

Dorcas Stories from the Front Room

Exhibition

23 September 2023
- 29 October 2023

Mailbox, Level 2
7 Commercial Street
Birmingham
B1 1RS

Black History Month runs for the
month of October

Tihara Smith
Windrush Collection
image Kayleigh Pace



Celebrating 75 years of Windrush, we discover who and what was Dorcas.

Dorcas Stories from the Front Room, Caribbean textile narratives now and then celebrates 75 years of Windrush, its enduring and future legacy, through the lens of textile crafts, fashion and Dorcas Clubs. The exhibition, organised by **Craftspace**, runs from 23 September to 29 October, Weds – Sun from 1pm to 6pm on Level 2 of the Mailbox, Birmingham.

Windrush descendent Rose Sinclair returns to Birmingham to co-curate a new exhibition highlighting Empire Windrush passenger landing cards of 26 skilled craftspeople who came to the Midlands alongside previously unseen historic fashion garments from the Jamaican Fashion Guild and contemporary designers.

Deirdre Figueiredo MBE, Director of Craftspace said: "Craftspace is delighted to invite Rose Sinclair back to Birmingham to share her important research and personal collections of Caribbean textile heritage, bringing rich narratives, knowledge and insights to otherwise unheard stories as part of Black History Month.

"In this 75th year of Windrush we celebrate the continued role of craft and textiles in shaping the legacy for new generations. This unique perspective from a lens of textile, fashion and community making acknowledges the significant contribution of Caribbean people to public life and culture in the UK."

Rose Sinclair said: "I am really excited at being back in my home town of Birmingham, and working with Craftspace on this project. This city informed my formative years, and it's where my love for art and textiles started, visiting the local libraries, the art galleries and museums.

"When I started my research about Black women and textiles, crafting and sewing and their importance to British craft aesthetic it would be the stories of my mum Bernice and her Dorcas Club here at her local church in Birmingham, that I drew on for inspiration. My mum was one of the Windrush generation, coming here in 1960 so this project is also special to me as it asks how we can look at the past, what is now and what is the future, from all those Windrush pioneers."

Three distinct spaces and narratives will take visitors on a journey through time from the arrival of Windrush in 1948 through to the contemporary textile and fashion creatives who are re-shaping identity and cultural expression. Exhibits include; re-constructed Windrush landing cards, archival material, domestic textiles, historical garments, photographs, contemporary textiles/fashion and a collectively made community textile, audio stories and film.

The exhibition begins from 1948 to 1962 and includes a selection of reconstructed **Windrush landing cards** filtered to show the people who came to the Midlands and who cited their profession as a craft or a trade including; tailor, cabinet maker, blacksmith, shoemaker, carpenter, moulder. Windrush images include a rare one of dressmaker **Evelyn Wauchope**, who stowed away on Empire Windrush. Rose Sinclair shows her own collection of Caribbean crafts typical of the 'front room' including a collection of intricate starched crochet elevated as art pieces.

In a second space **Vanley Burke's** photographs document life in Birmingham, what people wore and how they dressed their interior spaces. Master tailor **George Saunders** from Birmingham is also featured.

A third space shows how the Windrush legacy is evolving in the hands of new generations of creatives. **Daniel Gayle** of Denzilpatrick expresses his Jamaican/Irish family stories through Windrush inspired garments reimagining the type of suit that his grandfather arrived in remodeling them "from epic migrations over land and sea to the small passages we take in our city, and the places we visit in our hopes and dreams". **Tihara Smith's** designs are informed by oral testimony from her grandfather about his Windrush experience and her research visits to the Caribbean where straw crafts were a particular inspiration. **Norma Banton's** MasterPeace Academy and faith-based approach to her work and actions, embodies the Dorcas ethos of sharing the gift of your skills with others in the community. **Sara Fowles'** podcasts Yarning: Tales from Birmingham about Black women knitters relates the stories of how they learnt and the part it plays in their health and social connectivity.

A community project has been running alongside the development of the exhibition. Textile artists **Dawn Denton** and **Annette Ratti** have facilitated a textile project with Caribbean residents at **Pannel Croft Village** in Birmingham to draw on their stories and create a new collectively made textile depicting their work roles, professions and that of their families, building a picture of the impacts and reach of Caribbean people on public life and culture in the UK.

Visiting

The exhibition is free to visit on level 2 in the Mailbox and open Weds-Sun from 1 till 6pm.
Information and events <https://craftspace.co.uk/dorcas-stories/>

ENDS

Rose Sinclair

Rose Sinclair is a Design Lecturer (Textiles), Design Education at Goldsmiths, University of London. She is also a researcher, textiles practitioner, curator and author. She is an expert in Caribbean textiles, crafts and migrant experience in communities. Her unique research documents Black British women's crafting and design practices including textiles networks such as Dorcas Clubs/Societies and forms of participatory craft. Her research work on Dorcas Clubs was featured in the TV Programme '*Craftivism: Making a Difference*' BBC4 Feb 2021.

She co-curated the first retrospective of Althea McNish the first textile designer of Caribbean heritage to achieve international recognition, shown at the William Morris Gallery and The Whitworth. <http://www.gold.ac.uk/design/staff/sinclair/>

More information and images

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Craftspace

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Editors Notes

Artists and designers in the exhibition:

Tihara Smith, Daniel Gayle of Denzilpatrick, Norma Banton of MasterPeace Academy, Sara Fowles. Community project facilitated by textiles artists Dawn Denton and Annette Ratti.

Mailbox:

The space is kindly gifted by Mailbox. Andy Jackson, Mailbox Estate Director, said:
"Celebrating cultures is of extreme importance to us at The Mailbox, and we are therefore thrilled to be able to host this fantastic and thought-provoking exhibition. The exhibition tells such an important story, educating both our occupiers and guests."

Funding

Arts Council England, The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), Goldsmiths University of London, Feeney Trust, CEDIA Birmingham City University, Windrush 75 Network.

Craftspace: craftspace.co.uk

Craftspace is a charity creating opportunities to see, make and be curious about exceptional contemporary craft. We are based in Birmingham and work collaboratively regionally, nationally and internationally. We build relationships between artists, people and organisations and encourage the sharing of ideas, skills and knowledge.

We have 30+ years' experience and continue to learn, push boundaries and challenge ideas. Craftspace initiates artistic programmes which stimulate creative excellence, critical thinking and understanding of contemporary crafts in the widest social and cultural contexts.

Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development body for arts and culture across England, working to enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to visual art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2018 and 2022, we will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. www.artscouncil.org.uk

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