When you are from Here, There, Everywhere and Nowhere.

Elena D'Cruze-Reynolds (MA) Visual Communication

If you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what the very word 'citizenship' means.

Prime Minister Theresa May, Conservative Party Conference, 05 October 2016

My art practice examines being a citizen of the world. I reflect on my British identity and explore my contested sense of belonging as an Anglo-Indian and Spanish second generation born immigrant. I creatively use my professional experience as a theatrical and film costumier to explore my family history of intermarriage and diaspora. With nervous instinct, and with a hunger for knowledge, I have pulled at the threads of literature, immigration law, history, philosophy, feminist theory, race theory, geography, psychiatry, and religion, in order to learn about my Roots/Routes to Britain. 'One should either be a work of art, or wear a work of art' (A quote by Oscar Wilde, 2021), inspired me to think about creating a living soft sculpture, a costume for my displaced psyche, which reflects both my parents stories of diaspora, and my fathers haunting history of colonialism. I seek to fashion a style that visually communicates the complexities of psychological violence, historical and contemporary that is borne from political and legal structural change, which continues to leave people like me born from here, there, everywhere and nowhere, caught in a 21st century limbo.

‘Something startles where I thought I was safest’

(This Compost by Walt Whitman - Poems | Academy of American Poets, 2021)



‘Play the Fool- Cut Piece’ EDR Thought Experiment Performance art 14/12/2018

‘National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used or the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon.’ (FANON, 2021)

When the ‘Leave’ campaign won the EU referendum in 2016, a social contract was left in tatters (Tolokonnikova, n.d.) My emotions were muddled and I could feel the sharp psychological pain of needles and pins (Cooper, 2021). The veil on anti-immigrant sentiment had been lifted, and I was in vertigo, struggling to understand everything. I was experiencing Frantz Fanon’s violent phenomenon. Brexit had made the political private and my mother, along with 5 million other EU citizens in Britain, including those British living in the EU were now being ‘othered’, dehumanised as bargaining chips (Trust and Trust, 2021). As I write today mum can now be threatened with deportation if at any point if she fails to update her EU settlement status. This could be anything from forgetting to update a change of address, phone number or passport details (Trust and Trust, 2021)

This opens up a new precarious reality for our family, but not a reality that surprises us. In 2003 we experienced a ‘Windrush’ style scandal of our own. My father’s younger sister immigrated from India on my grandmother’s passport in 1962. In 2003 she found herself snared by the complexities of ever changing immigration law, which even the Home Office’s departmental experts have struggled to understand (Windrush Lessons Learned Review by Wendy Williams, 2021). It took my auntie seven years to prove her right to stay in Britain, even though she had medical records going back to the sixties, a national insurance number, worked in a school, and was married to a British Man. This was legitimate ‘intereference’ on her right to a private life (El-Enany, 2020) which had implications on her well being and caused years of frustration and emotional distress.

‘Language sets the scene’

The language of the Brexit divorce, along with the rising curtain of British exceptionalism, set the scene (The Stuart Hall Project, 2013) for my thought experiment, a performance piece of art, inspired by Yoko Ono’s *Cut Piece-1964*. Standing in front of a large screen as a backdrop, wearing my wedding dress and with my mouth forced shut, I waited for the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra to strike up ‘Land of Hope and Glory’. I wanted to transport my audience to Last Night Of The Proms, were, I, globalised Britannia herself waved and encouraged participants to individually come up to me, and cut pieces off my memory laden bridal gown. I had created a piece of personal and political art that was loaded with British culture and rebellious in style. After the performance I felt proud and full of adrenaline, but reality would soon take over as friends and acquaintances who were curious about my first term in adult higher education, were left shocked by my creative actions. This was not the kind of work that they expected from a normally whimsical, cartoon style illustrator.

I had met with a real time reaction, that was in line with the experience of grunge musician Courtney Love. Courtney has an enduring legacy as an outsider (George, 2021) which inspired an autobiographical art exhibition titled “She’s Not Even That Pretty” (Yaeger, 2021). The Daily Mail’s headline response to her framed lipstick graffitied wedding dress was ‘shock superseding talent: Courtney Love covers wedding dress in obscenities in attempt to launch art career (Daily Mail, 2012). I realised that my first terms work had made people feel uncomfortable, and now my immigrant intuition wanted to restrain me. I began to let guilt and conservatism slowly bleed into my newly found creative British confidence. My most treasured garment was in ruins, rolled up into a ball and shoved in a suitcase. I had defiled the purity of my wedding dress (Daily Mail, 2012), and now after the event and in the private gathering of my thoughts, a judge lay out the evidence of my crime in order to decide, is it good, is it bad, is right or is it wrong? Where are we going to? (Woolf.,2017)



Courtney Love Wedding Dress (A journal of Musical Things, 2021)
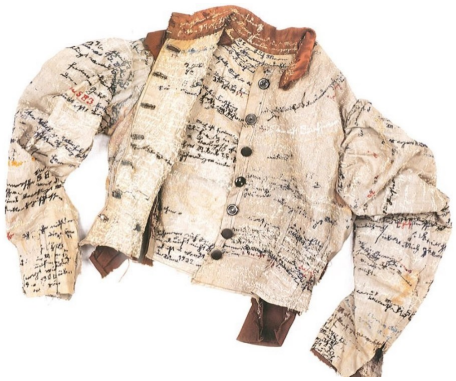


‘So she righted herself after the shock’ EDR studio 29/12/2018

My inner judge pulled apart and untangled my emotions, and eventually my hands were ready to get involved in the performative process of taking my gown out of the suitcase. I chose to undertake this role as a costumier, by switching from bride to dresser it gave me the freedom to separate off the feelings of regret, and blur the personal just for a while, so that I could interact with the garment in a critical and professional manner. By approaching it this way, I was free to dress the dummy, and let the fabric breathe. I saw the violent cuts for what they were, evidence, examples of my anxiety and experience of national liberation.

‘Indeed, my continuing passion, would be not to point the finger in judgements but to part the curtain, that invisible shadow that falls between people, the veil of indifference to each other's presence, each other's wonder, each other's human plight.'

(Eudora Welty Quote, 2021)



Following Courtney Love’s thread of “text” and “textile”, and its combined therapeutic use in the release of bottled up emotions, I came across the book *‘Agnes’s jacket, a psychologist’s search for the meaning of madness’.* In it, Gail A. Hornstein investigates people who find themselves caught up in a ‘mad world’. The book unravels the lived experience and creative actions of a nineteenth century seamstress and asylum patient, Agnes Richter, who from her “third rate”, overcrowded accommodation, fashioned, a haunting needle and thread narrative of frustration and anxiety. It is sad story of trauma, which has had a a massive impact on my thinking and practice. From the beginning of Agnes’s hospitalization in 1893 until her death in 1918, she believed that she was being detained unjustly, doctors diagnosed her voiced frustration as classic paranoia with audible hallucinations (Hornstein, 2009). Her condition got worse as the years went by, but her belief that she was being stolen from by unnamed people and hospital staff

continued until she died (Hornstein, 2009). For over 23 years she dealt with her emotions by using her skills as a seamstress and thus holding on to a sense of identity. Her jacket is evidence of her lived experience, it is brutally honest and displays the haunting power of creative resilience.

‘Metamorphosis’



PhilomelaSir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, Bt., A.R.A., R.W.S. (1833-1898)

Messages of Captivity

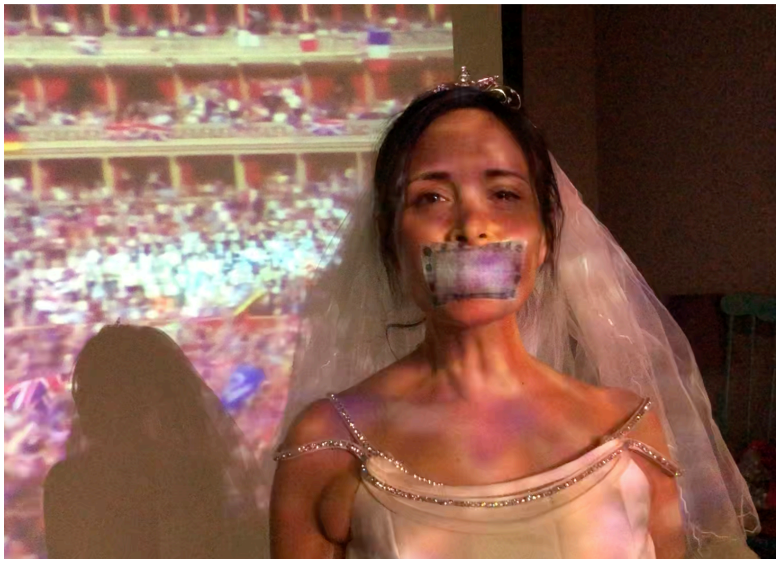
‘And what shall Philomela do? A guard prevents her flight; stout walls of solid stone fence in the hut; speechless lips can give no tokens of her wrongs. But grief has sharp wits, and in trouble cunning comes. She hangs a Thracian web on her loom, and skilfully weaving purple signs on a white background, she thus tells the story of her wrongs’.
Ovid, Metamorphoses VI

Literature from ancient Greece contains stories of how woven objects, embody the weavers psychology. Metamorphoses, tells the story Philomela (Beard, n.d.) the daughter of the King of Athens, who is raped by her brother in law. He silences Philomela by imprisoning and cutting out her tongue. Like Agnes, the princess would prove that she could not be so easily silenced. From captivity, she would tell the truth by occupying her hands and by creating a woven tapestry. In the ‘Subversive Stitch’ Rozsika Parker quotes

Catherine Christopher, who writes in her book ‘The Complete Book of Embroidery and Embroidery Stitches’, 1944 that,

“ *Few pursuits can rival embroidery for the opportunity it offers to impress (a woman’s) creative ability upon her surroundings and personal belongings. The things thus created may be few and far between, but they are an expression of yourself so individual and personal that they will always be cherished.” (Parker, 2010)*

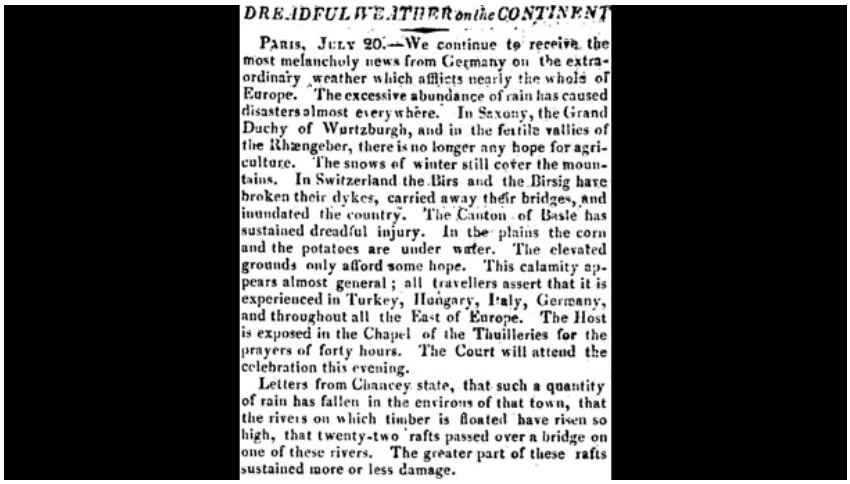
I know that in my lifetime, I will never have another canvas that is as personal and individual as my bridal gown. My thought experiment is alive, Philomela, Agnes Rhicter, Yoko Ono and Courtney Love, have all in their unique way contributed in giving my work a heartbeat. Their stories and use of “text” and “textile” has stabilised my cognitive horizon and given me the focus to appropriate my own ‘psy-Chic’ survival methods. I have been given the psychological freedom to freely fashion a language that communicates the complexity and richness of what it is like to be mixed race and British during unpredictable times.



‘Play the Fool- Cut Piece’ EDR Thought Experiment Performance art 14/12/2018

‘From the Ruins of Play the Fool’

The uplifting lesson that I had learnt from reading ‘Agnes’s Jacket’, was that through listening, we can find a way to nurture empathy, be wiser and kinder. With this in mind my New Year resolution for 2019 was to practice listening, and it didn’t take long to make an impact on my artwork.



DREADFUL WEATHER on the CONTINENT

PARIS, JULY 20.—We continue to receive the most melancholy news from Germany on the extraordinary weather which afflicts nearly the whole of Europe. The excessive abundance of rain has caused disasters almost every where. In Saxony, the Grand Duchy of Wurtzburgh, and in the fertile vallies of the Rhængeber, there is no longer any hope for agriculture. The snows of winter still cover the mountains. In Switzerland the Birs and the Birsig have broken their dykes, carried away their bridges, and inundated the country. The Canton of Basle has sustained dreadful injury. In the plains the corn and the potatoes are under water. The elevated grounds only afford some hope. This calamity appears almost general; all travellers assert that it is experienced in Turkey, Hungary, Italy, Germany, and throughout all the East of Europe. The Host is exposed in the Chapel of the Thuilleries for the prayers of forty hours. The Court will attend the celebration this evening.

Letters from Chancey state, that such a quantity of rain has fallen in the environs of that town, that the rivers on which timber is floated have risen so high, that twenty-two rafts passed over a bridge on one of these rivers. The greater part of these rafts sustained more or less damage.

‘Dreadful Weather on the Continent’ 24/07/1816- © sourced from the British Newspaper Archive

It was 7:30 in the morning, and I was in my kitchen preparing the lunchboxes whilst listening to BBC radio 4’s ‘Today’ programme, they were debating anxiously the important vote which was taking place in Parliament later that day. The segment was angering me, both sides of the argument where going round in circles, and all I wanted to do was turn the noise off, but, I couldn’t. I had to stick to my resolution, and I’m glad that I did because, I did learn something. Chine MacDonald, a regular contributor to BBC Religion and Ethics programmes, was sharing her ‘Thought of the day’. She addressed our national frustration and spoke of the cloud that we had all been living under since the referendum in 2016. She compared our current state of uncertainty with the uncertainty

that was experienced 200 years ago, when in 1815, Mount Tamboro of Indonesia erupted, the volcano spewed clouds of dust and tiny glass particles into the heavens.
The cloud mass blotted out the sunshine, it lowered temperatures and increased rainfall. For a year, the sun frequently disappeared and the continuing days of dark clouds, caused people to feel psychologically and physically low. ('Dreadful Weather on the Continent' from the Morning Post, 2021). One of the most notable things that took place because of the natural event, was the number of creative green shoots that grew out from the dark terrible weather (BBC Radio 4 - Thought for the Day, Chine McDonald - 15/01/2019, 2021). It is here that I became wedded to Mary Shelley, who from the confines of her Swiss retreat used the unseasonable weather, and its dark inspiration to write ‘Frankenstein’ (BBC Radio 4 - In Our Time, 1816, the Year Without a Summer, 2021).

‘Rematerializing a Spectre of Difference’



EDR-‘ Mind mapping’ 2020

Just like Mary Shelley, from under the cloud of uncertainty and the comfort of my home ‘I beheld the wretch-the miserable monster whom I created’ (Shelly, 2012). My wedding dress had been woken up by David Cameron, she stood in the the corner of my studio, haunting and alerting me to the essential focus that I would need to re-fashion my psychological self.

‘The Bride of Cameron’

“Whatever else Brexit means or does not mean, it certainly means racism. Born of fortuitous circumstances, lacking programme or policy, the government has had to find its ‘mandate’ in the twin Brexit themes: that immigration is unravelling of the nation, and anything foreign, except investment, is abhorrent to its ethos - thus giving a fillip to popular racism and elevating institutional racism to fully-fledged state racism”

(Sivandan. A, Institute of Race Relations 2021).

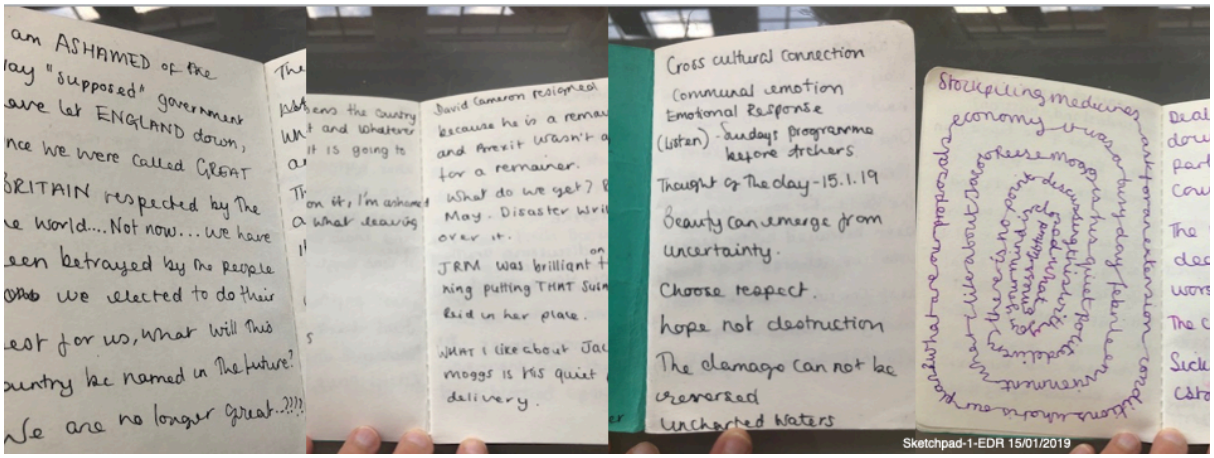
Author Elif Shafak says in her book ‘How to Stay Sane in an age of division’ that, ‘discrimination always starts with words’.



‘El Pais’ Online- The offensive graffiti.A. C.

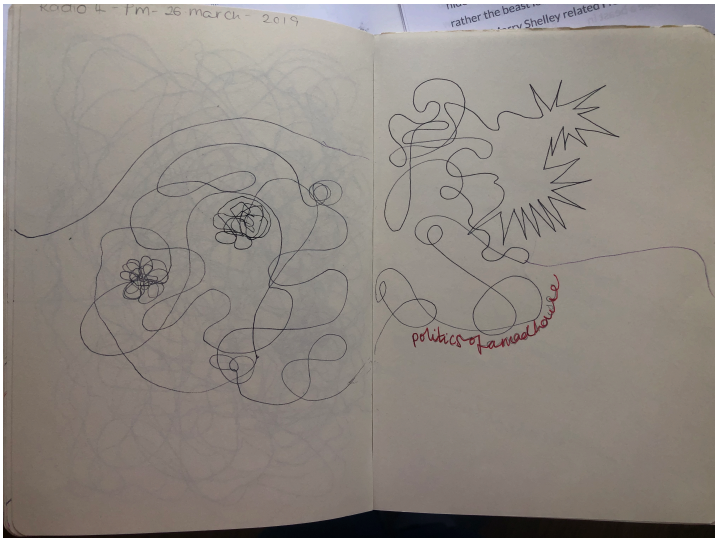
Only weeks after the referendum, I read an article in ‘El Pais’ on-line titled, ‘Racist graffiti scrawled outside Spanish school in London, British police report sharp spike in such incidents after Brexit vote’ (Carbajosa, 2021). It confirmed my fears, that Brexit would silently cause psycho-affective injuries, also known as 'Subversive warfare’- psychological services of ‘Use the people against the people’ (FANON, 2021). I attended Vicente Cañada Blanch for nearly two decades. It is where I learnt about my Spanish

culture, language, geography and history. As a child and teenager, it was where I felt happiest, in that building we were all immigrants. It was a place were we felt proud to be Spanish. I lamented as I carried on reading the article, the school had intended to change its uniform to incorporate a Spanish flag, now parents had concerns that the flag would now identify the children as foreigners which could result in violence against them (Carbajosa, 2021). The graffiti ‘Foreigners pack’ was directly speaking to me, unpacking my gown from the suitcase was my act of defiance against a dangerous movement which threatens to divide Britain.

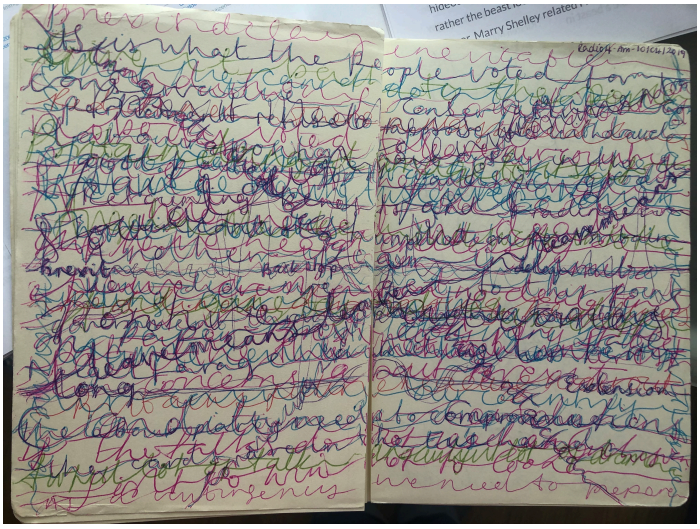


Sketchpad 1- ‘Listening Project’ EDR 15/01/2019

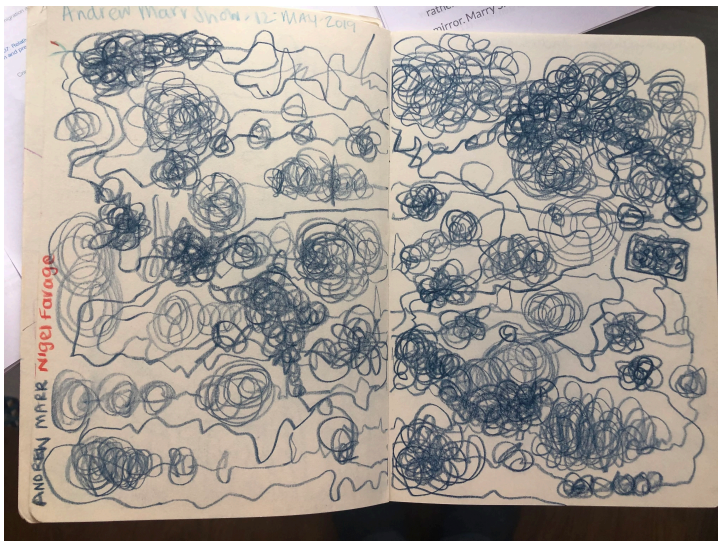
I began to experiment with careful engagement as I followed the ins and outs, of the social and political discussions that were shaping our mood. In sketchpads I wrote everything down, I naturally found myself adopting anthropologist Tim Ingold’s method of ‘wayfaring’, where rhythmically I combined movement and attention to create images of vocal sound, and their psychological imprints (Ingold, 2016). This practice took me from the written word, into the twist and turns of a single thread.



EDR, Sketchpad 2- ‘Listening Project’ R4 ‘Today’ 10/4/2019 black and red biro

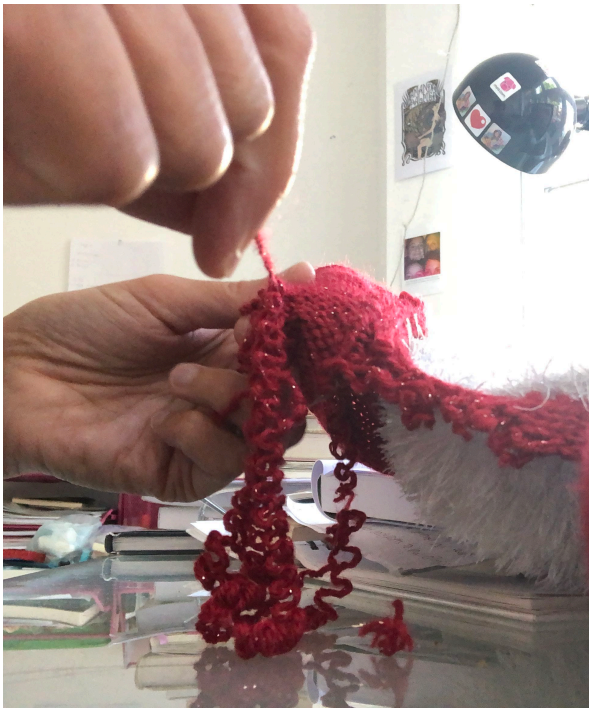


EDR, Sketchpad 2- ‘Listening Project’ R4 ‘PM’ 26/4/2019 black and red biro

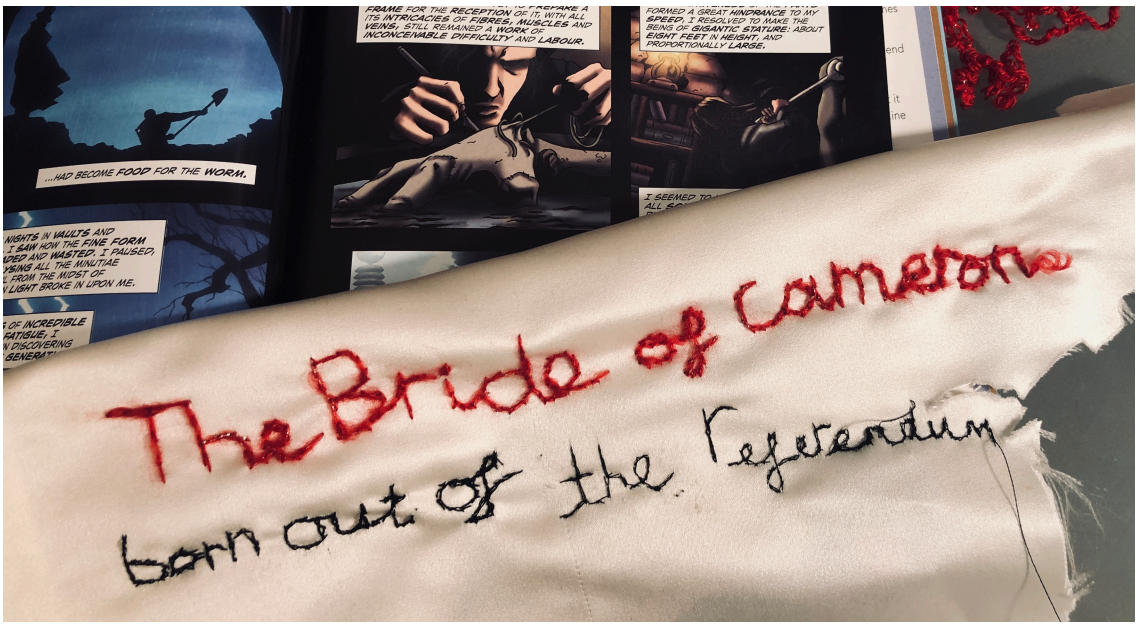


EDR, Sketchpad 2- ‘Listening Project’ ‘Andrew Marr Show’ Nigel Farage tied up in knots- 12/5/2019, blue pencil

I spent months filling up my sketch pads with words that I knew were to be sewn, but I still couldn't answer the questions that I kept on asking myself. What threads will I want to use? and what words do I want to embroider? Nothing was inspiring enough for my beautiful gown. I recalled Victor Frankenstein being animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm, in the application of his irksome and almost intolerable study (Shelly, 2012). I thought that I should look for my own irksome and intolerable inspiration. This was a turning point on my creative journey, as I learnt to incorporated video into my practice. I recorded myself pulling apart, a blood red knitted cardigan whilst listening to Nigel Farage on a radio show. This part of my practice harbours a dark unsettling feeling of self harm. The act of undoing reflects the vivisection that is taking place from within parliament. The old relationship is pulled apart as a new bespoke relationship stitched together. In this fragmented trial, I decided to sew the title that will be attached to my gown forever, 'The Bride of Cameron'.



Video 'vivisection'EDR- 21/05/2019



'The Bride of Cameron' EDR- 21/05/2019



'The Bride of Cameron' EDR- 21/05/2019

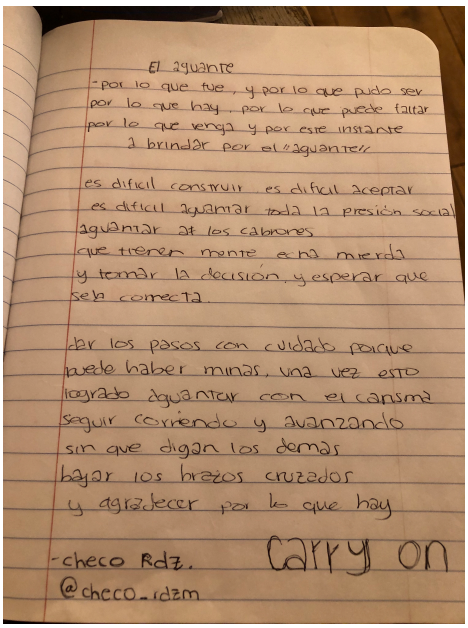


'The Bride of Cameron' EDR- 21/05/2019

I like the fragments pinned on to the dress, working this way I have been able to convey the surreal nature of politics and the reality of all the complexity and entanglements which probe our neuroses.

As part of my continuing research, I visited the poetry cafe in London in order to catch some live poetry, and practice ‘wayfairing’ in the wild. Placed on every table are note pads, where visitors can share their thoughts. It is here that I formed a point of connection with a poem written by Checo Rdz, titled ‘El Aguante’ ‘Endurance’. I am currently trying to get in contact with the poet via social media. I want to let him know that reading his words filled me with hope. Immigration was the key issue of Brexit, and with it came a rise in hatred and racial discrimination (2021). Checo reminded me, to carry on being me, to carry on not be scared of speaking Spanish to my daughters in the street or on the bus, to carry on staying alert, and to carry on being aware of the many twists and turns in relation to state policy and immigration issues.

‘El Aguante’



El Aguante poem by Checo Rdz- The Poetry Cafe London

‘Endurance’

For what it was, and for what it could be
for what there is, for what there could have been, for what could be missing,
for what comes, and for this moment
a toast to "endurance"

it is difficult to build, it is difficult to accept
it is difficult to endure all the social pressure
put up with the bastards
who have shit for brains
who make a decision they hope is correct.

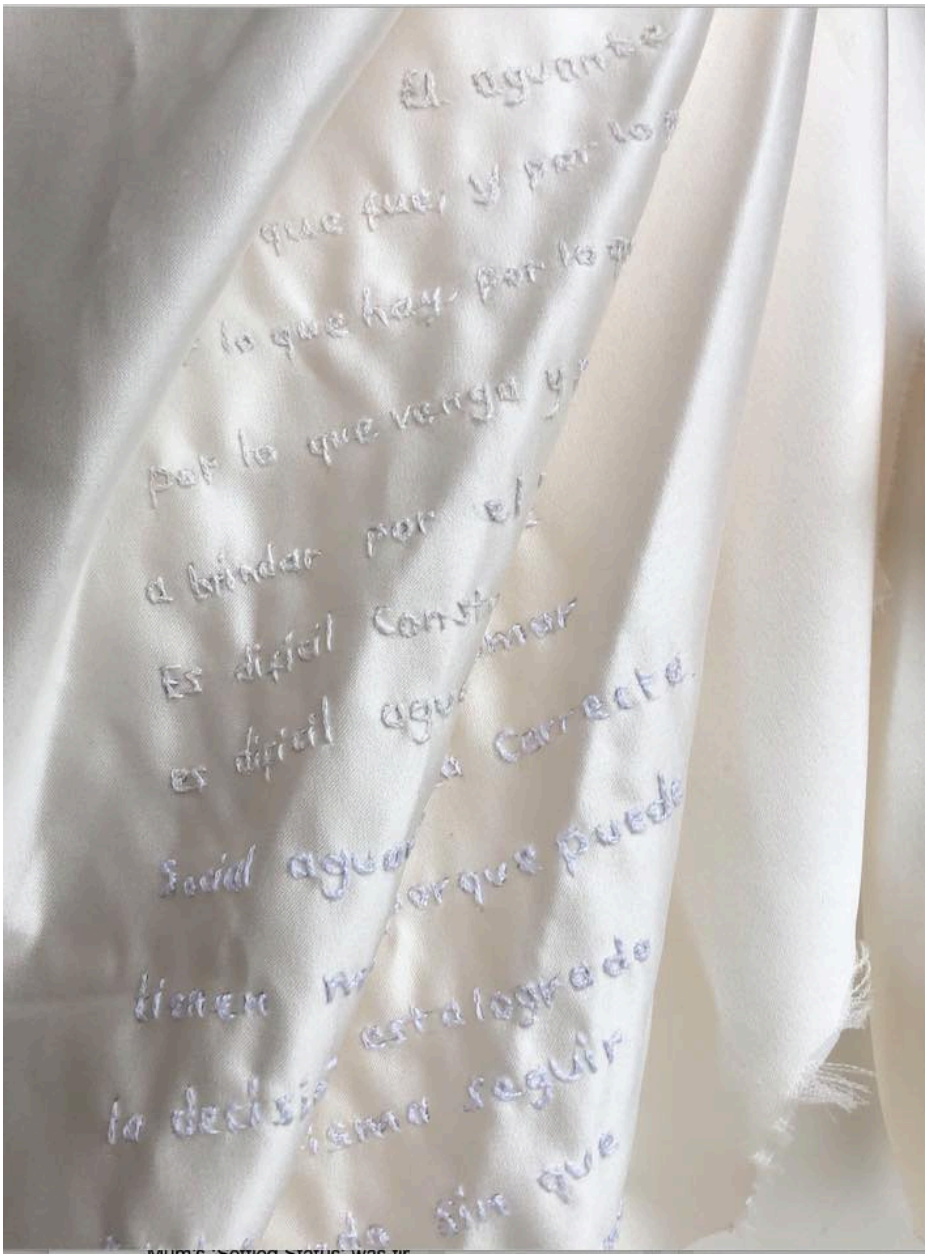
take your steps carefully because
there may be mines, once this has
been obtained, with all its charisma
keep running and moving forward
without others saying
lower your folded arms
and appreciate what there is.
Carry On



‘El Aguante’ video work in progress whilst listening to news on settled status concerns 04/09/2019 pencil on duchess satin

Mum's 'Settled Status' was finally confirmed at the end of August, it was a great relief, but, concerns still and will always exist. The governments 'Settled Status' is a digital platform, which many fear may not be good enough. Insecurity lies in the fact that there is no physical documentation proving a persons indefinite right to stay, MPs have suggested that it could be "blighted" by technical issues, leaving EU citizens in a Windrush style nightmare (Hundreds of EU citizens use Windrush scheme to stay in UK, 2021). In a letter to her friend Frida Kahlo wrote that, 'I wish to be worthy, with my painting, of the people to whom I belong and to the ideas that strengthen me…I want my work to be a contribution to the struggle of the people for peace and liberty' (HERRERA, 2018). Frida's letter and Checo's poem encouraged me to sew my first words into my gown. I too wish to be worthy, with my art, of the people to whom I belong, to those who like me are 'routed' to Britain.

Using white thread from my mum's needle box, I sewed Checo's poem into the folds of my skirt. Philosopher Gilles Deleuze fashioned a theory around the fold. He believed that the fold is 'an inside life, labour and language, in which man is embedded', the poem embroidered into the folds of my gown reflects Deleuze's theory and confirms that the fold is an image of of bifurcating paths, ripples of routes and experiences, where there can be no undisturbed stretch of fabric, no smooth surface, only multiple furrows and pleats, twists and turns (Bari, 2019).



‘First Words’- 04/09/2019/ White thread on duchess satin

‘Threads’

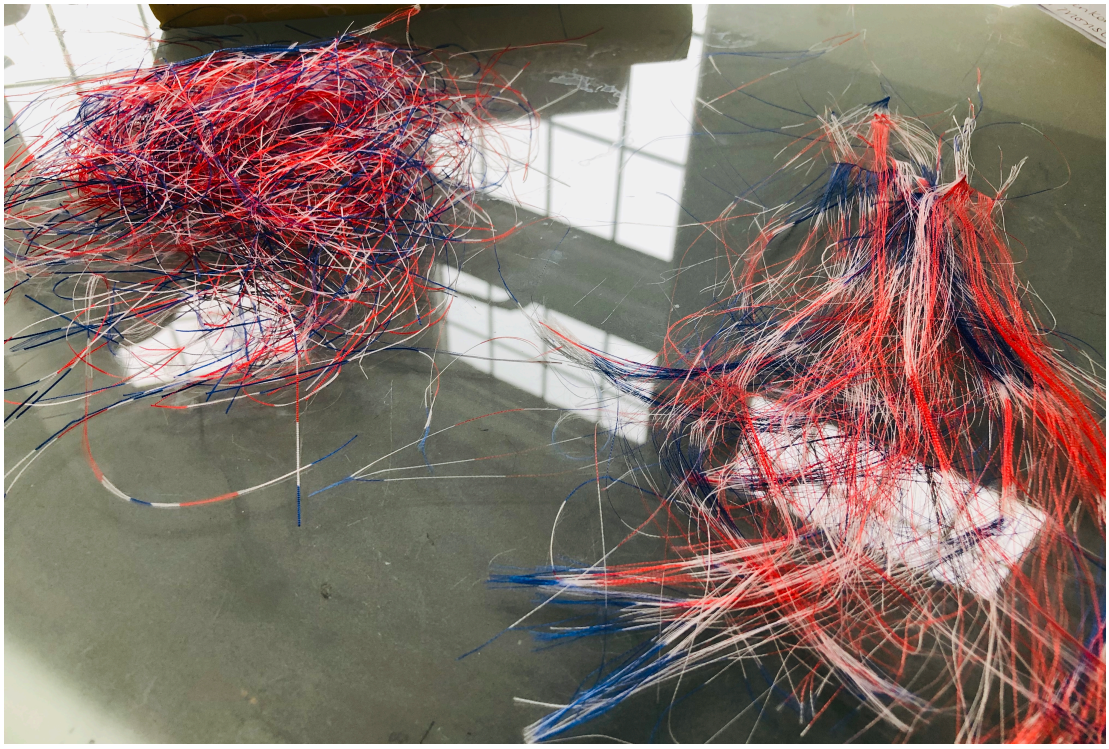
‘We live in a global environment with a huge number of ecological, economic, social, and political pressures tearing at its only dimly perceived, basically uninterpreted and uncomprehended fabric.’ (Said, 1994).



Video- ‘Identity Crisis’- EDR- 31/01/2020

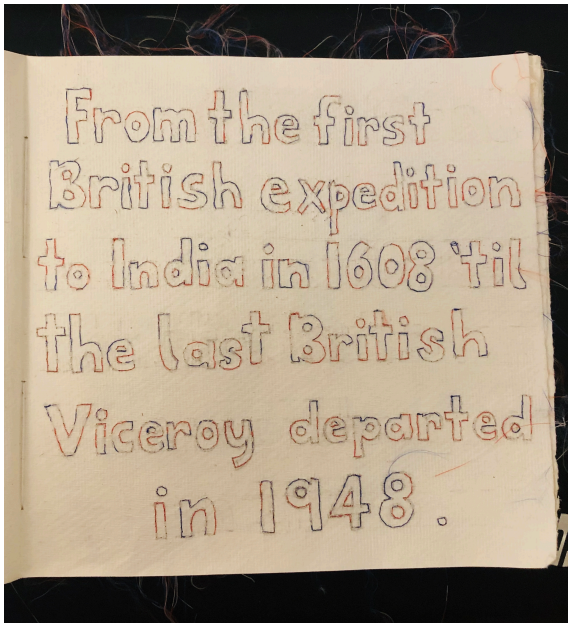
Edward Said writes in his book Culture and Imperialism that, ‘We are at a point in our work when we can no longer ignore empires and the imperial context in our studies’ (Said, 1994). In my video ’Identity Crisis’, I listen to a Brexit supporter who called a radio show to say why he voted to leave the EU, his reason was because he could only see “three or four white faces” whilst on a visit to a hospital in Harrow (James O'Brien takes down Brexit voter who complained about lack of 'white faces' at his local hospital, 2021) The caller insisted that he wasn’t being racist and went on to say that UK had “lost its identity”.

My frustrated creative interaction with the radio caller highlights how the British National project is one that expresses white ownership of colonial spoils (El-Enany, 2020). The callers remorselessly narrow and selfish interests and racial hatred does in fact lead to destructiveness (Said, 1994).



‘Historically generated loose ends’

“But this is the moment for us to think of our past and go up a gear again, to recapture the spirit of those seafaring ancestors immortalised above us whose exploits brought not just riches but something even more important than that – and that was a global perspective”(Johnson, 2021).



‘History Lesson’ EDR- 15/04/2020

Since the summer of 2020, I have had the time to learn about our family’s entanglement of ‘routes’ and ‘roots’, we have a history of diaspora and intermarriage that spans nearly two centuries. My six times great grandfather Richard Woods was born in Chorley, Lancashire, in 1829 aged 20 he enlisted in the army, and was sent on board the S.S Minorva to India. In 1842 he married Amelia Bowman in Madras, my Victorian great grandmother was an Anglo-Indian/Eurasian who belonged to one of the largest and oldest communities of mixed descent in the world (Anon 2021). British born men in India

were encouraged and paid by the British Government and the East India company to marry Indian women, they were led away from their own culture in the belief of British ideology, they chose western dress, English and christianity as the only way to bring up their families. They gave birth to a subservient, liminal workforce who worked the railways so that Britain could be enriched. Marriage is the thread that weaves my historical and contemporary together, it brings me to the now and to my current creative thinking space. My family navigated over two hundred years of 'Hostile' environment, it started in the motherland, where proscription effectively repressed, discriminated and 'othered'. Once Britain lost its grip on India and after partition, thousands like us were forced to leave for Britain, the fatherland (Blunt, 2005). My auntie's contemporary experience of being caught up in the 'Windrush' scandal proves that history does repeat itself and that 'routed' Britons are never secure.

With respect and in memory of my Indian female ancestors, I will name the Bride of Cameron, 'EurAsia'. Using the remnants of threads from a Union flag she will wear a gown embroidered with the perplexing changing dates of British immigration policy, and I will sew the names of the ships my seafaring family sailed on, their exploits not only brought me global perspective but something even more important than that- (Johnson, 2021) they brought my life into existence. I hope that my soft sculpture serves as a history lesson to future generations of my family and that they never forget where we came from and our obligation to stay alert. EurAsia is a reference point to those who are seeking to learn about Britain's multilayered, interlocking colonial history.

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