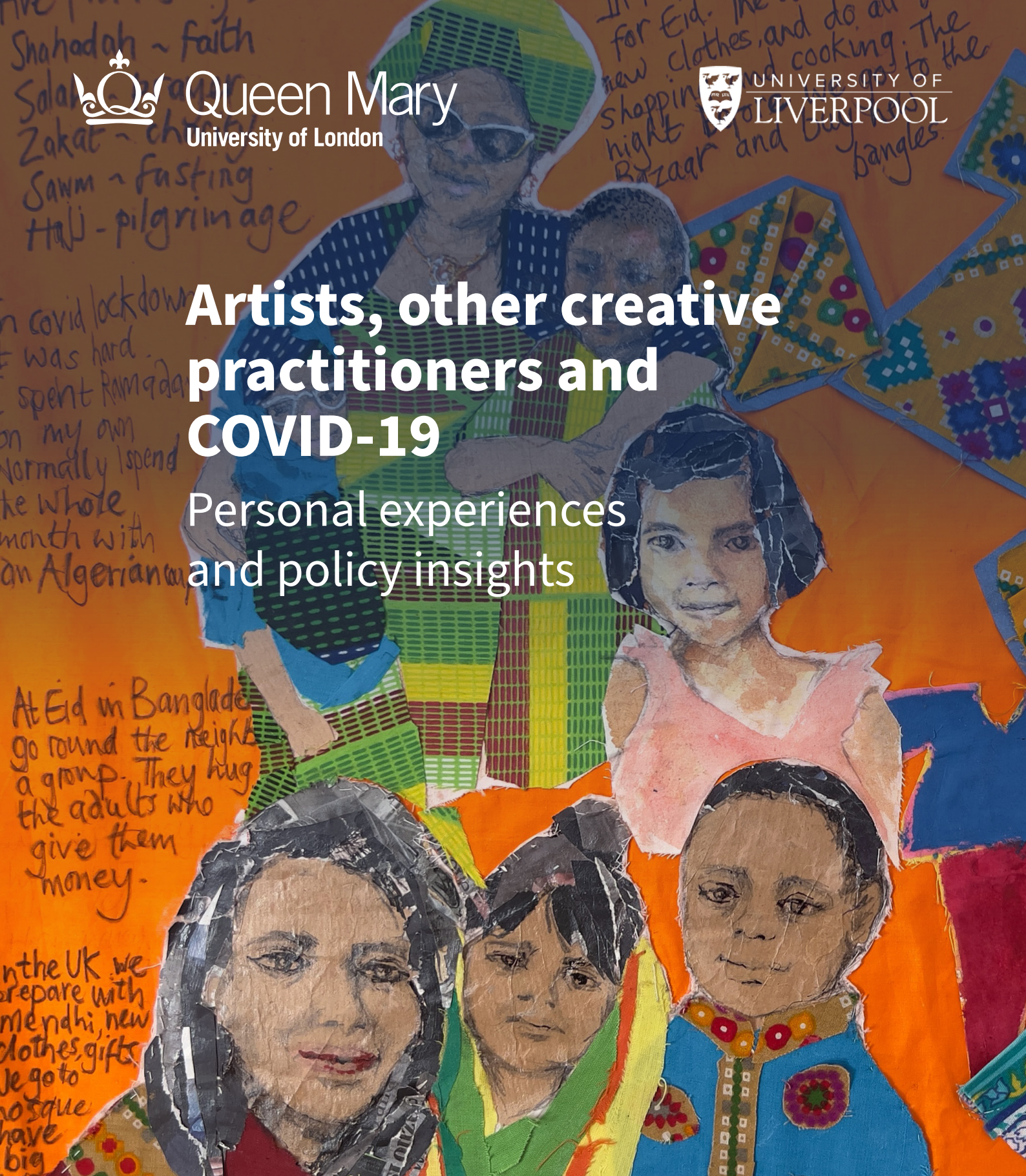


Artists, other creative practitioners and COVID-19

Personal experiences and policy insights



Authors: Eithne Nightingale, Alison Blunt and Alastair Owens

This report presents personal experiences and policy insights drawn from interviews with artists and other creative practitioners for the project “Stay Home”: Rethinking the Domestic in the COVID-19 pandemic’ (‘Stay Home Stories’), funded by Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of the UK Research and Innovation rapid response to COVID-19. This project is based at the Centre for Studies of Home, a partnership between Queen Mary University of London and the Museum of the Home, and in partnership with the University of Liverpool, Royal Geographical Society (with Institute of British Geographers) and National Museums Liverpool.

The research for this report has been led and conducted by researchers at Queen Mary University of London.

www.stayhomestories.co.uk

[@stayhomestories](https://twitter.com/stayhomestories)

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Cover image: Eid Textile Tales by Praxis Wings women’s group and Teresa Hare Duke.

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Introduction



I think that [the COVID-19 pandemic] has forced all of us in creative practice to ... be watchful ... to respond to situations, to think in terms of collaboration and comment and jumping on opportunities. And conversations, which we were all hungry for and are still hungry for”

Lydia Thornley,

designer, creative director and sketcher

This report shares personal experiences, and draws out insights for policy makers, from interviews held with 21 creative practitioners – both visual and performance artists – from May to November 2021. It focuses on how creative practitioners experienced and negotiated artistic, personal and professional challenges during the pandemic. It explores artists’ engagement with people and places both locally and globally, the importance of nature and outside space, and the use of old and new technology, including with audiences from diverse backgrounds. It shows how, for many, COVID-19 became an opportunity to learn new skills, a source of inspiration, and a tool for social justice. Finally,

it reviews how creative practitioners are coming out of the pandemic and draws on people’s reflections since the first UK lockdown in March 2020 to inform policy recommendations for how things should change.

The creative practitioners worked and/or lived in London and South-East England, the majority in the Greater London area. The interviews were conducted by post-doctoral researcher, Dr Eithne Nightingale, as part of the Stay Home Stories project, funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council as part of the UKRI rapid response to COVID-19 (see www.stayhomestories.co.uk).

The people who have contributed to this report are of different ages and genders, some with disabilities, and from a range of ethnicities, including White British, Black British African Caribbean, Black British African, British South and East Asian, British Turkish Cypriot, British Irish. Many are involved in some form of visual art – illustration, painting, printmaking, photography, sculpture, film and curation. One is a sound artist and three are theatre practitioners. Artists’ biographies and web links to their work are included at the end of the report.

In practice several artists combined different art forms and the experience of lockdown encouraged experimentation in different media. Some also continued to teach during the pandemic and/or were involved in

family or community arts projects with diverse audiences, transferring at least part of this activity online.

The interviews and the projects form the basis of four films produced by the Stay Home Stories project: *My Place, My Space*, featuring stories by young people from Barking and Dagenham with the organisation Write Back; *Our Homes Our Stories*, on the installation at the Museum of the Home by Stay Home Stories artist-in-residence, Alaa Alsaraji; *Eid Textile Tales*, featuring the work of artist Teresa Hare Duke with refugee women at Praxis; and *Life Under Lockdown*, featuring the street photography of Adam Isfendiyar and Eithne Nightingale in East London. A forthcoming podcast features the work of sound artist, Calum Perrin.

'Stay Home Stories' is a collaborative research project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as part of the UK Research and Innovation rapid response to COVID-19. The project is a partnership between Queen Mary University of London, University of Liverpool, the Museum of the Home¹, National Museums Liverpool and the Royal Geographical Society (with Institute of British Geographers). Other project outputs – all available at www.stayhomestories.co.uk – include reports on COVID-19 in London and Liverpool, short films – including on the 'Our homes, Our Stories' installation by project artist-in-residence Alaa Alsaraji at the Museum of the Home - podcasts, an online gallery of maps, learning resources, and blog posts. Future outputs include policy reports on the impact of the pandemic on museums and an interfaith resource guide on lessons learned from the pandemic.

Reports	<p>Burrell et al. (2021) <i>At Home in Liverpool During COVID-19</i>, Queen Mary University of London: London</p> <p>Blunt, et al. (2022) <i>At Home in London During COVID-19: policy recommendations and key findings</i>, Queen Mary University of London: London.</p>
Films	<p><i>Eid Textile Tales</i>, with Praxis, a charity for migrants and refugees</p> <p><i>Our Home, Our Stories</i>, with project artist-in-residence Alaa Alsaraji about her installation at the Museum of the Home</p> <p><i>My Place, My Space</i>, with Write Back, a charity working with young people in Barking and Dagenham</p> <p><i>Life Under Lockdown</i>, street photography in East London with Adam Isfendiyar and Eithne Nightingale</p>
Podcasts	<p>Episode 1: Museum of the Home 'Stay Home' Collection</p> <p>Episode 2: Religious belief and practice at home during the COVID-19 pandemic</p> <p>Episode 3: Migration, COVID-19 and community support in London and Liverpool</p> <p>Episode 4: Sounds of Lockdown with artist Calum Perrin</p> <p>Episode 5: COVID-19 in journalism and political debate - in production</p> <p>Episode 6: COVID-19 and outside space – in production</p>
Online gallery	Maps submitted by children and young people aged 7-16
Teaching resources	Stay Home teaching resources for Key Stages 1 and 2
Blog posts	Blog posts across the work of the Stay Home Stories project

¹ The Stay Home Stories project has been taking place at the same time as ongoing protests about the statue of Sir Robert Geffrye on the buildings of the Museum of the Home. See the project website for a blog post about the impact of the statue on the project, links to other resources, and the current position of the Museum's trustees.

Policy insights

From the experience of the pandemic, it is clear the cultural sector and individual creative practitioners would benefit from:

- More accessible and flexible funding schemes, and advice on employment opportunities in similar or related fields, particularly for freelance workers, whilst coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic and during future crises.
- A review of indoor, outdoor and virtual workspaces/creative hubs that are safe, flexible, affordable, accessible, local and inclusive; provide different working spaces beyond those for laptops and monitors; breakdown barriers and provide opportunities for activities such as networking, collaborative working, exhibitions, film screenings, and performances.
- A review of housing needs alongside those of working/studio space particularly for less established, younger creative practitioners.
- Skills training and sharing of good practice in new technologies including promoting creative work in the digital sphere; blended approaches to public engagement allowing multiple points of entry e.g. through live streaming of events for the housebound, people with disabilities and international audiences.
- Support for continued opportunities to experiment with different art forms, new and old technologies, for their own art practice, study and increased employability.
- Maintaining blended points of access to creative work for those who will still be shielding from COVID-19 or, for other reasons, would benefit from working at home for all or part of the week.
- Opportunities for fellow creatives and artists to reconvene and reinvigorate each other by sharing what they have learned and gained from individual challenges during the pandemic.
- A forum for creative practitioners to reflect on how they can contribute to anti-racism on individual, societal and political levels through their practice, including addressing the structures of whiteness and the privileges that white artists have frequently enjoyed.
- Support for artists of all backgrounds in addressing the colonial legacy of institutions and public spaces where they work.
- Recognition of, and support for, the powerful role of art in addressing inequalities highlighted by the pandemic and contributing to social justice e.g. in relation to poverty, housing, racial justice and the environment.
- Support for the mental health and wellbeing of artists from diverse backgrounds, given the increasing insecurity of, and vulnerability in, a fast-changing world.
- Prioritisation of the needs of young creatives who have missed out on networking and other opportunities at a crucial time in their careers.
- Collaboration with a range of organisations e.g. museums, archives or universities to ensure that creative work, including documentation of and creative responses to the pandemic, is accessible for present and future generations.
- Support for increased opportunities to curate and/or share work created during the pandemic, including online, and engage the public with issues that have emerged.

Challenges of the pandemic

The 21 creative practitioners interviewed for this research experienced different levels of stress during the pandemic. Whilst several were used to working from home, others found that they could not access studio space or specialist equipment. Some experienced a loss of creativity, particularly during the first lockdown. Alaa Alsaraji, visual artist and facilitator, “found it very difficult to motivate [myself] to do anything creative during lockdown.” Although initially it was hard to find inspiration, she “got good at just allowing that to happen... You can’t be giving a 100% all the time when something so major is going on around us.” Jules Chan, an actor, missed the inspiration of collaborative working: “Your circle of friends are other creatives who understand your endeavour ... it’s not the easiest to reengage and connect through phone calls or anything.” Some creatives had difficulties concentrating, experienced screen fatigue and missed the lack of structure with “days bleeding into nights, weeks into weekends”. Others had to juggle caring responsibilities without support or felt anxious

about family in other parts of the UK and abroad. Isolation, news about the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter Movement, and the climate crisis, triggered further anxiety.

Some had regular full or part time work, for example, as lecturers or museum educators, which continued during lockdown but was transferred online. Others faced the threat of a loss of income. They were dependent on short term projects that were postponed or cancelled and were sometimes unable to access the government funding scheme for freelancers. With the closure of theatres and concert halls those working in the performing arts were particularly vulnerable. As Jules Chan said: “The acting industry was like, who cared about you? There’s no auditions. There were no projects. Economically, there was a bit of furlough here and there, and that was good... without universal credit, I’d probably literally be homeless, or I’d be back at my parents’ house. Some people have become homeless because of it.”

CASE STUDY

Financial and other support for artistic development: Becky-Dee Trevenen

“I think COVID really changed me and my artistic practice. Early in the pandemic, I was part of a project called “Devolution Evolution” run by a theatre company called Tangled Feet which provided a mini grant to about 20 different artists from the Company’s freelance network. The grant was a no-questions-asked lump sum of money to spend doing whatever we liked to springboard an idea we wanted to play with. This was absolutely crucial at the time when we received it

as none of us could make live work as theatre makers, so it was some paid dreaming and development time, encouraging us to look inwards and analyse what within us we needed to express. I believe it helped me to find my own individual artistic voice outside of my theatre design work – which is often based on being given a specific brief and responding to it, instead of generating the seed of an idea personally. I really feel like I am an artist now, rather than a theatre designer.”

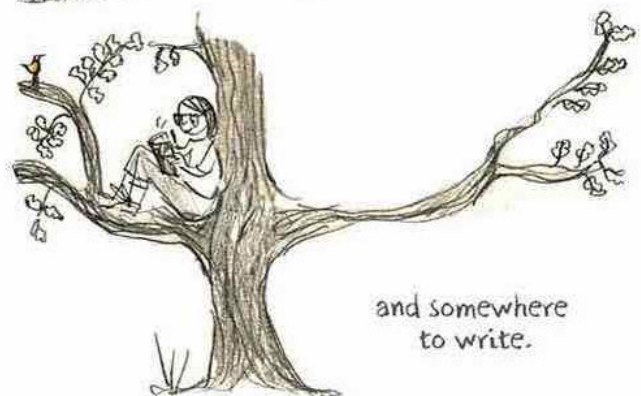
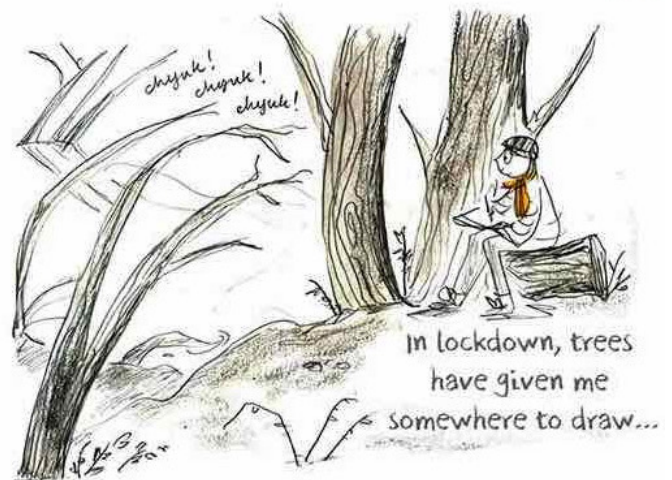
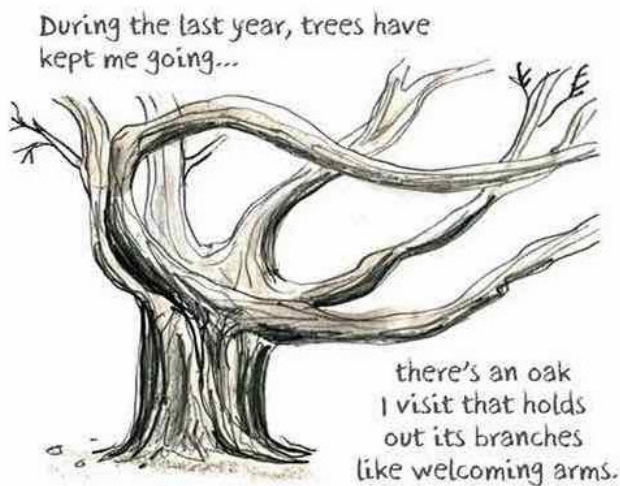


Wanstead Flats

Kois Miah

People responded to these various challenges differently. Several practitioners took regular, long-distance walks in their local area and established domestic routines. Jenny Blanchard, a visual artist, who was sheltering at home in Hackney with her partner and unable to visit her studio, exercised indoors, “There are 29 stairs, and we did it twice a day ... in the end I just thought my knees were going to give out.” Several found solace by drawing and photographing nature. Kois Miah, a freelance

documentary photographer who had planned to take photographs of elders in Brick Lane before the pandemic, said, “I was hit for six, because the world as we knew it came crashing to a halt.” To deal with stress he took his Hasselblad camera to Wanstead Flats nearby: “I didn’t want to photograph people, I didn’t want to be near people. I just wanted to find stuff in plants that evoked something that reflected emotion. That’s been my saviour in a way.”



Jules Chan did four hours of journaling every morning: "It was a practice of hope, to be like, *I'm still creative, I'm still doing this.*" Some took to archiving and completing unfinished work, in one case prompted by an increased sense of mortality due to age and the death, from COVID-19, of people close to him: "The pandemic, you know, brings death very close." Younger people experienced different emotions: "It's wanting to have a chance to live. Like, oh, give me a chance, man. I mean, I'm 25, you feel somehow your youth is being robbed – you don't know who to blame". (Jules Chan).

Some welcomed additional time to focus on a particular work, to reflect on or explore new directions. One visual artist was able to deal with stress as, having been brought up in care, she felt more used to living with

uncertainty than fellow artists who seemed to be panicking. Jules Chan, who is half Filipino, a quarter Spanish and a quarter Chinese, "did a lot of research on Black culture, my culture, Eastern culture, through the first lockdown because I had the time to understand myself more... it gives you a sense of confidence, an inner confidence." Calum Perrin, a sound artist who is autistic, found that the pandemic suited him well: "You were allowed to stay at home, there wasn't pressure to go out... being able to be in the domestic space, the calm of that... and the really positive impact that had on my mental health and my disability meant I was able to maybe work properly for the first time in my life." This, and the fact he only needed his laptop to work, meant he found more work during the pandemic than before.

Comic Diary
Jane Porter



Tower Hamlets Together

Film by Koïs Miah

Some learnt new skills and established closer links to the local area. Others found novel and exciting ways to use new technology including working with new audiences locally, nationally and internationally. There is no doubt that some attributed the pandemic to finding new ways of living and working. For Ali Pretty, artistic director at Kinetika, 'the pandemic has made most of us,

hopefully all of us, reflect on the kind of lives we live. There's a lot of hope, let's not go back to how it was before.'

Some curated their own work, either in local galleries when they were open, or online; submitted work to joint exhibitions; self-published photography books and sent packages to people for a theatre experience at home.

Access to indoor and outdoor space, equipment and materials



A Front Room in 1970

Curated by Michael McMillan at the Museum of the Home

Image reproduced courtesy of the Museum of the Home.

Limited access to studios forced many artists to work from home. Some lost access to specialist equipment, missed interaction with other artists and spaces to display work. Jenny Blanchard, a visual artist, built a studio in her garden; another visual artist, who works with sculpture, extended his. Fungai Marima, who was studying for an MA in printmaking and unable to access space and equipment at her

university, used surfaces and materials found in her home to make prints of different parts of her body in work that explored domestic abuse.

Many creative practitioners were inventive. Instead of going to markets to source objects for *The Front Room* at the Museum of the Home, Michael McMillan turned to eBay and Facebook.



Walking in the Wake
Film by Michael McMillan

Lydia Thornley, with an eye on cost, used recycled and natural materials. She took part in Cordwainers Grow Bundles Dyes project, growing woad and madder, but also experimented with plants in her own garden - croci, narcissi and sweet peas, producing her own dyed cloth that she used to bind books. “It’s materials for free that really interests me... particularly living in an area where people haven’t got much... how people can make work without having to spend a fortune in an art shop.”

Lydia moved out to make space for her own studio-mates, who didn’t have suitable space at home, or had young families. In response to the pandemic the management of the social enterprise rethought membership and what they could provide for those working at home. They also developed good ventilation, outside benches, tables and enhanced wifi for work in the open air.

Outdoor space, parks and nature have become more central to several artists’ work, supporting mental health and well-being, as inspiration, and as a resource for natural materials. However, these can often be seen as ‘white spaces.’² After the ‘rule of six’ was introduced in September 2020, permitting up to six people to meet together, Michael McMillan led a series of *Walking in the Wake* from Tilbury Cruise Terminal, where slave ships docked and where the SS Empire Windrush arrived, “because normally Black folks, we’re quite ambivalent about the English countryside, we’re othered in that space”.

Support for initiatives such as *Walking in the Wake* and the accompanying film break down these barriers “providing Black subjective agency in the natural world of the River Thames and the surrounding landscape”.

Plans to exhibit work could easily be frustrated. After a delay of ten months, Adam Isfendiyar’s exhibition of photographs of people in their windows, on their balconies, on their canal boats, or outside their homes in East London was displayed in the windows of Toynbee Hall but facing outwards in case the gallery had to close again. Being able to exhibit, set up installations, or perform in outdoor spaces was a huge advantage, as was the ability to showcase work online, although this was not always possible or appropriate. In Hackney, for example, the Arcola Theatre was able to use their newly built outdoor theatre space. In the autumn of 2020 the documentary exhibition *Ridley Road Stories*, celebrating the area’s African and Caribbean communities, was posted on the wall of the Red Cross building on the corner of Graham Road and Dalston Lane and, a year later, on the underside of Hackney Central bridge on Mare Street. Don Travis and Wayne Crichlow of the storytelling collective, Future Hackney, said in an interview with *Hackney Citizen* “It is our belief that the visual arts should be on the streets for everyone. We increasingly recognise exterior public art spaces as ‘the new gallery’” (Hackney Citizen, 24 September 2021). One impressive example of this was Tate Britain’s winter commission in 2020, *Remembering a Brave New World*, by Chila Kumari Burman. Thousands gathered day and night outside Tate Britain to admire figures lit up in neon lights inspired by Hindu mythology, Bollywood imagery, colonial history and the artist’s memories of personal visits to the Blackpool illuminations and her family’s ice-cream van in Liverpool.

²See Ingrid Pollard, *Pastoral Interlude*, 1988 and Sethi, A. (2021) *I belong here: a journey along the backbone of Britain*. London: Bloomsbury.

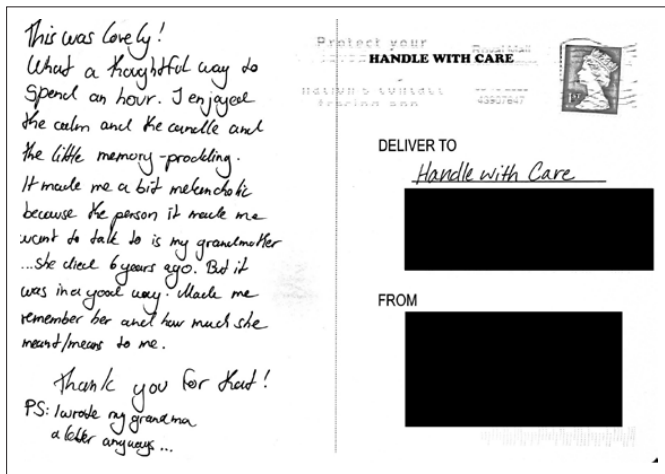
Old and new technology



Old cameras and lenses
acquired by Sapphire Goss

Two apparently converging trends have emerged during the pandemic: both an interest in developing artistic practice that is more intimate, personal and not dependent on new technology and, seemingly in opposition, an expanded use of new technology.

Kois Miah used his analogue medium format Hasselblad camera to photograph nature as a way of slowing down. Sapphire Goss, a filmmaker, sourced old lenses and cameras from eBay and experimented with new stereography techniques that took her practice in a completely different direction, including projects on *Attic Windows of the Infinite* and *The Eyes of Time*.



Postcard evaluating impact of Handle with Care
Sent to Natasha Wright

One visual artist used a typewriter and paper. Natasha Wright, frustrated at no live performances, decided that *Handle with Care*, an outreach project for people at home, was “not going to be any kind of digital theatre”. It involved sending a box of objects and instructions to people’s homes, for example, to light a candle, find a favourite object and put it in a place where you could see it. “In that way really thinking ... about how our home environment has had to become everything.” For one participant, it was “the most unique and intimate piece of theatre I’ve ever participated in.”



Hey You! An empowering celebration of growing up Black
Dapo Adeola and 18 Black illustrators
(Puffin, 2021).

Others adapted to, and embraced, new technology. Jane Porter learnt how to teach illustration online. “That was a steep learning curve, but it can work really, really well.” Jane also learnt video skills for the first time. “Without lockdown I’d never have started a YouTube channel, definitely not.” Featured on the YouTube channel are family challenge workshops on Zoom that connected family members across the UK as well as recorded interviews with other children’s book illustrators. Particularly impressive is the work of Dapo Adeola who collaborated with 18 other illustrators during the pandemic to produce *Hey You! An Empowering Celebration of Growing up Black* (see Jane Porter interviewing Dapo Adeola about this book on [YouTube](#)).

Lydia Thornley – who had previously run in-person workshops – produced videos on drawing techniques for the homeless at [Crisis](#) and [East London Cares](#).

Sapphire Goss launched the premiere of her film, *Closes and Opens: a history of Edinburgh’s futures*, online. “That was the first online event I did, and everyone was very nervous, but it was good in the end.” Jules Chan missed the open mic poetry night *Symposium* he used to organise so converted it to an online platform. To his surprise he enjoyed the experience of being cast in an online filming series called *Let Us Out*. “It was really interesting to get creative, rehearse online, make content from home... And then I started doing online coaching for actors with this teacher, for movement.” Amber Perrier became proficient in the use of social media to network. She also linked up with [Newham Locked Down Window Art](#) to showcase her work and get commissions.

CASE STUDY

Instagram Interiors:
Katie Whitford



*Instagram photo as source of inspiration
for a pen and ink drawing*
Katie Whitford

Instagram became a particularly powerful communication tool for visual artists. Katie Whitford, an illustrator, asked people to send her photographs of their home interiors. She drew 30 pen and ink drawings based on the 50 images she was sent in response to her Instagram post. “People usually respond really well because it’s so familiar to them and then they get to see it with fresh eyes.”

“My previous work has explored various aspects of the domestic space including our collective relationship to the domestic and the connection we have to objects that surround us, that we choose for ourselves on the basis of design, functionality and comfort but that often outlive us.

During the first lockdown of 2020, when we stayed at home amongst our stuff 24/7, these themes seemed suddenly prevalent. People had time to pay attention to the stark differences in the way we live. This was combined with the realisation that we are experiencing a housing crisis, with areas of the world under mass displacement. The conversation around homelessness seemed to shift. The home is a political idea.

In the first lockdown, my partner and I were living in a one bed flat in Lewisham with no garden. We were fortunate in many ways but fell into the category of waiting for cancelled medical care. So, while my partner waited for a hip operation, we were advised to shield completely and did so for eight months. Neither of us had family close by so it was just the two of us for all that time.

As a maker, I responded to the situation by looking for a project. I was used to going out and drawing, taking these into the studio and making prints so I had to think how I could work from home without just exploring my own space.

This led me to putting a call out on Instagram in late March 2020 asking people to send a photo of a room in their home so I could illustrate it and post them on Instagram.

Most of the drawings were of places I had never visited; from people I had never met. I was a tourist in their rooms, which, while being stuck at home like everybody else, felt lucky and nourishing. I could use my eye and interpret these spaces from the small amount of information I had. I received positive responses to the illustrations and felt like I was connecting with the people and places I was drawing from. With Iva who had recently divorced her husband, living in a flat in Deptford with two kids and no garden, and who had teamed up with a friend to get an Airbnb in Kent; with Jay, who moved back in with his parents during lockdown.

This project ultimately felt like part survival mechanism, part successful connection with the outside world at a time when going and sitting in your friend’s living room to drink wine and chat was out of the question. The work led me to a great exploration into other people’s worlds and really expanded my thinking about home.”

Community art practitioners developed blended approaches, combining audience development online – through videos, WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram – with resource packs delivered to people’s homes. When Teresa Hare Duke, visual artist and workshop leader, finally accepted that she would not be able to run the project, *Eid Textile Tales* in person with refugee women from Praxis in East London, she developed videos that she shared on WhatsApp so that the women and their families could design, sew and embroider pieces from packs of materials that she sent to their

homes. Praxis stepped in to support this online working. “Not all of us had the phone with internet but Praxis provided the mums, tablets and internet for us to use.” Teresa Hare Duke commented, “I have no doubt it would have been a richer experience face to face but despite my misgivings, it provided a real bonding opportunity... When eventually we could meet, we had a joyous unfurling of the textile in a park in Bethnal Green, and the women were visibly delighted with what they’d made. So, who was I to say that it wasn’t a success?”

CASE STUDY

Eid Textile Tales:
Teresa Hare Duke



Eid Textile Tales
by Praxis Wings women's group and Teresa Hare Duke

Eid Textile Tales was made by a group of Muslim women in 2021. The original project was conceived of in early 2020 before any of us had heard of COVID-19. It was to be a co-produced narrative textile, podcast and exhibition tool, a collaboration between myself, Teresa Hare Duke as artist, Nishta Mauree, as facilitator, and women who meet at Praxis, a charity in Tower Hamlets working with refugee and asylum seekers. The project aimed to open up conversations between Muslim and non-Muslim women, reveal undiscovered stories of women's experience of Ramadan and Eid and counter some of the prejudice Muslim women often experience.

Then we were all told to stay at home. At first, I panicked as I couldn't see how to do the project as pitched to our funders. Its success depended on teaching creative skills face-to-face, making a collective piece and encouraging dialogue between people of different faiths. Also, the women were confronted with far more pressing issues. Many lived in temporary housing or shared housing with relative strangers. There was misinformation and fake news, and it was difficult to know what to believe and which rules to follow. Many struggled with food poverty, trying to get to food banks or to get free school meals for their children. Some have no recourse to public funds and had to work to survive. There was restricted access to health and other services as well as advice. Home schooling without internet access was challenging. Shutting down the night before Eid, when plans to celebrate were cancelled, was particularly distressing. But there were also positive experiences of lockdown and evidence of the women's incredible resilience.

I started teaching some creative processes online via Zoom and on mobile phones. This was not easy and I still felt that the bulk of the project had to wait until we could meet up. When we found ourselves locked down again at Christmas 2020, I gave up on my determination

to deliver the project as a live workshopped process. So, during Ramadan 2021, we decided to do it remotely. We held recorded conversations over Zoom with a wider group of women of different faiths. I posted out packs of materials, paints, fabrics, pens, scissors, embroidery threads to a smaller group of Muslim women. Over WhatsApp I demonstrated techniques in how to paint, draw, design, collage, appliqué and embroider individual pieces. Rather than the textile piece being something we created together it became a patchwork of individual squares made by the women and their families working on their own at home, which they posted back to me and I pieced together into a large quilt.

Through the project I learnt that Islamic practise is based on shared fundamental values, but the practise is both nuanced and diverse. Also, I had to eat my words. I have no doubt it would have been a richer experience face-to-face. But despite my misgivings, it provided a real bonding opportunity. Importantly, we created something that proved both rewarding and a source of real pride for the women who made it.

"To me, it represents the pieces we've had in our lives we've left our families back home. We are broken. We've missed our families. And just bringing these pieces back together it shows that our life can be beautiful and somehow colourful. We've missed our family back home. But now I have a lot of sisters now with this project. We are like one family now" (Kemi, member of Wings).

The women shared their experiences of the project for the film *Eid Textile Tales*, produced by Stay Home Stories and launched at Praxis in May 2022.



Installation in Purfleet-on-Thames

By Kinetika in June 2020

As soon as the first lockdown was announced in March 2020, Ali Pretty and others from Kinetika made up 100 resource packs to design silk flags based on 100 stories of walks between Dagenham and Thurrock, for the project *Land of the Fanns*. They delivered these to 100 participants already engaged in the project and set up a Facebook page.

“Because we all had this time at home, and with the benefit of Zoom and the internet, we created a stronger community through that period. The result was a high-quality set of 100 flags.” They then organised socially distanced activities as soon as restrictions allowed – an installation of the flags in Purfleet-on-Thames in June 2020.

A year later, in May 2021 they organised a 10-day walking event between Barking and Dagenham to Purfleet ending in a performance directed online by Coco Loco, stranded in Australia.

But new technology, although a lifeline for many artists during the pandemic, has its limits. For Lydia Thornley, “for all of us who live alone, Zoom was an answer, but it wasn’t the answer” and, for Adam Isfendiyar, “It does seem to work having chats online – but it creates disconnection between people.” At times Amber Perrier needed to retreat into her art: “Social media sometimes gets too much so I have to find something to take my mind off it.” Jules Chan, after participating in an online funeral for his uncle in the Philippines, commented, “It’s really, really strange to experience what technology can do, but also the dangers of it if you aren’t aware of how it can detach your emotion from reality.” Although Alaa Alsaraji learnt how to use technology with great effect in her work with audiences, she still prefers face-to-face contact: “Part of my process is very much meeting people and building that trust. I was quite intimidated to do that online. We adjusted to it quite well, but I think, in future, I am going back to in person.”



CASE STUDY

Land of the Fanns: Ali Pretty, Kinetika

Kinetika had collected 100 stories based on walks between Dagenham and West Thurrock for two years before the pandemic for the project, *Land of the Fanns*. The stories were to be the inspiration for silk flags designed in artist-led workshops. Lockdown was announced after the delivery of just one workshop. The Kinetika team immediately created 100 resource packs that they delivered by car to those participants who had been engaged in writing their stories and were now ready to create illustrations for them. They also set up a Facebook page *Drawing Communities Together*. As Ali Pretty, founder and artistic director of Kinetika explains, “Normally, it’s all a bit of a rush, some communities can’t come to the workshop, or people can’t stay very long. But because we all had this time at home, and with the benefit of Zoom and the internet, we created a stronger community through that period. The result was a high-quality set of 100 flags.” By June 2020, when people

could work together, but at a social distance, Ali with the help of two women waxed all 100 designs. Instead of the planned May festival in Thames Chase, Kinetika created an outdoor installation of flags with local stories written on labels. “People loved it, exploring all the stories and kids trying to count 100 flags. Limited numbers and time slots kept people safe.”

By the end of August 2021, the flag designs and related stories were on the website. The material was turned into a book, launched in May 2021, with input from the writer Ken Worpole. The festival happened a year later than planned in May 2021, with 10 days of walking from Barking and Dagenham to Purfleet with the flags and a finale with performances at Langdon Hills, written, auditioned and directed by Coco Loco, a Hackney based group, stranded in Australia.

Local and Global Connections



Dispatches from a Small World

By Lydia Thornley

Several artists were inspired to explore and find inspiration in their local area. Lydia Thornley commented, “I and so many people became forensic explorers of our local neighbourhoods”. When, because of COVID-19 restrictions, she was unable to draw in local parks, she turned to her garden for inspiration. “My local park had signs everywhere saying, don’t sit on the benches. I thought, ‘I know, I’ll report from my back garden.’” This was the start of *Dispatches from a Small World*.



Life under Lockdown – the one remaining family on Marian Court

By Eithne Nightingale

Others took portraits that reflected the diversity of East London, the local shaped by the global. Adam Isfendiyar put out a call out on Tower Hamlets Mutual Aid Facebook page asking for volunteers to be photographed in their windows or outside their houses or flats. Eighty people responded. As Adam explains, “It was everything I wanted. I could work for myself, the weather was beautiful, I’d ride my bike around, take photos, come back, edit them.” The project reinforced his feeling of belonging to the local area. “Moving back to East London... it did definitely feel like it was a bit of a free pass into being part of here again.” This report’s lead author, Eithne Nightingale, who is also a photographer, took doorstep portraits in her two neighbouring streets with people holding objects that sustained them during lockdown. She had photographed her neighbours on their doorsteps previously but felt the pandemic was a historic moment to document. Living alone, she found it an important way of reducing isolation.

In contrast to working locally, artists took to the internet to connect globally. Sapphire Goss developed a collaborative film version of the Surrealist *Exquisite Corpse* - *Interior: an Exquisite Corpse Film in Two Parts* - where contributors see a part of what the last person filmed before they add to the sequence. “I put a call out to see if anyone is interested on Twitter and Instagram. I like the fact [the film] went globally when we couldn’t... it’s probably about what home became when you couldn’t leave it.”

The internet provided a lifeline for Coco Loco, a Hackney art organisation who, stranded in Australia because of travel restrictions, were able to script, audition and direct a show online, instead of in person, for the outdoor walking festival in Thurrock organised by Kinetika. Ali Pretty, founder and artistic director of Kinetika, held a seminar with silk weavers in Kolkata, something she has previously done in person: “I could have that conversation just by being in my room.” Whilst acknowledging this avoids the cost and environmental damage of international travel, she worries that younger people “won’t have the same opportunities as we did. How do you experience the nuances of all those different cultures?”

Creative responses to COVID-19



Many, but not all, creative practitioners found inspiration in the pandemic. Participants in Jane Porter's *Family Challenge* on Zoom drew on their COVID-19 experiences. "One of them was to make something you wished you could do or somewhere you wished you could go - that was all to do with that sense of longing. We actually made a virus and ...they did this little model of home schooling."

Online family challenge

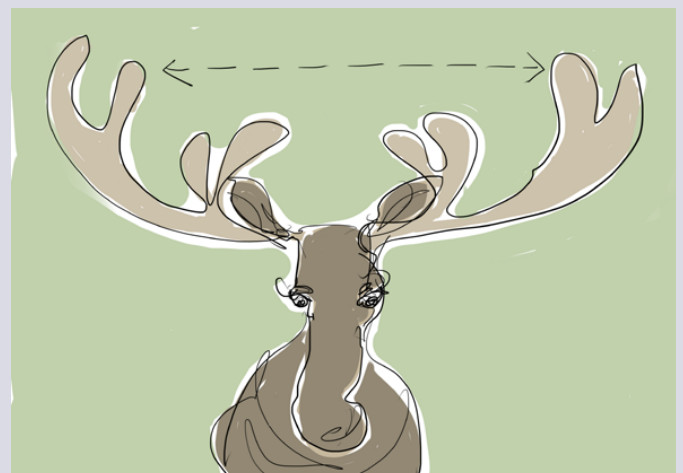
By Jane Porter



Comic illustration on social distancing

by Jane Porter

Jane Porter also drew comic illustrations of the lengths she took to avoid the virus - using gloves to pick vegetables, and to take food out of the freezer.



Comic illustration on social distancing

By Lydia Thornley

Lydia Thornley drew a guide on how to measure two metres of social distancing.



Health inequality during the pandemic in Nigeria

by Ekua Agha

Such restrictions, for another artist, triggered painful memories of racism. “One of the biggest things I found deeply uncomfortable was the social distancing thing. I wrote about it. You’d be walking down the street and have somebody cross the road. Well, that is my life.”

Ekua Agha drew pen and ink illustrations that reflected the inequality of access to health in Nigeria. “Social distancing has always been in existence in these communities where you’ve got the divide between rich and poor. There’s a whole issue right now with who’s getting vaccinated”.

Michael McMillan interviewed young activists involved in the black-led community initiative, *Ubele*, who ran a Zoom webinar, attended by 3000 people globally, about how Black and Brown communities were disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Using the glass door leading to the garden to make imprints of her body which were then erased, a process she **filmed**, Fungai Marima explored the increase in domestic abuse during the pandemic, triggering memories of domestic abuse she witnessed as a child in Zimbabwe.

CASE STUDY

Stay at Home Save Lives: Fungai Marima



Untitled Still 11

By Fungai Marima



Erasure

Film by Fungai Marima

The *Stay at Home Save Lives* series is part of an ongoing project that is investigating and documenting the relationship between the body and the home, through photography, printmaking, film and sound, highlighting cases of domestic violence and abuse that have risen during COVID-19 around the world.

As a child in Zimbabwe, I was witness to domestic violence and abuse. I have seen the effects of it and how it shows itself in how we interact with, and perceive, the world around us. I am passionate about exploring ways of talking about my experiences and finding a space to heal from, and expose, the effects of trauma.

However, the catalyst for this body of work was an [article](#) I read on the BBC website which explained:

‘Coronavirus: Domestic violence ‘increases globally during lockdown.

The UN has described the worldwide increase in domestic abuse as a “shadow pandemic” alongside Covid-19. It’s thought cases have increased by 20% during the lockdown, as many people are trapped at home with their abuser.’

The key words that stood out for me throughout the multiple lockdowns in the UK and the article were:

- *shadow pandemic*
- *trapped*
- *stay at home save lives*
- *erase*
- *imprint*
- *body*

The series focuses on capturing impressions of the body on a glass door overlooking the garden, at night, using grease applied onto the body and talcum powder to reveal the invisible vestiges. The door conveys contradictory metaphors – protection and freedom but also entrapment and what that means to the many vulnerable bodies that are experiencing what has been described by the UN as a ‘shadow pandemic’.

As I live with my family, I had to provide information on what I was planning to do and when, forewarning them that, in the morning, the doors would still have body marks on them. To respect others in the home I also had to think about the duration of the impressions, so documenting the process through photography and film needed to be done in one day. I had also to consider the neighbours - what they might see and the noise I would potentially make

I worked in silence, in the dark, creating quiet repeated marks on the doors so as not to alert anyone. This silence contributed to how I then documented the process and produced the video, *‘Erasure’*:

Erasure is part of a **two-film piece** highlighting the sinister nature of domestic violence and abuse and how often marginalised bodies are erased or silenced within societies as happened especially during the COVID-19 pandemic around the world.



Studio Walk.

By Jenny Blanchard
Oil on Linen. 30 x 40 cm 2020.

In his work *Conversations with Future Selves*, Calum Perrin, a sound artist, explored how the pandemic affected people with disabilities but also captured the textures, sounds, sensations of, and experiences in, his home.

Katie Whitford, too, with her drawings of people's interiors from photographs sent by Instagram and Sapphire Goss though her film *Interior: an Exquisite Corpse Film in Two Parts*, were

inspired by a more intense relationship with the home as a physical space.

Nostalgia also infused people's work. **Jenny Blanchard**, for example, drew on memories of walks that she could not undertake because she and her partner were sheltering.

"A feeling of longing to return to my studio two miles away through two parks. I traced the route through the air."

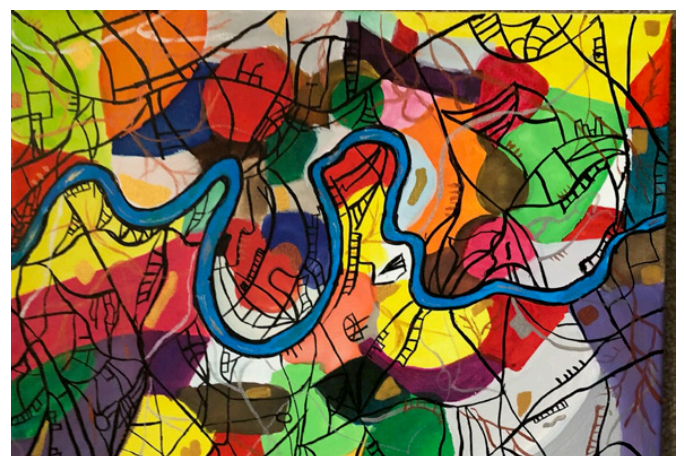


West End Lights

By Amber Perrier

In *West End Lights* **Amber Perrier** recalled the hustle and bustle of London before it descended into silence, reminding us that when lockdown is over, we will, once again, enjoy the bright lights.

Thames Ink is her map out of lockdown – the reds and blues of Transport for London, the bronze for residential areas, the green for the environment and the gold for the ponds and streams, connected to the River Thames: areas that we can rediscover when released.



Thames Ink

By Amber Perrier



Joe, Stanmore, from Living in Lockdown

By Adam Isfendiyar



Health workers from Australia in Life Under Lockdown

By Eithne Nightingale

The inclusion of text in the photography books *Living in Lockdown* by Adam Isfendiyar and *Life under Lockdown on Mehetabel Road and Isabella Road in Hackney, 2020* by Eithne Nightingale throws light on people's different experiences of the pandemic – the importance, or lack of, green space; the impact of different kinds of housing; the challenges of home schooling; the role of key workers; personal relationships within the home; people's fears and anxieties and views of the government's handling or indeed mishandling of the pandemic.

Both books are for sale in local bookshops and *Life Under Lockdown on Mehetabel Road and Isabella Road in Hackney, 2020* is in the collections of several London museums and archives. Adam Isfendiyar and Eithne Nightingale discuss their two photography projects in the film *Life Under Lockdown – street photography in East London*, produced as part of the **Stay Home Stories** project.



Days in Quarantine
Written and directed by Jules Chan

Jules Chan decided to interview people for the script of a play exploring what happens to people's identity during the pandemic: "People are craving truth, like what is honesty if you're living in a society where people don't trust the vaccine, the government, the people they're voting for. Don't trust themselves perhaps." The play touches on loneliness, finding love during lockdown, a parent dying of COVID-19 in hospital, the tensions about social distancing and protective measures. One character, based partly on Jules' experience, goes through the process of accepting his race, and finding a voice. "I didn't class myself as a writer beforehand."

Alaa Alsaraji, artist-in-residence for *Stay Home Stories* drew on project interviews and over 500 contributions of text, audio and visual material to the Museum of the Home's *Stay Home* rapid response collecting project. Her installation, *Our Homes, Our Stories* (at the Museum of the Home, October 2021 to January 2022), explored rituals of care during the pandemic and people's utopian visions of home. It was an interactive space, full of plants, where people could reflect on and contribute their own experiences of home. Many filled in postcards about what they would like their future home to be – whether it was a house or flat run by solar and wind energy or with a large garden and access to outdoor space.

CASE STUDY

Our Homes, Our Stories:
Alaa Alsaraji



Photographs reproduced courtesy of Sameer Naeem and Matthew Dormer

Alaa Alsaraji is an artist and facilitator who explores issues of identity and belonging within the broader socio-economic context in which we live. As artist-in-residence for the *Stay Home Stories* project, she wanted to create art that was accessible, that reflected visitors' own experiences and prompted them to think about their own version of a utopian home.

As inspiration for the installation, she drew on the *Stay Home* collection at the Museum of the Home and wider project research on people's experiences of home during the pandemic and ran online workshops with the project team. On the floor of the abstract living room, set within space adjacent to the rooms through time at the Museum of the Home, were designs which drew on the experiences of rituals of care in the pandemic; on the walls were utopian visions of home. One of the tufted floor rugs, of two hands unable to reach each other, was inspired by a daughter's way of caring for her elderly mother by not visiting. For another rug she designed a generic pot of hot food that could feed the whole family and the neighbours, inspired by people who got into

healthy eating. Other designs were based on indoor and outdoor activities – of people doing yoga; following the Chinese tradition of putting your feet in a bowl of hot water to calm the nerves; of growing tomatoes; walking and taking up cycling. On the rugs she added a motif of the [statue of Sir Robert Geffrye](#) - a 17th-century merchant who made part of his money from investment in the transatlantic slave trade - on the buildings of the Museum of the Home, which she crossed out to symbolise her and the project team's opposition to the presence of the statue. The inclusion of this motif, alongside an explanatory panel, evoked some response. One visitor said the crossed-out statue motif reminded her that "Black and ethnic minorities have suffered [in the pandemic] much worse partly because of the workplaces they are exposed to and the need to go out to work and partly perhaps because of historical concerns about medical practice and medical interventions in those communities... just that little symbol on the rug reminds you that COVID in the home is more than just the home. It is about impact across those communities."

» continued



One of the digital illustrations on the walls was of a bed with roots coming out of its legs, inspired by the statement, 'Everyone should be able to grow roots in whatever shape that takes'. For Alaa, "That conversation resonated with me because I have lived in maybe 14 houses over my 27 years but some of them have had the same bed – in Iran we had these roll out mattresses that you pack up and the room turns into a living-room." One of Alaa's illustrations addressed the issues of affordable housing and sustainability: "The most common themes about what a utopian home could look like are really essential things – they should be safe and affordable and a right for everyone."

As Alaa explains 'It was interesting to be sucked back into the topic of the pandemic for my artwork, but the project had a nice balance of acknowledging what is going on with all of us but also hopeful for the future. For myself, coming out of the pandemic, I wanted to take away that investing in a space is worth it whether you think of it as your home or as a temporary space.'

Art as a vehicle for social and environmental change

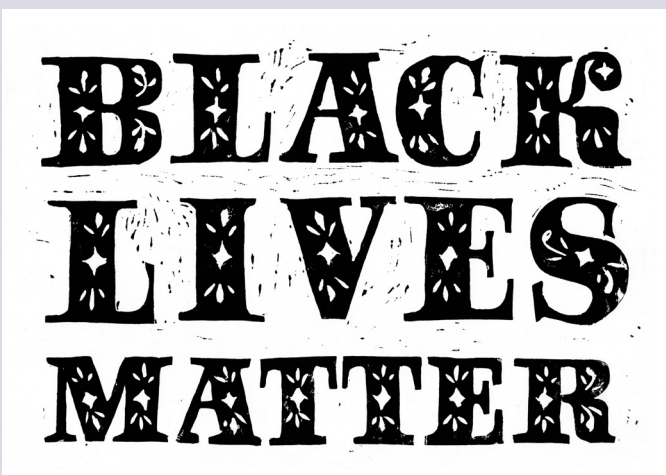


Housing Crisis
By Amber Perrier

The pandemic, in many cases, has intensified artists' focus on other issues such as the environment, climate crisis, Black Lives Matter, and inequalities in housing, education and health. Katie Whitford commented, "Suddenly people were interested in homelessness and like not having a home. Or in ways that people live, multi-generationally or ... in difficult situations." *Housing Crisis* by Amber Perrier depicts London tube trains coiled round houses and high-rise buildings and signifies the frustration of people not being able to afford housing in the city either because they have been furloughed or, like Amber, aged 26, are unable to afford the high prices.

People's responses to what a utopian home would look like in the *Our Homes, Our Stories* installation by artist-in-residence Alaa Alsaraji were concerned with the basic right to secure, affordable and sustainable homes for everyone. "London is insane. What many might think is a basic thing is actually becoming an unrealistic hoped-for dream and particularly if you look at the area where the museum is based which is massively affected by gentrification." Alaa, like Amber Perrier, noted that this was a particular challenge for younger people.

Following the death of George Floyd, Fungai Marima made plaster casts of people's knees: "Thinking about how governments have put knees on people's backs, stopped them from realising their potential." Amber Perrier found that people's conversations on social media and with friends and family during the Black Lives Matter protests exhausted her. She felt restored by *Grace*, a representation of herself. The reds, yellows and greens represent the different bright colours of the Caribbean islands where her parents have roots, her mother in Grenada and her father in Dominica. The earring of the black power fist says, 'I am standing by you'.



Poster by Jane Porter

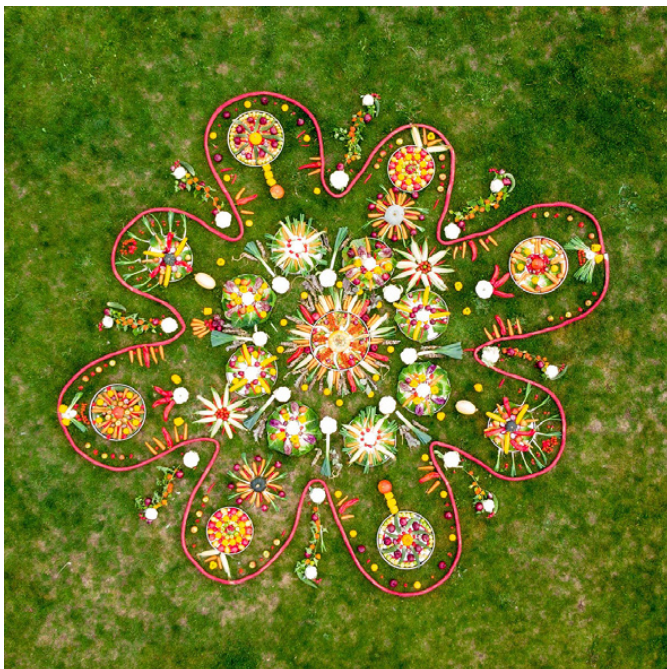


Grace

By Amber Perrier

Natasha Wright commented, “There are some days when I feel I want to be active and engaged. But also, I’ve gone to protests and I don’t feel safe, as a woman, as a Black person. I found myself having to be very selective about which things I have the energy to engage with.” Another artist commented, “If other people want to do it, I absolutely, wholeheartedly respect them for doing it, but I just thought, I’ve done this in my life, I’ve done this in my work, I’ve done loads of things that nobody’s ever paid any attention to, and suddenly they want me to get involved, and I just said... ‘No, ‘cos it’s nothing to do with us, it’s all to do with you.’ ... White society have to take responsibility for this, and they have to change.”

The importance of nature and the environment for wellbeing emerged as a key theme during the pandemic. Stay Home Stories worked with the organisation Write Back on the film *My Place, My Space*, featuring talented teenagers from Barking and Dagenham reading their stories inspired by the locations that have shaped them. Sam Norwood, founder of Write Back, explains in a [blog post](#), “These stories offer a powerful case for the importance of parks and public spaces in giving everyone (and especially young people) places to reflect, escape from stress and find creative inspiration.”



Mandala made out of food

Kinetika, Unique Imaging

For Ali Pretty from Kinetika, the link between nature, the environment and the climate crisis became even more apparent during the pandemic. Through a combination of social media and in-person activities, she explained how it was possible to organise community-based projects during the pandemic that were safe; gave voice to people’s relationships with the landscape through writing, art, walking together, performance and festivals; and addressed environmental issues, serving as a model for future projects.

“The aim ... is to show local people’s attachment to green space and their immediate local areas that became, I suppose, even more pertinent in lockdown. COVID and the climate emergency are, in my view, not unrelated... it should be a wake-up call, we have to review how we live. And part of that is to be more local, to be respectful and connected to our landscape.” One example of a successful project was the making of mandalas in September 2020 in Thurrock out of objects from the environment.

Jules Chan is positive. “It’s really confusing but an exciting time to be alive, man, because I think we’re at a process of a renaissance, a technology renaissance, a cultural renaissance. And I do think we’re realigning with better values as human beings... and understanding that power can come from communities.”

CASE STUDY

Mandalas:
Ali Pretty, Founder and Artistic Director of Kinetika

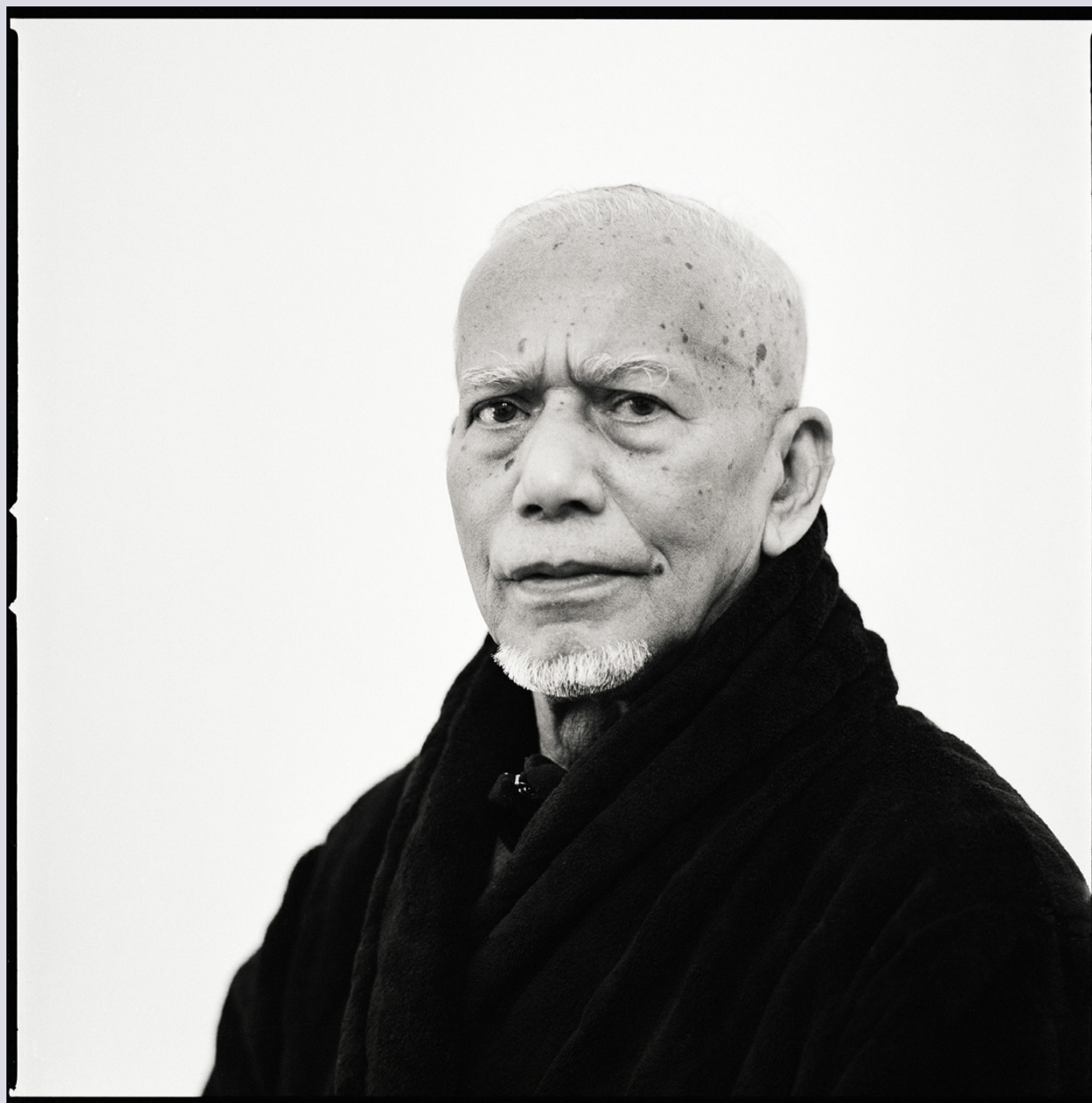


Mandala made out of waste from the Thames
Kinetika, Unique Imaging

The 2020 theme for Kinetika's annual walking festival across Thurrock was a call for communities to think about environmental solutions through designing large scale mandalas out of objects from the environment. Mandalas, circular geometric designs, are used by various spiritual traditions, as a form of meditation. In response to lockdown, Kinetika developed a resource pack and held a four-week online festival in May 2020 where people could try out making mandalas, for example, using food at home, plastic from the Thames, with leaves from the garden, and sowing wildflowers over landfill. The live festival was held in September 2020 allowing six people – in compliance with COVID-19 restrictions – to work on all or part of a mandala.

Curated walks of six people encouraged conversations about environmental issues between developers, councillors, activists, those responsible for regeneration and local people. Online videos captured the process at the beginning and end of the day. Some members of the public thought, "It's COVID, you should be staying at home." My response was, "No – this is people's mental health and wellbeing. We're doing it within all the guidelines and taking all the precautions." The mandalas were not only beautiful but communicated powerful environmental messages. For the people in Grays, supported by Steven Catchpole, Thames21 River Action Clean-Up Facilitator, it was, "Oh, my God, how much plastic comes up in the Thames all the time?"

Beyond the Pandemic



Dad in Lockdown
By Kois Miah

Some creative practitioners resumed projects that were put on hold. Kois Miah's portrait of his father, *Dad in Lockdown*, was selected for the Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize 2021 at the National Portrait Gallery (also see a [film](#) of Kois and his father

discussing the portrait). Kois's project to take photographs of elders of Brick Lane was postponed because of lockdown but his father moved in during the pandemic, providing an ideal opportunity to take his portrait.

Some people's direct in-person teaching resumed, and even thrived, after lockdown. For example, in June 2022 Ekua Agha taught a direct strategies module at the London Film School on Sembène Ousmane's critically acclaimed film, *Moolaadé* (2004). Teresa Hare Duke is planning participatory, co-produced projects, for example with Rich Mix, local schools, Stitches in Time and Praxis, building on the lockdown project with refugee women. All are dependent on project funding. Katie Whitford, heading back to London after completing her MA in printmaking in Bristol, had a solo exhibition of etchings in August 2022 entitled 'Soft Lighting' at 35 North Contemporary Fine Art in Brighton.

Several artists continued with and further developed projects created during lockdown. *Dispatches from a Small World* by Lydia Thornley generated a **Teemill shop** and cards, some on sale at the Garden Museum. Lydia's sketch walks and garden sketches led to illustrating **26 Habitats**, a project by writers' organisation 26 in partnership with The Wildlife Trust and has been commissioned to sketch long-awaited weddings. She is keen to explore other exhibition opportunities or publishing work for Dispatches project, in particular as it is now such a huge body of work.

Artwork 846 that Fungai Marima started in lockdown has been selected for the NAE (New Exchange) Open in Birmingham. As she explains, "846 remembers the harrowing 8 minute 46 second death of George Floyd through the powerful symbol of the knee. It highlights the significant importance of the knee as symbol of submission, a tool for oppression, reflective of historical gestures of the fist of the Black Panthers in America, the open hand of change of the MDC political party in Zimbabwe and the bending of the knee in western football."

Issues of racial, social and environmental justice, heightened during the pandemic, continue to be a major concern for creative practitioners. Jules Tan acted in *No Particular Order* about a dystopian future with a despot in power, an experimental take on authoritarianism. Amber Perrier is working in Social Value to engage further with local communities. Adam Isfendiyar, having gained an increased interest in collaborative and meaningful work during the pandemic, is planning a new project 'Scar Stories' – telling the stories behind subjects' physical scars. In Autumn 2021 Ali Pretty took some of the 500 silk flags created for *The Beach of Dreams*, in response to the rising tides and water levels along the East Coast, to COP26, the climate change summit in Glasgow. Kinetika has partnered with Creative Lives to develop this model of walking, talking and making on a national scale – 10,000 miles around the UK and Ireland in May 2024 pursuing the question of how we can all live our lives differently, as a matter of urgency in the face of the



846

By Fungai Marima

Climate Emergency, war in Europe and the Cost of Living.

Projects such as Beach of Dreams have "really benefitted and exploited the mixed use of technology and on the ground walking to engage hundreds of participants in a meaningful process and experience." New technology has also made national and international conversations easier. Ekua Agha, for example, has also used technology to collaborate with diverse artists working in the creative industries of Africa and the African diaspora of the Caribbean, the Americas, Europe, Asia and Australia. Particularly important has been the partnership with Sarah Kornfeld, Co-Founder and President of **Rising Partners**, working to find effective ways of addressing the myriad changes in the creative industry across the globe in a post-COVID-19 era.

The digital has continued to influence creative practice. Amber Perrier has started to combine her pen drawings with digital art. Becky-Dee Trevenen has noticed within the theatre industry an enthusiasm to explore the blending of live performance and digital mediums whilst at the same time noticing a hunger from audience members for live experiences such as music festivals and immersive theatre.

Lydia Thornley's creative practice has broadened out still further to include investigative drawing, design thinking and podcasting. A collaborative podcast *Studio Snack* with former studio-mate Narcis Sauleda grew from catch-up chats. A sketching assignment for a research team at Loughborough University London became **investigative drawing**. Combining sketching and design thinking helped shape programmes for creative careers charity **Ideas Foundation**.

Several artists wish to hold onto the slower pace and time for reflection, including on future directions, that the pandemic provided. Katie Whitford thinks that “the pandemic ... pushed me to breaking point in many ways but clarified a lot for me. Making is the thread that weaves through all of my life, without it I’m very lost. I think without the experience of 2020 and 2021, I might have forgotten that... I have grown a lot as an artist in the past year and feel much more... at home in my research and printmaking practice.” Becky Dee Trevenen wishes to hold onto some of the lessons learnt from the pandemic: “I think many people including myself are trying to avoid returning to such a manic pace of working post-pandemic after having a chance to really stop and analyse what was important to us.” Sapphire Goss agrees. “I am trying to... create that contemplative space again, without the restrictions but with the positive aspects like slowness, quiet and repetition that I found very productive in some ways. But it wasn’t just that, it was that I cut myself

some slack and allowed myself more rest and grace because of the ‘unprecedented circumstances’” This has economic implications: “How to find practical ways to get that back but still make money/be productive is something I haven’t quite figured out yet.”

Other long-term practical considerations have emerged from the pandemic, as Lydia Thornley explains: “I gave up my desk space [in a co-working space], as part-time access was unworkable and I wasn’t getting value from my membership. Temporary working from home during lockdown became permanent. But the flexible working that emerged from the pandemic also made projects harder to plan. Boundaries blurred working days and weeks. Clients needed a lot more flexibility. So it will be interesting to see if this becomes the norm or if structure returns in a new form, in much the same way that online living became hybrid.”

Conclusion



We live in a post-COVID world. There is no going back to a previous sense of 'normal.' Our future is full of new uncertainties, threats, inequality and challenge at local, national and global levels. This makes it even more imperative that we find more effective ways to communicate and understand how creative process can play a part in that."

Teresa Hare Duke

The COVID-19 pandemic was deeply disruptive not just of the lives of individual artists, but also of the creative ecology of the entire country. An already precarious sector was faced with a crisis as work was cancelled, events were postponed, and opportunities in a largely freelance economy rapidly slipped away. It was an anxious and difficult time for most. Artists' responses to the pandemic varied widely, and many were forced to do other things to get by. But the events also presented new opportunities for creative reflection, as the pace of life slowed down, and as challenges such as social inequalities, racial injustice and the climate emergency came into sharper focus in the midst of a global crisis. For some artists, the pandemic led them to diversify practice, try new things, use alternative technologies and media, be creative in unfamiliar spaces, and disseminate in different ways. The past few years may come to be seen as a unique moment of significant artistic

innovation where creativity became a powerful way of confronting and responding to a complex public health crisis.

As our creative communities heal, there are opportunities to build back better, by addressing some of the material needs of a precarious sector and learning from experiences of the pandemic. New ways of working and collaborating that became the norm during COVID-19 restrictions offer inspiration for the future. Based on the testimony of creative practitioners about their experiences of living and working during the COVID-19 pandemic, our key recommendations focus on the material changes and support required to build more inclusive and supportive creative networks to sustain and nurture all kinds of artistic talent beyond the pandemic.

Policy insights

From the experience of the pandemic, it is clear the cultural sector and individual creative practitioners would benefit from:

- More accessible and flexible funding schemes, and advice on employment opportunities in similar or related fields, particularly for freelance workers, whilst coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic and during future crises.
- A review of indoor, outdoor and virtual workspaces/creative hubs that are safe, flexible, affordable, accessible, local and inclusive; provide different working spaces beyond those for laptops and monitors; breakdown barriers and provide opportunities for activities such as networking, collaborative working, exhibitions, film screenings, and performances.
- A review of housing needs alongside those of working/studio space particularly for less established, younger creative practitioners.
- Skills training and sharing of good practice in new technologies including promoting creative work in the digital sphere; blended approaches to public engagement allowing multiple points of entry e.g. through live streaming of events for the housebound, people with disabilities and international audiences.
- Support for continued opportunities to experiment with different art forms, new and old technologies, for their own art practice, study and increased employability.
- Maintaining blended points of access to creative work for those who will still be shielding from COVID-19 or, for other reasons, would benefit from working at home for all or part of the week.
- Opportunities for artists and other creative practitioners to reconvene and reinvigorate each other by sharing what they have learned and gained from individual challenges during the pandemic.
- A forum for creative practitioners to reflect on how they can contribute to anti-racism on individual, societal and political levels through their practice, including addressing the structures of whiteness and the privileges that white artists have frequently enjoyed.
- Support for artists of all backgrounds in addressing the colonial legacy of institutions and public spaces where they work.
- Recognition of, and support for, the powerful role of art in addressing inequalities highlighted by the pandemic and contributing to social justice e.g. in relation to poverty, housing, racial justice and the environment.
- Support for the mental health and wellbeing of artists from diverse backgrounds, given the increasing insecurity of, and vulnerability in, a fast-changing world.
- Prioritisation of the needs of young creatives who have missed out on networking and other opportunities at a crucial time in their careers.
- Collaboration with a range of organisations e.g. museums, archives or universities to ensure that creative work, including documentation of and creative responses to the pandemic, is accessible for present and future generations.
- Support for increased opportunities to curate and/or share work created during the pandemic, including online, and engage the public with issues that have emerged.

Web links and resources

Stay Home Stories website

www.stayhomestories.co.uk

Stay Home Stories films

Eid Textile Tales, with Praxis, a charity for migrants and refugees

Our Home, Our Stories, with project artist-in-residence Alaa Alsaraji who created the Stay Home Stories installation at the Museum of the Home

My Place, My Space, with Write Back, a charity working with young people in Barking and Dagenham

Life Under Lockdown, street photography in East London with Adam Isfendiyar and Eithne Nightingale – in production

Blog by Sam Norwood, founder of Write Black

<https://www.stayhomestories.co.uk/my-place-my-space>

Stay Home Stories podcasts

Episode 1: Museum of the Home 'Stay Home' Collection

Episode 2: Religious belief and practice at home during the COVID-19 pandemic

Episode 3: Migration, COVID-19 and community support in London and Liverpool

Episode 4: Sounds of Lockdown with artist Calum Perrin-

Episode 5: COVID-19 in journalism and political debate – in production

Episode 6: COVID-19 and outside space – in production

Maps submitted by children and young people aged 7-16

Stay Home teaching resources for Key Stages 1 and 2

Sir Robert Geffrye statue on the buildings of the Museum of the Home.

See the [project website](#) for a blog post about the impact of the statue on the project, links to other resources, and the current position of the Museum's trustees.

Tower Hamlets Together film by Kois Miah

https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/health__social_care/health_and_medical_advice/Coronavirus/Tower_Hamlets_Together.aspx

A Front Room in 1970 curated by Michael McMillan at the Museum of the Home

<https://www.museumofthehome.org.uk/whats-on/rooms-through-time/a-front-room-in-1970/>

Walking in the Wake, film by Michael McMillan

<https://www.estuaryfestival.com/event/detail/walking-in-the-wake-2.html#>

Attic Windows of the Infinite (2021) by Sapphire Goss

<https://www.sapphiregoss.com/infinite>

The Eyes of Time – 2020 to present by Sapphire Goss

<https://www.sapphiregoss.com/eyesoftime>

Looking At Picture Books 6: with DAPO ADEOLA, interview by Jane Porter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KC2KJKNLly8&t=13s>

An online workshop for Crisis... by Lydia Thornley

<https://thornley.co.uk/work/everyday-art->

St Margaret's House and East London Cares: by Lydia Thornley

<https://thornley.co.uk/work/st-margarets-house-and-east-london-cares>

Newham Locked Down Window Art 2022

<https://www.nlwa.co.uk>

Dispatches from a Small World by Lydia Thornley

<https://dispatchesfromasmallworld.blog>

Interiors by Sapphire Goss

<https://movingimageartists.co.uk/category/mia-3/>

In Our Dreams... Family Creative Challenge no. 17 by Jane Porter

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5A0NOdVqZI&t=306s>

2m by Lydia Thornley

<https://thornley.co.uk/blog/news/2m>

Threshold by Fungai Marima

<https://www.fungaimarima.co.uk/digital>

Conversations with Future Selves by Calum Perrin

<https://soundcloud.com/calumperrin/sets/conversations-future-selves>

Confined under Lockdown by Jenny Blanchard

<https://www.stayhomestories.co.uk/jenny>

London under Lockdown by Amber Perrier

<https://www.stayhomestories.co.uk/amber>

Life under Lockdown by Eithne Nightingale

<https://www.stayhomestories.co.uk/life-under-lockdown>

Available at Pages bookshop

<https://www.pagesofhackney.co.uk/webshop/product/life-under-lockdown-on-mehetabel-road-and-isabella-road-in-hackney-2020/>

Living in Lockdown by Adam Isfendiyar

<https://www.adamisfendiyar.com/prints/living-in-lockdown-book>

T100 Calling 2020 Films, Thurrock's Annual Walking Festival, Ali Pretty, Kinetika

<http://thurrock100.com/t100-calling-films/>

Kois Miah with Abdul Monaf : Taylor Wessing Photographic Portrait Prize

<https://studiolydiathornleytshop.teemill.com>

Dispatches from a Small World Teemill shop and cards by Lydia Thornley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iDLgAoHo3o>

26 Habitats by Lydia Thornley

<https://thornley.co.uk/work/26-habitats>

Beach of Dreams: A 500-mile creative walk, Ali Pretty, Kinetika

www.beachofdreams.co.uk

Rising Partners, Strategy for Art and the Creative Economy

www.risingpartners.com

Studio Snack, a collaborative podcast by Lydia Thornley and Narcis Sauleda

<https://anchor.fm/studio-snak/episodes/Studio-Snack-The-sound-of-Thinking-e1hr4f>

Investigative Drawing by Lydia Thornley

<https://thornley.co.uk/work/craic>

Design Thinking for Ideas Foundation by Lydia Thornley

<https://thornley.co.uk/work/design-thinking-for-ideas-foundation>

Biographies*

Ekua Andrea Agha obtained her PhD from the Department of English, Creative Writing and Theatre at Birkbeck, University of London. Her research project, *The Culture Within; Artistic and Theoretical Challenges to Hegemony in the Works of the Senegalese Filmmaker and Writer, Ousmane Sembène* employs a multidisciplinary approach to examining issues relating to the history, religion and cultures of former colonised subjects in West African societies. Dr Agha is a Senior Research Fellow of IFRA-Nigeria (The French Institute for Research in Africa) and a member of ACT – Africa Centre for Transregional Research at Albert-Ludwigs Universität Freiburg. Ekua is also the coordinator of the Nigerian-Brazilian Public History Project.
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/ekua-agma-b045951b/>

Alaa Alsaraji is a visual artist, designer and creative facilitator. Through her creative practice she aims to explore themes such as belonging, reimagining space and community, predominantly using the medium of digital illustration. She also works as a facilitator, delivering creative workshops. Alaa is also the arts editor of Khidr Collective.
<https://alsarajialaa.co.uk>

Jenny Blanchard lives and works in Hackney, London. Her work continues as an observation of settlement. She uses primal and personal sites which are recalled by memory and aerial imagery. She studied at Winchester School of Art, Morley College and The City Lit.
<https://www.jennyblanchard.co.uk>

Jules Chan graduated from Drama Centre London and has worked at The National Theatre (2020) and Southbank Centre (2020). At the end of 2021 he wrote, directed and performed in his own play *Days In Quarantine*. He is a co-founder of 'Rising Waves' - a mentorship programme for British East and South-East Asians supported by the Arts Council. He has worked extensively with movement-based company The Pappy Show on their new production called *What Do You See?* (2022) at The Shoreditch Town Hall and most recently on their hit show *BOYS* (2022) at the Barbican for their 40th year anniversary (2022). Most recently, he has appeared at Theatre503 performing *No Particular Order* by Joel Tan and *All The Happy Things* by Naomi Denny.
<https://www.instagram.com/julesdpchan/?hl=en>

Sapphire Goss is a multi-disciplinary artist who works with moving image, photography and other lens-based methods. Using obsolete technologies, she creates chimerical imagery using unexpected materials, looping and processing to make an 'analogue uncanny': grainy, shimmering, otherworldly. Goss has received several awards, most recently the Arts Council Developing Your Creative Practice award for her project *Attic Windows of the Infinite*. In 2018 she was the recipient of ACE funding for the large-scale multimedia project *Eternity City*. Her work has been shown widely in exhibitions and events including the Barbican, Tate Exchange, Fermynwoods Contemporary, Milton Keynes Art Centre, East End Film Festival, and *Sea Change*. She was selected for Live Cinema UK's National Talent Pool in 2018. Her video, photography, research and writing work has been featured in performances, events, commissioned for a variety of platforms and used for commercial content and music videos. <https://www.sapphiregoss.com>

Teresa Hare Duke is an independent creative producer with extensive experience of participatory practice and co-production as the Community Development lead at the V&A Museum of Childhood (2002-19) and at arts centres, theatres, community arts organisations, particularly in east London. She is a practicing artist and skilled in producing co-designed exhibitions, installations, festivals, events and outcomes.
<https://www.teresahareduke.co.uk>

Adam Isfendiyar is a London-based event and portrait photographer, whose passion is in documentary. His work has been exhibited at The Brunei Gallery, SOAS, The ICP Museum, New York, Sway Gallery, London & Stockholm. He was one of the organisers of 'Outside In,' an exhibition of lockdown inspired art in Whitechapel Bell Foundry and worked with The Wellcome Centre for Human Genetics to produce 'Indoors' - Experiences of Older People During Lockdown, which was exhibited at Toynbee Hall. His work has been published in *National Geographic Traveler*, *Tokyo Weekender*, *Lava Magazine*, *Crank Magazine* and *Edge Of Humanity Magazine*. <https://www.adamisfendiyar.com>

Fungai Marima is a multimedia artist who was born in Zimbabwe and is currently based in London. Often self-reflective, her work investigates themes of displacement, memory, trauma and the female body and highlighting her Zimbabwean heritage, through exploring ideas of body as an archive. <https://www.fungaimarima.co.uk>

*Two artists opted to remain anonymous.

Kois Miah is a freelance photographer based in East London who mostly looks at cultural and social issues and has covered the many events showcasing London's multicultural communities. His current project Brick Lane: A Community Portrait tells of the stories of British Bangladeshis emanating from Brick Lane, the street that became the heart of a fledgling community in the 1960's. Kois was an exhibitor at the National Portrait Gallery's Taylor Wessing Portrait Prize 2021 and his COVID-19 lockdown project 'Mangled', a series of environmental portraits, will be exhibited as part of the Bloomsbury Festival in October 2022. <https://koismiah.co.uk>

Michael McMillan is a writer and artist, whose installation The Front Room is a permanent 1970s period room at the Museum of the Home. It has been iterated as part of the Life Between Islands group exhibition at Tate Britain 2021-22. His multi-media anthology Sonic Vibrations is published on <https://writersmosaic.org.uk/> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_McMillan

Eithne Nightingale is a researcher, writer, photographer and filmmaker. She gained a PhD in 2019 on child migration for which she created award-winning films on Child Migrant Stories (see childmigrantstories.com). Her book *Child Migrant Voices in Modern Britain – oral histories since 1930s* will be published by Bloomsbury in 2023. She has photographed her neighbours several times including during the COVID-19 pandemic. She is working on stayhomestories.co.uk as a researcher and on the website, films and podcasts. She was previously Head of Equality and Diversity at the V&A. www.eithnenightingale.com

Amber Perrier is an artist who uses inks, and pen drawings on the City of London and illustrations of people. https://www.instagram.com/amber_perrier/?hl=en She previously worked in Community Engagement at The British Library, encouraging communities to share their thoughts and stories of living in London, its diversity, politics, environment and the ongoing construction and deconstruction of the city. She is now working in Social Value and as a freelancer with YouPress' ScribersHive Storytelling and Multimedia workshop at Royal Docks Newham, and as an Exhibitions Coordinator at the Bloomsbury Festival taking place in October 2022.

Calum Perrin works across visual art, theatre, music and radio. They explore themes of disability, sensory experience and domesticity, as well as the relationship between documented processes and artistic practice. Calum has worked with BBC Radio 3 and 4, BBC Sounds, Audible, Paraorchestra, VICE, Donmar Warehouse, The Yard, Bodleian Libraries, the Prague Quadrennial and HearSay amongst others. They were the artist-in-residence at the Museum of the Home in 2021. <https://www.calumperrin.com>

Jane Porter is a picture book author and illustrator, and also teaches illustration and comics at Putney School of Art. She is working on a graphic novel, 'The Ghost Carp', inspired by volunteering at clean-ups on the river Wandle. Jane's latest picture book is 'The Girl Who Noticed Everything', illustrated by Maisie Paradise Shearring, published by Walker Books. In her spare time, she is learning to play Irish fiddle. www.janeporter.co.uk

Ali Pretty is best known as the founding member and artistic director of the international outdoor arts company, Kinetika, after an established career in carnival arts. Ali has been developing her practice to develop transformational walking arts projects with diverse communities and recently completed Beach of Dreams leading a 500-mile walk involving 500 participants and 500 silk flags from Lowestoft to Tilbury. This pioneering place-making model has been replicated internationally in various forms in Ethiopia, Chile and India <http://www.alipretty.com>

Lydia Thornley is a designer, creative director and sketcher working solo and collaboratively in east London. Lydia studied graphic design at Canterbury (now UCA) and worked for London design practices for 10 years before going freelance. In late career, her creative practice has expanded, using her thinking and the drawing practice that were once unseen parts of her work. <https://thornley.co.uk>

Becky-Dee Trevenen is a set and costume designer for theatre and live performance. Having discovered a new self-led artistic practice during the pandemic, her next challenge is finding the balance between this nourishing solo work and maintaining a sustainable creative career. www.beckydeetrevenen.com

Katie Whitford is an artist based in London. Her work explores the everyday soft intimacies of home. Katie's etchings and drawings are packed tightly with motifs and references. Her work is constructed from her own memories and experiences, woven with a range of visuals from films, museums, books and places. She carefully considers the spaces between objects and composes drawings and etchings rich in surface, pattern and tone. She is driven by a fascination with the gentle ordinariness of home and how objects characterise a place while narrating and describing a life. <https://www.katiewhitford.com>

Natasha Wright is a theatre maker and administrator based in London. Her feminist, multidisciplinary practice aims to expand access and inclusivity, interrogating traditional theatrical structures by exploring new ways of engaging with audiences. You can follow her on Twitter [@natashapwright](https://twitter.com/natashapwright) <https://www.natashapwright.com>




Eid Textile Tales
by Praxis Wings women's group
and Teresa Hare Duke




**Artists, other creative
practitioners and
COVID-19**

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