

# We are Commoners

Creative acts of commoning

## Environmental responsibility

Craftspace aims to be as sustainable as possible when developing and touring exhibitions. The design and print takes into account use of environmentally friendly materials and methods of production. The exhibition plinths and stands, banners and labels are all designed to be reused or recycled.

## Find out more

For details of tour venues, digital content, resources, events and information for schools go to [craftspace.co.uk/wearecommoners](https://craftspace.co.uk/wearecommoners)



Large print information is available at [craftspace.co.uk/we-are-commoners-large-print](https://craftspace.co.uk/we-are-commoners-large-print)



Image on front: Alice McLean, Justine Boussard and the Walsall Road Allotment holders, Common Ground: The Walsall Road Allotments, Photo: Alice McLean

## Your feedback



We would love to know what you thought of the exhibition.

Please complete our online survey for a chance to win a piece of **We are Commoners** merchandise. We evaluate all our activities to report to our funders Arts Council England.

Spread the word! Share content about the exhibition or your commoning stories. Don't forget to tag us:

📷 [craftspace\\_](#)  
🐦 [tweetcraftspace](#)  
f [craftspace](#)

#WeAreCommoners

## Introduction

**We are Commoners** invites you to become, or recognise yourself, as a 'commoner'.

*The commons means:  
Things we share/ Places  
we share/ Systems we  
share/ Ideas we share/  
Culture we share.*

– Peter Barnes,  
On the Commons co-founder

Increasing privatisation, individualism and the impact of austerity have eroded the commons. Activating the verb 'to common' is a way to renew public life. Acts of commoning can be woven into every aspect of life and become a way of living. A life in which we can connect to produce shared rituals and resources that we look after together. Getting involved through co-operation, mutual care and exchange can heal and make change in our communities.

Featuring UK and international artists, the projects exhibited represent ideas and resources to inspire acts of commoning.

Craft and making skills are often passed down and shared in all cultures of the world. They are also portable, including across borders. In this exhibition, skills and materials provide a means to common or are used to give insight into examples of commoning.

The artists' projects are represented across three themes: **Claiming**, **Healing** and **Co-operating**. They all suggest a shift in thinking from 'you're on your own' to 'we're in this together.' Actions of claiming, healing and co-operating can enable communities to thrive.

We hope visitors will feel encouraged by the examples of co-operative action. To experiment, seek out exchange and make connections with people, objects, spaces and their environments.

**#WeAreCommoners**

## More about the themes

**Healing** — artists' projects draw on creative thinking combined with using hands and materials as a way of healing. They also show the positive effects of performing mutual care and acts of repair for, and between ourselves, public spaces and the natural environment. Everyday commoning can generate a feeling of belonging and connection that leads to wellbeing for all.

**Claiming** — in the 21st century there are many forms of 'enclosure' resulting from privatisation, commerce and other systems. Artists' projects show different ways that commoning actions make it possible to claim or reclaim: craft skills, ancient wisdom, rituals, voice, fashion, spaces and resources. The commons remind us there are mutually enriching ways to own. People can collectively make decisions to shape and improve the future of their communities.

**Co-operating** — a key part of commoning is social co-operation to get things done and strengthen networks and relationships. Artists' projects highlight the benefits of collaboration, pooling resources and knowledge. The different forms of exchange that take place through commoning actions produces new ideas, systems and shared resources to benefit our ecosystem as a whole.

In an article about 'Commons Thinking' Justin Kenrick describes the commons as "...life-sustaining or life-enhancing resources and services that have not been divided up and assigned a monetary value in the global economy but instead are shared – according to evolving arrangements and agreements – among members of a community or group. They range from the air we breathe, pollination provided by bees, land that provides food for gathering, sharing, cultivating and dwelling rather than selling, to libraries, public parks, pavements we walk along, and on to childcare, care for the elderly and words of comfort given freely and willingly rather than at an hourly rate."

## Exhibitors

### **Alinah Azadeh**

@alinahazadeh  
alinahazadeh.com

### **Linda Brothwell**

@lindabrothwell  
lindabrothwell.com

### **Ele Carpenter**

@ele.carpenter  
embroidereddigitalcommons.net

### **Rachael Colley**

@rachaelcolleyartist  
rachaelcolleyartist.wordpress.com

### **Kate Hodgson**

@katehodgsonprints  
k8hodgson.wixsite.com/mysite

### **Hefin Jones**

@hellohefin  
hefinjones.co.uk

### **Pinkie Maclure**

@pinkie.maclure  
pinkiemaclure.net

### **Deirdre Nelson**

@map\_making  
deirdre-nelson.co.uk

### **Jacky Oliver**

@jackyolivermetalwork  
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### **Amy Twigger Holroyd**

@amytwiggerh  
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### **Collectives and collaborations**

#### **Blackwater Polytechnic**

@blackwaterpolytechnic  
blackwaterpolytechnic.com

#### **Common Agency Projects:**

##### **Shane Waltener**

@shanewaltener  
shanewaltener.com

##### **Laura Glaser**

@glassophie  
lauraglaser.com

##### **Fourthland**

@fourthland  
fourthland.com

##### **Alice McLean & Justine Boussard**

@JustineBoussard  
@AliceMc\_Lean  
alicemclean.com

##### **Lise Bjørne Linnert & Gelawesh Waledkhani**

@liselinnert  
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@gelawesh.waledkhani

##### **Claudia Rodríguez, Ana Joaquina Ramírez & Rosina Santana Castellón**

@claudia\_rodriguez\_claro  
@colectivohilos  
proyectoredesartecomunitarioenelriosantiago.  
wordpress.com

## Crafting the Commons Research Network December 2019 – December 2021

The network, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, is led by Nottingham Trent University in partnership with Craftspace. Artists in the exhibition and academics from a range of disciplines participated in workshops, discussions and exchange.

The network blog documents activities and contributions about exhibition projects, ideas and thoughts:

[commoners.craftspace.co.uk](https://commoners.craftspace.co.uk)

## About Craftspace

Craftspace is a charity creating opportunities to see, make and be curious about exceptional contemporary craft.

We champion the power of craft to change lives and communities. Our work builds relationships between artists, people and organisations and encourages the sharing of ideas, skills and knowledge. Craftspace initiates artistic programmes which stimulate creative excellence, critical thinking and understanding of contemporary crafts in the widest social and cultural contexts.

With over 30 years' experience, we continue to learn, push boundaries and challenge ideas. Based in Birmingham, we work collaboratively regionally, nationally and internationally.

We fundraise to deliver our work. There are many different ways to support us, for example by joining Craftspace+, making a donation or buying something from our online shop.

[craftspace.co.uk/support-us](https://craftspace.co.uk/support-us)



**Craftspace asked the artists what commons and commoning means to them, this is what they said...**

Commons means  
togetherness.

Kate Hodgson

The commons  
means we should  
all have equal access  
to a healthy planet.

Pinkie Maclure

Commons means...a space where knowledge,  
stories and time together are shared. It is a  
space for exploring, for development, for  
process, for change.

Lise Bjørne Linnert and  
Gelawesh Waledkhani

Commons means  
to us; coming  
together; not having  
to talk much but  
looking really hard.

Blackwater  
Polytechnic

Commons is a  
provocation and  
constant reminder:  
alternative ways  
of organising life  
are possible.

Amy Twigger Holroyd

The concept of  
the commons is an  
approach to collective  
care and survival  
through a sustainable  
and renewable  
relationship to  
the planet.

Ele Carpenter

Commons means...  
a site for meeting  
and interaction, a  
space to be held, a  
place providing you  
with sense of self  
and freedom.

Shane Waltener

Commons...means  
a way of coming  
together, in which a  
space of uncertainty  
can generate a  
feeling of belonging  
and connecting  
people to each  
other and their  
environment.

Fourthland

Commons means  
connection;  
to space, to  
opportunity and  
with collective  
responsibility.

Linda Brothwell

Collectively exploring  
new possibilities for  
our public institutions  
that reflect emergent  
issues and ambitions  
that are important for  
young people.

Hefin Jones

Food...can be  
valued and governed  
as a commons...  
it is constructed  
as such in a range  
of initiatives in all  
world regions.

Rachael Colley

As we re-evaluate our relationship to the  
land in a changing climate, the commons  
are a reminder that there are other ways to  
own. Acts of commoning must happen not  
only within communities, but also across  
multiple generations. To us, commons  
means trying to be a good ancestor.

Alice McLean &  
Justine Boussard

Commons means:  
everything we share  
that belongs to all  
of us, that we don't  
have to buy and  
isn't (completely)  
controlled by  
the state.

Alinah Azadeh

A shared way of  
thinking, sharing  
ideas, knowledge,  
skills that everyone  
involved in 'Bees  
and Refugees' gains  
so much from.

Jacky Oliver

Commons means to me, the awareness  
that we are part of a complex system  
that affects us and for which we are all  
responsible. Just like a river is formed by  
so many drops of water, community action  
is only accomplished through the efforts  
and participation of many.

Claudia Rodríguez

Commoning, to  
me, is social and  
involves a shared  
understanding that  
we take care of each  
other in sharing skills  
and resources.

Deirdre Nelson