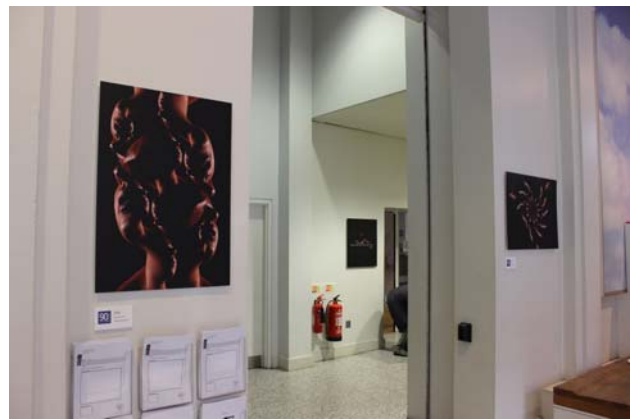


90 Degree Citizen – EVALUATION REPORT

an exhibition project by Virtual Migrants + performance/discussion events



EVALUATION REPORT

by project director and manager Kooj (Kuljit) Chuhan

Evaluative Summary and key concluding points

90 Degree Citizen was an ambitious, multi-layered and complex project, with a range of partners (Street Level gallery in Glasgow, Manchester Museum, Platforma, GMIAU, and to a lesser extent Community Arts North West) and a number of contributors and collaborators given its small budget and organisational base. More than simply a curated exhibition led by an artists' collective on the theme of 'arts and refugees', the project included new commissions and collaborative production and curation as well as discussions, performances and presentations involving two live events and a conference, gaining good audiences and partnerships in the process.

The achievements of the project are very strong, the audience feedback is overwhelmingly between good and excellent across all parameters of the project, and it has clearly and successfully presented work from seriously marginalised artistic communities at a very professional level with positive press reviews received in the process. The project addresses a significant gap in artistic provision – being the first exhibition of visual arts from people of refugee experience in Greater Manchester of any breadth – and also contributed to important dialogues and contextual debates within the field. That, and the fact that the project along with our organisation Virtual Migrants was profiled at a national level through inclusion in Platforma, is a significant achievement.

There were a number of issues encountered by the team in delivering the project as would be expected with any such endeavour and these are documented in this report. None of these have any strong significance except for two which stand out:

(a) the budget and available capacity was far too low for the level of ambition and complexity of the project which impacted negatively on project workers and is something requiring urgent attention with future work,

(b) the Manchester Museum fell significantly short in certain areas that significantly damaged the project, by failing to install essential text labelling and panels alongside the exhibits and in their own curator's glass case for half of the exhibition's duration.

In addition to this report the project has an online archive on the Virtual Migrants website – its introductory page is located at www.virtualmigrants.net/90-degree-citizen plus a number of sub-menu items.

Summary of project

The exhibition and artists.

“90 Degree Citizen” was a refugee art exhibition at The Manchester Museum presenting a sample of artists from England and Scotland, from 10th October to 17th November 2013. This comprised three artists associated with Virtual Migrants (Greater Manchester) and three artists / groups associated with Street Level Photoworks (Glasgow). All are early- to mid-career artists whose work resonates with experiences of refuge, presenting recent work.

A fuller outline of the exhibition and artists is available within the Exhibition Guide – included later in this report.

This exhibition is probably the first refugee art show in the North West with both a national profile and crossing national boundaries. Therefore we see this as a pilot project towards a broader exhibition of refugee visual art practices across the UK and possibly internationally. Such a development is overdue for Greater Manchester, both a major cultural centre and a strong locus for refugee communities.

The majority of the artists are women, generating a strong sense of female perspective; there is also a recurring theme of responding to violence in varying forms. There is a degree of contrast and comparison between the work created in Glasgow and Manchester – within the strong commonality the different approaches reflect underlying structural differences between the culture of the two regions and countries in relation to refugees.

The exhibition was organised using collaborative curating methods involving Street Level gallery, collective members of Virtual Migrants, and to a lesser degree the Manchester Museum. Excluding the considerable ‘in kind’ support for the project, the total cash income was just over £8k.

Platforma National Conference of the Arts and Refugees

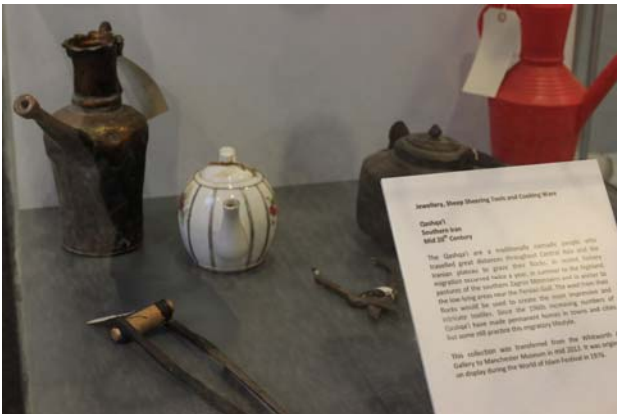
The second biennial Platforma national refugee arts festival and conference (October 31st – November 1st) was also taking place in Manchester this year. “90 Degree Citizen” formed the key visual art exhibition with full support and a financial contribution from Platforma; it was a leading part of the ‘fringe’ programme. This made the exhibition a strategically important opportunity for professional development of the exhibiting artists, providing rare and difficult to achieve exposure.

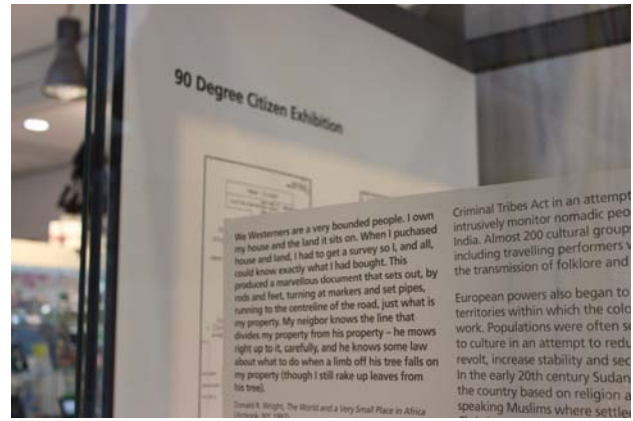
We were invited to contribute a presentation about our work within the two-day Platforma conference. Kooj Chuhan delivered this presentation as a keynote at the beginning of the festival directly preceding the presentation address from Alison Clark-Jenkins (Arts Council Director North and National Director of Combined Arts). This directly gave the exhibition, the artists and our organisation a national profile.



Manchester Museum – exhibition venue and collaborating organisation

A deeper context was provided by the exhibition’s setting in the Manchester Museum. The Curator of Anthropology Stephen Welsh met with the artists and explored some of the museum collections in their stores, from which he identified specific museum artefacts that resonated with the exhibition and these were placed on display within the museum. Alongside the selected objects was a key piece of text written by Stephen, which deconstructed the colonial context in which museum objects are acquired and placed into categories according to boundaries devised by European colonisers. This was a parallel narrative exploring the categorisation of cultures and nations, so resonating with the way humans are categorised within the migration process as a result of a similar historical process. In this way the exhibition facilitated visual art and cultural museology to interact, the exhibition became extended, and the audience experience was enriched.





“Committed To Represent” pop-up exhibition by GMIAU

A further partnership involved the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit (GMIAU), who directly supported the printing and mounting of photographic work relating to legal support for refugees. This formed a pop-up exhibition titled “Committed To Represent”, which was shown during the Platforma conference and also on the preceding evening at the second exhibition event.

Live Events supporting the exhibition

Two events supported the exhibition:

(a) “In Conversation” event 10th October 2013, the exhibition opening evening chaired by poet Sai Murray – presenting a talk about the work, exhibition tour, meet the artists, collaborators and curators (including Stephen Welsh, Ursula Sharma from GMIAU and Tony Openshaw from Asylum Support Housing Advice), finishing with a solo music performance by Congolese singer Emmanuela Yogolelo with accompaniment.





(b) “Re-Presenting Refugees” event 30th October 2013 on the eve of the Platforma conference – a multimedia discussion-performance event continuing the approach of our ‘Passenger’ shows, exploring art, displacement and politics, including two key national speakers/artists who were then presenting the next day at the Platforma conference – Tom Green (co-director of Platforma) and Humberto Velez (international video/live artist). Other members of the panel were Isobel and Mavis from GMIAU, Iseult from Street Level gallery (Glasgow), musician Pat Mackela, and writer / actress Yusra Warsama. The performance involved musicians and poets Aidan Jolly, Sai Murray, Elmi Ali, Pat Mackela, Tracey Zengeni, along with Maya Chowdhry using invisible theatre and Mazaher creating projected visuals on a set of three mannequins.





People involved – artists, managers, curators and collaborators

Artists:

Tracey Zengeni – visual artist and vocalist, also project management assistant

Amang Mardokhy – Kurdish visual artist based in Manchester

Mazaher – Iranian visual, film and media artist based in Manchester

Flora Alexander – Iranian visual artist based in Glasgow

Iseult Timmermans – artist / producer at Street Level Photoworks; co-curator of 90 Degree Citizen The **International Women’s Group** from North Glasgow using photographic mixed media

Refugee women at Glasgow’s **Red Road Community Photography Studio**

Yusra Warsama – poet, playwright and actor from Somalia

Humberto Velez – international visual, media and performance artist

Sai Murray – writer, poet, spoken word; also chair and MC of In Conversation event 10th October

Maya Chowdhry – performer, writer, multimedia and interactive artist; also social media marketing and online support

Aidan Jolly – composer-songwriter and musician; also performance event manager

Elmi Ali – writer, poet, spoken word

Emmanuela Yogolelo – singer from DR Congo based in Manchester

Pat Mackela – musician from DR Congo based in Manchester (drums and percussion)

Serge Tebu – musician from Cameroon based in Manchester

Lis Murphy – musician based in Manchester

Managers, curators and collaborators (some roles fulfilled by artists as noted above):

Kooj Chuhan – lead curator, director and project manager of 90 Degree Citizen

Stephen Welsh – Curator of Living Cultures at Manchester Museum

Tim Birch – press and PR consultant and manager for 90 Degree Citizen

Rosalind Sandhu – co-curator of 90 Degree Citizen

Andrea Winn - Curator of Community Exhibitions at Manchester Museum

Tom Green – director of Platforma national network of arts and refugees

Denise McDowell – director of Gtr Manchester Immigration Aid Unit

Isobel Bowler – legal case worker at GM Immigration Aid Unit

Mavis Makhaza from Gtr Manchester Immigration Aid Unit and WAST (Women Asylum Seekers Together)

Ursula Sharma from Gtr Manchester Immigration Aid Unit

Tony Openshaw from ASHA – Asylum Support Housing Advice

Evaluation methods

Audience

We used attractively printed Evaluation Postcards in both exhibition spaces with posting-box. Using short answers and tick-boxes. Postcards are friendlier, resonate with travel / displacement.



Please let us know what you thought about 90 Degree Citizen. It will help us to do more projects and do them better. Either fill in this card and place it in the box by reception, or even better fill in the questionnaire online at www.virtualmigrants.net/90-degree-citizen/feedback

This feedback is for: Exhibition
 In Conversation event 10th October
 Special event 30th October

Please say what you liked:

What could have been better:

Please rate the following, where 1=poor, 3=average and 5=excellent:

- (a) Artistic quality [] 1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5
(b) How well presented [] 1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5
(c) Positive message [] 1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5
(d) Promotes people and art that needs support
[] 1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5
(e) Your own understanding of refugees and migrants
[] 1 [] 2 [] 3 [] 4 [] 5

PRIZE DRAW: Add your contact details to be on our email list, or to be entered into the prize draw for one of 3 Virtual Migrants DVD box sets, or signed art prints:

email list [] prize draw

Name

Email

Phone (optional)

A web-link to an online survey for feedback was also included on the postcards, plus website link on introductory text panels and exhibition guide for possible commenting. The internet possibilities were:

1. Online evaluation survey
2. Structured commenting on facebook feedback page
3. Feedback comments on our blog

The above includes easy access via mobile smartphones, allowing immediate feedback.

Features:

- Tick-boxes select whether for the exhibition or a specific event.
- Prize draw Virtual Migrants DVD box-sets / signed prints for feedback.

Artists, collaborators and partners:

There was a feedback form for collaborators, artists and partners.

Finally an evaluation meeting with artist / project team took place after the project ended, plus conversational feedback notes from the Manchester Museum.

Evaluation results and analysis

All results data are attached as two excel documents, one for audience data and comments and the other for data and comments from the team of artists, collaborators and partners.

The minuted notes from the evaluation meeting are reproduced later in this document, and the report from the press / PR specialist is also reproduced in this document along with image samples from some of the press coverage.

Audience:

We received a total of 48 responses. This was less than anticipated, most of them coming from attendees at the two events. There was little evidence of the museum venue involving themselves with the exhibition once it was on show in the way that a gallery normally would. We assume this was a capacity issue, but it impacted on engagement with the exhibition nonetheless. Online feedback was small – only 5 responses.

There was very strong consistency in response, with a high average score of over 4 (out of 5) for all of the following questions:

- a) Please rate the Artistic quality**
- b) Please rate how well the exhibition or event was presented**
- c) Please rate if you felt the overall message within the exhibition or event was worthwhile**
- d) Please rate if you felt the exhibition or event promotes people and art that needs support**

Interestingly, the score was lower for the following question:

- e) Please rate your OWN understanding of refugees and migrants**

While the average score was 4, in fact 9 people out of 42 (= 21.5%) said they had 3 (average level of understanding) or less about refugees. This was not expected, as it is often assumed that such events attract people who already know a good deal about refugees.

A great many positive comments were received, such as:

The talk from a lady (mary?) who shared her experience of seeking asylum in the UK for over 10 years - and the struggles she faced. I found it very insightful that she was able to share her experience with us and it bought to light the extreme difficulties she had to face. I also liked the discussions about whether the word 'refugee' was a label or used as just a label. It was interesting to hear whether the artists and people in your discussion used the term when referring to themselves or if they shyed away from it. Do your artists represent themselves as artists who are migrants or just artists. This distinction and association was extremely interesting to me.

Interesting insightful discussion. Good to talk with partner. Loved the performance. Helping get a sense of contemporary / current situation and concerns. Looking at the art, knowing the pictures were by refugees / asylum seekers, made me see the art differently where abstract = I'm interpreting as trauma/pain and refugee journey moving performance - lovely voice of Tracey refugee art - refugee experience = so powerful on the individuals as human -> that commonality (though each person-specific experience) -> = art by people who have had ref/asy seeker experience

great exhibition and deeper project. Such moving artwork.

I liked the way the event was organised, the speakers and the topics

Liked the works of artists, the discussion, the participation of those who work with asylum seekers / refugees

The main negative comments (which were few) tended to be about the venue being cold or not distinguishing the work clearly, or about the second event where the facilitating chair was overloaded with project managing at the same time and this section had some mixed responses.

Team responses – artists, collaborators and partners

This feedback form was complex and while strongly positive in all areas, there were some mixed responses across a number of specific points which will be looked at now.

EXHIBITION:

Presentation – this was compromised by the Manchester Museum allowing the text labels for each artwork to fall off the wall, and then not managing to put them back on the wall again for another two weeks. While the museum were mostly supportive in many ways, this was poor and substandard treatment of a marginalised artistic community.

The final glass case by museum curator Stephen Welsh – again for over two weeks there was a missing specific and critical text panel which not only made sense of the objects in the case by drawing out their relationship to the exhibition, but also entirely subverted the message they would otherwise suggest. Without this subversion and clarity the glass case became the opposite of its intention. Again, this was poor practice from the museum, and also very frustrating for the museum curator who had no ability to be able to affect this process.

LAUNCH EVENT 10/10/13

Audience attendance was lower than expected – around 50 or so. This was largely due to late publicity / marketing and inefficiencies in social media among the project team, plus an event clash on the same evening.

RE-PRESENTING REFUGEES EVENT 30/10/13

Attendance was very good at this event – over 100 and there were not enough seats – however as mentioned before the discussion chairing was below a good standard and lacked structure and became too long. This was due to the chair / facilitator being overloaded on that day.

MARKETING

There was some excellent material – particularly the exhibition guide – and also some good marketing resulted in good attendance at the second live event and some good reviews especially in the Manchester Evening News, Northern Soul and AN magazine online. However, national print or broadcast was not achieved, yet the team may be overly critical here since this was a tough target to achieve.

Social media was also felt to have struggled – this needs a greater team effort and strategy in future. Questions were raised as to the value of print flyers and other outlets, as opposed to advertising (which we did not do).

MANAGEMENT

Aside from one member of the team who consistently felt all aspects of management were below adequate, the active management of the project was considered to have been good except for low available capacity (which is a key issue especially given the budgetary constraints as compared to the ambition) and problems with working as a team – again alluded to earlier. Low capacity often leads to team working issues, and this may be a key cause, though issues with experience and skill might also need to be considered.

The one member who consistently felt problems in management was in charge of the performance aspects, and in fact was commenting primarily about the performance aspects of the project. The management of such performance for the events in such a project may well need addressing in future.

OUR DEVELOPMENT

This project considerably increased our profile and ability to do more ambitious projects. However, we might improve how we critically appraise our strengths and weaknesses to move forward.

Exhibition Guide:

90 DEGREE CITIZEN

Labels. Like 'youth', 'middle class', 'minority'. All become narrow in the imagination, while some - like 'refugee' - also become weighed down by layers of misguided judgements from politicians and the media. Among the casualties lies diversity of creative expression, and the ability to be recognised without pre-conceptions simply as a human being. This exhibition avoids labels such as 'refugee art' or 'refugee artists' not least because they make little sense. Yet despite the wide range of cultural geographies, there are threads that connect all of the artists and their work, threads that are continually fluid and branch out at different angles.

Among Mordokhy



International Women's Group



Mazaher



Flora Alexander



Tracey Zengeni



Isaelt Timmermans



AN EXHIBITION BY
VIRTUAL MIGRANTS
AT MANCHESTER MUSEUM
10TH OCT - 17TH NOV 2013

GUIDE TO ARTISTS AND PROJECT

90 Degree Citizen presents artworks that resonate with experiences of migration and refuge. Created by Virtual Migrants, a group of artists and cultural activists based in Manchester, it represents a new wave of artistic expression rich in symbolism, narrative and cultural hybridity. The work challenges stereotypes and with both sensitivity and strength, it allows us to connect our humanity with other ways of seeing and being.

The six artists are Amang Mordokhy, Iselt Timmermans, Mazaher, International Women's Group, Tracey Zengeni and Flora Alexander. Selected museum objects are displayed to expose their underlying colonial impetus, forming an integral part of the exhibition. A pop-up exhibition produced with Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit is being premiered on Weds 30th October as a part of a special discussion and performance event. This brief guide introduces the artists, their work, and the nature of such a project.

To experience forced or coerced migration in relation to conflict does not define anyone's creative impulse, but it often raises questions about humanity, a concern for justice and a freshness of perception. These intertwine with the other creative drivers for such artists and communities in ways that take time to interpret. The work presented here is also diverse in its approach, some being created by involving local people as against others by individual artists.

Manchester Museum provides us with a rare insight into the historical context behind the cultural labelling we encounter every day, where the impetus of the European powers was to make rigid geographical boundaries in their colonised regions and to actively suppress cultures that resisted this. Ethnic categorisation became narrow and negative, which in turn fuelled various divisions, conflicts and racist ideologies while also infiltrating the way we think today.

90 Degree Citizen begins to expose the connection between this history, modern day labels and the divisive conflicts that appear to be increasingly common, and which also result in the need for refuge.

Kooj (Kuljit) Chuhra, project director

Please give us your feedback on this exhibition at www.virtualmigrants.net/90-degree-citizen/feedback



Produced in partnership with Street Level Photoworks (Glasgow), The Manchester Museum and Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit. Part of Platforma 2013 national festival of arts and refugees. www.virtualmigrants.net

virtual migrants

GUIDE TO ARTISTS AND PROJECT



Tracey Zengeni Zimbabwe / UK

I choose subjects by what delights and captures my imagination from just everyday things that happen around me or to me. I find that the things that inspire my everyday are the things that are non-permanent... because life is not permanent, so I try and express that a lot within my work - be it sculpture, photography or painting. Our lives are made up of little bits of impermanence, each and every day we shed a little of ourselves to the outside world and I try and show that in my work.

The International Women's group UK / Worldwide

This voluntary group, run by and for refugee and asylum seeking women, in North Glasgow has over 60 members from across the globe. They organise a series of cultural events throughout the year including Scottish Refugee Week, International Women's Day, Burns Night and 16 days Campaign. The group believe that sharing different cultural traditions through food, music and art is a positive step for community integration. Working with Isleult Timmermans this is their visual response to issues of violence against women, and an exploration of what is important to them.



Mazaher Iran / UK

Abstract forms are my dearest friends in my poems, photography or phrases. Expressive language of Metonymy, enemy of ignorant monarch. In my photos there is no attempt to evoke the passage of time. Time is frozen for the truth to shine. Immersion in contrast and forms in a dimension that nobody is allowed to enter but you. I compose by the contrast of light and dark, while I use colours to match the mood of my world with, despite the subjects, colour. www.barnoo.co.uk



Isleult Timmermans UK / with Red Road Community Studio

Since graduating from Glasgow School of Art in 1995, Isleult has been involved in making work and establishing opportunities for others across a range of settings: establishing an artist-run exhibition space in Glasgow's West End and a community space on the margins of the city - Red Road Community Studio (2010 - 2012). Isleult explores the boundaries of collaborative arts practice and create applications of photography. She has exhibited in formal and non-formal settings, contributed to a variety of publications, and has work in The Scottish National Portrait Gallery collection. www.redroadfacts.org.uk www.multi-story.org



Amang Mardokhy Kurdistan (Iraq) / UK

I have come from Kurdistan, north part of Iraq. Since the early start of my art experience I also have learned how to live and express the suffering of my people through painting. It is true that I am living in a secure country now, and I am away from that pain. The Iraqi Al-Baath regime is no longer in power and there is a hope for a democracy process to be established in the new system, however, the effects of those dark days do not disappear easily. amang-art.blogspot.co.uk



Flora Alexander Iran / UK

This autobiographical series of intricate papercut works reflect Flora's Search For Home. "My journey began from where I grew up (Iran); it was there that I started to realise safety, security and comfort are essential to call somewhere home. These do not exist in my homeland, so I started to look for somewhere where they did. My journey started in Istanbul, then onto Turkey and India. Glasgow has become my home, and all the things I was looking for I found here: the safety, security and comfort that was missing for most of my life." www.iseult.com/iseult/flora-alexander



This project connects campaigners, human rights lawyers, communities, museum curators, artists, writers and performers.

Stephen Welsh is Curator of Living Cultures at Manchester Museum interested in deconstructing anthropological objects, their role in collections, and post-colonial perspectives.

Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit gains justice for people who are survivors of torture, trafficking, abuse, conflict, divided families and others affected by immigration controls.

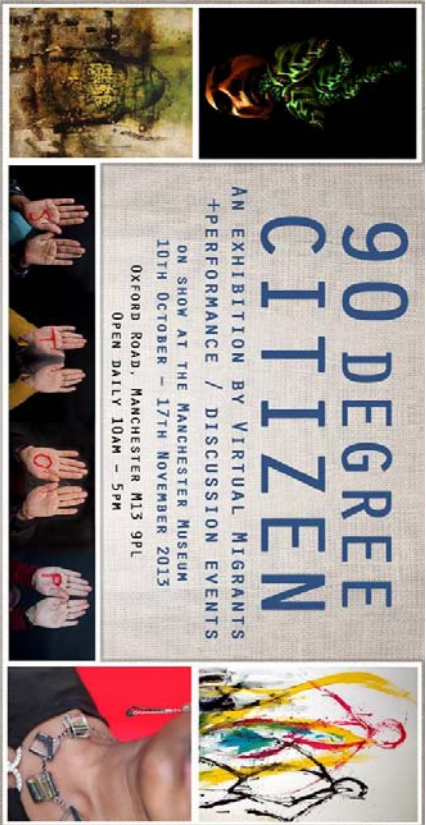
The artists in the discussion+performance events include Virtual Migrants regulars Tracey Zengeni (vocalist), Simon Murray (poet), Aidan Jolly (musician), Maya Chowdhry (invisible theatre), Mazaher (VJ projections). Guest artists include Emmanuela Yogoletio (singer), Elni Ali (poet), Serge Tabu (musician). Guest speakers include Humberto Velez (visual performance artist), Denise McDowell (GM Immigration Aid Unit), Flora Alexander (visual artist), Tony Openshaw (Asylum Support Housing Advice).



Virtual Migrants is a Manchester-based, migrant-led collective working to raise issues of race, global inequality and migrant-justice since 1998. VM engages the public via visual, new media and performance practice which strongly resists the pornography of suffering and charity case depiction of migrant peoples. We aim to intervene where dominant narratives exclude historical, imperial, class and racial contexts and to promote awareness of alternative progressive voices.

This project is directed, managed and curated by Kooji (Kuljit) Chohan. Co-curated by Isleult Timmermans and Rosalind Sandhu. Co-managed by Tracey Zengeni and Maya Chowdhry.

Exhibition Flyer:



90 DEGREE CITIZEN

AN EXHIBITION BY VIRTUAL MIGRANTS
+PERFORMANCE / DISCUSSION EVENTS

ON SHOW AT THE MANCHESTER MUSEUM
10TH OCTOBER - 17TH NOVEMBER 2013
OXFORD ROAD, MANCHESTER M13 9PL
OPEN DAILY 10AM - 5PM

90 Degree Citizen presents artworks that resonate with experiences of migration and refuge. They represent a sample of a new wave of expression in the UK outside of the limitations of western art schools and markets, often with a greater interest in symbolism, narrative and cultural hybridity.

Exhibiting artists include award-winning Anang Hardkly from Kurdish Iraq, whose paintings touch on repression, history and resistance. Photographer Beate Timmermans worked with Refugee women at Glasgow's Red Road Community Studio exploring 'How military violence affects women's lives', Iranian photographer Mezhzar creates detailed montages combining human forms with Persian-influenced designs. The International Women's Group from North Glasgow use photographic mixed media in response to issues of violence against women. Bold paintings and prints by Tracey Zengeni from Zimbabwe reflect on influences between her homeland and the UK. Painter and mixed media artist Flora Alexander presents intricate paper-cuts, subverting popular notions of her native Iran.

A special display of museum objects by curator Stephen Walsh (Manchester Museum) challenges how cultures were categorised during the era of colonial object collecting, which among other things suppressed diaspora expression.

"Committed To Represent" pop-up exhibition produced with Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit will be on show Weds 30th October to Friday 1st November. This celebrates the critical work of legal caseworkers in the difficult lives of refugees.

Exhibition open daily 10am - 5pm at the Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL.

Opening event: In Conversation with artists and curators plus live music from Emmanuela Yogoletto
Thursday 10th October, 6.00 - 8.30pm

Special event: Re-Presenting Refugees Panel discussion with 'Passenger 12' multimedia + special guests
Wednesday 30th October, 6.00 - 9.00pm

Both events are FREE and the cafe will stay open. Registration of your attendance is advised at www.virtualmigrants.net. Produced in partnership with Street Level Photoworks (Glasgow), The Manchester Museum and Gr Manchester Immigration Aid Unit. Part of Platforma 2013 national festival of arts and refugees.

Project directed by Koolhaas, co-managed by Tracey Zengeni, curatorial support by Beate Timmermans and Rosalind Sandhu, marketing by Rinya Chowdhry, print design by Wellington Mibanda, performances produced by Sai Puri and Aidan Jolly.

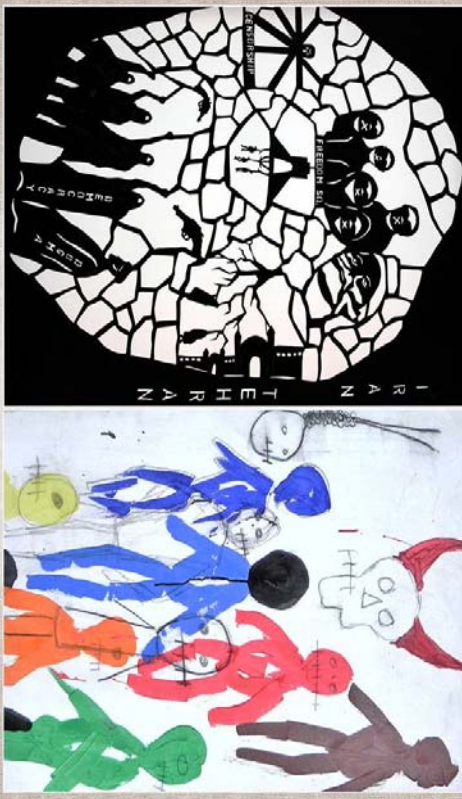
streetlevel COLOMBIA
platforma Glasgow
MANCHESTER The University of Manchester
cao The University of Manchester
MANCHESTER The University of Manchester
virtual migrants WWW.VIRTUALMIGRANTS.NET



90 DEGREE CITIZEN

AN EXHIBITION BY VIRTUAL MIGRANTS
+PERFORMANCE / DISCUSSION EVENTS

ON SHOW AT THE MANCHESTER MUSEUM
10TH OCTOBER - 17TH NOVEMBER 2013



migrant art - alternative connections - cultural boundaries

A rare exhibition of work by a new wave of visual artists whose experiences include life as refugees in the UK engaging with objects from The Manchester Museum.

Produced in partnership with Street Level Photoworks (Glasgow), The Manchester Museum and Immigration Aid Unit. Part of Platforma 2013 national festival of arts and refugees.

Special performance / discussion events on 10th and 30th October, starting at 6pm.

virtual migrants WWW.VIRTUALMIGRANTS.NET

Entries in the Platforma conference / festival brochure:

OCTOBER – NOVEMBER / PLATFORMA FRINGE

18

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER

PLATFORMA FRINGE

Events independently programmed and produced by artists and organisations from the Platforma network.

10 OCTOBER – 17 NOVEMBER

90 DEGREE CITIZEN: AN EXHIBITION BY VIRTUAL MIGRANTS

EXHIBITION OPEN DAILY 10AM-5PM

SPECIAL PERFORMANCE / DISCUSSION EVENTS ON 10TH AND 30TH OCTOBER, STARTING AT 6PM.

THE MANCHESTER MUSEUM

A rare exhibition of work by a new wave of visual artists whose experiences include life as refugees in the UK, engaging with objects from The Manchester Museum.

From Kurdish Iraq, Amang Mandokhy, whose paintings touch on repression, history and resistance. Photographer Iseult Timmermans worked with refugee women at Glasgow's Red Road Community Studio exploring "how military violence affects women's lives". Iranian photographer Mazaher creates detailed montages combining human forms with Persian-influenced designs. The International Women's Group from North Glasgow use photographic mixed media in response to issues of violence against women. Bold paintings and prints by Tracey Zengeni from Zimbabwe reflect on influences between her homeland and the UK. Painter and mixed media artist Flora Alexander presents intricate paper-cuts,

subverting popular notions of her native Iran.

A special display of museum objects by curator Stephen Welsh (The Manchester Museum) challenges how cultures were categorised during the era of colonial object collecting, which among other things suppressed diaspora expression.

"Committed To Represent" pop-up exhibition will be on show Weds 30th October to Friday 1st November. This celebrates the crucial work of legal caseworkers in the difficult lives of refugees.

Produced in partnership with Street Level Photoworks (Glasgow), The Manchester Museum and Immigration Aid Unit

18 OCTOBER – 17 NOVEMBER

TRACING PRESENCE BY ELIZABETH KWANT

THE PEOPLE'S HISTORY MUSEUM

Tracing Presence is a series of large-scale portraits developed by Manchester-based artist Elizabeth Kwant during a residency with The Boaz Trust – a charity working to help destitute asylum seekers in Manchester. Tracing Presence questions the fragility of existence, at once beautiful yet haunting.

25-27 OCTOBER

KURT SCHWITTERS AUTUMN SEMINAR AND ENTARTETE KUNST MEMORIAL

MERZ BARN, ELTERWATER

A free programme of workshops and presentations presented by LittoralArts/

19

OCTOBER – NOVEMBER / PLATFORMA FRINGE

6 NOVEMBER

THE SATELLITE STATE DISKO PRESENTS KAL

MANCHESTER ACADEMY 3

Kal, Europe's finest 'Rock n Roma' band are back in the UK with their new album – hosted by Manchester's Balkan music DJs, The Satellite State Disko.

Blending traditional Balkan Roma music with influences of Tango, Middle Eastern grooves, and rock – Kal are one of the most famous and experimental Roma bands from Serbia. Led by singer Dragan Ristic, the band promote Roma heritage and actively challenge prejudice through their music. Celebrating the launch of their new album 'Romology' in November, this will be the first chance to hear Kal's newest tracks performed live in the UK!

The evening will continue late into the night with more Balkan beats, Slavic Soul, Normad ska, and Arab Surf brought to you by The Satellite State Disko DJs.

Tickets: www.manchestracademy.net



WORKS BY FLORA ALEXANDER AND TRACEY ZENGENI



EDEN BY ELIZABETH KWANT



KAL

Presentation by Virtual Migrants scheduled as part of the opening Plenary for the conference:

THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER / PLATFORMA CONFERENCE

4

THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER

PLATFORMA CONFERENCE

MARTIN HARRIS CENTRE, THE UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

Artists, performers, academics, organisations and funders from across the UK and around the world showcase work, share practice and discuss aspects of the arts by, about and with refugees.

10AM REGISTRATION

10.40-11.30AM PLENARY

– Welcome and introduction from Almir Koldžić (Counterpoints Arts) and Cilla Baynes (Community Arts North West)

– Alison Clark-Jenkins (Arts Council Director North and National Director of Combined Arts)

– Virtual Migrants present their new exhibition 90 Degree Citizen showing at The Manchester Museum

– Choral performance by Women Asylum Seekers Together

11.30AM-1PM WORKSHOPS

1 – REGIONAL ASYLUM ACTIVISM Supporting artists and curators to enhance the potential of their work to shift public attitudes about asylum in the UK. The workshop will equip participants with the know-how, contacts and confidence to deliver positive public discussions and post-performance Q&As about some of the social and political issues their work may touch on.

2 – JUMPING THE HURDLES Considering issues around employment and skill development for artists wanting to work in participatory arts. The session will be practical, fun, challenging and interactive. With Peter Moser from More Music and composer/producer/educator Serge Tebu.

3 – ASPECTS OF STEREOTYPING WITHIN AND ACROSS CULTURES An interactive session presented by Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (to take place at The Manchester Museum). Discussing issues that have arisen in some of the Sainsbury Centre's work with refugees. The focus of objects in the session will be the body, leading to discussions of social behaviours, norms and expectations. The aim is to take a lead from chosen objects to concentrate on taboos, including bodily appearance and dress, behaviour, customs, beliefs, sex and death.

4 – HOST-GUEST DYNAMICS OF PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES WITH ARTISTS AND REFUGEES This session will document and critically reflect upon the collaborative process of artist/producers and refugee participants in the creation of the video/live performance work Double Dutch. Drawing from Isabel Lima's experience of working with cross-cultural groups and Hannah Marsden's research into hospitality theory, it will examine these complex relationships in terms of host and guest. Led by artist Isabel Lima with Hannah Marsden from GemArts.

5

THURSDAY 31 OCTOBER / PLATFORMA CONFERENCE

5 – DECLARATION KRIOL FROM RAFIKI JAZZ (12-1PM)

An interactive workshop from Rafiki Jazz touring their Declaration Kriol project: make your own algo-kriol mixtape. Meet Yaxu the live-coder & algorave pioneer, working with software, percussionists and multi-lingual vocalists from world music collective, Rafiki Jazz. You just bring your voice!

1-2PM LUNCH

1.30-2PM ARTISTS IN FOCUS

A chance to view and discuss work by a range of artists that will be on display throughout the Conference.

FAITH PEARSON

Faith Pearson uses discarded materials to create images and constructions that reflect human existence and survival, both ancient and urban across the world. The work balances the chaos and destruction caused by this society with creativity and playfulness. She is inspired by the community engagement projects she does with people who are often on the edges of society, including refugee families.

RITAH NANTONGO

Showcasing her work done as part of the Creative Focus Women's Group at the Refugee Council in London using crochet, knitting, beadwork and embroidery. Ritah is also leading on a world map using crochet techniques, beadwork and embroidery which she will be displaying as a work in progress at the Platforma Festival.

LEN GRANT: LIFE WITHOUT PAPERS

Commissioned by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and Unbound Philanthropy, Life Without Papers is a blog by photographer and writer Len Grant telling the stories of

the undocumented. It highlights their daily struggles and vulnerabilities, but also their strength and resilience. Undocumented migrants are not allowed to work. They have no right to state benefits nor to a place to live. They are unseen and potentially the most vulnerable group in the UK today. Len's work will be on display outside the Manchester Museum. lifewithoutpapers.co.uk

MACLADE BEZY

Maclade Bezy trained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Kinshasa and has been making ceramics for over 30 years, working on commissions across Africa, Asia, Europe and the USA. Bezy creates masks and sculptures as well as drawings and paintings using bold and distinct shapes, earthy colours and intriguing textures. His work explores everyday life in Africa reflecting aspects of family, community, poverty and humanity.

2-2.30PM PLENARY

– 'THE WALK TO RAS AL-AIN'

ALEXANDRA KHARIBIAN A promenade performance based on the true story of Alexandra's grandmother Alice Kharibian and the events of 1915-1923 when hundreds of thousands of Armenians were forcibly removed from their homes and communities.

– Professor Maggie O'Neill (University of Durham) speaking on 'Diasporic Communities and the Impact of Dispersal: Participatory Action Research and Participatory Arts'.

Key notes from Team Evaluation Meeting – 16 December 2013

1. Feedback forms

Reviewed the Feedback Postcards. There are also some evaluations via the website. Some positive feedback and also some pointers for how things could be improved in the future.

2. Exhibition

- i. Received well by audience
- ii. Discussion about labels for artwork and text for glass case and how important these were for contextualising the exhibition and these were missing for a number of weeks.
- iii. Collaboration with Platforma – the visual art exhibition made an impact on the festival.
- iv. Exhibition guides – clear well presented, good strong visual.
- v. Pop Up exhibition – lots of good comments about it and visitors who came specially to see it.
- vi. Influence on the audience?
- vii. Performance – Emmanuela – good performance and feedback. Ok audience, bit low. Competing with another event in MHC. Chaired well.
- viii. Re:presenting Refugees. Speeches from GMIAU were fantastic. Good discussions, but needed timings. Conflict with Chair and Project Management roles for the event. Good attendance for the second event. Discussion about the engagement with audience. Process of performance was good, interesting development. Discussion about communication methods.

3. Marketing

- i. Good turnout for the second event.
- ii. Needed more content for distribution via Social Media. Needed to have photos at event and people posting straight to Instagram, twitter and Facebook.
- iii. Print – distribution needed to be done a bit earlier, 6 weeks before optimal. There are other organisations e.g. Stick Up. How effective are the leaflets? Audience attendees have come through knowing about VM work. Using flyers for 'branding'. Discussion about how to evaluate success of this campaign. Difficult to measure the new audiences, need to find out how audiences heard about it.
- iv. Press – discussion of press mentions for VM.

4. Management

- i. Capacity was stretched. We achieved a lot for the money we spent. Discussion about the artists doing some of the project management and learning new skills. Discussion about communication and changes and some issues here, a production meeting and production plan and other production tools would have helped this. Also capacity to track the milestones and know who's responsible for every tasks?

5. Development

- i. Partners developed as part of work of VM this year.

Press and PR report from Tim Birch

Key aim

Profile-raising publicity.

Qualifier

The work was focused on both 'arts' and 'general press' coverage -- and did not engage with Twitter and other social media.

Approach

The initial period of research provided a long list of <150 contacts that spanned >60 different press/publicity outlets.

The press outlets spanned three broad categories:

- 'print' magazines and print newspapers;
- 'online' newspapers, art-specific websites, and blogs;
- 'broadcast' TV and radio.

Pitches were targeted with due respect for the above categories, the specific interests of outlets and their geographical reach. This provided five sub-categories:

1. visual arts specific press;
2. general interest, local press;
3. general interest, regional/national press;
4. local/regional radio;
5. local/regional TV

Aside from TV, coverage was achieved in the other four sub-categories.

Mitigating factors

The following factors are acknowledged:

- The run of the NDC show clashed with "Black History Month"
- The launch of NDC clashed with the "Manchester Big Weekender": a cultural event promoted by multiple partners and interested sponsors.
- Limited time: roughly 3 weeks was available for the work (perhaps 3 months would have been ideal).
- Declining state of the press: The press and publicity landscape continues to suffer effects from heavy redundancies, the end of print runs (sometimes shifting to online), smaller editorial staffers / teams, etc. Initial research suggested that some magazines or websites would accept submissions (listings, reviews) rather than cover an event.

- Editorial bias: It is perhaps interesting to note that the only interest from a national newspaper came from *The Independent* (Editor: Amol Rajan, born in India).
-

Results

Proviso

Several quality websites helped to spread the word of the show and it is likely that this helped rather than hindered 'profile raising'.

For example:

- Partner organisations (Virtual Migrants, The Manchester Museum et al);
- Kindred or aligned organisations (e.g. Institute of Race Relations);
- Listings organisations (e.g. The Audience Agency)

Measurement

An indication of 'profile-raising publicity' has been gained by considering:

- the quality of coverage (considering factors such as word count and air time etc);
- the audience/reach of press outlets;
- the value of coverage where this can be estimated, i.e. from rate cards provided by some organisations.

To help assessment an estimated total 'value' has been reached through the 'equivalent advertising value' [EAV] marker.

Scoping the results

MEN, News item (by Reporter, Amy Glendinning)

"2.4million unique users who experience 12.4million page views every month ... and Britain's largest circulating regional daily with up to 130,485 copies" (Source M.E.N. 2013)

A News item, published once (*Cutting not sourced*).

EAV £82.50

MEN / City Life (What's on?)

(as above)

<http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/find-things-to-do/#event/90590>

A listing, published for one month

EAV £1,080

MEN, Visual Arts mini-feature (full page)

(as above)

A mini-feature, published once (*Print cutting sourced*).

EAV £2,750

The Skinny

http://www.theskinny.co.uk/event/68869-90_degree_citizen
"in 500+ venues in Manchester and Liverpool ... 100,000 estimated readers in Manchester [alone]"
(The Skinny, 2013)
Listed for one month
EAV £540

Nubian Times

<http://thenubiantimes.com/90-degree-citizen-an-exhibition-at-the-manchester-museum/>
"total potential audience of over 80,000 people ... There are 15,000 Newspapers distributed to homes across Manchester. The remaining 5,000 Newspapers are available in public places including the libraries in Manchester. Newsagents, shops, cafes, and all work places in the area" (Nubian Times, 2013)
Mini-feature, published for one month
EAV £1,080

The List

<http://www.list.co.uk/event/20503656-90-degree-citizen/>
"Page Impressions per month
.....3,881,412
Unique Users per month
.....1,643,314" (The List, 2013)
EAV £540

BBC Radio (Merseyside; "Upfront" magazine show, focused on NW region and black issues)
11 minute live radio interview (from 1:25:36 to 1:36:38 by the timecode)
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01jhkny> (The show was available online for 7 days).
(Using equivalent commercial station rate)
EAV £1,425

Manchester Wire

<http://manchesterwire.co.uk/#!/90-degree-citizen-ex-refugee-art-exhibition-at-manchester-museum>
EAV £225

Northern Soul

(respected arts & culture blog site run by two ex-journos from The Guardian & The Times)
<http://www.northernsoul.me.uk/90-degree-citizen-at-manchester-museum/>
1,000 word feature review.
EAV £900

a-n (Interface section)

(Arts industry publication) Readership 18,500 visual arts and other arts professionals
<http://www.a-n.co.uk/interface/reviews/single/3957696>
EAV £600

PEACE FM

30 minute live radio discussion, Tue 5 November
(using equivalent commercial station rate)
EAV £4,275

Asian Lite

"The No.1 newspaper for British-Asians and British-Asian professionals/business people" (Asian Lite 2013)

Feature 1,000 words

EAV £2,750

TOTAL VALUE

<i>(Estimated, as described)</i>

<u>£16,247.50</u>

Notes

One reflective article is confirmed, and to be published by *Axisweb* in 2014. It has not been included in this summary.

'Interest' -- as distinct from 'coverage', and where evidenced by email exchanges/phone call notes etc -- came from top quality outlets including *The Independent* newspaper, *New Statesman* magazine, and *Radio 4's* Woman's Hour.

At least one interview was completed but not published for some unknown reason (perhaps 'Editorial whim' should join 'bias' among the mitigating factors?) ... Artist 'Mazaher' has confirmed that *Bury Times* Reporter and Entertainments Editor, Melanie Wallwork, conducted an interview with him by phone -- however no article was published.

Copies of various press coverage:

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2013

MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2013

VISUAL ARTS



ARRESTING IMAGES (clockwise from the left) War by Amang Mardokhy, Tracey Zengen's Absolution, Man's Weapon by Seuit Timmer, and singer Katy Carr

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

SARAH WALTERS VISITS THE PLATFORMA FESTIVAL, A CELEBRATION OF WORKS BY REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

In a culturally diverse city like Manchester, it's easy to think that all communities are well represented and listened to – even those alienated by their own nations and seeking a safe life elsewhere. Certainly, the organisers of the annual Platforma Festival – a celebration of cultural expression by refugees, asylum seekers and their supporters – would agree that substantial progress has been made in addressing the challenges that refugees face in finding networks for support and expression in their new communities. But it also has a desire

to move this on further, and the festival hopes its diverse programme of events created by more than 100 artists, curators and academics will improve awareness, understanding and debate. “The cultural practitioners are working within and across a range of art forms and coming from all parts of the UK, as well as Ireland, Germany, Italy, USA and Slovenia,” explains Almir Koldzic, co-director of festival developer Counterpoint Arts. “In presenting what seems to be a more sophisticated and reflective approach to the practice in this field, the festival provides us with a

glimpse at new possibilities emerging. It also perhaps suggests a shift of focus, where displacement is not seen purely as negative or damaging but also as a creatively potent and potentially transformative experience. “In operating across different cultures and settings, exiles and migrants develop a double perspective or sensitivity towards difference that can open up creative expressions and help us experience multiplicity beyond fixed categories and identities.” This concept is perhaps most accessibly illustrated by 90 Degree Citizen: An Exhibition By Virtual Migrants, currently showing at Man-

chester Museum. A collection of contemporary works, it explores many shared challenges, from resistance in the streets to the indelible signatures a person's homeland leaves on them long after they leave. Amang Mardokhy's arresting paintings are inspired by repression in Kurdish Iraq, while Iselit Timmermans' photography highlights the tales of militant violence experienced by refugee women brought together at a community centre in Glasgow (Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, daily until November 17, free). Elizabeth Kwant's Tracing Presence, at the People's History Mu-



PERFORMANCE Manchester International Roots Orchestra. Picture: Shirlaine Forrest

seum, is a powerful collection too, and inspired by the destitute asylum seekers she met while working with support group The Boaz Trust (Bridge Street, until November 17, free). But today is also day two of Platform's conference and live sessions. Among the highlights: Favianna Rodriguez's Migration Is Beautiful, in

which visitors are able to re-imagine the butterfly image he has created as a symbol of the beauty of migration; Gemarts Double Dutch, in which two refugee participants will jump a pair of skipping ropes in a light-hearted dig at the confusing nature and language of the immigration process; and musical performances from

British-Polish singer Katy Carr at 5pm (all Manchester Museum) and multinational outfit Manchester International Roots Orchestra (Martin Harris Centre, Oxford Road). **● Most events today, some until November 17; free but some booking may be required – see platforma.org.uk for full programme.**

THE SKINNY

INDEPENDENT CULTURAL JOURNALISM

FREE Northwest Issue 08 November 2013

MUSIC
Wooden Shjips
Connan Mockasin
Cinema Selection

Art Manchester

2022NQ

JON PARKER LEE

22 NOV – 7 DEC, NOT 24 NOV, 1 DEC, TIMES VARY, FREE

Photographer Jon Parker Lee presents an exhibition of work spanning ten years of freelance photography behind the scenes.

Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art

WILL KWAN: BREATHE RESIDENCY

VARIOUS DATES BETWEEN 3 SEP AND 23 NOV, 10:00AM – 5:00PM, FREE

Hong Kong-born and Canada-based artist Will Kwan explores the post-industrial landscape of Manchester, inspired by Engels' 1844 text, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, and utilising video and photo work to explore the new economies created.

WENDI XIE: FIRST STEP SHOWCASE

VARIOUS DATES BETWEEN 21 SEP AND 21 DEC, 10:00AM – 5:00PM, FREE

Recent MA Ceramics and Glass Design graduate, Wendi Xie

presents a collection of work us...

CATALYST: CONTEMPORARY ART AND WAR

12 OCT – 23 FEB, 10:00AM – 5:00PM, FREE
A new exhibition bringing together the work of over 70 artists across photography, film, sculpture, oil paintings, prints and book works to explore our changing perceptions of conflict in a time when our reactions are so influenced by the media.

Islington Mill

THE BALL IS BACK

1–9 NOV, NOT 3, 4, 5, 1:00PM – 6:00PM, FREE

Three years on from their first joint exhibition, Alex Humphreys, John Powell-Jones and Barry Steadmund are reunited to showcase new works.

MMU: Special Collections

THE LANGUAGE OF PROCESS

VARIOUS DATES BETWEEN 23 SEP AND 20 DEC, TIMES VARY, FREE

A new exhibition exploring how new materials and technologies are changing digital product design, with design work from some of the world's leading creative designers, including Assa Ashuach, Tom Dixon, Patrick Jouin, Ingo Maurer and Marcel Wanders.

Manchester Art Gallery

RADICAL FIGURE: POST-WAR

THE GIFTS OF THE DEPARTED:

ALINAH AZADEH

VARIOUS DATES BETWEEN 23 NOV AND 1 MAR, 10:00AM – 5:30PM, FREE

Interdisciplinary artist, Alinah Azadeh presents a new exhibition of work exploring communal rituals and the process of wrapping and exchanging gifts.

Manchester Jewish Museum

CHAGALL, SOUTINE AND THE
SCHOOL OF PARIS

VARIOUS DATES BETWEEN 20 JUN AND 24 NOV, TIMES VARY, FREE

An exhibition showcasing work by some of the most famous Jewish artists in history, including work by Marc Chagall, Chaim Soutine, Lazar Berson and Sonia Delaunay.

Manchester Museum

90 DEGREE CITIZEN

10 OCT – 17 NOV, 10:00AM – 5:00PM, FREE

As part of Platforma National Refugee Arts Festival, Virtual Migrants partner with Street Level Photoworks to present artworks by a group of artists exploring the broken line between homeland and destination through photography, painting and print-making.

National Football Museum

90 Degree Citizen

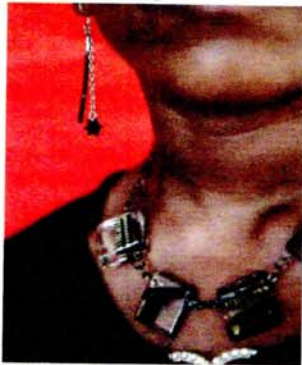
BY TIM BIRCH

An intriguing new exhibition by artists – who all happen to share ‘refugee’ status in their back stories – is currently free to attend at The Manchester Museum to 17 November. The mix, of this art and the museum, conjures up a hideous irony: the fact that Colonial objects in British museums are often treated better than people seeking refuge in the UK.

Today, ‘refugee’ is a term loaded with stigma. Among the more scare-mongering and blaming voices of the British press and politics, alike, ‘refugees’ are marginalised and criminalised. In stark comparison the artefacts that fill the glass cabinets of museums across the UK are revered, housed and loved (despite much of this historical horde having been stolen or purchased during Colonial times).

Why is this? The exhibition, “90 Degree Citizen” (a nod to the radical turns a refugee must typically take) does not claim to have the answers. However it does welcome such questioning and conversation. The project has been led by Kooj Chuhan [pictured] who is co-director of Virtual Migrants, a critical arts organisation active since 1998 that engages audiences through just this kind of smart public intervention, raising the level of debate around important issues such as racism, immigration, and other topics.

Kooj is calm and clear in his discussion of what remains a complex area: “In previous times the idea of giving refuge to people was something to be proud of, and the way that has turned around is almost shocking when you continue to hear the way these people [refugees] are described in the media. Plus there are children, families, being placed in detention centres and seen as the scourge of society, scroungers and so on.



Perhaps the art show draws attention to another uneasy truth, that refugees can be the flip side to our lives and the policies of our government. Kooj says: “We hear about soldiers going off to Afghanistan or the number of their deaths, but when people who are linked with that land up on our door step then they’re often criminalised.”

For sure, this art show at Manchester

Museum combines two strands of cultural content into one intriguing mix. On one hand there are the paintings and photographic pieces by artists who happen to share ‘refugee’ status in their life experiences: individuals hailing from Iran, Iraq, Zimbabwe plus many other nations courtesy of a large International Women’s Group participating from Glasgow.

On the other hand the art is nestled, without much fanfare, amidst the existing exhibits and architectural features of the Museum. In a sense, the show has somehow found its place amidst the existing space – just as refugees find their way with new lands, language and laws.

Kooj suggests the show is presented in this quiet, ‘under the radar’ fashion to let the art speak for itself; for Kooj “Art can rehumanise people” as he explains: “On the one hand you can try and confront the stigma, but the problem is that you end up using the same kind of language to rebut it. You end up categorising people for the sake of rebutting. You can use alternative statistics but you’re still describing people in very dehumanising ways. When you’re doing art, you’re trying to cut through all of that.”



Kooj Chuhan

Without drawing unfair attention to the individuals involved, Kooj says that for these artists, leaving the hardships of their homelands, and often the love of their families and friends, has been the start of long and troublesome journeys; some “experienced or witnessed brutal acts, including by the people who were trafficking them [to the UK] through a complex system of family making payments, and then not knowing when the next stage would come for the next payment etc.”



Sai Murray hosts a panel debate at the Museum with three of the artists Zengeni and Mazaher



[Back to reviews »](#)

90 Degree Citizen

Manchester Museum, Manchester
30 October - 17 November 2013

Reviewed by: [Tim Birch](#) »

An enduring issue with art that finds an airing in foyers, or along the staircases and walls of non-gallery spaces, is that it can be all too easily overlooked. Not only are visitors ever more distracted, heads fixated on mobiles etc, they naturally move through such spaces en route from A to B: to the main gallery space, to the gift shop, the toilet, the exit ... yet curious, attentive visitors to "90 Degree Citizen", currently at Manchester Museum to 17 November, will have their double-takes and closer inspection rewarded.

Peppering the foyer, and spicing up the café, is a mix of paintings and photographic work by a disparate group of artists who happen to share 'refugee' status in their, respective, life experiences.

In different hands, those back stories would make for valuable publicity (and even art review) hooks: veritable gold dust to attract prospective critics, jourmos, and bloggers alike, all panning for a decent story or, worse, an excuse to mouth off about their latest whimsy of received wisdom on immigration, the economy, or another unrelated topic. There is no such play for your attention here by this project's lead organisation, Virtual Migrants, or from the Museum.

Sure, visitors are informed of the underlying connection between the artists, through a complementary pamphlet. Doubtless, each of the artists has firsthand experience of abhorrent realities and hardships the like of which most of us could only (poorly, vaguely) imagine. But? The text panels for the artworks just state the facts: artist, title, media, year.

There is no pretence, no conceited theme, no cutting-edge claims or meritorious fanfare. In fact the show is muted to new arrivals ... In my case, attention was initially grabbed by the Museum's own exhibits of stuffed animals, tribal paraphernalia and mundane signage to the Café etc. Perhaps this is a useful mudding of a visitor's mind? Intended or not, this is a purposeful unsettling, given the deeper context and abyss of unspoken issues that this show, and its attendant events and panel talks, lightly touches upon.

You even have to turn back round (180 degrees) to face the door by which you enter, to finally spy a large banner announcing the show: "90 Degree Citizen".

If, in the audiovisual mayhem of the Museum foyer, some re-focusing is required, it leads you to find an art show that somehow 'fits', and 'works', in the spaces left between the Museum's own exhibits and architecture. For me, a fundamental message is soon manifest: Art – especially smart, subtle shows like this one -- has this ability to re-humanise people as "artists"; as "citizens"; as "people". In the case of this show, it happens to be people who all too easily get marginalised, and at worse criminalised, as "refugees".

For instance, if a visitor had been primed by Amang Markhody's back story of his life in Kurdish Iraq, he or she might be forgiven for mis-reading his painting, "End of war" as an autobiographical representation: some kind of confessional expression. Yet having heard Amang speak, straightforwardly and sincerely, on a panel discussion during the opening night, his paintings ought to be simply read as having been painted by a switched-on human being who has been moved by ongoing crises around the world, especially the recent media attention given the Syrian State's use of chemical warfare.

Markhody's canvases conjure with figurative elements, merged into more abstract backgrounds. If you know of Manchester's living painters, those working across the past couple of decades, then perhaps a stylistic sibling is Margaret Cahill (who happens to have a solo show, also in Manchester, from 7 November).

Tracey Zengeni hails from Zimbabwe. Her paintings show people reduced to, or constituted by, outlines. Her style is rooted in bright colours and bold markings that might have the feel of 'cave painting' simplicity. By the same token they display directness – perhaps invoking the frankest appreciation of painting: that if it is to show reality, it can only, honestly, show an outline against the faintly discerned first light of truth.



[\[enlarge\]](#)

Amang Markhody, "End of war" (2013)



[\[enlarge\]](#)

Tracey Zengeni, "Devil's playground"



[\[enlarge\]](#)

Mazaher, "Freedom"

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Inappropriate material?
Ideas? Technical issues?

[» Feedback to a-n](#)

Manchester Wire | Going out and going on in the relay city - Mozilla Firefox

Manchester Wire

26.03.2014. El Capo bar and restaurant to open in the Northern Quarter.

17.03.2014 - 23.03.2014. MCR Scenewipe's

10.10.2013 - 17.11.2013. 90 Degree Citizen refugee art exhibition at Manchester Museum.

Manchester Museum will host 90 Degree Citizen, a small art show by artists who share 'refugee' status in their back stories, later this month. This show of work by new wave visual artists, organised run by Manchester-based arts organisation Virtual Migrants, will present pieces that resonate with experiences of migration and refuge often with a greater interest in symbolism, narrative and cultural hybridity compared to the limitations of Western art schools and markets. The exhibition features work from the likes of Nigerian Iraqi migrant artist Emmanuela Yogoletto. For more contextual depth, there will be special events including a pop-up exhibition and conference (Wed 30 Oct - Fri 1 Nov), which celebrates the work of legal caseworkers in the difficult lives of refugees. The museum curator, Stephen Walsh, has also chosen a special selection of 'Colonial' objects, which correspond with the exhibition. It is a free event but you must register beforehand online.

Thu 10 Oct - Sun 17 Nov, Manchester Museum, Oxford Road, M13 9PL, 10am - 5pm daily, FREE - online registration advised for launch and pop-up events, www.virtualmigrants.net

Words: [Steven Brown](#)

COMMENTS

90 degree citizen, an exhibition at the Manchester Museum | The Nubian Times... <http://thenubiantimes.com/90-degree-citizen-an-exhibition-at-the-manch->

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THE NUBIAN TIMES

NEWS SPEAKERS CORNER ENTERTAINMENT LIFESTYLE BUSINESS CLASSIFIEDS SPORTS FASHION VIDEOS

EVENTS MUSIC PREVIEWS/REVIEWS FILM THEATRE TV WHAT'S ON TNT TOP TWEETS

90 degree citizen...an exhibition at the Manchester Museum

Print Editions Available Online

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Combrook Strategic Centre

Label News Categories Twitter

March 16, 2014 Blog Health, Lifestyle writer

DID YOU KNOW?... Meetings

March 16, 2014 Blog Fashion, Manchester Plus writer

TNT MANCHESTER FLAG...

March 16, 2014 Blog Local Spots, Sports writer

Wigan block City's unprecedented quarterly parcel

March 15, 2014 Blog Editor's Choice writer

1 of 4

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90 degree citizen, an exhibition at the Manchester Museum | The Nubian Times... <http://thenubiantimes.com/90-degree-citizen-an-exhibition-at-the-manch->

Inspirational Women - Special

March 15, 2014 Blog Editor's Choice writer

Inspirational Quotes...

March 15, 2014 Blog Editor's Choice writer

In the News...

March 15, 2014 Blog Speakers Corner writer

Manchester Schools take part in Youth Conference about forced marriage

March 15, 2014 Blog News writer

Malaysian Airlines flight disappears without trace

March 15, 2014 Blog Editor's Choice, Global News writer

Condoleezza Rice joins 'Ban Bossy' campaign

March 15, 2014 Blog Education, Speakers Corner writer

Chinese maths teachers to help boost English schools

TNT DATING

Popular News

January 30, 2014 Blog Speakers Corner, Talking Point writer

TNT TALKING POINT-Fears for Future of Gambia

March 2, 2014 Blog Editor's Choice, Local News writer

Miss Side hosted BARAC - Peace, Justice & Equality meeting & summit...

February 1, 2014 Blog Editor's Choice, Local News writer

The Nubian Times News COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

February 6, 2014 Blog Business, Business News writer

The Nubian Times meets Civic Stimulation Resources

January 22, 2014 Blog Editor's Choice, Local News writer

The Nubian Times News-Topically Men Dies after Canal Incident

January 22, 2014 Blog Local News writer

Drugs and cash seized in Chesham Hill

RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

Black History Month - International Slavery Museum, Liverpool

BRIDES OF CULTURE RBH MULTICULTURAL BRIDAL EXHIBITION

March 2013

The Nubian Times MEC Awards at the Esplanade Hilton Hotel Manchester

SECTOR 4 ESSENTIALS creating positive outcomes

Manchester Community Central & Third Sector Launch Manchester Funding Fair 2013

2 of 4

18/03/2014 15:49

Firefox

Activity report form | 90 Degree Citizen | Reviews | Interface | 90 Degree Citizen at Manchester Museum

Northern Soul - 90 Degree Citizen.htm

NORTHERN SOUL


STUFF TO DO THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

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90 Degree Citizen at Manchester Museum

Manissa Burgess October 22, 2013 Art Arts



Beginning in the foyer and spreading towards the café at Manchester Museum is an exhibition of some significance. Organised by Virtual Migrants – who organise digital media artists and productions responding to themes of race, migration and globalisation – *90 Degree Citizen* was inspired by the bi-yearly Platforma arts and refugees network conference. This will be held in Manchester from October 31 to November 1 and its organisers were keen to include an art exhibition in their line-up of activities. Initially there were difficulties finding a space – until Manchester Museum stepped in.

The linking factor here is that all works in the exhibition are by artists who have been refugees but, as Kooj Chuhan of Virtual Migrants outlines, they're keen not to give it a simplistic label. "There are a lot of issues in terms of when we are 'doing' refugees in the arts, what does that mean? We're very careful not to say 'this is a refugee art exhibition' because the phrase 'refugee art' doesn't really make any sense but there's a certain kind of creativity that we located amongst the experience of having been a refugee at one time or another."

Indeed, some of the artwork in the exhibition is directly expressive of the artist's refugee experience, but for others their output is less obviously influenced by the experience. Chuhan continues: "First and foremost I should say it is an art exhibition. It is fundamentally about a group of artists who are producing art and we're displaying it. That's a kind of

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art exhibition, it is fundamentally about a group of artists who are producing art and we're displaying it. That's a kind of starting point. When we dig a bit deeper into that we begin to ask, what thread is there running through this? We like to have multi-dimensional exhibitions. I often feel that the art world, especially the visual art world, is often very one dimensional in the West. [In this exhibition] there's no prescription as to artists needing to have to reflect one issue or another."

One of the artists most directly depicting his experience spent living in a war zone is Amang Mardokhy. He paints bold, powerful depictions of the horrific sights he saw in his native Kurdistan in Northern Iraq, they are eyewitness accounts of the persecution his people were subjected to under Saddam Hussain's regime.

"My memory was full of sad stories and full of psychological damage, culture was destroyed, everything in front of me. I didn't see the hope inside it. After I come to the UK, I see what I come through. My art work reflects what I have seen, trying to express the feeling of the people. The situation is still same, after is Iraq war, Afghanistan, Sept 11th, Syria, Libya – war is moving around us, you are never going to stop this situation. I don't agree with any war, 13 year of my life in this process. I'm not a person to be all dark side, sad story whatever, but that is the reality."



Originally from Zimbabwe, Tracey Zengeni's work focuses primarily on impermanence: "Anything that we do, you walk out of your house, that could be pretty much the end of you. You always walk with death on our side. A flower growing, within a day could be dead."

But rather than a depressing notion, it instead forces focus onto the present and Zengeni produces artworks bursting with colour and life. "Not that I'm morbid I just like the idea of knowing that whatever it is that I create can possibly not be there tomorrow. Whatever is in my mind cannot be the same, I can never be the same painting twice."

Elsewhere, Iranian Mazaher chooses to present simply beautiful images, tonal montages of photographic images of facial features arranged to create abstract patterns.

"Abstract forms are my dearest friends in my poems, photography or phrases. Talking about bad [things], makes bad stronger I believe. If we try to show the good side of everything I think it's the only weapon people like me and you have got. What I try to show in my pictures, for example, is using darkness to show the light. If we try to do this every day in our life we can say that we've been fighting with peace [to combat] what we call darkness, what we call war."

Meanwhile, there are detailed monochromatic paper-cuts by Iranian Flora Alexander and Iseult Timmermans who work with the Glasgow-based International Women's Group and record their response to issues of violence against women.

It's also significant that the artists are exhibiting in a museum stuffed full of artefacts that were taken, at one time or another, from other countries and cultures. The presentation of these objects is something that Stephen Welsh, the director of Living Cultures at the museum, is looking to change.

"What we need to do is look for new ways of working and challenges on our preconceived curatorial orthodoxies used in museums, particularly when it comes to migration. Museums haven't been particularly good at representing diaspora or migration. Museums have been concerned with categorising people, defining them as belonging to a certain place at a certain time. But the reality of the situation is that many people have migrated over thousands of years for very

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Mazaher sees the poetry in himself, as a refugee, exhibiting alongside these objects. "What is interesting for me in this exhibition, my artwork is in a place that I can call 'a refugee place'. The objects presented here are from different areas around the world and one of these artworks, one of these objects, is my artwork. So I see it as a really close connection between these artworks as 'refugee' objects and my artwork as someone who is a refugee."

Review by Marissa Burgess

Main image: Mazaher (Time left)

More info: 90 Degree Citizen exhibition continues until November 17, 2013. Platforma is at Manchester University from October 31 to November 1, 2013 and an additional pop up exhibition Committed to Represent organised by Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit takes over a temporary space in the Museum from October 30 to November 1, prelude by a discussion and performance event on the opening night 6pm-9pm.

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