

Made in the Middle

Contemporary Craft from the Midlands

A touring exhibition from
Craftspace with Leicester Gallery

Teachers' Pack

craftspace.co.uk/mitm
craftspace.co.uk
#MadeITM

Contents

- 3. Introduction
- 4. Partnerships and Projects
- 5. Where to see the exhibition
- 6. How to explore the exhibition
- 6. Themes in the exhibition
- 8. Activities for the exhibition
- 9. Activities for the classroom
- 10. Other resources and Exhibitor information
- 11. Useful websites, Feedback and Glossary



The Ballard of Backwards and Forwards
Michaela McMillan
Photo Hayley Salter

Introduction

Overview of the exhibition

Made in the Middle tells a story of exceptional contemporary craft and design made in the Midlands. This ninth version showcases the work of thirty-seven artists. They represent the region's vibrant and diverse creative community.

Thirty-one of the artists were selected through an open call, by a panel of curators and craft experts. Many created new work for this exhibition which shows new creative developments.

The exhibitors include both emerging talents and established names. Their work highlights powerful stories about the world we live in.

In the exhibition you can explore three themes. These themes are; the materials things are made from, the craft techniques used and the stories the artists want to share. Each theme is colour coded: green for materials, yellow for techniques and blue for stories.

Six of the artists were invited by Guest Curator Jazz Swali, with curatorial support by Marta Marsicka. Their pieces reflect the enriching cultural impact of global migration to the region. This selection is titled 'Shaping the Landscape' and is highlighted with pink labels.

Made in the Middle will be inspiring for anyone interested in making, seeing or buying craft.

Partnerships

This edition of Made in the Middle was initiated by Craftspace and co-curated with Leicester Gallery at De Montfort University.

Projects

Alongside the main exhibition Craftspace devised additional projects to:

- explore and celebrate everyday stories of community making
- give young people first hand insight into creative careers through a unique chance to work one-to-one with an artist in their studio.

These projects are outlined below:

Stories of Making and Migration

Building on recent projects where we met skilled makers within community groups, Craftspace wanted to tell stories of everyday making in the Midlands through the lens of migration and diaspora.

Craftspace commissioned Hayley Salter to find and collect stories of 'everyday makers' in the Midlands. Their work shows the influence of migration on creativity, craft skills and techniques and celebrates how diversity in the region has shaped the area's identity.

Hayley collected 10 different personal stories which can be found on the Craftspace website:
craftspace.co.uk/mitm-making-stories

There is also a film within the exhibition which shares the stories from the project.

Hayley Salter is a Birmingham based photographer and creative producer.

Crafting Pathways

Crafting Pathways was a project for four young people to develop their artistic skills, interests and identities. They also discovered what it is like to work as an artist.

The project paired the participants with Made in the Middle exhibitors:

Abigail Villarroel with Oliver Bliss
Megan Herbert with Nobuko Okumura
Owen Robins with Michaela McMillan
Taylor Barrett with Nilupa Yasmin

It provided an opportunity to broaden their artistic knowledge. They were also able to master new processes and techniques. The young people learned from the artists' own experiences how creative careers start, grow and change.

Each person has produced an artwork for the exhibition. The process challenged them to make in new ways and apply this learning to their own ideas. They worked with the artists in their studios, worked independently, and visited special places for research and inspiration.

The artworks will be added to the exhibition as they are completed.

Where to see the exhibition

The exhibition will tour for up to 18 months.
These are the confirmed venues



**Leicester Gallery,
De Montfort University**

25 January – 22 March
2025

Vijay Patel Building,
De Montfort University,
Mill Lane, Leicester,
LE2 7PT

thegallery.dmu.ac.uk



**Hub,
Sleaford**

5 April – 6 July
2025

Navigation Warf,
Carre Street, Sleaford,
Lincolnshire,
NG34 7TW

hub-sleaford.org.uk



**Nuneaton Museum
& Art Gallery**

27 September –
22 November 2025

Riversley Park,
Coton Road,
Nuneaton,
CV11 5TU

[nuneatonbedworth.
gov.uk/museum](http://nuneatonbedworth.gov.uk/museum)



**Midlands Art Centre,
Birmingham**

14 February –
12 April 2026

Cannon Hill Park,
Birmingham,
B12 9QH

[www.macbirmingham.
co.uk](http://www.macbirmingham.co.uk)

How to explore the exhibition

The diversity of the pieces and their materials provides an opportunity for students to see high-level expertise in contemporary craft pushed to its innovative limit and beyond. The exhibition will allow students space to learn more about materials and see the range of craft practices. It also presents an opportunity to consider the exhibition's links to ideas surrounding personal identity, the environment and the cultural impact of migration to the region.

There are two handling trolleys with the opportunity to touch and hold works and materials from some of the exhibitors.

The exhibition has the following resources to support visits:

Exhibition Guide: a free leaflet for navigation around the exhibition and further information on the work and themes.

Activity Guide: a free activity guide for exercises to do in the exhibition and at home.

These are both available to download from the Craftspace website: craftspace.co.uk/mitm

Themes in the exhibition

As mentioned the selected artists are split into three thematic groupings: 'Materials', 'Techniques', and 'Stories'. The invited artists are grouped under the theme of 'Shaping the Landscape'.

Stories

This section draws together the artists who tell stories through their work. Some may be sharing histories of their community, while others are exploring the injustices of the world. There is also work that examines personal identity, or the generous sharing of the artist's own experiences.

Whether the stories are about themselves or the world about them they all draw us into the subjects they are sharing.

Artists in this section:

Aisha Carberry	Michaela McMillan
Jo Cope	Nilupa Yasmin
Karina Thompson	Oliver Bliss
Mahawa Keita	Oxana Geets
Martha Wiles	Paul McAllister
Melanie Tomlinson	Rachael Colley

Materials

The artists included in this group are particularly interested in exploring the qualities of the materials they use. Some take traditional craft media like clay, metal or paper and use them in new ways.

For others it is about creating new substances out of waste products. These artists are driven by a curiosity about how materials work and what they can do.

Artists in this section:

Clare Pentlow	Natalie Cole
Emma-Jane Rule	Ruiya Xu
Francesca Buxton	Verity Howard
Johnny Armstrong	Zoë Hillyard
Katie Smith	
Lucy Baxendale	

Shaping the Landscape

This selection of six artists celebrates the region's cultural heritage and it's evolving creative identity. Invited by Jazz Swali with Craftspace, the collection features the artists listed below.

These deeply personal works explore themes of cultural heritage, mythology, global migration, identity, and resilience. Through diverse mediums including glass, ceramics, and textiles.

Artists in this section:

Christopher Day	Klara Szafrńska
Farwa Moledina	Tereza Bušková
Halima Cassell	Xin Chen

Techniques

The craft sector is rich in skills. All artists showing in Made in the Middle are exceptional makers. However, for the artists in this group, it is experimentation with techniques that provides the focus for their work.

Some of the artists work to develop new processes. Others explore pushing techniques to work in new ways. There are also those that focus on perfecting traditional skills.

For all these artists, the way they make is as important to them as what they make.

Artists in this section:

Jade Webb	Robert Maurice King
Jennifer Collier	Roo Dhissou
Keisha Brittle	Sarah-May Johnson
Keeley Traae	
Nobuko Okumura	
Olivia Ricketts	

Activities

Activities for the exhibition

- Some of the artists have used 'found objects.' Find these exhibits. Consider how they have created stories from them and think about how they may have used real-life events or locations as inspiration.
- Martha Wiles' and Rachael Colley's work revolves around sustainable eating and the ways food is consumed, though in very different ways. Does their work make you consider or reconsider the ways in which you may consume food?
- The artists in this exhibition have used a great variety of materials in their craft. Find and list as many different materials as you can. How are materials that appear similar actually different?
- Look at what inspires the different artists: personal stories, politics, nature, heritage, sustainability, identity, place, post-industrial landscapes. Choose three or four of these inspirations to focus on. How are they reflected in the artists' work? What are you inspired by?
- How many different craft practices can you find in the exhibition, e.g. weaver, ceramicist? What practice would you like to try and why?

Activities for the classroom

- Some of the important themes present in the exhibition are migration, journeys, sustainability, place, and personal identity. Draw a 'symbolic' map or timeline that links images with life events to create a visual display of your life, or the life of someone you know.
- Exhibitors including Michaela McMillan and Robert Maurice King have used found objects to share or create stories. Look for an object in a park or garden, or something from home to inspire a short story or writing about your object, what tale could it tell?
- Thinking further about the materials used by the artists, research a particular material that caught your eye or one which you were not aware of before. Is it something completely new? What else could it be used for in craft or in other subjects or industries? Make a material handbook of your findings. You can include samples and ideas for how the material could be used.
- The idea of our place within nature and use of natural materials is something that is considered by a few of the artists in this exhibition. Taking some time in nature, explore how you inhabit and use nature. Think about how some green areas may have changed throughout history due to industry or city/urban growth. Make a map of these areas. This could be drawn and embellished with materials, or made with fabric and stitched.

If your school is interested in developing its art and culture offer it can apply to be part of Artsmark.

For more information visit www.artsmark.org.uk.

Other resources:

Exhibitor information

Aishah Carberry
@aishahful
aishahcarberry.wixsite.com

Chris Day
@christopherdayglass
chrisdayglass.com

Clare Pentlow
@cjpdesigns
cjpdesigns.co.uk

Emma-Jane Rule
@emmajanerule
craftscouncil.org.uk/
directory/
emma-jane-rule-silversmith

Farwa Moledina
@farwamoledina
farwamoledina.com

Francesca Buxton
@fran_buxton_mixed_media
franbuxtonmixedmedia.com

Halima Cassell
@halimacassell
halimacassell.com

Jade Webb
@jadeleightextiles

Jennifer Collier
@paperjennifer
jennifercollier.co.uk

Jo Cope
@jocope_studio
jocope.com

Johnny Armstrong
hamstringbone@gmail.com

Karina Thompson
@karinaworld2
karinathompson.com

Katie Smith
@katiesmith_art
kasceramics.com

Keeley Traae
@keeleytraae_3d
keeleytraae.com

Keisha Brittle
@keishabrittleleglass
keishabrittleleglass.com

Klara Szafrńska
@klaraszafranska
klaraszafranska.com

Lucy Baxendale
@baxenburg
lucybaxendale.com

Mahawa Keita
@mansading_designs
masading.com

Martha Wiles
@martha_wiles_art
marthaewiles.myportfolio.
com/martha-wiles-art

Melanie Tomlinson
@melaniejtomlinson
melanietomlinson.co.uk

Michaela McMillan
@michaelamcmillan
michaelamcmillan.com

Natalie Cole
@natalie_cole_1

Nilupa Yasmin
@nilupayasmin_
nilupayasmin.com

Nobuko Okumura
@okubonarumuko
nobuko.co.uk

Oliver Bliss
@olybliss
olybliss.com
Olivia Ricketts
@oliviarickettsdesign
oliviaricketts.com

Oxana Geets
@oxanageets

Rachael Colley
@rachaelcolleyartist
rachaelcolleyartist.
wordpress.com

Robert Maurice King
@robbieycorp
robbieycorp.co.uk

Roo Dhissou
@roodhissou
rookaurdhissou.com

Ruiya Xu
@rebecca_ruiya_xu
2023.rca.ac.uk/students/
ruiya-xu

Sarah-May Johnson
@sarahmay.johnson
sarahmayjohnson.com

Tereza Bušková
@tereza.buskova

Verity Howard
@verityhowardceramics
verityhowardceramics.com

Xin Chen
@xinxinxin_chen
xinxinxinchen.notion.site/
artwork

Zoe Hillyard
@ceramicpatchwork
zoehillyard.wordpress.com

Made in the Middle 30

Throughout 2016 Craftspace celebrated its thirtieth anniversary. Made in the Middle touring exhibition has been a feature of Craftspace's artistic programme for over thirty years. This website hosts a wealth of resources from these exhibitions. It also includes a special digital exhibition: 30 Years, 30 Makers. madeinthemiddle.org

Useful Websites

These websites below may be of use when researching craft and thinking about materials:

craftspace.co.uk

madeinthemiddle.org

craftscouncil.org.uk

whereinspirationblooms.co.uk/post/exploring-the-5-biggest-craft-trends-for-2024

visualartists.ie/how-to-manual/sustainable-art-practices-some-thoughts-for-visual-artists

instituteofmaking.org.uk/materials-library/library

Please feedback on your visit

Following a visit to Made in the Middle please use the following social media options to tell us what you thought of your visit.

Instagram: @craftspace_

Facebook: craftspace

Glossary

Ceramic = The product created from the shaping and firing of inorganic, non-metallic material such as clay.

Biomaterials = Biological material used as a crafting medium.

Textiles = Any filament, fibre, or yarn that can be made into fabric or cloth, and the resulting material itself.

Sustainable = (In an art making context) creating works that minimise harm to the environment, often utilising recycled materials, natural objects, and eco-friendly techniques.

Migration = The movement of people from one place to another for a short or long period of time.

Diaspora = A population that is scattered across regions which are separate from its geographic place of origin. The dispersion or spread of a people from their original homeland.

Identity = The distinguishing character or personality of an individual.

Community = A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common.

Compiled by Oscar Lawson

We are grateful for financial support from principal funder Arts Council England

Craftspace[©]



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



LUNTS CASTINGS
est. 1930

