrastructure to enable distributed production and encourage a resurgence of this crop.

Blackburn, of course, has its own example of flax innovation in the form of Homegrown/Homespun, the collaboration between Northern England Fibreshed, Super Slow Way and Community Clothing. Flax has been grown on unused sites in the town over the last few years, spun and woven. The day after the roundtable, Justine Aldersey-Williams from Northern England Fibreshed shared her experiences of the work and of making the UK's first pair of indigo linen jeans in at least 120 years.

Acknowledging impacts

Sometimes we find that boundaries of the past reverberate in the present. Many attendees shared their experiences and feelings about the continuing impacts of colonialism within the textiles industry. Artist Thierry Oussou brought to life some of these with the discussion of his work, Equilibrium Wind, shown during the Biennial at the Blackburn Cotton Exchange, a building designed to sell raw cotton picked by enslaved African labourers in the plantations of the Caribbean and American colonies to mill owners in Lancashire. In reality, the American Civil War meant that no cotton was ever traded there. Into this space Thierry brought a small amount of the raw cotton crop from his plantation, Equilibrium Wind, in Benin. He explained how through this work he hopes to challenge people to think about where their cotton comes from, who has grown it and how they are treated. He is also exploring the economics of cotton in Benin, a country where all fibre production is state controlled, with locals seeing very little benefit from it. The cotton he brought to Blackburn filled a table top, the only amount he was able to negotiate bringing out of the country.

Questions of power, policy and justice are never far away in the textiles trade. Indeed, the history of textiles is a history of edges and power: boundaries of identity, social class and social norms communicating who is in and who is out, borders of trade and national policy determining what is made and by whom. But these are lines which are never firmly stitched in place, instead they are continually drawn and redrawn by the creative and political acts of people and communities around the world. The artists who shared their work at this roundtable and the attendees who joined the discussion are all involved in doing just this.

Edges as spaces of innovation and change exist everywhere, but we can also actively create them, and the British Textile Biennial does a wonderful job of this. It brings people together to learn from one another and through these interactions create new possibilities that would otherwise not have existed. As we work to create a more regenerative future for textiles, we should keep an eye on what is emerging at the edges.



Textiles Futures at British Textile Biennial - Photography by Jack Bolton



Josie Warden is a strategic designer with over a decade of experience working with grassroots, policy, business, and civil society organisations to create systemic change and build a more regenerative future, with particular experience in the fields of fashion and textiles - former Head of Regenerative Design at the RSA.

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Art in Manufacturing

By Elena Jackson

The National Festival of Making is a celebration of making and manufacturing - from the kitchen table to the factory floor. Presenting a programme of work that combines Art, Manufacturing, Making and Communities, the organisation commissions artists to create exceptional new work, a year round programme and a nationally relevant cultural festival in Blackburn, Lancashire.

In this text, Elena Jackson, Co-Founder and Director of National Festival of Making, introduces the origin of the Art in Manufacturing commissioning programme, its place within the wider Festival and the impact of residencies for artists and manufacturers across the north of England. The excerpt comes from a newly launching publication 'Radical Pairings' which features writing from Art Critic Elizabeth Fullerton, The CoLAB founder Claire Mander, and artist and Chair of the Festival of Making CIC Board of Directors Jamie Holman, along with interviews with commissioned artists.

Art in Manufacturing is the National Festival of Making's headline commissioning programme. The initiative was developed in parallel to the Festival and became our unique proposition to engage the manufacturing sector and formed a commissioning partnership with The Super Slow Way, an Arts Council England Creative People and Places programme. Conceived in 2016, Art in Manufacturing is based on three guiding principles - to develop a creative dialogue between the National Festival of Making as an arts organisation and the industrial workforce operating in Lancashire; to create a unique platform for emerging and established artists to make new, original and ambitious work; and to present a celebratory programme of commissions for Festival audiences and project participants to experience, reflective of Blackburn and Lancashire's place-based making narrative. It is the evolving connection between these three anchors - industry, art and audience - that inform Art in Manufacturing.

The residency programme facilitates access to cutting-edge technologies and unearths hidden heritages. The resulting artworks are presented as part of the National Festival of Making's programme in venues from Blackburn's grandest, historic spaces to repurposed town centre shops. Since the first residencies, we have commissioned over 35 artists to work with more than 20 factories where they have created remarkable outcomes from sculpture to film and installation to choreography. The Festival, and the works created during residencies, make visible the culture made here, and forms an invitation to experience this place through an alternative lens.

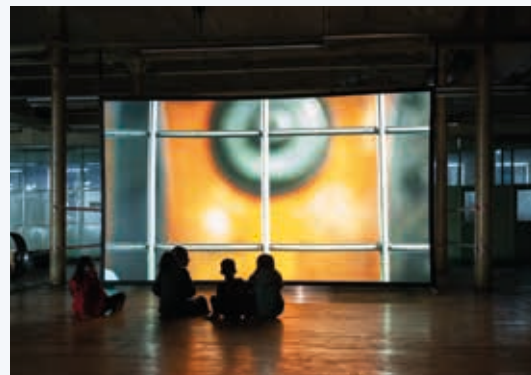
Like Art in Manufacturing, the National Festival of Making is built on a series of principles and goals - critical layers of impact centred on cultural regeneration that sit underneath the spectacle and celebration experienced by an audience of 40,000.

The Festival weekend is a joyful and exploratory gathering where families try a skill for the first time, established makers work with artisan crafters, music and performance is enjoyed across the town centre, thousands of people make things with their hands, and audiences experience new work in spaces previously unknown to them. These strands interact with, and happen alongside each other, as we purposefully present new contemporary work alongside family-friendly content. This challenges the hierarchical norm of differentiating and separating the excellence of biennial content and the accessibility of family content, and in doing so we warmly invite a more connected, social and cultural exchange.

The National Festival of Making grew from a simple yet astonishing statistic: in Blackburn in 2016, the year the Festival was founded, almost twice the national average of people still worked in manufacturing industries. This knowledge gave rise to a contemporary reflection, an opportunity to look to the locale where manufacturing had been part of the culture since the industrial revolution - the town's motto is, 'Arte et Labore', 'By Skill and Hard Work'. The Festival's inception became a chance to look forward, at how a return to a celebration of the region's shared making identity could be transformative for the communities who live and work here, and could welcome visitors to experience Blackburn and Lancashire anew.

The National Festival of Making and Art in Manufacturing came to shape a place-specific narrative for much that has followed, leaning into generations of making heritage and towards a contemporary making future. Where in 2016, Blackburn was cited as a town with some of the lowest arts engagement across the UK, the borough now boasts four Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisations; the National Festival of Making along with Blackburn Museum & Art Gallery, British Textile Biennial and Culturapedia. Working in partnership with each other and a wide network of cross-sector stakeholders has been critical to the successful expansion of Blackburn's cultural ecology, underpinned by the support of Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and its commitment to cultural regeneration.

The Art in Manufacturing proposition intentionally locates the industrial sector at the centre of the commissioning programme. Across 30+ artists placed, the residencies are all unique. Each project is distinctive to the particular artist and manufacturing partner, however the structural framework and artist brief is the same. Artists are engaged to spend a period of time in a making or manufacturing setting ranging from three months to two years, with agreements made as to duration and frequency of visits. While in residence artists are invited to investigate their industrial setting and to allow the identity of the space to inform the project - exploring the factories' products, processes, materials, workforce community, architecture, heritage and technology.



Often bursting with ideas during the R&D period, artists begin to refine their research towards a proposition, with access to skilled staff, archival material and informed by conversation and learning. In line with the brief in which we ask artists to make a new work to be presented at the National Festival of Making, artists and factories move into the making phase, collaborating to combine their vision and expertise to craft extraordinary artistic responses.

Since the first residencies, artists have brought a hunger for experimentation with proposals that eschewed expectations, testing their own boundaries, those of their partner manufacturers and that of exhibition space and site.

Amongst the breadth of commissions, works include Lazerian's "Chromatogram", the first work made in what has become an eight year long partnership with Cardboard Box Company; Dawinder Bansal's "Making of a South Asian Wedding" that time travelled through cultural traditions across family generations; Martyn Ware's sound and performance work at Tony's Empress Ballroom "Church of Rare Souls", a catalyst in the reinterpretation of the space for contemporary cultural programming; Liz Wilson's, "The Optical Mechanical" made with Spiroflow and "Within the Wake", an ensemble of sound, sculpture and video made with industry-leading technologists, CNC Robotics; Jacqueline Donachie's film IMPERIAL, inspired by fast beats, slow canals and the repetition of industry, experienced by audiences in situ at Lancashire Saw Company; and Margo Selby's "Breathing Colour", a sculptural celebration of Standfast & Barracks' centenary year that featured a colour palette selected by the workforce to create a 160-metre suspended textile work.

An artist's practice is often to test, and to either intentionally or unintentionally be disruptive within their own practice or within the space they occupy. Through Art in Manufacturing we are inviting and welcoming the unknown which can stand in opposition to the precise and formulaic way that the commercial sector can operate. Because of this unknown, we appreciate a huge amount of trust that all manufacturers have placed in us to respectfully and considerately collaborate with them, with a shared aim that, through the programme, we might connect their story to a much wider and unexpected audience and create experiences with their workforces that fall outside of the everyday.

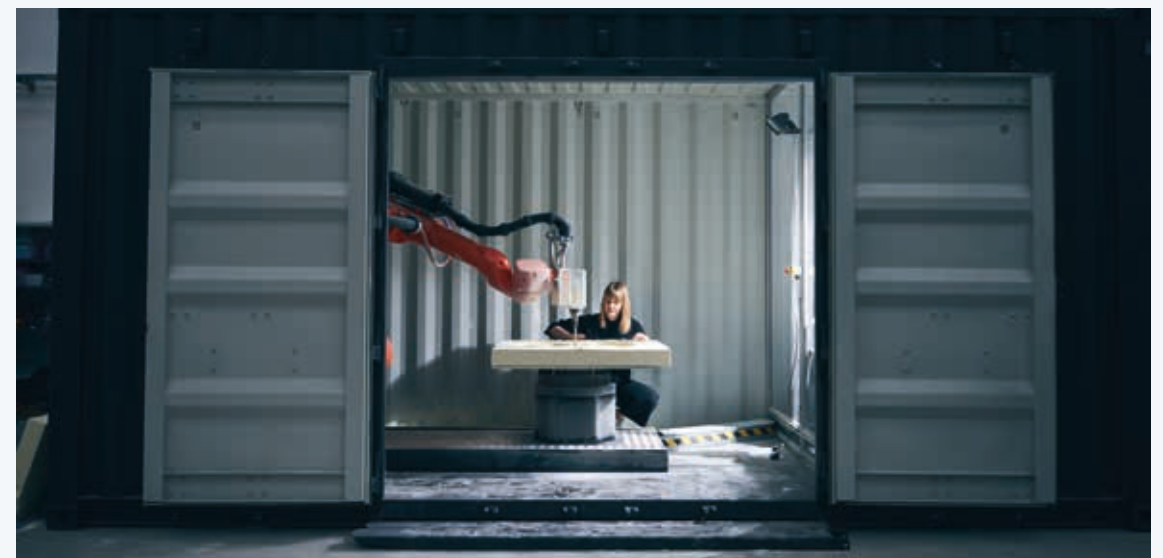
Within the nuances of each residency there is a huge amount of creative opportunity for both manufacturer and resident artist. The artists commissioned have grasped everything that working in partnership with a factory can offer as a platform to push their practice into new spaces. Art in Manufacturing often creates a sense of returning to something more playful and experimental, which is mirrored in the reflections from industry who share that they were invited to, or sometimes forced to, think differently about themselves, their workplace, their products and processes.

Embracing the invitation to be experimental, one partner manufacturer expresses a common theme we see recurring across the collaborations, that the project and the artist's presence in the facility made them push the boundaries of what they can do. As the outcome was non-commercial they were released from the confinement of industry standardisations allowing the factory, the workforce and the machinery itself, to be more creative. Pushing what is normally considered possible or appropriate to realise the artist's ambitious vision, made the business work more closely together - new bonds not only between artist and factory are formed but within the workplace setting too. Whilst Art in Manufacturing doesn't lead with commercial product goals, the components of the programme create fertile ground for innovation, coming back to the sentiment from factories, that working with an artist invites them to think and do things differently.

For the commissioned artists, the programme offers a unique opportunity to take risks and be ambitious in the development of new work. Within this space, the workforce is the creator alongside the artist, challenging perceptions of who makes art, and who it is experienced by. Putting artists in residence with manufacturers can be disruptive but the outcomes for artist, industry and audience are remarkable.



(Left) Imperial: Jacqueline Donachie & Lancashire Saw Company
(From Top) Fabula un Facto: Sam Williams & Cardboard Box Company
Within the Wake - Liz Wilson & CNC Robotics





The Artistry House



A Hub for Creativity, Culture and Connection

Lancashire has always been a place where creativity and innovation thrive, bringing people together through art, design, and storytelling. From its industrial heritage to its evolving cultural scene, the region embraces authenticity and connection. At the heart of it all is a vibrant creative hub – The Artistry House – set within a Grade II listed townhouse on Preston’s historic Winckley Square.

The project was born from Co-founder Lynsey Thompson and Andy Walmsley’s passion for property, art and design, along with their love for collaboration. It’s a space where creative practitioners and businesses can come together to exchange ideas and work side by side, in a setting that feels unique. Also, with Andy’s background as an artist, it was a natural choice to incorporate an art gallery space to the offering.

A Space That Celebrates Art and Community

Across Lancashire, investment in arts and culture is on the rise – from The Harris Museum’s transformation to the growth of independent galleries. The team is proud to be part of this creative evolution, but they also recognise the need for greater support to elevate the value of these projects. That’s why they wanted to use the house to champion the power of creativity and make a real stand for its impact.

The Artistry House celebrates creativity in all its forms bringing them together in a welcoming, inclusive space. It strips away the aloofness that can sometimes exist at different ends of the creative spectrum. The in-house gallery gives artists a platform to showcase their work and connect with a vibrant community, while tenants in the house range from filmmakers and designers to the British Institute of Professional Photography. More than just a workspace, it’s a venue for meetings, events, talks, exhibitions, and workshops. From brand launches to pop-up performances, it’s a place for cultural conversations and creative exploration.

Lynsey and Andy know this is crucial because it sparks innovation and encourages growth. By bringing creatives together, it fosters an environment where new ideas thrive, making a lasting impact on both culture and business.

Bringing Art and Business Closer Together

At the heart of The Artistry House is Wash Studio, Lynsey and Andy’s long established Creative Agency.

With years of experience, this tightly knit team of four has always drawn inspiration from art and innovation to drive business growth. They are dedicated to showcasing how commercial art helps companies stand out and build deeper connections with their audiences.

“Creativity has never simply been a luxury for businesses – it’s a powerful tool for storytelling, shaping identity, and building authentic relationships with customers and audiences. In today’s world, where consumers crave meaning and authenticity we feel our approach to what we do has certainly hit the Zeitgeist. But to be honest, it’s something we’ve always done.

Back in 2003 when we founded the company, our aim was to build the studio culture on a foundation where our conceptual thinking - ‘the idea’ - became the forefront of our service offering. ‘Creativity is our currency’. And to bring our own authentic voice to the forefront, we put our money where our mouths are by investing in the city and turning our studio into an extension of who we really are - The Artistry House is our creative home”. Andy Walmsley

From independent galleries and street art to festivals and creative workspaces, these elements make a place more vibrant and distinctive. They spark fresh thinking, challenge the norm, and turn culture into something to engage with, not just observe.

A Bright Future for Creativity in Lancashire

As the region grows into a cultural and creative hotspot, places like this will continue to shape the future. Whether supporting local artists, working on exciting brand projects, or encouraging creative thinking in businesses, the team is dedicated to pushing boundaries and making a lasting impact.

With a strong belief in collaboration, innovation, and storytelling, the space proves that creativity is a tool for change, connection, and progress. As more people and businesses embrace it, the possibilities are endless.

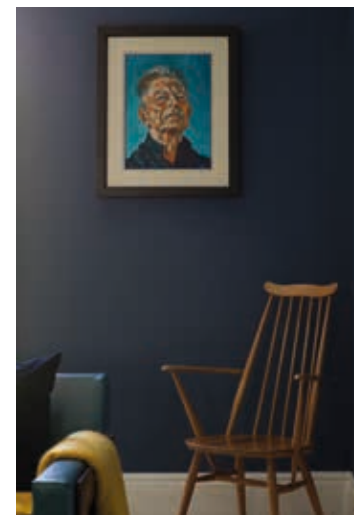
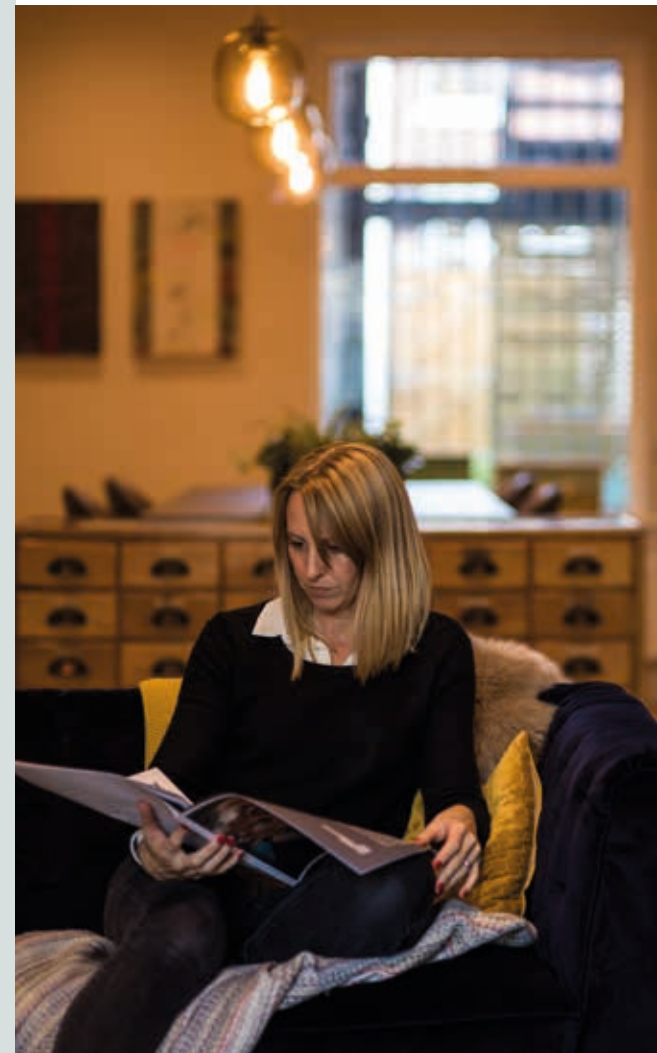


Whether you want to discuss a potential project, exhibit, collaborate, or simply be inspired, the doors are always open. For those passionate about art, culture, and creative thinking, get in touch with theartistry.house

Creating a Place for Creativity to Thrive

For Lynsey and Andy, the mission is to encourage individuals and businesses to think bigger and bolder, while creating a meaningful impact on their community. With experience delivering place based projects of all sizes, they're passionate about retaining local talent and improving the area, ensuring creativity and opportunity can flourish outside of the major cities. Reflecting on this vision, Lynsey emphasises the power of creative spaces, stating.

“With more creative spaces, the area will attract talent, businesses, and cultural investment, transforming it into a hub of opportunity and progress. But it’s not just about economic growth – it also enriches communities and enhances quality of life. More of this is needed here – to create a place where people feel proud to live and work, building fulfilling lives without the dreaded commute to Manchester or Liverpool.”



The British Textile Biennial



Taking place in venues across Lancashire
October 2025



Set against the backdrop of Lancashire's moors and mills, the British Textile Biennial invites artists, designers, and creative professionals to engage with the rich legacy of the textile industry in the area and explore its far-reaching impact on global culture and technology. With its epic mills and grandiose civic architecture along the country's longest waterway, the Leeds & Liverpool Canal, the landscape tells the story of textiles while showcasing its contemporary expression with the community that has textiles in its DNA.

Since launching in 2019, BTB has attracted over 200,000 visitors and featured more than 126 artists, designers, and creatives, cementing its place on the

UK's cultural calendar. Throughout the month-long event, Lancashire becomes a hub for exhibitions, installations, performances, and commissions that examine the past, present, and future of textiles. Key venues, including Blackburn Cotton Exchange, Queen Street Mill Museum in Burnley, and The Whitaker Museum in Rossendale, serve as platforms for critical engagement with textile heritage and cultures.

British Textile Biennial changes its focus with each presentation, with a thread of connection woven between each programme. The inaugural 2019 edition explored fabric as a means of expression; showing textiles as a vehicle for protest and cultural identity in slogan-



emblazoned T Shirts, football fashion and traditional union and demo banners, presenting performances and new works that took a dynamic look at our relationship with that most basic and ancient of human creations, cloth.



BTB21 shifted focus to the global reach of textiles, emphasizing how fabric connects cultures and economies, whilst acknowledging the traumatic impact of the colonial project on people across the globe. Turner Prize winner, Lubaina Himid presented an epic installation using Dutch Wax Print fabrics in the Great Barn at Gawthorpe Hall. Jamie Holman, Jasleen Kaur and Masimba Hwati revealed the residual cultural identities of the British Empire embedded in textiles and Azraa Motala produced a series of powerful portraits that provided a platform for an overlooked community of young British South Asian women from Lancashire, too often invisible and unheard.

In 2023, sustainability took centre stage as the biennial questioned whether textile production could ever be truly regenerative—socially and environmentally. Artists from Benin to Bangladesh presented work tackling the legacy of colonialism, while others revisited pre-industrial textile production. From the so-called 'slave cloth', spun and woven by hand on the Pennine moors, to the bales of used fast fashion that make their way from British high streets to the markets and toxic mountains of waste in West Africa, BTB23 followed that journey.

Left) Banner Culture installation at Brierfield Mill (British Textile Biennial)
(From Top) Victoria Udondian by Ofong Ufok
Lost Threads by Lubaina Himid

With a packed programme of workshops, guided tours, talks, and large scale installations, BTB25 offers something for all audiences. Running from October 2 to November 2, 2025, this edition continues BTB's mission to explore textiles as both a historical and contemporary force, shaping our world in ways we are only beginning to fully understand.



For 2025, in *Pioneers of the Material World*, BTB looks at how Lancashire's textile innovations shaped the 20th century. From airships to high-performance materials used in extreme environments, the region's influence is significant. Lancashire's textiles outfitted legendary explorers such as Hillary and Norgay, as well as aviation pioneer Amelia Earhart. While these early innovators enabled humans to conquer mountains, oceans, and skies, they could not have foreseen the environmental consequences so evident now.

BTB25 presents the work of artists who collaborate with indigenous communities to explore nature's own material innovations, such as dyes from the purple sea snail and cochineal beetles that point to a future where sustainable materials align with ecological principles rather than exploit them.

Once again, BTB25 will activate East Lancashire's historic mills and industrial spaces, reimagining them as venues for large-scale installations and performances. These spaces, rich in history, provide the context and inspiration for interrogating Lancashire's industrial legacy while envisioning a future of sustainable textiles.



(Left) *The British Invasion*: Jasleen Kaur, Jamie Holman & Masimba Hwati
(From Top) *Dead White Man*: Jeremy Hutchison
Thread Bearing Witness – Alice Kettle
Adidas Spezial Trainer Exhibition





Town & Country



Like large parts of the North, Lancashire holds a unique place in the UK's identity with rich cultural assets of national and areas of natural beauty.

By Ed Matthews-Gentle

Lancashire presents a model for much of Britain beyond the metropolitan hubs, with a rich and diverse geography of small cities, towns, rural hinterlands and coastal communities shaped by a legacy of industrialisation.

However, this landscape is dramatically impacted by the demise of manufacturing and globalisation over the past fifty years. For parts of the county, this has resulted in long-term socio-economic decline.

The ambitions of cultural and creative businesses in Lancashire have been further constrained by the structural shortcomings of a post-industrial economy, which is often reflected in the inherent barriers to national funding for regions.

A recent Creative Funding Report, contrasting investment by Arts Council into the regions ranked Preston at the bottom of the place index, with Manchester's residents benefiting from £523,337 investment for every ten thousand residents, compared to £24,250 in Lancashire's prime city - the equivalent of £2.40 per person.

The case for culture in Lancashire is well understood. However, lack of scale is often at odds with fragmented and disaggregated cultural assets.

Yet with 140 miles of stunning coastline connecting with Merseyside to the south and west, and Cumbria to the north, with expansive rural areas and an extraordinary mix of cities, towns and villages, Lancashire offers precisely the context that can demonstrate the cohesive power of cultural regeneration and reimagining of places

– with no preconditions for who should be involved, and no constraints on the level of ambition or aspiration.

Lancashire's boundaries and identities have been endlessly re-shaped, most significantly in 1889, and again in 1974 with the secession of Liverpool and Manchester. To this day, many in places like Bolton, Bury and Rochdale identify more naturally with 'historic Lancashire' than with an urban metropolis and super cluster for the high growth creative industries. For those on either side of the borders the result can sometimes be a diminished sense of place and a confusing sense of self.

Yet within this crisis of identity lies opportunity. Lancashire was the birthplace of the industrial revolution that exploited resources. Today, it sits at the threshold of new challenges and opportunities in a high-speed, globalised world, at the dawn of the fourth industrial revolution. With a population of 1.5m people, Lancashire's £34bn economy was in steady and constant growth before the pandemic. It's home to the fourth largest aerospace cluster in the world and to a range of important and emerging sectors from manufacturing and hospitality to cyber, digital and low carbon. It is also a thriving tourism destination.

In cyber security, Lancashire is an undisputed national leader with a rich seam of cyber-related research and innovation assets across industry and academia. Samlesbury near Preston was announced in 2021 as the preferred location for the new National Cyber Force Centre, which will help to bring unparalleled opportunities for positive economic and societal impacts.

Among these opportunities is the need to accelerate the process of building scale and resilience in the county's cultural and creative businesses and to create sustainable environments and growth strategies by aggregating existing sector and educational assets.

Beyond the county's 18 NPOs in the 2023-2026 round (at £10.1m a 59.1% increase on the previous round), there are insufficient large cultural organisations which can deliver the scale, reach, agility and quality of cultural experiences enjoyed in other parts of the UK. Smaller cultural organisations can lack the muscle to scale up with minimal risk and the capacity to experiment with new technology and new ways of reaching audiences, or to utilise data and research, and generate innovative funding models. The question for many cultural organisations in Lancashire is how to scale deeper.



Research by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), highlighted how the complexities of the current administrative structure and dynamic between towns and larger urban centres contribute to dispersed creativity:

"Lancashire consists of independent urban centres and rural landscapes, spread across a large area with no natural epicentre to concentrate creative outputs around. Connectivity is hampered by the inconsistent provision of public transport, limited digital infrastructure, and issues arising from the proximity of large cities outside the county. Lancashire's diverse range of populations lacks a single cohesive identity, and it does not possess a single unifying source of governance. All of this provides infrastructural challenges for the creative sector in the region, as there is often little innate drive of movement across the county to any central clearing house of activity. The geography of the region, therefore, presents a host of difficulties facilitating a united cultural identity and the exchange of knowledge information."

The focus now turns to how creative economies can recover and foster growth in regions, towns, and cities. Location is an important determinant for successful and sustainable forms of economic growth. Place-based initiatives are becoming more popular as centrally-distributed funding is under ever-increasing pressure. In Lancashire, the arts and culture sector fell 26.5% during the pandemic, compared to a 24% fall in economic activity nationally. Despite this, strong partnerships and creative activity exist across the county.



Remade - Lancashire's Cultural Investment Strategy (Tom Fleming 2020), sets out an approach for culture to deliver a step change in places through increased connectivity, enhanced capacity, improved crossovers, bolder commissioning, innovative infrastructure and developing compelling cultural narratives.

A better connected cultural and creative sector will establish a framework for the main urban areas, smaller towns and rural areas to work collaboratively on building scale, presence and impact. By working together, the diversity of initiatives across places can more effectively develop a clear offer and role, which resonates locally, nationally and internationally for audiences and markets.

A stronger, more diverse, sustainable and appropriately skilled creative and cultural sector will fuel the next generation of leaders, innovators and culture seekers to deliver positive outcomes for economic and inclusive growth in places, alongside increased convergence and innovation across culture, creativity, research, science, technology and manufacturing.

Investment in enhanced infrastructure is required to develop the local ecosystems of towns and cities to deliver a quality offer to diverse audiences. State-of-the-art physical assets distributed more widely through communities, business, higher education, colleges and schools can play a significant part in levelling up culture.

A compelling narrative is key to a sense of place. The distinctiveness of their places, people, environmental ideas, and cultural experiences are what will gain cities, towns and regions national and international recognition. Lancashire's new Combined County Authority is now officially launched, and there is clear steer from the current government to progress plans to establish a mayoral combined authority as the preferred model alongside reorganisation of local government.

Lancashire's devolution deal will deliver more powers and funding in areas such as adult education, transport, employment and skills.



While the County considers its longer-term devolution options there is an opportunity for Lancashire to consider its own model for a county-wide deal, based on the strength of its creative community, its heritage and environmental offer as expressed in new and emerging priority schemes such as the ‘Super Slow Way Linear Park.

Super Slow Way, one of Lancashire’s two Arts Council-supported Creative People and Places programmes, covers the 22-mile section of the Leeds to Liverpool Canal corridor stretching through East Lancashire from Blackburn in the west, through Hyndburn, Burnley, and Pendle to the east. It seeks to marry physical regeneration to expansive programmes of environmental, cultural, leisure, educational and economic activity in some of Lancashire’s most deprived places. (see following pages)

Culture features prominently in local place strategies across the country. Blackburn, one of Arts Council England’s Priority Places, is looking to augment investment in key activities such as the National Festival of Making with ambitious plans highlighting the potential to build on its distinctive cultural heritage, including the textile industry, and to address low levels of cultural participation by engaging local communities in new creative opportunities.

The implementation of a culture and heritage-led master plan for Blackburn will augment initiatives to cultivate the next generation of cultural leaders by nurturing local talent and the development of a place-based curriculum. This will support creative careers and connect to a dynamic commissioning programme as a platform for creative employment. These plans will seek to consolidate the existing cultural sector through capital investments and the development of a strong cultural offer that reflects the diversity of place, alongside an asset-based approach to delivering major refurbishment and improvement programmes of arts and heritage venues.

This degree of ambition is matched elsewhere. Blackpool has already articulated a vision to establish itself as the Coastal Capital of Creativity. Pivotal to these plans is the reimagining of the dual hidden gems of Grundy Art Gallery and Central Library to create a thriving new culture hub for the community and to enhance the cultural offer within the town.

Blackpool, with some of the most deprived areas in the UK, is another town designated a Priority Place. Opportunities and prospects for residents are also affected by negative perceptions of place. The town has already benefited from over £39.5m Town Deal investment including £4.5m to upgrade the famous Illuminations. The related Lightpool Festival began in 2016, to celebrate the Illuminations by bringing contemporary artists to Blackpool to be inspired by the town’s unique relationship with light. Lightpool is now included in Light up the North Festival Network (LUTN). Showtown, Blackpool’s new Museum of Fun & Entertainment opened last year and the next phase of improvements to the Winter Gardens is in progress. These interventions contribute to improved place-based perceptions and support Blackpool’s sustained efforts to become a year-round visitor destination with step-changing benefits for businesses, residents and visitors.

In contrast, Preston’s strategic approach builds on social value, community wealth building and the city’s strengths: a wealth of organisations with expertise in participatory arts; a range of cultural institutions; and a network of independent artists and creative industries organisations densely spread throughout the city. Preston Council and these stakeholders are committed to a renewed proposition for culture which demonstrates an authentic understanding of context and socially engaged arts practice. Harris Museum is considered by many to be Lancashire’s anchor cultural institution has entered the final phase of £16m transformation. The Harris Your Place will transform the centre with dedicated spaces for creativity, playing, learning, socialising, and volunteering.

Elsewhere, Burnley is developing plans for an ambitious year of culture in 2027. ‘Cultivate’ is Lancaster University’s new task group on arts & culture.

Lancashire’s higher education Institutions play a leading role building as world renowned faculties of research and recognising that the greatest strength of its cultural economy is its people. Across arts, culture, and heritage more generally, there is a depth of talent providing cultural, arts, and economic benefits.

One model for a form of cultural devolution already exists in the form of the Cultural Compact, originally conceived as an approach to harness the power of culture to be transformational in urban places. We are yet to see if the concept can also generate similar outcomes in a semi-rural context. It has in fact led to larger combined bids to Arts Council England and others for more dynamic and ambitious projects with the ability to scale-up positive impact in places.

Culture may be defined differently in different places, but for towns and cities in Lancashire, its importance in making diverse and distinct places more attractive for residents, visitors, workers and investors is understood from the coast to the hills. At a time of economic pressures and uncertainty, culture may provide the formula for more inclusive versions of growth, quality of life and opportunity



Ed Matthews-Gentle is Strategic Lead for Culture & Creative Industries at Creative Lancashire and oversees ReMade: Lancashire’s Cultural Investment Strategy.



The Super Slow Way



Developing cultural assets with communities along the Leeds & Liverpool Canal in East Lancashire

The Super Slow Way is a cultural development programme that covers 20 miles of the Leeds & Liverpool Canal corridor stretching through East Lancashire from Blackburn in the west, through Hyndburn and Burnley, and ending in Pendle in the east. Primarily a post-industrial area, it is classified as being one of the most deprived localities in England.



Placemaking is a much-overused term and often overlooks the people that live in the places being made'. Super Slow Way helps the people that live here in East Lancashire to make a difference in the places they live, whose families have shaped it often going back generations; they know every back street, every tree, every wall and every ruin in their neighbourhood and their lives are often blighted by the urban decay that surrounds them. Super Slow Way works to let people find their own voice, their own creativity, to create new, personal forms of expression and production, and, in doing so, carve out spaces that are not held in the grip of global forces who only measure success in the so-called growth of the economy.

The Canal & River Trust work tirelessly to keep this two-hundred-year-old waterway navigable for leisure traffic, fuelled by the belief in its iconic presence cutting across the north of England and its intrinsic value to the communities along its banks. Hosted by the Trust for the past 10 years, Super Slow Way has developed its programming to address the needs of these communities and worked to become a key strategic partner in the region, using its Arts Council investment as a cultural lever in the regeneration plans of all four local authorities, as well as at county level.

It has built a creative programme that places culture and environmental sustainability at the centre of regeneration and offers new opportunities of community access and agency that in turn generates prosperity and improves the health and wellbeing of residents.



Artist Illustration: Imperial Mill, Blackburn (left)
The Leeds & Liverpool Canal in Brierfield, Pendle (above)

Director, Laurie Peake, outlined the vision -

“We want to encourage visitors to celebrate our places with us, in spaces that are filled with a thousand different voices speaking in a thousand individual ways or singing in one collective voice about their lives and their communities whose labour has hewn this historic landscape, but we don’t want to be nostalgic about what was and romanticise the past, we are carving out a new future here together, on The Super Slow Way. The name encapsulates that space, the canal that had once been the super highway of the industrial revolution and is now a place where time slows down, where you feel a hundred miles away from your town even though it may be moving through the heart of it and where you can enjoy nature which has often been left to its own devices and is teeming with wildlife and bio-diversity. It’s a perfect metaphor for art – a space you can retreat to, where your life takes on a different aspect and is full of possibilities with a timeframe of its own.”

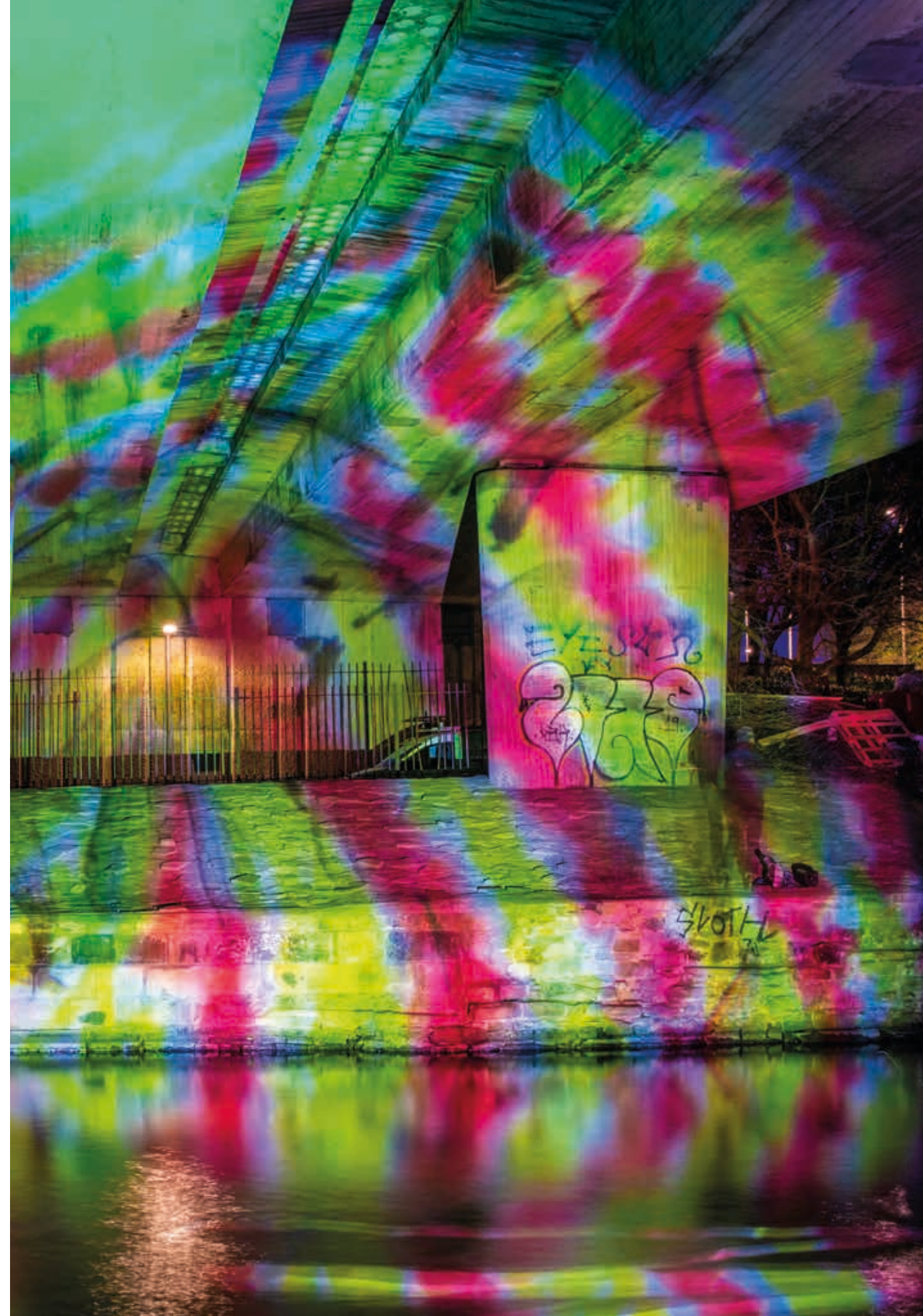


We believe this creative process and this canal can be a conduit to take these communities to a new future; they can breathe new life into its neglected green spaces and derelict old mills and warehouses, with their own art and their own culture, produced by them and shaped in this place. We've come a long way over the last 10 years, in almost 100 projects, from the very intimate to the massively collective, with over 20,000 participants – on towpaths, in pocket parks and flax fields, with murals, pop-up cafés, pontoons for canoeing and much more. With a range of feasibility studies and masterplans over the past 5 years, Super Slow Way has demonstrated how the Linear Park can create a new, vibrant narrative for East Lancashire along this richly bio-diverse green/blue corridor, boosting connectivity, creativity and delivering enormous health and wellbeing benefits. Through the imaginative repurposing of our industrial heritage, this Pennine Lancashire Linear Park, bookended by Northlight at the former Brierfield Mill in the east and Imperial Mill, Blackburn in the west, is slowly becoming a super 'string of pearls' that holds its communities together and gives visitors a multitude of reasons to visit!

Now an independent organisation, Super Slow Way Ltd has big plans for the future, to build the capacity of communities on its length to transform the ruins that currently act as blights in their neighbourhoods into assets that help improve their environments and enhance their life chances, in the abandoned gas holders, empty churches and the acres of unused land on our 20 mile stretch of the canal – our linear park. Over the next ten years, with the help of funders such as Historic England, we aim to champion community ownership to realise the potential of these spaces, to generate new local economies by unlocking the creative energy of the people that live here to build upon the assets on their doorsteps. You could call it a campaign for social and environmental justice - with a team of 20,000 who are already making it happen.



Laurie Peake is the Director of Super Slow Way, part of Arts Council England's Creative People and Places programme. Creative People and Places focuses on parts of the country where involvement in creativity and culture is significantly below the national average.





Dawinder Bansal ©



Dawinder is a multi-award-winning British Artist and Producer known for her dynamic work that blends her British, Indian, and Kenyan heritage into unique art exploring South Asian identity, social history and issues. Her creations span immersive installations, films, podcasts, and live events, all designed to transport audiences to a vibrant intersection of past and present.

Dawinder Bansal's commissions include Jambo Cinema for the Commonwealth Games 2022, contributions to the British Art Show and presentations at the BFI London Film Festival 2020 and New Art Exchange 2020. Other notable works include We Found Love in the 80s at the Barbican and Asian Women & Cars: The Road to Independence at Multistory, V&A, Barbican and The Making of a South Asian Wedding for the National Festival of Making.

What was your first memory of creativity?

My artistic journey is deeply rooted in the vibrant, multi-sensory world of my childhood. Growing up in Wolverhampton in the 1980s, my parents' electrical shop also served as a Bollywood VHS rental store, immersing me in a rich tapestry of Indian cinema, music, and community conversations. The shop, a social hub for British South Asians, became a backdrop for my early creative influences, where nostalgia, storytelling, and cultural identity intertwined. One of the key reasons I do what I do is to celebrate the sacrifices and achievements of the first generation of South Asian migrants, like my parents, who arrived in Wolverhampton from India via Kenya in the 1960s during the time of Enoch Powell's infamous Rivers of Blood speech. They achieved a great deal despite the challenges they faced in a country which did not want them. British television in the 80s played a significant role in shaping my imagination. Shows like *Why Don't You?* encouraged children to repurpose everyday items into artistic creations, while *Hartbeat* with Tony Hart revealed the transformative power of art. Films such as *Back to the Future*, *Beetlejuice* and *Alice in Wonderland* further fuelled my fascination with time travel, the surreal, and the boundless possibilities of storytelling—concepts that now permeate my immersive artistic practice.

What was your creative journey to get to where you are?

Unlike many artists, I did not take the conventional path through art school. Instead, I pursued a degree in Computer Science at De Montfort University, following family expectations. However, my passion for storytelling remained unwavering. I carved my own path into the creative industry through volunteering, community projects and later, as an Independent Theatre Council Fastrack Trainee which led me into producing.

My early career experiences at Birmingham REP and then Southbank Centre's Alchemy On Tour Festival, under the visionary Jude Kelly, exposed me to the transformative power of storytelling, not just as an artistic tool but as a means of cultural preservation and communal healing. Additionally, I had the opportunity to work in Brazil under the Cultural Leadership Programme, where I experienced some of the most cutting-edge and groundbreaking art. This exposure broadened my perspective on immersive and experimental art forms, further shaping my creative approach. Yet, it was in blending personal memory with collective history that my unique artistic voice truly emerged.

that feel alive and relevant today. I also pay close attention to how younger generations engage with art, ensuring my work remains accessible and engaging across different audiences.

Reinvention is the key to keeping relevant, experimenting with new forms, ideas and also collaborating with younger other artists.

What impact have high-profile commissions had on your career?

Receiving a high-profile commission from the Commonwealth Games was a transformative moment in my career. It enabled me to create new immersive spaces, including teenage bedrooms and a recreation of my late father's shop, further deepening my exploration of memory and nostalgia. This opportunity also allowed me to experiment with virtual reality, expanding the ways in which audiences can interact with and experience my work.

In addition to the Commonwealth Games, collaborations with major cultural institutions such as the Barbican, Southbank Centre, BBC, and the National Festival of Making have provided a platform to amplify my artistic vision on both national and international stages. These commissions have pushed the boundaries of immersive storytelling while ensuring that British South Asian narratives, often marginalized in mainstream art spaces, receive the attention and respect they deserve. Despite these large-scale projects, I remain intentional in my artistic approach, prioritising emotional integrity and authenticity. My work's success is not merely defined by institutional recognition but by the profound personal connections it fosters. I am always deeply moved when visitors step into my installations and find themselves instantly transported back in time—whether through recognizing a wallpaper pattern from their childhood home, hearing a familiar song, or rediscovering an object that reawakens a long-forgotten memory.

How do you establish your own style over a period of time, and still stay relevant?

Staying relevant isn't about chasing trends; it's about staying true to my personal experiences and cultural observations while allowing my work to evolve. My style is rooted in storytelling—drawing from memories, oral histories, and everyday objects that carry emotional weight. Over time, I've refined my approach, making my installations more immersive, interactive, and multisensory, incorporating sound, film, and set design to transport audiences into a moment in time. Television and film have always played a big role in shaping my aesthetic. I still find inspiration in the surreal, dreamlike qualities of *Alice in Wonderland* and the futuristic imagination of *Back to the Future*. These influences remind me that nostalgia isn't just about looking back—it's about reinterpreting the past in ways

Does your work develop thematically, or is it more distinctive and random?

There are strong thematic threads running through all my work—retro era, nostalgia, migration, identity, and cultural memory. While each project has its unique form, they all explore human connection and the significance of seemingly mundane objects. My work starts with the connecting points, the story and I always ask myself—what interests me about this story? My process usually starts with a deep dive into memory—whether personal or collective. I often collect objects, stories, and archival materials, allowing them to guide the direction of a project.

However, I also embrace moments of spontaneity. Sometimes, an unexpected detail—a faded magazine cover, an old photograph, or a snippet of music from an 80s film—sparks a whole new creative direction. I enjoy the balance between structured storytelling and allowing my work to develop organically and I often test out new work in front of a live audience. This mix keeps my projects fresh, even as they stay connected to overarching themes.

What or who has been the biggest influence on your work?

My artistic influences are as layered as my work itself. Tony Hart was my first artistic mentor from a distance—his ability to make art accessible and enjoyable resonated with me as a child. In literature and storytelling, figures such as R.K. Narayan, Meera Syal, and Ayub Khan-Din have shaped my understanding of British South Asian life. Western writers like Sue Townsend and Woody Allen, alongside the boundary-pushing creativity of Grayson Perry, Jude Kelly and Wayne Hemingway have also played a role in shaping my worldview. In cinema, Robert Zemeckis's *Back to the Future* continues to influence my relationship with nostalgia, while Tim Burton's ability to merge the whimsical with the macabre inspires my visual storytelling. These diverse influences have helped me forge a distinct artistic voice—one that is deeply personal yet universally resonant.



What inspires you or provokes the motivation towards creativity within?

What fuels my creativity is a deep commitment to storytelling and cultural preservation, particularly the experiences of South Asian women. *Asian Women & Cars* highlighted the power of personal histories in shaping social change for my mother and her generation of women, demonstrating how everyday objects can hold extraordinary meaning. My work is both an artistic expression and a historical archive, ensuring that these narratives endure beyond the present moment.

What is it you love most about what you do?

For me, the greatest reward is the emotional resonance my work evokes. Seeing audiences step into my installations and experience a profound sense of recognition and connection is the ultimate validation of my practice. Creativity became the only space where I could express what was in my mind, to be an individual, and to share that with the world.

My work is more than nostalgia—it is a bridge between generations, a space for shared storytelling, and a means of reclaiming histories that might otherwise be lost. In an era that often moves too quickly, I offer a rare and precious gift: the chance to pause, reflect, and rediscover the past as a living, breathing presence in the now.

“Memories are time machines—we step into them, and suddenly, the past is alive again. My work explores the power of nostalgia, but not as mere sentimentality—rather, as a force that reconnects us to lost histories, forgotten spaces, and the cultural fabric that defines us. Growing up in Wolverhampton in the 1980s, surrounded by Bollywood VHS tapes and the hum of my parents’ shop, I learned that objects hold stories, and stories hold emotions. My practice is a way of preserving and reimagining these histories, turning personal memory into shared experience.”



Dawinder Bansal is currently a fellow at the Royal Society of Arts and a former member of ITV Central's Diversity Board and advisor for the Jerwood Arts Foundation. Dawinder is dedicated to fostering meaningful dialogue within the arts.

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Emily Peet ©



Emily Peet is an award-winning illustrator and artist from Lancashire, designing vibrant and whimsical mixed-media illustrations from her cosy home studio in Lytham St Annes.

Inspired by the natural world, and little joys in everyday life, Emily aims to create illustrations that are relatable, whilst sharing a dose of colour. Primarily working with gouache paint and digital software, Emily runs her own online shop and sells her designs through makers markets and fairs. Alongside this, she leads her versatile freelance practice, where she continues to expand her professional portfolio. In 2023 Emily was commissioned by Creative Lancashire to produce a series of portraits to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of Hip Hop including Little Simz and MF Doom.

What was your first memory of creativity?

My first memories of creativity were drawing when I was very little. I can remember days spent colouring at my Grandparent's house very well. I still have some of my early drawings and sketchbooks where I 'drew' my interpretation of various dog breeds. I also remember playing with Lego, Playdough, and other very hands-on toys, and expressing my creativity through them.

What was your creative journey to get to where you are? Creativity has been a key part of my life since I was young, so the journey started there and grew with the encouragement from my family. I progressed through school with Art being a priority during GCSEs and A-Levels, as well as in my spare time. The support from my teachers reaffirmed that a career in the creative

industries was a path I wanted to pursue. I then went on to graduate from the University of Central Lancashire with a First-Class BA (Hons) degree in Illustration. Since graduating in 2022, I have been working as a Freelance Illustrator full time.

How do you establish your own style over a period of time, and still stay relevant?

My style of work can vary depending on the piece I'm working on, and what materials I'm using. Over time, I have established my style by staying true to myself, my interests, and using lots of colour. I'm always looking for new inspirations, and aim to stay relevant by continuously creating new art and progressing my own practice. I also remain open minded about new projects that I take on, that push me outside of familiar territories. I believe that to be an artist and to make art of any kind is relevant because it is essential within contemporary society.

What or who has been the biggest influence on your work – the artists or designers you admire and inspire you the most and why?

Inspiration for my work is directly inspired by the life around me. Over the years I've noticed that apart from the natural world, much of the media I consume has a big influence. From animated films like Studio Ghibli, the universe around The Lord of the Rings, video games

such as Animal Crossing, and the music I listen to. Artists, designers, and creators that I admire particularly inspire me at times when I feel stuck or lost. Whether it's their choice of materials and colour, it's something I can relate to, or it simply makes me smile, their work allows me to reconnect with my own creativity. Some names to mention are Megan Wang, Leigh Ellexson, Billy Murphy, Lize Meddings, Linh Truong, Tiffany Tan, Nevin Johnson.

What inspires you or provokes the motivation towards creativity within?

It's the desire to create and make art which sparks my motivation. Being able to combine my interests and experiences with my creative skills, and expressing myself through this, is something I feel very privileged to be able to do on a daily basis. I also usually find my motivation to be the most prominent when I'm not creating. Whether I'm out on a walk or spending time somewhere new, I also find the down-time to be just as valuable.

Does your work/process develop thematically, or is it more distinctive and random?

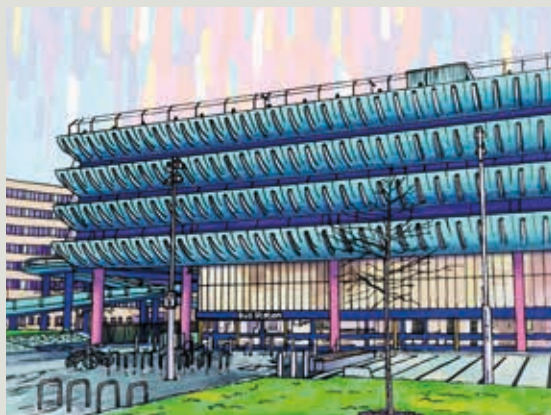
My work definitely leans towards being distinctive and random. I have so many inspirations that spark my creativity, I think it would be difficult to keep it uniform. The fact that my art can be unpredictable is one of the reasons why I enjoy creating. It brings me variety, and gives my work character, each piece with its own unique style. The overall consistency that unites my art is the use of colour. It's always the first thing that other people notice and comment on.

What is it you love most about what you do?

I love bringing a little bit of cheerfulness to people through my illustrations. Connecting with people at markets and seeing how something I've created can make someone smile is an unforgettable feeling. I also love solving issues through creating, whether that be smaller personal commissions or larger projects such as the ones I've worked on in publishing.



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The Black Artisans



Jo Sealy

Following a successful presentation at National Festival of Making, last year Haworth Art Gallery in Accrington hosted an expanded version of the Black Artisans Photography Exhibition. Black Artisans spotlights 36 exceptional artisans, demonstrating a breadth of skills rarely seen together. Each artist brings a unique perspective and technique, creating a vibrant tapestry of craftsmanship that celebrates the richness of Black British artisan heritage.



Jo emphasises that there are many more artisans she has encountered and been inspired by, such as leather bag designer Dolores Swift of Neoma Design in Brighton, steel pan tuner Dudley Dickson, inventor of collapsible stages and steel pan stands, and Toussaint Clarke from Bath, a key member of the Rainbow Steel Orchestra. theblackartisans.org

Image: Vanley Burke, Lucille Junkere, Donald Baugh, Jo Sealy and Jason Stocks-Young – Conversations in Creativity Black Artisan Panel @ Haworth Art Gallery

Curator and documentary photographer Jo Sealy shares reflections on her encounters with some of the first artisans she photographed.

“The first artisan I met was Chris Bramble, the respected ceramicist and sculptor. I was struck by his meditative approach, blending European and African traditions. He shared his background, including his training at Glasgow School of Art, and how he now shares his studio with his students. I feel he is somewhat under the radar, although his daughter, Freya Bramble-Carter, is well-known on social media and The Great Pottery Throw Down.” One of Jo’s aims is to highlight the careers of older makers who may be less connected via social media. When she met Doreen Gittens of Archipelago Textiles, whose workshop is based in the Oxo Tower where she has worked for 25 years, Jo recalled: “I was awestruck by the size of Gittens’ loom and the timeless beauty of her weaving. While photographing her drafting a weave, Doreen spoke about her earlier career, her story was deeply inspirational, as was the location of her studio overlooking the Thames.”

Jo also discussed the career of David ‘Satch’ Botwe, a French horn repairer who now runs his own business in Southwark. She photographed him in his workshop but was equally keen to share his life story.

“As a schoolboy, Satch joined the Compton Swing Collection as a trumpeter, a unique school band that worked with stars like Stéphane Grappelli and Cilla Black. Realising he wouldn’t make it as a professional musician, he took an instrument repair course at Morden. Now, he reaches out to young people, giving talks in schools and sharing his expertise.”



Jo’s journey also led her to jeweller Melanie Eddy, whose career spans sculptural jewellery, design, manufacture, critical writing, and creative development. Melanie has collaborated with institutions such as Swarovski, the Victoria & Albert Museum, Central Saint Martins, and the British Council. In 2010, she completed a two-month creative residency at Turquoise Mountain’s Institute for Afghan Arts and Architecture in Kabul. Jo was captivated by the beauty of Melanie’s workshop and the inspirational objects with which she surrounds herself. Jo went on to describe photographing the renowned West African musician Moussa Dembele, a griot from Burkina Faso, on a hot day in South London. She captured him repairing a balafon, one of the many instruments he plays with his band, Koroleko. Jo noted his dedication to music and his belief that his instruments possess agency and a life of their own.



Her final artisan was Ray Clarke, a former fashion designer who retrained as an upholsterer in 2009 at London Metropolitan University. In 2015, he moved into a large workshop, Atelier Ray Clarke. Jo was struck by the calm busyness of his studio, filled with tools, fabrics, and furniture awaiting his craftsmanship, which spans both modern and traditional styles.

(Above) Adaesi Ukairo – Black Artisans ‘Meet the Maker’
(Bottom) Jo Sealy - Photographer & Founder - Black Artisans



Nehal Aamir ©



Nehal Aamir is a British-Pakistani ceramic artist based in Manchester, blending traditional craftsmanship with contemporary art. Her narrative-driven work explores themes of labour, community, and the human stories embedded in craft, drawing on symbolic elements and everyday objects. Born in Pakistan and moving to the UK at nine, Aamir's art is deeply influenced by memories of her childhood and her journey of navigating identity in a new environment. Through her ceramics, she reflects on the connections between past and present, celebrating the beauty of ordinary moments and their role in shaping identity.

What was your first memory of creativity?

I was first introduced to ceramics at 14, in Year 9, and immediately felt a sense of freedom in art that I didn't find in subjects like science or maths. I was fascinated by transforming everyday materials - even garbage into something meaningful. This approach nurtured my curiosity and awareness of the world around me. As an introvert, I found comfort in observing rather than speaking, realizing that art could be my voice. Clay intrigued me because it was rarely used in school, sparking my desire to explore it further. I wanted to create unique work that spoke for me, seeking acknowledgment through my art. This passion stayed with me as I left secondary school, determined to pursue a creative path.

What was your creative journey to get to where you are?

I was fortunate enough to have received support from my family although I did always struggle to seek inspiration from outside. You can say I was looking for someone whose life and work I admired and the choices they made which somehow reflected my journey as well or at least resonated with. This sense of familiarity gives one

a sense of hope and motivation and whenever I meet people, I want to feel that feeling. A feeling of home, acceptance and positivity. These are some of the key elements that are embedded in my work ethos. This idea of home has always intrigued me, what it looks like and how do I create it being away from it.

This dialogue was more present in my everyday life, when I moved to London to study my BA. This meant that I was going to live a very different life compared to the one with my family in Manchester, I was very excited for all the possibilities ahead of me such as living in a new space, studying in an art school and forming friendships and professional relationships.

Studying in an institute like Central Saint Martin's had always been a dream of mine. Having the opportunity to be there for 3 years, I made the most of it. My goal was to learn and work hard on the ceramic design course that I was on. Coming from college, where there were barely any ceramics facilities, I felt like a kid in a candy store. The guidance and advice from my tutors and technicians helped me to better understand my niche interests in ceramics and the types of work I wanted to create following university.

What impact have clients and commissions had on your career?

Working at Darwen Terracotta gave me the opportunity to expand and develop my work, moving beyond the limits of my small studio. Access to their processes and materials opened up new possibilities, though working in a busy, functioning factory came with challenges. Coordinating with their firing schedules and relying on assistance for certain tasks taught me the importance of flexibility and teamwork, leaving room for delays and the unexpected. I gained insight into the intricacies of industrial ceramics from the products they create and the materials they use, and the expertise required at each step. I learned how the factory operates and applied their techniques, such as mould-making and specialised processes to create plaster borders, ceramic relief tiles, and glazes.



What inspires you or provokes the motivation towards creativity within?

My recent works became heavily inspired by symbols. Visually, I think they are very fun and can be expressed in many different ways. Throughout history they have been presented in paintings, sculpture, ceramics, public murals and in religious books. Symbols and their meanings are represented through animals, objects, plants and things around us. I was fascinated and use them to tell my own stories. Many of my projects were inspired by Persian or Mughal paintings, an art form that derived from India. The constant questions about home, keeping in touch with my roots and how could I know more about it? Well it was through learning about the history, reading and looking at preserved moments captured in objects, buildings and culture.



Living in the UK, I was lucky enough to experience an essence of history, found in museum collections. Looking at these objects, I'm always transported back in time.

They are nothing like objects that we surround ourselves with now. These pieces are timeless and so precious, it feels like such a honor to have seen them, maybe because there won't be anything like it again. Seems like the only way I'm able to experience those times again. Whether it's looking at a metal box, with intricately carved text from the Quran or beautifully painted functional



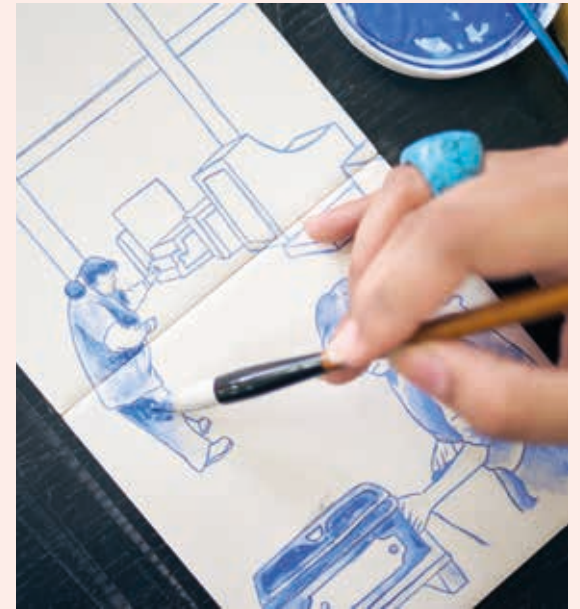
ceramicware, imagining what I would store in the metal box, or what I would eat out of the ceramics. How are these objects relevant to us in this day and age? Can it still be of use to us? Can this be recreated using our knowledge and skills?

What is it you love most about what you do?

My creative practice and I aren't separate. My everyday life influences my choices and my actions. My curiosity about life grows, my experiences help me to understand them better and much more to question like why things are the way that they are. Making is one of the ways I help to deal with the conversations I have with myself and the world around me. It's my way of saying it out loud.

I am constantly asking myself "What matters to you the most and how do I stay connected with it?"

What I love about what I do, I would say it's the people because art cannot be created in isolation.



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Luigi Carnovale ©

Luigi Carnovale is the founder and creative director of Design LSC, with over 30 years of experience in brand strategy, visual identity, and packaging. Luigi's work is deeply rooted in print and materiality, with a strong emphasis on craft, leading to collaborations with material companies and recognition from D&AD and Creative Review. Luigi also serves on the board for the Northern Design Festival 2025 and will soon begin a three-year role on Lancaster University's School of Design Advisory Board, helping to shape its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.



What was your first memory of creativity?

As a child in the 80s, I spent summers in Milan visiting family, and I was fascinated by the stylish magazine covers on newsstands. My uncle's apartment was surrounded by elegant boutiques and restaurants, each with its own distinct look but all effortlessly stylish. The signs, the window displays, the little details – it was a completely different level of design compared to my hometown. The magazines themselves felt special. The photography was more striking I would excitedly tell my art teacher, Mrs Barnes, all about it. One day, she suggested I create my own magazine cover. I spent hours cutting out letters, making collages, and experimenting. Looking back, I realise that was my first step into graphic design. I still remember her words: "You could do this for a job if you knuckled down." That advice stuck with me.

What was your creative journey to get to where you are?

After a short spell as a freelance designer in Blackburn, I moved to Manchester and co-founded a studio with a good friend, specialising in print design and branding - working with a diverse range of clients from design, manufacturing, fashion, premium hospitality venues, galleries and museums. After 15 years, I decided to relocate the studio to Lancashire. I now work from a meticulously restored, Grade II-listed Victorian mill chimney – a remarkable, light-filled studio on the banks of the Leeds Liverpool Canal, near Preston.

What impact have big name clients had on your career?

Working with the world's largest specialist paper manufacturer has undoubtedly had a significant impact on my career. My approach to design is grounded in a balance of composition, technical expertise, and a drive to explore innovative techniques – qualities that have brought Design LSC to the attention of leading paper brands, publishers, and clients in the arts and culture sector.

How do you establish your own style over a period of time, and still stay relevant?

Staying relevant is about originating fresh ideas and thinking logically through each project. The tactile nature of materials, especially paper, constantly challenges me to refine my approach and think critically. Collaborating with brands that value craftsmanship highlights the lasting importance of a well-thought-out process in design.

Does your work develop thematically, or is it more distinctive and random?

My work tends to develop around certain themes, rather than being random. I'm always exploring how materials can make designs better. By sticking to this way of working, I'm able to push the boundaries of print design and come up with fresh, meaningful ideas. Each project builds on the last, pushing me to think carefully and improve my process. This keeps my work consistent and ensures I'm responding thoughtfully to the needs of the client. It's this approach that helps me stay relevant and continue growing while staying true to my design values.

What or who has been the biggest influence on your work and why?

Bob Noorda's minimalist designs, especially his work on public signage systems like those for the Milan Metro and New York City subway, inspired me with their ability to combine aesthetics with practical communication. His philosophy of "don't bore the public with mysterious designs" resonates with my own belief that design should always be purposeful and intuitive. I also have a personal connection to his work for the Touring Club Italiano, which left a lasting impression on me during childhood trips to Italy. Bruno Monguzzi's career also broadened my understanding of design, especially his approach to exhibition design and how he intertwined typography with architecture.



What inspires you or provokes the motivation towards creativity within?

I'm motivated by the challenge of making good design, simple and effective. The way materials, can elevate a design and bring ideas to life is a constant source of inspiration. I also draw motivation from the work I see from other designers who demonstrate that thoughtful design can have a lasting impact. Whether it's exploring new techniques, responding to a client's brief, or finding ways to communicate ideas clearly.

What is it you love most about what you do?

It's incredibly satisfying to take an idea and shape it into something meaningful, whether that's through print design, branding, or crafting innovative solutions for clients. I also enjoy the continuous learning that comes with my work, especially the opportunity to collaborate with clients, educators, students and other creatives.



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Photography Credits:

Conversations in Creativity:
Adeshina Adesokan & Christina Davies

National Festival of Making: Robin Zahler,
Fiona Finchett, Rachel Bywater & Jules Lister

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Family DEM, Source Creative & especially
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Lazerian (Liam Hopkins) & Cardboard Box Company - Art & manufacturing (National Festival of Making)

