

The Blackwater Polytechnic

Tree

Mild steel, elm wood, cotton, wool, paper, paint

The Blackwater Polytechnic form a cultural commons shaped by co-operation in place and creativity. Based on a fruit farm, it provides resources for their commoning: economic opportunity, a place to find materials, territory to exhibit and work in.

Within this exhibition they intend their structure to, “claim space, to define the territory of our commons wherever we set up camp.” This coming together reflects shared respect for making and trust in each other.

Ben Coode-Adams forged a steel skin, cut, folded and shaped like fabric, with elm branches. Simon Emery applied his painted patterned surface. Hung from branches are Freddie Robins’ knitted puns. Sara Impey links stitched quotations and sayings about the individual in relation to society. Justin Knopp’s woodblock print is based on a Japanese paper streamer.

Jacky Oliver

Breaking Borders

Steel, enamel

Jacky celebrates shared places, systems and ideas that bring people together. 'Bees and Refugees' in London, founded by Ali Alzein, is a charity protecting honeybees as well as helping refugees who may be struggling to adjust to their new lives. Having fled his home in Syria, Ali speaks of the importance of 'freedom of movement' and 'breaking borders' for refugees.

Jacky has purposely avoided giving the sculptural forms a border, displacing the organised structure of a beehive's honeycomb. The landmass shapes of Syria, the Middle East and Africa, volunteer refugees' countries, have been changed.

Enamelled panels feature Ali's and his grandpa's handwriting with information about bees. We are invited to consider where and how forms of exchange can happen and the role of bee keeping in community wellbeing and cohesion.

'Bees and Refugees' images by Olly Burn

Deirdre Nelson

Guild of Commoning

Nettle and cotton fabric, natural dyed eco cotton, hand dyed and embroidered

Deirdre has created a 'Guild of Commoning' to celebrate the acts of commoning within 2km of her flat in Glasgow. Each badge represents a community led organisation that runs on the exchange of skills or resources. The fabric panel is a key to all the examples found.

The mapping starts with Deirdre's own tenement flats. During the first lockdown she was reminded how shared hallways, gardens and responsibilities resulted in regular acts of commoning. This included food and book sharing.

At the heart of this invented guild is the belief that commoning is social. A thriving community relies on a shared understanding that we take care of each other.

The pieces are embroidered using eco cotton dyed with plants foraged from Deirdre's local park using a couching technique found in gold work.

ODG Assembly with Hefin Jones

Audio of creative writing

The idea for an Oriel Davies Gallery youth assembly came from conversations between Hefin, gallery staff and local youth services. Together they created an open call aimed at young people aged 14-25 in Powys. The opportunity was to use creative writing and fiction to bring activities for the ODG Assembly to life.

Whilst supporting young people to develop their writing, the process enabled the gallery to learn about young people's interests, needs, and ambitions. The world imagined through the young writers' texts will shape the future of the ODG Assembly.

The audio includes recitals of these texts from the writers and other young people.



ODG Assembly with Hefin Jones

Printed publication

The ODG Assembly supports young people to creatively explore issues they care about; develop connections and use the gallery in new ways.

Online workshops with local youth groups examined the participants' daily, informal, and creative acts of commoning. The ideas that were generated will be used to programme a festival exploring alternative forms of gallery usership. This will put craft and issues that matter most to young people at the centre.

This publication brings together interviews, ideas, and texts written by young people in Powys. Their shared theme explores what the ODG Assembly could be, what it could do and how it could do it.

Initiated by Ele Carpenter

Fractal

Embroidery, mixed fabrics, appliqué on brown linen

The 'Embroidered Digital Commons' is a collective reading and stitching of a text written by Raqs Media Collective called 'A Concise Lexicon of / for the Digital Commons' (2003).

The full vocabulary is an A-Z of 26 terms, which describe the relationship between social, digital and material space. Each term describes common ownership, use and access across digital platforms.

The commons is linked with digital media due to the availability of free and open source software. This includes the shared production of knowledge, open access, and creative commons.

Embroidery is a slow craft; the project has run over 10 years as and when people feel inspired. The terms have been stitched by different groups and volunteers from across the world.

This term 'Fractal' was facilitated by Mr X-Stitch and Katherine Freddie Fitton.

Facilitated by Ele Carpenter

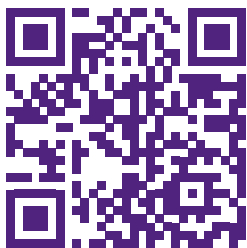
Embroidered Digital Commons

Website

The website brings together embroideries by over 1,000 people stitching over 4,500 words of a vocabulary in workshops, media labs, stitching circles and conferences.

The embroidered vocabulary has been co-ordinated by: Craftspace, Access Space, National Museum of Computing, MozFest, Goldsmiths University, European Women Writers Network, NEOF, Digital Humanities Conference, Madlab, CCCB Barcelona, Mr X-Stitch, Stitch Lily, Radical Cross Stitch, V&A, Bildmuseet and HUMlab, Brenda Burrell, Sharon Hall Shipp, Suzanne Hardy, Rose Sinclair, Camille Reynolds, Courtney King, Mami Mizushina.

Website by Darren Banks



**Facilitated by Ele Carpenter, Craftspace,
Camille Reynolds, Courtney King and
Mami Mizushina**

Portability

Embroidery, mixed fabrics

‘Embroidered Digital Commons’ emerged from hacker/maker debates in the mid-2000s. Long before social media, crafters organised collective textile projects to bring their communities together. The relaxed and supportive atmosphere of a sewing circle provides space to share experiences and ideas. The pandemic increased isolation; working and social lives moved online. The sociability of life was lost. It is vital we create safe social spaces for being together online.

Embroidering ‘Portability’ in Birmingham was a collective project, sewing together online and independently. The stitchers were a lively mix, many experimenting with a needle and thread for the first time, some finding time whilst home-schooling, others studying textiles wanting to connect. With many demands on people’s time, when finally we sit down to stitch, we find a calm moment of concentration and reflection.

Embroidered Digital Commons

Fractal Term

The self-organising design of repeating, replicating structures, often found in snowflakes, tree branch growth patterns, molecular structures and free code. Every part of a fractal pattern carries within it the signature or the emboss of the whole. A single fractal iteration carries within it the kernels of all others of its kind. Every fractal is a rescension of every other fractal that has grown from within it. In the same way a fragment of free code, or free cultural code, carries within it a myriad possibilities of its own reproduction and dispersal within a shared symbolic or information space. Fractals best describe the geometry of the matrices that are formed when data is shared instead of being just mined and shipped by a community of coders. Fractals are the fruit trees of the unconscious designing mind.

Embroidered Digital Commons

Portability Term

The feature of a system or work that best describes its ability to move quickly through different spaces and mediums. A sign or a meme that can travel well between image, sound and text media is portable. A work, which while it speaks of one site, is understood in another location, is portable. A work that describes many locations in the course of its interpretative orbit is also portable. A portable work is rich in memes, which act as engines for its movements, and is endowed with compact kernels that can travel well without danger of being cracked open. Briefcases, languages, post cards, Swiss knives, computers, jests, stories and shoes are portable. Gifts, because they change hands, must always be portable. Monuments can never be. The life histories of some (itinerant) individuals and (nomadic) communities make them approximate the condition of portability.

Alice McLean and Justine Boussard

Common Ground: The Peckham Rye

Common Token

Etched steel, Ordnance Survey map, photographs, poster and rhyme

Common Ground examines how making can open the process of recording and sharing local commoning history. Alice and Justine researched the history of Peckham Rye Common to understand how cities develop and who decides what is preserved or not. They discovered it was thanks to campaigning by local residents that this ancestral open land and community resource was saved from privatisation in 1868. Similar threats to land and spaces exist today.

These commemorative tokens bring the campaign back to life, celebrating what our ancestors did to protect this piece of land. Justine and Alice distributed them on the Common to raise awareness of this piece of local history. The humble goose symbolises what is possible when people unite to preserve what is theirs.

Photographs by Andrew Ferguson

Alice McLean and Justine Boussard

Common Ground: The Walsall Road Allotments

Etched brass, display card, photographs
and project print

These tokens celebrate the victorious campaign led by cats and humans in 2019, to protect Birmingham's Walsall Road Allotments.

Established in 1907, they risked destruction for the Commonwealth Games 2022 redevelopment. Spearheaded by the charismatic Robert, (@AllotmentCat on twitter), the community ran a campaign cleverly building on the internet's fascination for cats. It gathered 16,000 signatures globally in just three months.

During 2020, Alice and Justine ran online creative workshops with plotholders to design the token. They believe this campaign and other 'acts of commoning' the plotholders undertake daily, looking after the land and their community, will have a positive impact on future generations. Faced with an uncertain future, the commons remind us there are other, mutually enriching, ways to own.

Supported by the Worshipful Company of Pewterers
Photographs by Betty Farruggia

Amy Twigger Holroyd

Reknit Spectrum/Reknit Sampler

Digital print, found cashmere jumper, various reknit treatments in wool and silk

The 'Reknit Revolution' project encourages hand knitters to use their skills to rework their knitwear, to rebel against the professionalisation, or enclosure, of fashion. Amy encourages us to see every stitch as a unit of possibility, ripe for change.

The 'Reknit Spectrum' showcases a complete range of 'treatments' that can be used to rework existing knitwear: to repair holes or stains, resolve issues of fit, or restyle tired designs. Each treatment is flexible in scale, appearance and finish.

The 'Reknit Sampler' showcases five treatments: stitch-hack, embellish, insert pocket and replace cuff. Instructions for the reknit processes are available at reknitrevolution.org



Amy Twigger Holroyd

A Temporary Outpost of the Blue Fashion Commons

Found clothes, wood, assorted resources

Structure by Ben Coode-Adams, Blackwater Polytechnic

This installation presents clothing as a shared community resource in a fictional parallel world. There, for environmental reasons, the sale of all blue textiles whether new or used, is banned. Instead exchange systems have developed; blue items are traded and repaired at community-run hubs. Branded logos and meaningless imagery have been rejected in favour of reclaimed embroidered folk symbols.

Visitors are invited to use the resources for repair and take a garment without any monetary payment. Will people follow the rules of this miniature commons, enabling a successful unsupervised clothes swap? Amy encourages us to think differently about our clothing as items that can be borrowed repeatedly, from a vast shared material resource. Skills and creativity in maintenance is valued and crucial to avoid a wasteful throwaway culture.

Common Agency Projects (Shane Waltener & Laura Glaser)

**Commoning Action #14: How to
stand your ground generously**

Handmade coiled trug (foraged cabbage tree leaves), stones (from a communal dye garden in Walton-on-the-Naze)

“On so many levels, including personal and political..., nature and the environment are our remaining and shared common language” – Sean Swallow

During COVID-19 restrictions, visual artist Shane and dance artist Laura met weekly in parks and commons. Public spaces developed a new function, more than safe spaces to socialise in, they became cultural centres where people went to be entertained, share ideas and experiences.

Witnessing this, the artists chose to work in green urban spaces and with nature: the weather, seasons, the site and all that grows in it. Through observation and play, they developed and rehearsed making and performance scores, exploring the idea of nature as a commons. They created work through movement improvisation, recording and discussing it with each other and interested park goers.

Common Agency Projects (Shane Waltener & Laura Glaser)

**Commoning Action #15: How to
support yourself and all that is around you**
Willow poles (from a private garden in
Walton-on-the-Naze)

Commoning Actions #14 and #15 are instructions to be repeated by visitors. Each time the works are remade, new knowledge is created amongst a growing community of performers. We ask ourselves how does this material feel? How does it behave? How do I connect with it and others? What can I do with it? How can it support me? How can I nurture it?

Each 'Commoning Action' aims to be a renewed introduction between us and nature. A symbolic act of repair for a damaged world, in which we are increasingly alienated from our environment. To Shane, commons means, "A site for meeting and interaction, a space to be held, a place providing you with sense of self and freedom."

Rachael Colley

Material Experimentation

Organic materials and food waste

Rachael explores food as a powerful, far-reaching form of commons. Like craft, it crosses class boundaries and encourages open conversation. She is interested in how food, more specifically food waste, can awaken the senses and provoke discussion, reflecting on issues of consumerism.

To create these material samples Rachael worked with her local council to make use of organic matter. This consisted of wood and bracken, gathered from common land and hedgerows.

The range she has created has been processed and combined with food waste to develop a series of biodegradable materials. They are designed to re-enter the habitat they have been removed from. Rachael has been inspired by 'circular design principles', working within them, to create these innovative materials. Her materials research continues to develop.

Rachael Colley

Neckpieces: Elder, Rapeseed, Bracken

Organic materials, food waste and fabric cord

Rachael's wearable works challenge the throwaway culture of costume jewellery. She considers how consumers discard their pieces replacing them with the latest styles.

Her pieces have a limited lifespan and are designed to return to the land to biodegrade as fashions change. Respecting the end of an object's life can create new rituals, whilst recognising the value of craftsmanship. This idea resonates with ancient ritual practices; celebrating the nourishment that is provided in many ways, by both the land and craft.

The following materials were used to make these neckpieces: elder wood (untreated, charred, burned through, avocado dyed), rapeseed stalks, bracken, discarded coffee grounds, tea leaves, potato peel, organic banana yarn and organic linen yarn.

Claudia Rodríguez, Ana Joaquina Ramírez, Rosina Santana Castellón

Nets Project

Photographs, film, sample weave

The work made during this project demonstrates the power of community action to seek ethical care of a natural resource that belongs to all.

The artists worked with over 400 people in several communities along the polluted Santiago river in Guadalajara, Mexico, to make a 150 metre long weave. Through teaching people to finger crochet, they created a social network; linking city residents with people from rural areas. This formed a protest to government agencies to clean up the river.

The project was inspired by a child's death caused by arsenic poisoning after playing by the water.

The monumental weave was carried in a traditional procession; common in Mexican culture, to a specific river site and installed as a temporary sculpture. Public discussion and poetry performances followed.

Photographs by Ana Joaquina Ramírez, Magda Bocanegra and Metztli Cerda

Pinkie Maclure

Lament for the Seas on a Great Auk

Stained glass, painted, engraved and layered

This piece highlights issues of the pollution and exploitation of the oceans.

The great auk was a very common, docile, flightless seabird that looked a bit like a penguin. It thrived in Northern Europe and America in huge numbers for around 5 million years. In the 19th century, however, it became extinct, entirely due to human greed for its feathers, meat, eggs and oil. The oil was burnt for fuel.

Pinkie feels that, "...the oil industry, global warming and overfishing are the greatest threats to our seas and the fast-decreasing populations of wild creatures who live there. We all urgently need to adopt more sustainable ways of heating, clothing and feeding ourselves before it is too late."

Pinkie Maclure

Rewilding at the Cloutie Tree

Stained glass, painted, engraved and layered

Much of the UK's land and seabed is owned by the Crown Estates and a small number of individuals. Too often the natural environment is seen as a moneymaking opportunity.

Recently, there is growing interest in reclaiming once-common land and returning it to a more natural condition; rewilding.

In Scotland, since pre-Christian times, a cloutie tree, beside a holy well, is a place where people hang cloths, or cloths. The names of ill people are written on them, in the hope that as the clout rots, the illness will be cured.

In this piece, featuring critically endangered species, people are attempting to cure environmental ills; reversing ecological damage by releasing native species back into the environment. It is a controversial approach, disliked by many farmers and landowners, because it threatens their profits.

Facilitated by Kate Hodgson

PARRTY

Risograph printed zines and posters

Kate Hodgson is collaborating with young women in Parr, St Helens. Through conversation and creative exchange, 'PARRTY' aims to amplify their voices and views. It will celebrate their experiences, stories and ideas, claiming space for themselves in the town.

'PARRTY' will evolve through a series of zines for young women, by young women exploring topics that interest them. Updated throughout the tour, and online using #STHPARRTY, subjects will include everything from fashion to food, thoughts of the past and visions for the future.

'PARRTY' is produced by Heart of Glass, a St Helens, Merseyside-based collaborative and social arts agency. heartofglass.org.uk

Kate was supported in the development of the residency by co-exhibitor Deirdre Nelson. Their podcast is available here:



Alinah Azadeh, Craftspace and participating communities

Craft in Common

Mixed media

Plans for a physical residency in Birmingham were disrupted by the March 2020 lockdown. Instead Alinah created a digital resource. Five reflective and instructional videos focus on emotional commons with the themes of courage, care, loss, connection and repair.

Alinah wants to examine, through making and stories, the human values and emotional resources produced as a result of commoning. These acts take on more significance when public spaces are not open for activities and people have to isolate from each other. She feels human attention, care, love, wellbeing and resilience are an undervalued aspect of commoning.



Craft in Common on tour

Mixed media

These pieces have been made by people local to this venue. The participants have used the 'Craft in Common' resource created by Alinah Azadeh, to make items that explore themes of courage, care, loss, connection and repair.

Through this creative resource Alinah invites people to use hearts, minds and hands to do whatever they can with whatever they can find at home. The making process can be used as a way to: face fears, acknowledge courage, deal with loss, show solidarity, remember we aren't alone, reach out to others, stay well mentally and emotionally and remember that we are all interconnected.

**Gelawesh Waledkhani and
Lise Bjørne Linnert in collaboration
with undocumented migrants in Norway**
A room between the rooms (2020 – ongoing)
Installation

Since March 2020 groups of undocumented migrants have met around “drawing tables” in workshops arranged by the artists. Tables with digital screens were set up simultaneously in Oslo, Trondheim and Bergen.

Participants connected to share memories and stories. They drew memories of a room, exploring and expressing emotions through lines, self-portraits, embroidered words and symbols, with both personal and universal meaning. A well-known Norwegian writer led workshops, sharing how to use words poetically to tell their stories.

They worked outside using natural materials each season had to offer. In spring brushes were made from twigs and leaves. In autumn they stitched on fallen leaves, mending them as an act of care and protest. Their treatment of leaves symbolised how they wished for undocumented migrants living in limbo to be seen and treated.

Fourthland

New Land

Straw, wax, hessian, threads, paper

Fourthland work in public spaces to interrupt the flow and invite passers-by to engage with rituals of making. In 2015, they installed themselves on a street in Hoxton, London for a performance over the summer.

‘New Land’ is made up of hundreds of straw bundles; rolled by hand, tied and stitched, one by one onto hessian. They form a series of interlinking shapes which symbolise the connection between people and the land.

Passers-by from all over the world joined the process, stories were exchanged as they made. Common stories of home reflected a shared human history and sense of belonging. Craft skills became a way of coming together across human cultures. This collective making enables Fourthland to create a community around the work; each part encompassing stories collected during the act of making.

Fourthland

Land Carriers

Paper, wheat flower, ash, earth pigment, wax

These carriers crafted from urban and natural debris, including the Metro newspaper, were used as tools for the performance. Filled with thread and straw they were passed between the artists like a ritual. This gesture created a curiosity around the making process, prompting passers-by to ask, “What are you carrying?” This led to deeper questions about what we all carry within us.

The public performance was an experiment in how hand making and ‘handheld knowledge’ can connect across cultural and social barriers. Commoning began to take place around tactile materials and a willingness to make together and connect through the exchange of stories and energy. The artwork is like a social fabric; making us aware of how essential it is for us to be interconnected in and with our environment.

Linda Brothwell

Acts of Care: Bench Repair Project

Oak panels, ebony inlay, handmade tools for wood inlay

Linda considers 'Acts of Care' as the anchor of her creative practice; "bringing me home, using my hands, to the very centre of myself." Since 2009 this ongoing project has had international editions, each created for a new place, using varied skills and techniques. All placed the intention of 'care' of public spaces at the core. Through making the work and the tools required, she can spend months or years immersed in the techniques, materials and stories of a place.

The first 'Bench Repair Project' edition was in Lisbon. Linda replaced broken wooden bench slats with new ones city-wide, inlaid with traditional Portuguese designs. She carefully created each tool to play a specific part in the act of care, to fit her hands and be portable for working on street benches.

Photograph: 'Beco do India Bench' by Bridget Smith

Linda Brothwell

Acts of Care: Bench Repair Project

Wooden slats with inlay for bench repairs
within Bristol

In this new edition, each slat created for a park in Bristol, has been inlaid by hand using these handmade tools. Imagery of patches and stitches are used to decorate, highlighting the potential for beauty in everyday care and repair.

During COVID-19 Linda worked through hope rather than certainty to create this caring action for the city and spaces that 'hold' her. It is, "...an offering to the future, to a time when we can sit and share in public space again."

When restrictions allow, Linda intends to repair the benches in Bristol's parks.

Digital artist Finbar Marcel created a film in response to the themes of this work, inviting us into a new world of tools and action in public spaces.



A Room Between the Rooms participants:

Addis

Hiwot

Hooshang

Koroush

Mansour

Meseret

Mina

Monire

Nasim

Parwana and Sara

Sara

Sirwan

Tamru

Tigisti

Zahra

To learn more about their stories, please visit:
craftspace.co.uk/gelawesh-lise



Portability Stitchers:

Umut Augustin, Sheena Lone, Samantha Rodell,
Julia Gilbert, Camilla Huber, Rhiannon Davies,
Esther Makama, Naomi Cross, Tia Parmar,
Jade Durling, Anne Cummins, Penfia Rodrigues,
Ruth Laughlin, Sheila Barnes, Rebecca Hui,
Jacqui Walker, Kiki Wong, Christabel Wong,
Claire Witcomb, Tia Bhayat, Nasim Akhtar,
Donna Barton, Chris Kelly, Shamsun Parvin,
Dilwara Khanam, Ruya Khatun, Adeeba Yasin,
Amy Li, Jutta Stahlhacke, Donna Claxton

Linda Brothwell

Acts of Care: Bench Repair Project

Photograph

The Lisbon project was commissioned by Clare Cumberlidge for the British Council UK Pavilion 'Timeless' for Experimenta Design Biennial, Lisbon, Portugal.

The project was nominated for 'British Insurance Designs of the Year' in 2010.

Photographer: Bridget Smith

Linda Brothwell
Grammar of Repair
Graphite & ink on paper
2021

Collection of drawn works

