



Migrations exhibition

KANEKO Center, Nebraska, USA (*February 6 – April 25, 2015*)

National College of Art & Design Gallery, Dublin, Ireland (*April 30 – May 29, 2015*)

Australian Design Centre, Sydney (*December 18, 2015 – February 27, 2016*)

Huddersfield Art Gallery, England (*October 22, 2016 – January 21, 2017*)

TEXTILES AND THEIR transnational narratives are the primary focus of *Cultural Threads: transnational textiles today* (Bloomsbury: 2015), from which the Migrations exhibition emerged. The premise of the Migrations exhibition was that the portability of textiles – the ease with which they move around the globe – and their hybrid position within the worlds of craft, design and art make them particularly apt carriers of culture. Alongside portability, the exhibition also focused on the reality that the textile often exists as a multiple. While versions roam, others stay closer to home.

The exhibition included contemporary artists, designers and an author who all work at the intersection of cultures and use multiple, portable textiles as their vehicle to explore the notion of textiles as carriers of multiple cultural influences. As curator and academic [Christine Chęcinska](#) observes, “there is an accessibility when we work with textiles in a curatorial setting so that people can come in and recognise, or begin to recognise, themselves and their own stories because we are working with cloth.” This accessibility was an important motivation when planning the exhibition content.

But it was, I hope, an accessibility grounded in content. Joseph McBrinn in his [exhibition review of Migrations](#) writes, “Although the spread of global capitalism seems to flatten and homogenize all cultures, this exhibition and publication aptly showed just how textiles, operating beyond the literary abstract of postcolonial theory,

have acted as both resistance to and comment upon this process.” (*Textile*, volume 15, issue 1, pp. 115.)

Rather than cast the textile as a surrogate carrier of theory, the textile is intended to exemplify through physical means ideas that are also accessible through written, albeit often dense, text. In the hyperlinks that follow, a selection of Migrations exhibitors and I speak to some of these concerns. These voices offer a final reflection on a project that began as a book, travelled as an exhibition and I hope will continue to exist as a conversation.

Jessica Hemmings
Professor of Crafts
University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Migrations exhibitors

Jasleen Kaur

‘The main focus in my work is design as a cultural unifier,’ explains Scottish-Indian designer [Jasleen Kaur](#). In the photographic series that records the staging of the *Dear Lord Robert Napier* project Kaur documents her request to tie a turban, with her Sikh father’s assistance, on the head of the current Lord Robert Napier. Lord Napier’s grandfather – Sir Robert Napier – occupied a central role in the British annexation of the Punjab which, as Kaur explains, “helped to open up the migratory relationship between India and Britain that enabled my Sikh Great Grandfather to come to Britain.”

Jasleen Kaur
Dear Lord Robert Napier (2010)
digital photographs and digital scan of Lambda C Type Print (shown on loop)
Photographer: Rachel Louise Brown

Julie Ryder

Australian artist [Julie Ryder’s](#) Generate series is inspired by Charles Darwin’s journey across the South Pacific to Australia on the HMS Beagle. Working with the format of the portrait, Ryder translates the uncomfortably close genealogy of Darwin’s own family tree into meticulously collected and cut discs of plant materials – a hybrid of plants that migrated by way of intentional introduction to Australia, alongside native species. She explains that the

series of textiles addresses ‘18th and 19th century fascination with scientific exploration, botanical and zoological specimen collection and the appropriation of the “exotic other”.’ The blue palette of the digital textile prints offers a nod to Wedgewood, the pottery company founded by Emma and Charles’ Darwin’s mutual grandfather Josiah Wedgewood I.

Julie Ryder
Drawing for “Emma” (2015)
leaf dots, various plant species, archival glue, Hahnemuhle 300gsm paper
Regenerate: 1808 & Regenerate: 1835 (2008), silk, reactive dyes, digital print

Studio Formafantasma

Each blanket in the *Colony* series by Italian designers Studio Formafantasma contain urban and architectural plans from an African city that experienced a version of Italian colonization. (Ethiopia, admittedly, was never officially colonized.) The blankets share the same system of composition: the Italian city plan, plans for a key building such as a town hall, and in the final layer, references to the complex contemporary relationship between Europe and North Africa. *Colony* refers not only to an Italian image of Africa that did not come to pass but the escalating loss of life by individuals attempting to migrate from North Africa to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea today.

Studio Formafantasma
Colony: Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) & Colony: Asmara (Eritrea) (2011)
Mohair wool, cotton, ceramic tiles, polyester. Courtesy of Gallery Libby Sellers

Godfried Donkor

[Godfried Donkor](#) is a Ghanaian artist based in London. His video, *The Currency of Ntoma (Fabric)*, captures his mother’s explanation of the meanings found in her personal collection of woven and printed textiles spliced with footage of the King of the Ashanti’s Chief Dresser folding around himself a massive dark cloth. Here “Holland prints” refer to wax-resist textiles. The transnational identity of wax-resist textiles emerges from the numerous cultures that have in the past, and continue today, to identify with wax-resist cloth. Present-day Indonesia has a history of refined wax-resist production known as batik. During Dutch colonization of the region, batik production was taken up in the Netherlands intended for trade with the islands. When the market proved unsuccessful, trade was instead established with west African countries – originally stopovers – on shipping routes to the East Indies. The woven kente cloth “The Mind is Finished” referred to in Donkor’s video is also discussed in the short story “The End of Skill” by Mamle Kabu included in *Cultural Threads* (Bloomsbury: 2015).

Godfried Donkor
The Currency of Ntoma (Fabric) 2012
video, 20 minutes 27 seconds



1.



2.

3.



Mr Somebody & Mr Nobody

[Mr Somebody & Mr Nobody](#) is a collaborative practice between South African born Heidi Chisholm and Sharon Lombard who now reside in the USA. Self-described as “immigrant artists”, Chisholm and Lombard adapt khangas – or proverb cloths – originally an east Africa textile tradition, with their own designs. The textiles exemplify portability: manufactured in North Carolina, or in the case of one version of the *Stubborn Chicken* khangas, silkscreened in Cape Town, South Africa on Indian cotton, finished by a women’s cooperative there, and then exported back to Miami for distribution.

Mr Somebody & Mr Nobody
Khangas series (all 2014)
silk screen print on cotton and
digital print on cotton

East African Khangas

While South African artists Mr Somebody & Mr Nobody design khangas that are inspired by the east African textile tradition of proverb cloths, these printed textiles were purchased in Tanzania. Their communication ranges from personal statements about the importance of a loving home to political campaign slogans promising “truth and transparency”. Sold in matching pairs, the cloths are later cut apart and tied around the lower and upper body or wrapped around the wearer’s head.

East African Khangas
printed cotton textiles, purchased
2014 & 2016

Dan Halter

Zimbabwean artist [Dan Halter’s](#) *Rifugiato Mappa del Mondo*, which translates from Italian as *Refugee World Map*, uses carrier bags refashioned in the shape of a world map loosely based on migration statistics. Françoise Dupré uses these very same bags as the common material of her own collaborative-participatory art practice, which involves co-production with local community groups. And – in a cruel irony – the large woven plastic bags also appeared in Marc Jacobs’s 2007 collection for Louis Vuitton, a luxury brand celebrated for their iconic logo patterned luggage. *Halter’s Space Invader (Johannesburg taxi rank – Port of entry)* video was staged in the taxi ranks of Harare, Zimbabwe and Johannesburg, South Africa – where bus journeys often begin and end between the two nations. In each location Halter installed and recorded large woven synthetic carrier bags often owned by migrants to transport their material possessions. Recorded from above by Halter, the bags suggest icons of a video game. While *Space Invader* adopts a veneer of science fiction/gaming culture it has a far harder narrative of displacement and economic inequality to tell.

Dan Halter
Space Invader (Johannesburg taxi rank – Port of entry) 2010
video, duration: 3 minutes
4 seconds, edition of 5

Rifugiato Mappa del Mondo, 2013
new and used plastic weave bags,
multiple of 8

Pamela Johnson

“100% Cotton” explores Britain’s postcolonial identity. Shifting between the perspectives of a father and daughter, the poem appropriates textile terms and garment shapes to show how culturally specific details migrate and move into daily use, often with little recognition of the past. Following antagonism between neighbours, the poem describes the north west of Britain today – a region of once thriving textile manufacturing.

Pamela Johnson
audio recording, 2 minutes 4 seconds,
first published in *The Textile Reader*
(Bloomsbury: 2012)

Françoise Dupré

London-based French-born artist [Françoise Dupré’s](#) material of choice – large plastic carrier bags – are controversially known as “Ghana-must-go bags” after the 1983 expulsion order that gave illegal immigrants (often Ghanaian workers) 14 days to leave Nigeria. Dupré notes the ubiquity of similar carrier bags in the multicultural eighteenth arrondissement of Paris where she spent her childhood and adopts the fabric for the narratives of migration and movement of labour the material communicates. *From Cluj-Napoca with Shetland motif* and *From Morant Bay: see the world* are pieced from carrier bags to create a cacophony of colour and motif. *Stripes* uses the straps from the same type of woven carrier bags Halter has used – multiple carrier bags that transport the personal possessions of so many around the world.

Françoise Dupré

Stripes started in 2009 in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina with straps of bags used in OUVRAGE project – 2011 woven webbing, straps from carrier bags and thread, bamboo cane and hooks

From Morant Bay: see the world (2014)
stitched woven and printed polythene,
PVC, webbing, one steel red plastic
coated screw hook

From Cluj-Napoca with Shetland motif
(2014) stitched woven and printed polythene,
webbing, one steel red plastic
coated screw hook

Toril Johannessen

Norwegian artist [Toril Johannessen](#) creates digitally printed textiles inspired by the optical illusions found in wax-resist textile patterns. Wax resist textiles – the same material discussed in Godfried Donkor’s video *The Currency of Ntoma (Fabric)* provide a fertile example of cross-cultural influence generated by trade, labour and the migration of both people and material goods originally between the Netherlands and what is now known as Indonesia and, more recently, the west African nations. Responding to the importance of our need to understand the textile through touch, visitors were invited to handle these fabrics and refold the display.

Toril Johannessen
Unlearning Optical Illusions: The Hermann Grid Illusion, The Hering Illusion, The Wundt Illusion, The Oppel-Kundt Illusion
(2014) cotton, digital print

Claire Barber

British artist [Claire Barber’s](#) practice takes local communities as its starting point. For *You Are the Journey (An Embroidered Intervention)* Barber revisited an earlier collaborative project with RA Webb which placed questions and space for hand written responses by commuters on the front of the Hythe Ferry Ten Journey ticket used by passengers commuting between Hythe and the city of Southampton on southern coast of England. Subsequent batches of tickets printed the commuters’ responses in the same area where the multi-use tickets received punch holes to indicate a journey. Revisiting the appropriated and fully functional tickets used in the project, Barber needle wove into the paper tickets with remnant threads of her daily wardrobe of clothes – yet another pattern that communicates identity while accompanying our daily journeys.

Claire Barber
You Are the Journey (An Embroidered Intervention) (2015)
used ferry tickets, reclaimed yarn, pins;
needle weaving over used ferry tickets



4.



6.



5.

Image captions

1.

Installation view of the *Migrations* exhibition at the Huddersfield Gallery of Art, England.

left & right walls: east African Khangas, printed cotton textiles, (purchased Tanzania 2014 & 2016).

middle table: Toril Johannessen, *Unlearning Optical Illusions: The Hermann Grid Illusion, The Hering Illusion, The Wundt Illusion, The Oppel-Kundt Illusion* (2014) cotton, digital print.

2.

Installation view of the *Migrations* exhibition at the Huddersfield Gallery of Art, England.

left: Claire Barber *You Are the Journey (An Embroidered Intervention)* (2015), used ferry tickets, reclaimed yarn, pins; needle weaving over used ferry tickets (detail).

middle: Françoise Dupré, *Stripes* started in 2009 in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina with straps of bags used in *OUVRAGE* project (2009 – 2011), woven webbing, straps from carrier bags and thread, bamboo cane and hooks.

right: Françoise Dupré, *Arabesques, stars with dragon* (2014) wall hanging installation, stitched woven and printed polythene, polyester/cotton bias, thread, quilting pins, acrylic knitted flat braids, six stainless steel screw rings.

3.

Installation view of the *Migrations* exhibition at the National College of Art & Design Gallery, Dublin, Ireland.

left: Mr Somebody & Mr Nobody, *Khanga* series (all 2014), digital print on cotton.

middle: Pamela Johnson, audio recording, 2 minutes 4 seconds, first published in *The Textile Reader* (Bloomsbury: 2012).

right: Françoise Dupré, *Stripes* started in 2009 in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina with straps of bags used in *OUVRAGE* project (2009 – 2011), woven webbing, straps from carrier bags and thread, bamboo cane and hooks.

4.

Installation view of the *Migrations* exhibition Australian Design Centre, Sydney.

Foreground: Toril Johannessen, *Unlearning Optical Illusions: The Hermann Grid Illusion, The Hering Illusion, The Wundt Illusion, The Oppel-Kundt Illusion* (2014) cotton, digital print.

background: Julie Ryder, *Regenerate: 1835* (2008), silk, reactive dyes, digital print.

5.

Installation view of the *Migrations* exhibition at the National College of Art & Design Gallery, Dublin, Ireland.

left: Mr Somebody & Mr Nobody, *Stubborn Chicken khangas* (2014), silk screen print on cotton and digital print on cotton.

middle wall: Dan Halter, *Rifugiato Mappa del Mondo* (2013) new and used plastic weave bags, multiple of 8.

middle table: Toril Johannessen, *Unlearning Optical Illusions: The Hermann Grid Illusion, The Hering Illusion, The Wundt Illusion, The Oppel-Kundt Illusion* (2014) cotton, digital print.

right: Françoise Dupré, *Stripes* started in 2009 in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina with straps of bags used in *OUVRAGE* project (2009 – 2011), woven webbing, straps from carrier bags and thread, bamboo cane and hooks.

far right: Mr Somebody & Mr Nobody, *Khanga* series (all 2014), digital print on cotton.

6.

Installation view of the *Migrations* exhibition at the Huddersfield Gallery of Art, England.

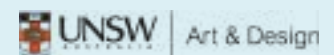
left: Françoise Dupré, *Arabesques, stars with dragon* (2014) wall hanging installation, stitched woven and printed polythene, polyester/cotton bias, thread, quilting pins, acrylic knitted flat braids, six stainless steel screw rings.

middle: Françoise Dupré, *Stripes* started in 2009 in Mostar, Bosnia-Herzegovina with straps of bags used in *OUVRAGE* project (2009 – 2011), woven webbing, straps from carrier bags and thread, bamboo cane and hooks.

right: Dan Halter, *Space Invader (Johannesburg taxi rank – Port of entry)* (2010), video, duration: 3 minutes 4 seconds, edition of 5.



ROTOR



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