

PORTRAIT(S) OF CAMDEN

A project led by Joana Monteiro in partnership with WM College
and in collaboration with 500 people of Camden

A community
quilt celebrating
the diversity and
creativity of the
London Borough
of Camden





“ The project is a symbol of the collaboration and compassion that we need more of in the world today!”

Elin, workshop participant

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FOREWORD

KATHY SCHICKER

At WM College, London’s oldest college for adult learning, we believe creativity and community go hand in hand. Our involvement in the *Portraits of Camden Quilt* grew from this ethos, and it has been a privilege for our staff and learners to contribute from the very beginning.

What began as a simple conversation has grown into a vibrant, multi-layered collaboration—and we still feel like we’re only at the start of its journey. The project has brought joy, curiosity, laughter, skill-sharing, and self-confidence to everyone involved. It has also presented a few challenges—and one very large spreadsheet! Above all, it has fostered a sense of community and creativity that continues to flourish.

Our partnership began in spring 2023, when Joana and I were supporting members of a local sewing group, that she was facilitating as part of her PhD research, to transition into formal education. A passing conversation about a quilt representing Camden’s people sparked this journey—and we haven’t looked back since.

The concept was compelling: to use quilting—a communal and expressive art form—to tell contemporary stories. It offered a tactile, inclusive way to engage learners and residents of all ages and backgrounds, blending heritage with modern narratives. The idea of co-creation through textiles felt both meaningful and accessible.

Building on this vision, we knew WM College could bring experience and expertise to the project. We had a passionate and active Textiles and Quilting group, and both Zoe Hewett-Dutton and I had spent over a decade working on similar partnership projects with institutions like the British Museum. We shared a deep commitment to celebrating local identity, creativity, and community voices.

The collaboration unfolded dynamically. We helped map out the journey from concept to reality—planning each stage to transform hundreds of individual quilt frames into a unified public artwork. We launched the quilt with a workshop at Camden Inspire festival in September 2023 and have continued to support it through creative sessions, materials, and studio space.

Left: WM College Learner Awards, 17th October 2025

By September 2024, the project had grown to include 484 portraits. The quilting phase was meticulously organised, with packs distributed to the quilting group for completion at home. As the quilted portraits returned each week, the sense of pride and connection grew. Within weeks, the panels were complete.

Participants gained new skills in textile art and storytelling, infused each portrait with their personal style, and added their own mark and narrative to the process. The meditative and collaborative nature of quilting uplifted everyone involved.

For WM College, this collaboration exemplifies how creative learning builds confidence, connection, and belonging—values at the heart of our mission. The quilting group went on to win our prestigious Learner Award for *Outstanding Group Achievement* for their work on the *Portraits of Camden Quilt*.

The Quilt stands as a visual snapshot of Camden's people and stories. It invites dialogue, strengthens community identity, and inspires future collaborations. Its legacy lies in its ability to bring people together and celebrate the richness of our shared humanity.

This book offers a different kind of legacy. It documents the process, voices, and reflections—the emotions, conversations, and personal journeys that the quilt itself might not fully convey. It is a testament to the power of creativity, collaboration, and community.

At WM College, we're proud that the *Portraits of Camden Quilt* reflects the creative energy, resilience, and diversity that define both our community and our college. It is a visual representation of our mission to become an anti-racist college, reaffirming our commitment to fostering an inclusive, anti-racist, and accessible learning environment for all.

We hope this project inspires more collaborations that celebrate Camden's creativity and the transformative power of learning at every stage of life.

Kathy Schicker
Curriculum Manager, Fashion and Textiles
WM College



Kathy Schicker is a textile artist and designer with a passion for light, innovative materials, and the fusion of craft and new technology. With an MA in Design for Textile Futures from Central St Martins, she specializes in Jacquard weaving and light-reactive textiles for interiors. Her work has been exhibited internationally and includes collaborations with GlaxoSmithKline, the British Museum, and Eurostar. Kathy is a founder member of Puff & Flock and KathKath Design Studios, and currently serves as Curriculum Manager for Fashion, Textiles, and Art & Design at WM College.

INTRODUCTION



Left: Camden Inspire Festival,
2nd September 2023

Camden borough is a tapestry woven from transformation, diversity, and creativity. Once rural farmland, it rapidly evolved during the 19th century with the arrival of canals and railways, becoming a centre of industry and innovation. Waves of migrants – from Irish labourers and Jewish refugees to Afro-Caribbean, South Asian, Middle Eastern and European communities – shaped its identity and cultural life. By the late 20th century, Camden was famous for its counterculture, music scene, and progressive spirit. Today, it stands as one of London's most vibrant and dynamic boroughs – a place where creativity, culture, and innovation thrive side by side. *Portrait(s) of Camden* celebrates this rich diversity through the creative expressions of those who make the borough so unique – its residents, workers, students, and visitors alike.

The idea for the *Portrait(s) of Camden* quilt was sparked by three simultaneous moments of inspiration: a visit to Tate Modern, where my seven-year-old daughter created a fabric banner about saving tigers; Lucy Orta's exhibition *Traces: Stories of Migration* and her evocative fabric portraits; and an invitation to lead a creative workshop at Camden Inspire Festival in September 2023, themed around "Storytelling". The accessibility of working with textiles, the intimacy of making one's own portrait, and the quilt's longstanding role as a communal medium for storytelling all came together to form the concept for a Camden quilt.

WM College was the perfect partner. Dedicated to supporting lifelong learning and driving positive change across the borough, the institution – through Kathy Schicker and her talented Fashion and Textile team – brought deep expertise in quilting and in co-creating community textile art.

Over two years and with the support and contribution of many Camden organisations, this collaborative endeavour grew organically, bringing together 500 people, including nine WMC learners, to create four quilt panels and a fabric book. These works now travel across the borough and beyond, carrying messages of equality, connection, and solidarity.

In the following pages, you will discover not only the process behind the making of the quilt, but also the personal stories stitched into it. The portrait-making workshops, held across the borough, ensured that a wide range of voices and experiences were represented, and created extraordinary opportunities to experience the joy and empowerment of making together – themes explored by Professor Sandy Black and Dr Francesco Mazzarella.

These pages offer a good glimpse into the many stories stitched within the layers of fabric that form the quilt – yet nothing compares to seeing and touching the portraits in person. Through this book, we hope to inspire you to visit one of the exhibitions, to experience their beauty and power first-hand – and perhaps even to create a portrait of your own.

Joana Monteiro
Project Lead



Joana Monteiro is a socially engaged designer and proud Camden resident with French and Portuguese roots. She believes in the power of collective making to inspire connection and drive social change. Joana holds an MSc in International Management from ESCP Europe, an MA in Pattern and Garment Technology from London College of Fashion (LCF), UAL, where she is currently completing a PhD in Fashion Design for Social Change.



COLLECTIVE MAKING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

DR FRANCESCO MAZZARELLA & PROF. SANDY BLACK

As researchers and academics at LCF, we have long worked in the fields of fashion sustainability and design for social innovation, and have recently come closer together under the UAL DESIS Lab. Building on Ezio Manzini's (2015) pioneering work on *design for social innovation*, we recognise that in the context of today's polycrisis, the lines between social design and design for social innovation have blurred. Contemporary debates foreground *design justice* (Costanza-Chock, 2020), *designing social change* (Noel, 2023), and *design from the margins* (Casas-Romero & Mazzarella, 2024). Recently, Manzini (2024) has highlighted a double shift in the field of design for social innovation – from those “rich in time, energy and resources” to those “poor in these”, and from the centre to the peripheries.

The Portrait(s) of Camden project, led by Joana Monteiro, explores co-design for social change with individuals from varied cultural, social, and lived experiences. Through a series of making workshops in the London Borough of Camden, it opens fashion and textiles up as a democratic and participatory process that enhances inclusivity, wellbeing, and empowerment. The variety of individual expression and creative energy displayed in the textile portraits reflects the diversity and richness of Camden's evolving population and has demonstrated empowerment in action. A sense of pride and tangible achievement of the makers is inherent in the final quilts, a collective statement that stands witness to real lives and the positive effects of the shared activity of making.

Situated within the field of *fashion design for sustainability*, this project focuses on the social pillar (Mazzarella & Williams, 2022) and exemplifies how designers are increasingly acting as *hosts* and *facilitators* (Williams, 2018).

Left: Camden Inspire Festival,
2nd September 2023

Designers now play multiple roles: facilitators, relationship brokers, collaborators, and empathetic listeners. Joana's *sororalistic* approach extends beyond maternalistic or fraternalistic models (Thorpe & Gamman, 2011), prioritising trust, care, and equity built through shared making.

Such collective practices challenge conventional notions of authorship and power in design. They decentralise the designer's role and reframe design as a social practice centred on relationships and experimentation rather than on mere physical outputs. Yet, the very notion of "empowerment" warrants reflection – who gives power to whom, and under what conditions?

As in this project, collective making, or "social making" (Hackney *et al.*, 2022), generates tangible and intangible benefits: skill-building, creativity, pride, self-confidence, agency, and community engagement. It preserves cultural heritages while nurturing mental wellbeing and belonging. As Charny (2011) notes, making connects cultures and generations, offering freedom, pleasure, and self-expression. For Helen Storey, working with refugee communities in Jordan and Malawi, making allows sharing care, meditating, and shaping better lives (Black & Storey, 2023).

While *Portrait(s) of Camden* is a community art project, it also hints at new models of sustainable fashion entrepreneurship, echoing findings from *Fostering Sustainable Practices* (Black *et al.*, 2021), which demonstrated the radical potential of purpose-led, small-scale design ventures. Yet, challenges persist: navigating community dynamics, limited funding, institutional barriers, and the emotional toll on facilitators.

Projects like this raise crucial questions: how can designers work ethically with vulnerable communities, decolonise dominant design practices, and sustain impact beyond initial project timeframes and funding? How can we capture the intangible, transformative effects of social design?

Ultimately, we see *Portrait(s) of Camden* as planting seeds of hope – moving from a fashion system negligent to people and planet toward one grounded in care, empathy, equity, collaboration, and social justice. As Joana's PhD supervisors, we have witnessed her evolution as a pattern-maker, designer, researcher, entrepreneur, and change-maker. This project already stands as part of her doctoral legacy, fostering community, agency, and paving pathways toward a more equitable, diverse, inclusive, and sustainable future, in and through fashion.

Dr Francesco Mazzarella

Reader in Design for Social Change
London College of Fashion, UAL

Prof. Sandy Black

Professor of Fashion and Textile Design and Technology
London College of Fashion, UAL

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QUILTING FOR ACTIVISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

JOANA MONTEIRO

Quilting has long been more than a craft of comfort and beauty; it is a powerful vehicle for activism, storytelling, and the pursuit of human rights. From the nineteenth century to today, stitched and patched textiles have given voice to communities, recorded injustices, and built bridges of solidarity.

In the United States, quilting as a form of social action dates to the abolitionist movement of the 1830s, when women used quilt blocks and patterns to raise funds and symbolise resistance to slavery. A century later, civil rights activist Ruth Clement Bond collaborated with Black women in Tennessee to create the *Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) quilts*, which acknowledged and celebrated the role of Black workers in bringing electricity to the South – including the “Black Power Fist” quilt, a lasting symbol of strength and solidarity. Later, the *Freedom Quilting Bee Cooperative*, founded in 1966 in Alabama, empowered Black women to earn income while supporting the civil rights movement. Their bold quilts, pieced from scraps of work clothes and household fabrics, became both economic lifelines and emblems of resilience and hope.

In the UK, collaborative quilting as a form of expression, protest, and solidarity also has a rich history. *The Rajah Quilt* (1841), made by female convicts aboard the ship *Rajah* during their transport from England to Tasmania, stands as a powerful symbol of resilience, creativity, and women’s collective agency. More recently, quilting continues to serve as a medium for public remembrance and activism. *The Grenfell Tower Memorial Quilt*, begun in 2017, unites community members, artists, and families to honour the 72 lives lost in the tragedy, transforming

Left: Human Rights Today Festival, 18th June 2025

collective grief into a fabric of solidarity and justice and calling for government accountability. Similarly, *The Norfolk Trans Joy Community Quilt* (2023) celebrates visibility, inclusion, and pride within the transgender community, using shared creativity to counter exclusion and affirm joy as a radical act of resistance.

Quilting has been used as a medium for protest, remembrance, and advocacy in many countries. In 1970s and 1980s Chile, women stitched *arpilleras* – quilt squares documenting life under Pinochet’s dictatorship – an example of a quiet act of political defiance. *Journey to Freedom quilt* (2004) depicts women’s memories of apartheid in South Africa. Some projects grew to a monumental scale, resonating with audiences across the world. *The AIDS Memorial Quilt*, begun in 1985 in San Francisco, transformed private grief into a global movement for awareness and compassion, becoming the world’s largest community arts project. Likewise, *The Monument Quilt* (2013), created across the USA and Mexico, stitched together over 3,000 fabric squares made by survivors and allies to transform stories of gender-based and sexual violence into a monumental expression of healing and visibility.

Today, quilting thrives within the global movement of *craftivism* – the fusion of craft and activism – where the act of making becomes a form of protest and storytelling. Projects such as the *#UDHR Quilt Project* (Universal Declaration of Human Rights Quilt Project) engaged 131 global artists. Organisations like the Social Justice Sewing Academy bring youth and intergenerational quilters together around issues such as racism, gender justice and gun violence, emphasising that the act of collective making can build community and effect change.

The history of quilting for activism and human rights is rich, layered, and ongoing. The quilt stands as both artwork and social document. *Portrait(s) of Camden* contributes to this tradition. In February 2024, to mark International Women’s Day, Camden Giving invited local community leaders supporting girls and women across the borough to create their portraits for the quilt. The evening was a celebration of their work, their stories, and their shared commitment to gender equality.

Yet it was also a time for reflection, acknowledging how much more must be done to ensure that girls and women can truly thrive. In June 2025, two panels of the quilt were exhibited at the Human Rights Today Festival for Refugee Week, organised by the charity We Restart. *Portrait(s) of Camden* was displayed as part of an exhibition exploring the history of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, alongside powerful artworks by refugee artists from around the world.

The collaborative process of *Portrait(s) of Camden* is itself an act of resistance in a world often marked by division. It stands as a celebration of diversity, collaboration, and solidarity while affirming the role of art in shaping a more just and equal society.

Joana Monteiro

Read:

Jess Bailey (2024) *Many Hands Make a Quilt*

Marsha MacDowell, Mary Worrall, Lynne Swanson, and Beth Donaldson (2016) *Quilts and Human Rights*

Julia Triston (2025) *Textile Protest*



MAKING THE QUILT PORTRAIT-MAKING WORKSHOPS

From September 2023 to September 2024, twenty workshops were delivered across Camden, in collaboration with a wide range of organisations—including state and private schools, community and family centres, festivals, charities, funders, and local activity groups. 500 people of all ages, backgrounds, religions, ethnicities, and gender identities have created their own fabric portraits.

The brief was simple: “Create your portrait with fabric.” Materials were intentionally accessible to all—each participant received a pre-cut calico square as a canvas, along with scrap fabrics destined for landfill, embroidery scissors, and glue sticks. The idea of what a portrait could be was left open-ended, empowering participants to represent themselves however they wished—through shapes, colours and textures that conveyed what they wanted the world to know about them.

As discussed by Sandy Black and Francesco Mazarella, collaborative making brings a wide range of benefits. While creating their portraits, many participants experienced a sense of calm and wellbeing. The process of crafting something beautiful and personal became a therapeutic act of self-expression. Each workshop also fostered opportunities for connection, conversation, and discovery. Participants learned about one another, and often surprised themselves with their own creativity. By the end, all shared a sense of pride—in what they had made, in contributing to this inclusive, and celebratory project, and in being part of the Camden community.

List of workshops:

Camden Inspire Festival (02.09.2023 and 07.09.2024)
 Northbridge House Schools (06.10.2023 and 29.11.2023)
 Somers Gallery (21.10.2023)
 Edith Neville Primary School (21.11.2023)
 Maria Fidelis Secondary School (24.01.2024)
 The Village Prep School for Girls (07.02.2024)
 Edith Neville Family Centre (04.03.2024)
 Camden Giving (06.03.2024 and 08.09.2025)
 The British Library (19.03.2024)
 WM College (26.03.2024)
 Torriano Primary School (24.05.2024)
 Talking About Our Generations group (TAOG) (01.06.2024)
 Be Lifted Now (12.06.2024)
 The Windrush Festival (22.06.2024)
 Green City Projects at the London Irish Centre (04.07.2024)
 Forum + (13.07.2024)
 Emerald Wednesdays and St Paul's Woodland Garden
 Wednesday afternoon group at Green City Projects (04.09.2024)



"Some participants were quite skilled and others were a lot less confident but they all enjoyed the experience and how accessible it felt for everyone."

Tessa Havers-Strong, Forum +, Director



"It was really nice. I particularly felt it was important to include those who don't always feel seen or included in the wider community."

Emma, facilitator, Emerald Wednesdays at Green City Projects and TAOG



"I found it very relaxing and therapeutic! There are not many times during the working day to relax and be creative."

Amy Hagemman,
Edith Neville Family Centre Lead



"I liked being around people and creating something together. Not necessarily the conversation, more the focus on the creating. I wouldn't have done something like this on my own."

Workshop participant



"Seeing the examples helped and it's nice to think ours might have been shown as examples to others."

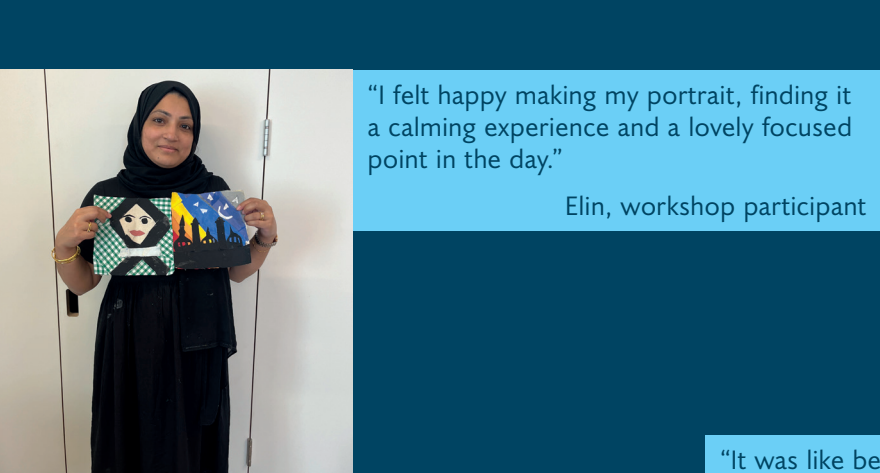
Workshop participant



"It was an interesting challenge to see how I could represent myself with a limited choice of materials. The materials themselves were really varied textures, which was also fun to create with."

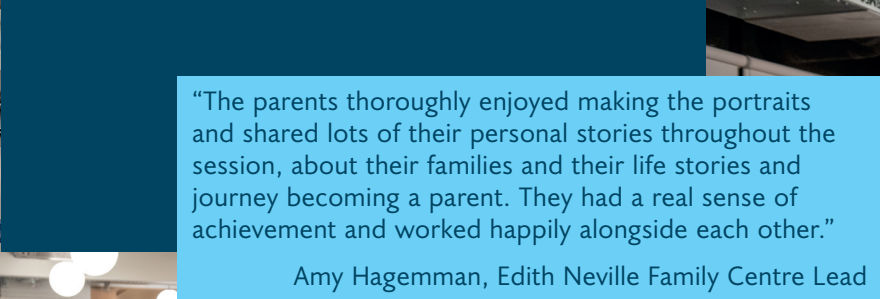
Zoe, workshop participant





"I felt happy making my portrait, finding it a calming experience and a lovely focused point in the day."

Elin, workshop participant



"The parents thoroughly enjoyed making the portraits and shared lots of their personal stories throughout the session, about their families and their life stories and journey becoming a parent. They had a real sense of achievement and worked happily alongside each other."

Amy Hagemman, Edith Neville Family Centre Lead



"It was like being back in art classes, one of my favourite classes at school. You could have heard a pin drop. I found it very therapeutic."

TAOG participant



"Working with pieces of fabric was liberating and I felt part of something bigger than me – I like to think that community is the "fabric of life", and I really felt like this during the workshop. It is awesome to think that my portrait is now part of the bigger quilt."

Bérendère, workshop participant



"We felt very proud to be able to host the LGBT workshop and provide a space for our community to share their "Camden voice" and story."

Tessa Havers-Strong, Forum +, Director





MAKING THE QUILT

QUILTING AND ASSEMBLING THE PORTRAITS

Between September 2024 and September 2025, nine learners from the WM College quilted and assembled the portraits.

Ranging from beginners to experienced quilters, they patiently stitched each piece of fabric – by hand or machine – adding their own creative voices to the *Portrait(s) of Camden*.

The quilting process did more than secure the fabric; it added layers of texture, storytelling, and collaboration to the work. Each quilter brought their unique style – geometric, freeform, subtle, hand-stitched, and more – to complement the narrative within each square of fabric and enhance each portrait. On the reverse of the quilt, the threads might tell a story of their own.

Quilting and assembling so many portraits were no small feat. Yet, through this challenge, the quilters explored new techniques, experienced the therapeutic calm of making, discovered fresh creative possibilities, and found connection – both as part of a quilting community and as proud Camden community members.

Their collaborative effort was awarded the *Outstanding Group Achievement* at the WM College Learner Awards 2025.

The portraits were quilted and assembled by:

Berit, Chnar, Jessica, Joana, Joanne, Kathy, Midori, Rosalind, Thea, Valerie, Virginia, and Zoe.



"It was interesting to see the different techniques and methods used to create the portraits, it was inspiring."

Thea, quilter



"I loved taking part in this project. When I put the panels together, I realised how beautiful the portraits had become with the quilting. I could recognise the portraits I had quilted and others that Berit and Thea had done as well as the Camden people themselves."

Jessica, quilter

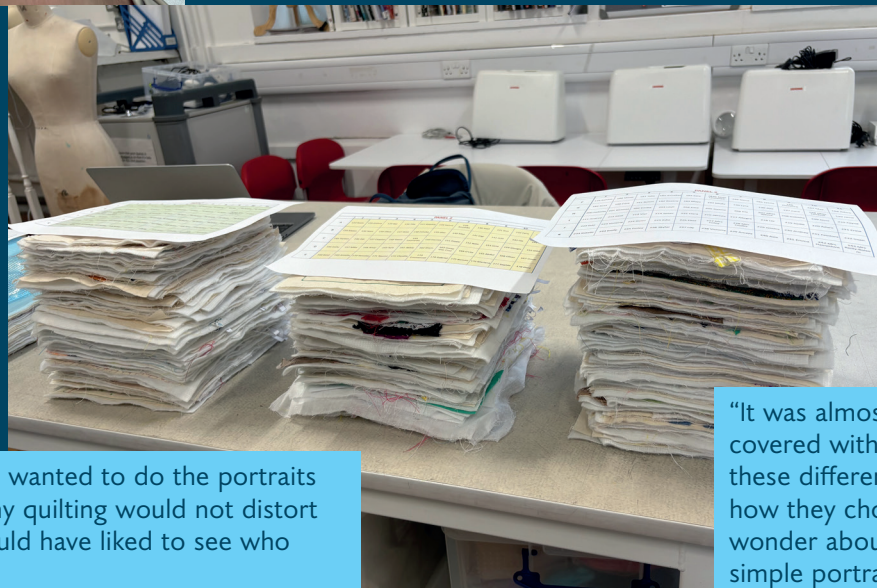
"It was fun to add something to someone else's creation. I tried to imagine the creator's favourite colours etc. at the same time I tried to add something positive to enhance the portrait by me as well."

Midori, quilter



"It was challenging because I wanted to do the portraits justice and make sure that my quilting would not distort or change the pictures. I would have liked to see who created which portrait."

Berit, quilter



"It was almost a bit unreal, having my kitchen floor covered with faces of strangers. I enjoyed seeing all these different faces of people I'd never met and seeing how they chose to represent themselves. It made me wonder about the person behind the fabric, from the simple portraits to the extravagant ones. Everyone can be creative."

Joanne, quilter

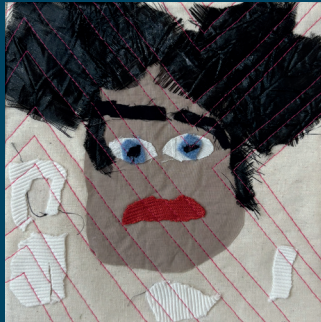


Quilting styles

Hand-quilting



Geometric



Minimal



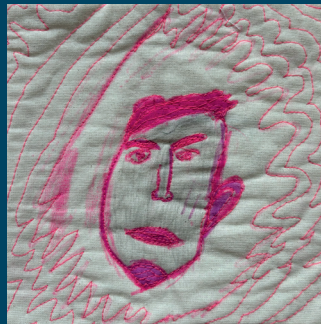
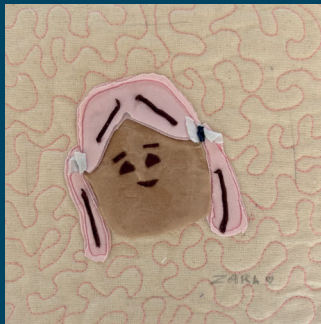
Drawing



Contour



Freeform



Quilters' creative voices

“I love what the quilters did to enhance each portrait.”
Portrait maker



The quilters' portraits

"I enjoy being part of a group of people who have the same interest. I usually quilt (or do other crafts) on my own and am not part of a group."

Berit, quilter

"Each portrait represents more than just the individual. And that's true of life, isn't it? We are all more than just one individual - we are our family, our friends, our community and all of the people we haven't met yet!"

Jessica, quilter

"It is nice to feel a part of a collaborative project with a specific goal."

Thea, quilter

"I have never done a community project before, but it was a nice feeling to have fellow sewers."

Midori, quilter



Joanne



Alice



Rosalind



Midori



Berit



Thea



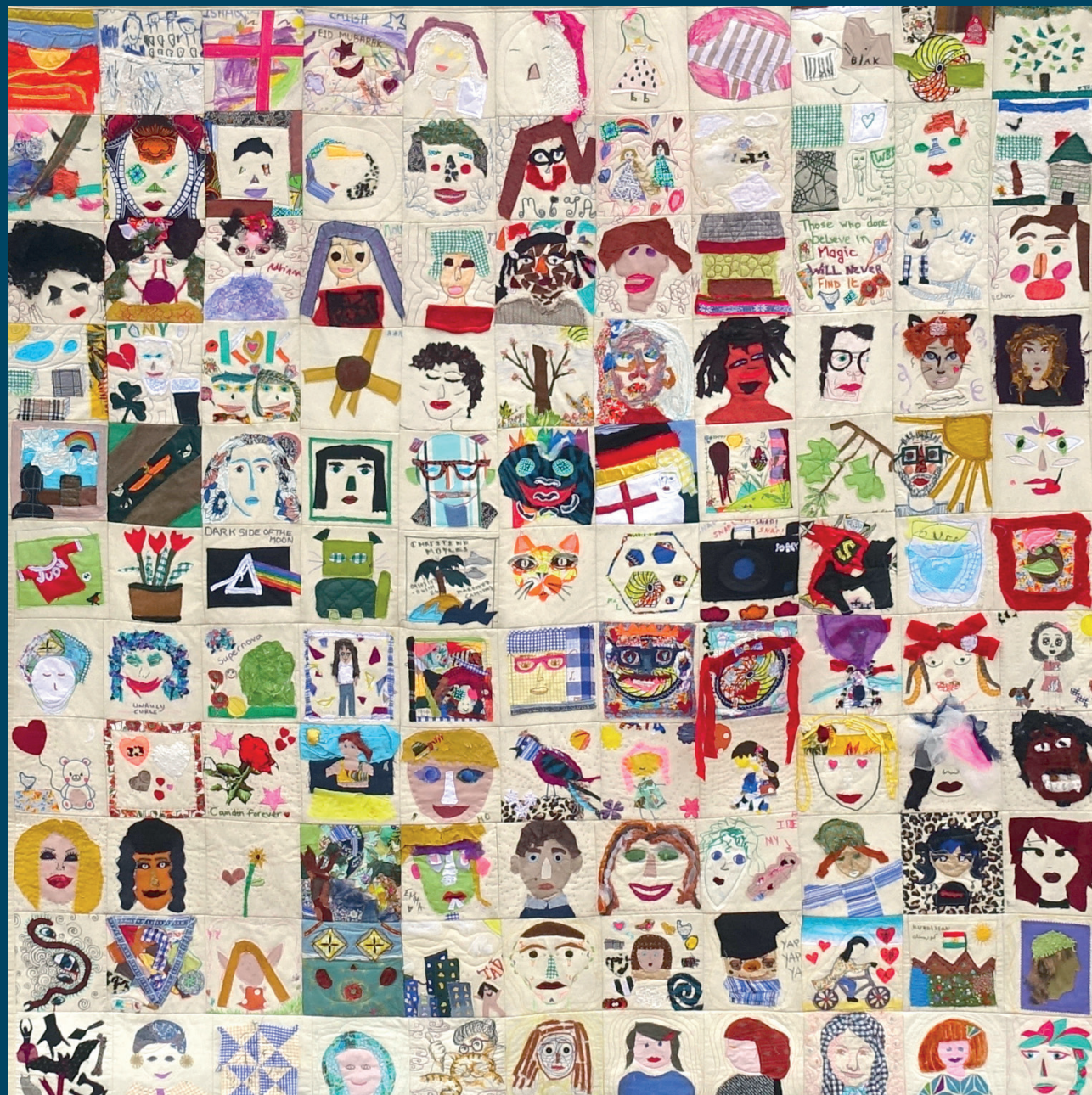
Chnar



Jessica



Zoe



THE QUILT

Over two years, four quilted panels and a textile book were created. These patchworks of portraits and stories reflect our identities as individuals and as a community. The diversity within our community is its greatest strength, and in this quilt, that diversity is expressed in an endless variety of creative ways.

The choice of fabrics brings colour, texture, and depth. Patterns such as flowers become hair, noses, eyes, or entire faces. Velvet transforms into red lips or glistening leaves. Layered textiles create three-dimensional portraits. Some are simple and delicate; others burst with bold colours and patterns. Each is beautiful on its own—and together they form something extraordinary.

The range of personal stories told through these portraits is astonishing. Most depict faces, sometimes highlighting details like curly hair, a piercing, green eyes, or a gold tooth. Yet the quilt also includes animals, landscapes, favourite food, and more. Some participants represented themselves through their countries of origin or current homes, with several nods to Camden itself. Others conveyed passions, professions, or the importance of love, a recurring theme seen in portraits of couples and families. While many celebrate joy, others reflect on doubt, fear, grief, and trauma. Each of these stories contribute to the vibrant, ever-evolving tapestry that is Camden.

In the quilts, the portraits appear in the order they were created. On the following pages, they are gathered by themes, that celebrate both our shared connections and the beautiful differences in how each of us creates. Wherever possible, the maker's name and age are included. And for those who shared the stories behind their portraits, a few words offer a glimpse into the memories and meaning stitched into the fabric.



Sara and Kit in front of the Camden Council office, Pancras Square

Joana and Maciej in Oakshott Court, Somers Town



Scarlet and Leo in Camden Town



Linda and Teresa, on Primrose Hill

Portraits sharing colour schemes



Sophia



June (90)



Daniel (29)



Sophie (28)



Molly (6)



Nursery pupil



James (42)



Ira (39)

Gentle tones with sparks of colour



Franzi (38)



Maria (43)



Luna (9 months)



Cait took a selfie with her phone and reproduced it with fabric. She wrote precise instructions for the quilters on the back.



Anonymous



Bérengère (46)

Fabric patterns for all individual expressions



Karen (25)



James



Dahabo



Nikki and Finley (9 and 45)



Amber (29)



Amy (27)



Lucy (18)



Laura



Paul (43)



Athieng



Cathal (25)



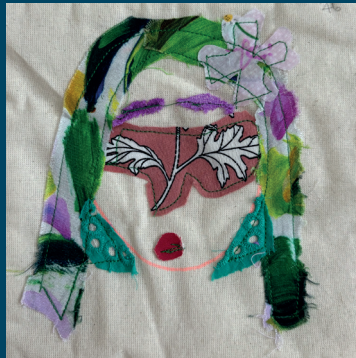
Tom (39)



Louise (24)



Clara (20)



Teresa (24)



Michael (73)



Roisin



Sophie

Flowers and nature as a representation of self



Rebecca



Chloe (18)



Miss Carlon



Rose



Tash (52)



Khadija (39)



Iris (7)



"I love tulips. I liked the process of collaging material in unusual ways, so I could use gingham material to represent my tulip stems." Erica



"Camden helped me bloom." Suraya



Subin (22), a night landscape

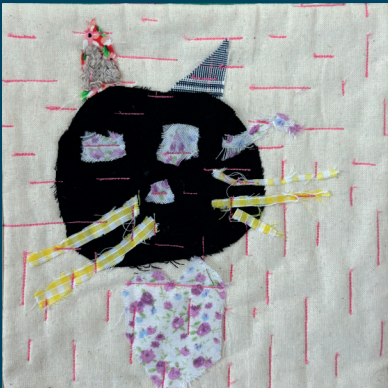


Tony



Mayor of Camden, Councillor Samata Khatoon

Animals we love



Eva



Sadie (10)



Victoria (10)



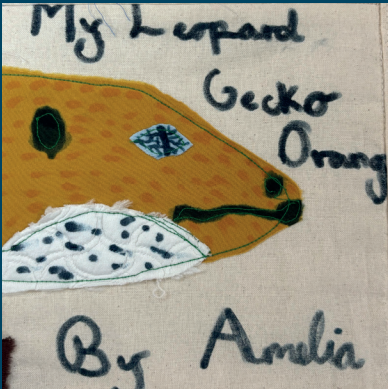
Ethan (7)



Sheila (37)



Kate



Amelia carried her gecko in her bag.



Sarah, an artist who was working on a series of bird paintings.



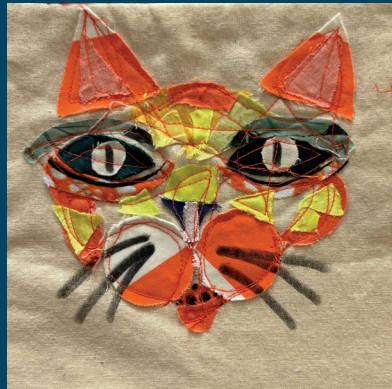
Elisa (10) likes to sleep like a panda.



Chirstie, Headteacher, The Village Prep School, and her dog.



Ewa loves unicorns.



"I did a ginger cat; home is where a ginger cat is for me!" Lydia

What we wear, who we are



Cora, Deputy head of the Village Prep School always wears a scarf.



Olivia (10)



Nursery pupil (3) asked for help to make his sunglasses.



Yusuf (7) made the monster face from the jumper he was wearing on the day.



Sophire (11)



Oriel (7)

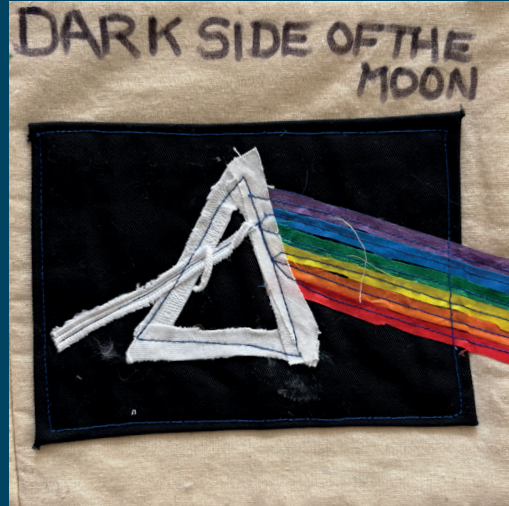


Luthfa (43) left a pin from her hijab on her portrait.



Elise (8)

The things we love



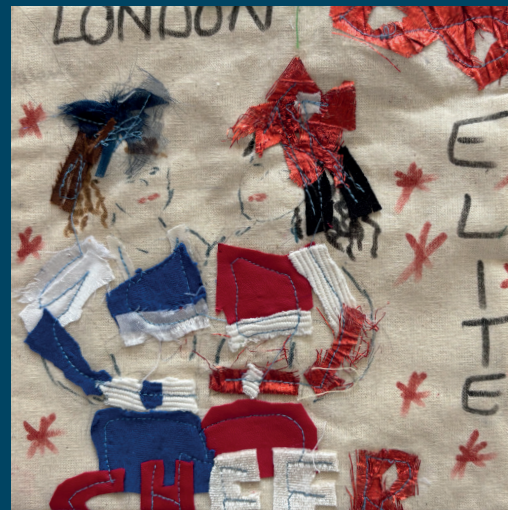
Frances is a fan of Pink Floyd. The Dark Side of the Moon (1973) is her favourite album.



"I love photography. I take photos from the perspective of someone who uses a wheelchair. It is a big part of what I do." Michaela



Judy is a big fan of Arsenal and added the robin to represent the Gardening Group.



Valerie runs the Cheerleading group London Infinity Elite in Camden.

and the things we do



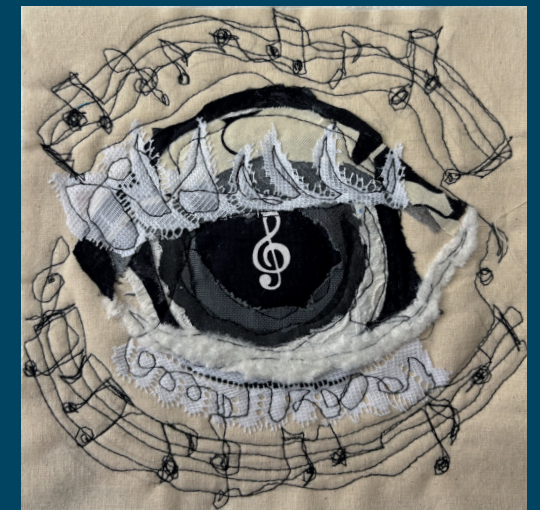
"The story behind my portrait is my love of music, particularly sharing it with others through teaching." Elin, Music teacher



Miss Tani was the receptionist at the Village Prep School.



"My portrait was simply a picture of what I look like. I look like an artist and I wanted to use simple shapes to recreate my face." Ian Mowforth, Arts teacher, the Village Prep School



"I see life like a tornado, the eye of the hurricane is where I was born. A spiral spinning around the world. I am an artist, painter, musician, printmaker. My Self- portrait is my eye! Spiral eye! Musician eye! Artistic eye!" Ananda (40)

Not taking ourselves too seriously



Salma



Evie (9)



Martino and Marco (41 and 4)

Words that define us



"I did a quote I like as I am into quotes. I can't believe it is up there. It is very special." Breda



Dan (38)



Zoe (26)



"Mine is Super Pug! Pugs are lovely dogs, and you do not see them often." T.B.



Lilan (23)



Angela wrote Hongkonger in Chinese.



"I did a puzzle that makes me me! Without any of the puzzle it won't be me."

“Family is everything”



Layla (41)



Loane, Camille and Lucille (6, 4 and 39)



Marwa (9) misses her sister who lives in India.



Nazma



Kirsty (35)



Maggie and Si



Paulina



Nina (8)

Women of Camden



Danni



Siobhan



Yasmin



Nazma



Amy



Judy



Sofia



Kathy (58)

Women's voices



"Mine was depicting a time of process as my mum used to try and girlyfy me all the time and was obsessed with the fact that I wasn't very girly. I got so annoyed with her I shaved my eyebrows off and I got my friend's clippers and cut my hair really spiky as she wouldn't let me grow my hair really long like I wanted. I was 15 and spiked it up with glue. I do remember my mum screaming at me, what have you done?" Pebbles



"It felt exposing to show yourself to others, but I enjoyed it and I feel proud that it's part of the bigger tapestry of women of Camden. I was trying to show that women hold many conflicting roles and responsibilities." Natasha Friend, Camden Giving, Director



Kateryna (11) explained that she had to wear a mask and hide her true self.



"Freedom under the veil." Ayesha



"My name is Saba. Pinks and purples are my essence. I love femininity, being a woman. I try to be resilient and I am sassy!!!" Saba

The emotions we carry



Year 7 student placed a band of fabric covering her eyes and explained that she feels misunderstood by her parents.



Rita (15) is scared of insects. To overcome it, she chose to portray it.



Ikran embodied the many layers of trauma that women endure, symbolized through her use of layered fabrics and blood-red tears.



"I designed a desert Island with palm trees surrounded by choppy sea with sharks swimming in it. This is how it feels to try and navigate the system." Christine



Participant (14) wanted to study arts, but her parents disagreed. The question marks in her eyes represent an unknown future.



Raoul (9.5) did not know how to portray himself and choose to represent a question mark.

Those we remember



In loving memory of Betty, George, Audrey, Harry and Maria, members of the Talking About Our Generations group (TAOG)

“I wanted to include the members of our group who have passed away, along with the things they loved most. They were an important part of our community in Camden, and although they couldn’t be here to make their own portraits, I felt strongly that they should be remembered. I began by adding the first letters of their names—since fitting them all in was difficult while helping others—and the sewers kindly stitched in the full names. I also included alliums and the colours Betty loved, as well as music and a robin, because we believe that Harry visits us as a robin. In this way, everyone we’ve lost still feels present in our work.”

Emma, facilitator, TAOG



In loving memory of Tony, Jeff’s friend and beloved member of the London Irish Centre.



Ken and Katie made this portrait together. Ken sadly passed away shortly after.



“I made a lovely cherry blossom tree which I planted when a friend died and I imagined the tree and my friend.” Therese

Flags and places that define us



Daisy (32)



Alyshah (9.5)



Ruzina (38) – the Mecca.



Sophie – Djerba, Tunisia, a place she visited, loved and that inspired her.



Peter (73)



"I had no clear plan in mind for my portrait but once I started to make it an idea took hold. I began to build a scene representing myself with both my English and German heritage signified by flags." Tessa



Aishwarya (25) – view from her bedroom.



Ashley (27)

Camden, the place we call home



“Mine has another layer of meaning for me, I used to live round the corner from Camden Lock and that was when my marriage started to go down hill but you wouldn’t know that from looking at me but there is a bit of that in there. Just being there gives me a frisson.” Peter



Sam (53) lives at St Pancras Intl Station and is the station’s official photographer.



Nic loves swimming in the women’s pond on Hampstead Heath. “It is my happy place.”

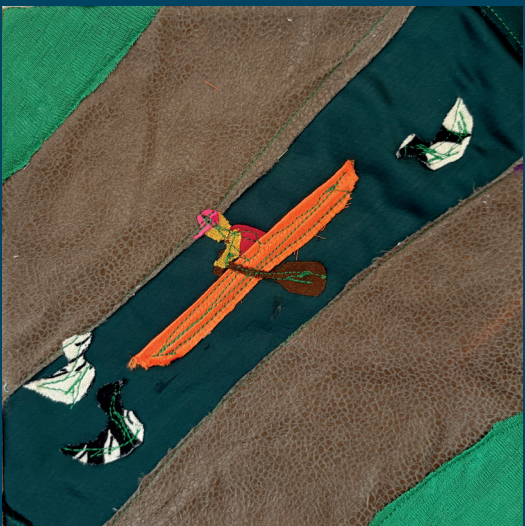


Sandie’s parents came from Mauritius and have called Camden home since.

“While making my portrait, I was thinking of Camden and how everyone can belong here and is welcome to feel at home.”
Tessa Havers-Strong, Forum +, Director



Katherine (85) has always lived in Camden.



Emily (41), from The Pirate Castle, London’s longest-running community boating charity, on the Regent’s Canal.



“From Kurdistan to Camden”

by Chnar

چیرۆکی پشت ئەو پۆترمیتە ئەویەکە وینەی هەریمی کوردستان ی
عێراق، هەربۆیە ئەوهم هەلبژارد چونکە زۆر خۆلک نازانن کە هەریمی
کوردستان چەند جوان و خۆش و سەرنج ڕاکێشە هەر چوار وەرزه و
جوانی خۆی هەیه هەموی چیا و دار و ئاو گۆل.
چیز و هەستیکی زۆر خۆش پێ بەخشیم چونکە لەکاتی دروست کردن
هەموو کوەدستانم هاتە بەرچاو لەگەڵ هەر تەقەلێک هەموو یادەری
خۆشی و ناخۆشی م دەهاتەوه یادەریبۆیە بە ئمپرۆیدەری دروستم
کرد. هەستم بەخۆشیەکی زۆر کرد کە ببوم بە بەشیک لەو ٥٠٠ کەسە ی ناو
لێفەکە چونکە توانیم وینەی بەشیک لە هەریمەکەم دروست بکەم.

My portrait represents the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, my homeland.

I chose this subject because many people are unaware of how beautiful and captivating Kurdistan truly is — its rich landscapes filled with trees, rivers, and life.

Creating this portrait brought me great joy. It felt as though my hands and mind were connected, allowing my hands to express my deepest thoughts and emotions. With every stitch, I recalled both the happiness and the sorrow tied to my homeland.

I am proud that my beloved region will be remembered as part of 500 Portraits of Camden, the community I now call home.

Chnar



“We are made of pieces”

by Jade

In real life, we are made of pieces: memories, experiences, joys, heartbreaks, identities we grow into and out of.

And in this portrait, I am made of pieces too, just like life is made of moments: soft, rough, torn, mended pieces of fabric, stitched together to form a version of myself that holds all those fragments.

Each scrap of material in my portrait carries meaning. Some represent softness, others strength. Some were chosen for their colours, but even colour can hold memory, a shade that reminds me of home, or of someone I loved. The layering, the textures, the threads... they all echo something inside me that isn't easily said in words.

This project reminded me that we don't need to be perfect to be whole. Wholeness can come from fragments, as long as they're held together with care.

I chose to take part in this project because I believe in the quiet power of visibility, of being seen, not for titles or roles, but for the person I am. In a world that often moves too fast to notice, this quilt slowed everything down. It invited each of us to stitch a truth, a story, a moment of identity into something permanent.

To be one of 500 is humbling but also grounding. It reminds me that I'm not alone. Each face, each stitch, speaks of resilience, care, and quiet rebellion.

Being part of the *Portrait(s) of Camden* quilt means my story is sewn alongside hundreds of others, a patchwork of lives that often go unseen or unheard. But here, we are visible. Here, we belong.

Jade



EXHIBITING THE QUILT

Since June 2025, Portrait(s) of Camden has begun its journey across the borough, reaching new audiences through a series of exhibitions and events. Although only two panels were completed at that time, the quilt was first displayed at the Human Rights Today Festival organised by We Restart for Refugee Week. It then returned to the Village Prep School, where pupils, staff, and parents could see their contributions come to life. The completed set of four quilted panels was later exhibited in full at the London Irish Centre for its 70th anniversary, where it remained on display for a month. At the time of writing, the portraits are being shown at the WM College as part of its 170th anniversary celebrations.

Exhibiting the four panels together elevates the project to an entirely new scale. No longer do we focus on single squares; instead, we witness the power of bringing together 500 individual pieces into one cohesive artwork – stretching over eight metres in length. These exhibitions give everyone involved, from portrait makers to quilters, the opportunity to be recognised as artists. Seeing their work on display brings a sense of pride, validation, and connection, enhancing both wellbeing and confidence. For many, viewing their portrait as part of such a vast collective is deeply emotional – it evokes a sense of belonging to “one big family, a wider community.” This is especially moving for those who may never have felt acknowledged in this way before.

Displaying the quilt is vital to spreading its powerful message of inclusion and hope. Each exhibition becomes a space to inspire and connect, sparking conversations about creativity, storytelling, community, and identity. The future of Portrait(s) of Camden holds endless opportunities to celebrate creativity and diversity—within Camden and beyond.

Left: London Irish Centre,
September-October 2025



Human Rights Today Festival,
Organised by We Restart,
18th June 2025



Headteacher Kirstie Hampshire
and Joana, The Village Prep
School for Girls, Summer Fête,
5th July 2025

“

Portrait(s) of Camden was a perfect fit for the Human Rights Today Festival because it embodies community voices, personal stories, and creative expression – the same values at the heart of our work. The quilt offered a beautiful and accessible way to connect people to themes of identity, belonging, and resilience. We particularly liked that the project gave space for so many different individuals to contribute to a shared artwork while celebrating diversity.”

*Cristina Antonini, Co-founder,
We Restart Charity – Art Centre of Sanctuary*

“

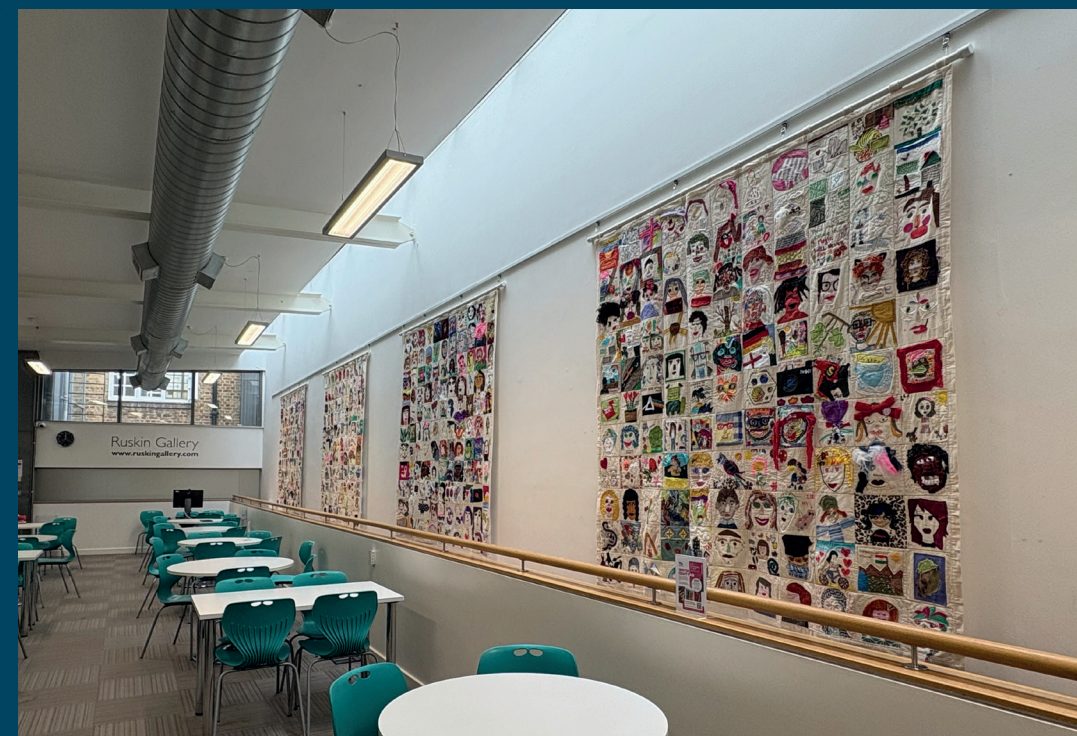
When the quilts came to school on display, I was blown away. The scale of the individual world might be small, but the impact was huge. The differences in styles and techniques were one thing but the joy and ambition in making was clear to see.”

Ian Mowforth, Arts Teacher, The Village Prep School



London Irish Centre 70th Anniversary Celebrations, September - October 2025

WM College, 170th anniversary exhibition, October-December 2025



“

Survivors have often felt themselves excluded from society. Not only in Ireland but by the Irish Diaspora living in the UK. Our service does as much as we can to support our clients healing from this exclusion and connect the survivors both internally with the wider London Irish Centre Community and externally with the wider London community. As such, the survivor community being represented and acknowledged as part of the wider community of Camden means a great deal. To see the survivors' faces as they both saw the quilts and their other work being exhibited meant so much and I felt so proud to be part of the team and to have played a small part in the project.”

Roisin, Survivors Programme Coordinator, London Irish Centre

“

Most of our group are not artists so it was wonderful to have something we created exhibited and on display in Camden. A once in a lifetime experience for many and one that is very cherished.”

Tessa Havers-Strong, Forum +, Director



“A remarkable project, a collective story of Camden, stitched with care, imagination and authenticity.”

*Cristina Antonini, Co-founder,
We Restart Charity – Art Centre of Sanctuary*

CONCLUSION

Portrait(s) of Camden opens a conversation about community and identity – both individual and collective. As Jade so beautifully expressed beside her portrait, our identities are layered, ever evolving, and shaped by a patchwork of influences, experiences, and emotions. The fabric pieces that make up each portrait in the quilts reflect this richness, serving as a metaphor for the complexity of who we are. Across all the portraits in these pages runs a shared longing: to be seen, to be acknowledged, and to belong. By stitching them together, we not only honour each individual story but also create a collective portrait of a borough defined by diversity, equality, and solidarity.

The quilt's message extends far beyond Camden, inviting us to imagine creative collaboration as an act of resistance against structures built on division and hate.

Let *Portrait(s) of Camden* remind us that when we come together, we can create something beautiful, meaningful, and full of hope.

PROJECT PARTNERS

This project was made possible thanks to the support and contributions from:



WM College is London's oldest adult education college, empowering learners since 1854 through high-quality, inclusive education in a supportive, welcoming community. With inspiring teaching and a commitment to wellbeing and personal growth, the college helps every learner thrive. WM College, through Kathy Schicker, has been a key partner of *Portrait(s) of Camden*, working with Joana from the project's early development through to the making of the quilt.

www.wmcollege.ac.uk



Camden Inspire Festival is an annual community festival run by Camden Town Unlimited Business Improvement District (BID). At its core, the festival is about opening the doors of Camden's creative institutions and embedding closer connections between the cultural sector and local communities. Through workshops, talks and performance, it brings together artists, residents, and local institutions to explore new creative outlets and celebrate Camden's collective identity. Camden Inspire hosted two portrait-making workshops and helped launch the project during their festival in 2023.

www.camdeninspire.com



Camden Giving is an independent charity dedicated to ending poverty and inequality in the London Borough of Camden. Through community-led decision-making and accessible funding, the organisation empowers residents to shape solutions, build connections and strengthen local leadership. Camden Giving has been a key supporter and contributor to *Portrait(s) of Camden*, hosting two portrait-making workshops, including an event for International Women's Day.

www.camdengiving.org.uk



The British Library is the UK's national library, preserving culture and knowledge for all. It supports creativity and research and actively works with local community groups and residents to explore its collection, share stories, and support free activities. The Community Engagement team worked with Joana to organise a portrait-making workshop in their community hub, The Last Word.

www.bl.uk/visit/local-community

TAOG



Talking About Our Generations is an intergenerational group bringing people in their 20s to 90s together to share stories, laughter, and meaningful connection. Through conversations and outings, the group nurtures friendship and belonging, creating a welcoming community where no one feels alone. Members created their portraits over tea on a quiet Saturday afternoon in June 2024 — and, according to facilitator Emma, they had never been so quiet.

www.talkingaboutourgenerations.co.uk

Be Lifted Now empowers women and girls across North-West London — offering support, inspiration, and practical community programmes for ages 7 to 70, including Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic women, survivors of domestic violence, single mothers and those in poverty. Be Lifted Now held a portrait-making workshop with mothers and children during one of their weekly support meetings in Camden.

www.webeliftednow.com



Camden Black British History is a registered Charity rooted in History, Arts, and Culture. Dedicated to uncovering, preserving, and celebrating stories, it works across archives, local communities, the arts sector, and cultural partnerships. *Portrait(s) of Camden* collaborated with Camden Black British History to deliver a portrait-making workshop during the Camden Windrush Festival in 2024.

www.camdenbbh.org



Green City Projects use gardens as a foundation for creative health, helping people connect with nature, each other, and themselves. Our mission is to combat isolation and support health and wellbeing by creating safe, accessible spaces where people can come together. Facilitators Emma and Ben organised two portrait-making workshops with different groups of people – Members of the London Irish Centre, St Paul's Woodland Garden group, and the Emerald Wednesdays group. 2024 Mayor of Camden, Councillor Samata Khatoon, joined one of the workshops, creating her portrait together with other participants in the tranquil garden setting.

www.greencityprojects.co.uk



The London Irish Centre stands at the heart of London's Irish community, offering a warm and inclusive space where culture, heritage, and practical support come together. Since 1955, it has embraced people facing loneliness or change, providing services, events, and connections to enrich lives and build resilient, diverse neighbourhoods. As part of this ongoing commitment, members of the Irish community created their own portraits during a workshop with Green City Projects. *Portrait(s) of Camden* was proudly showcased during the Centre's 70th-anniversary celebrations.

www.londonirishcentre.org



Forum+ is an independent charity dedicated to promoting equality and improving the lives of LGBT+ people in Camden and Islington. Through social groups and community events, forum + celebrates local LGBT+ identity and offers support to individuals who have experienced hate crime. Tessa and Aoife organised a dedicated portrait-making event at The Pirate Castle, on the Regent's canal in the heart of Camden Town, for community members to be creative and "*share their Camden voice and story*".

www.forumplus.org.uk



Stitch by Stitch is a community-led sewing group in Somers Town, Camden. Led by four local residents, the group facilitates drop-in making sessions and fashion design workshops to women in the community and collaborates with Camden organisations such as Central Saint Martins and Camden Giving. The group helped with the delivery of workshops at Camden Inspire Festival and at Edith Neville Family Centre.



WE RESTART is a UK charity using art to support resilience, social connection, and healing. Working with refugees and displaced communities, it delivers creative workshops, public projects and cultural events that foster inclusion, amplify underrepresented voices, and promote positive change globally. We Restart organised the Human Rights Today Festival for Refugee Week in June 2025, during which *Portrait(s) of Camden quilt* was showcased alongside artworks by refugee artists from around the world.

www.werest.art

Schools

To capture the stories of the children of Camden, portrait-making workshops were organised in many schools from nursery to secondary education: **Northbridge House Nursery and Primary Schools, Edith Neville Primary School, Maria Fidelis Secondary School, The Village Preparatory School for Girls, Torriano Primary School.**

Acknowledgements

This project has been shaped by the generosity, energy, and creativity of so many people, and I am deeply grateful for every contribution.

To WM College, thank you for providing a space where ideas could grow and where community truly thrives. My heartfelt thanks go to Kathy Schicker, Luisa Tobitt, Zoe Hewett-Dutton, and Alice Thompson, and to all the quilters whose hands, patience, and imagination helped bring this work to life.

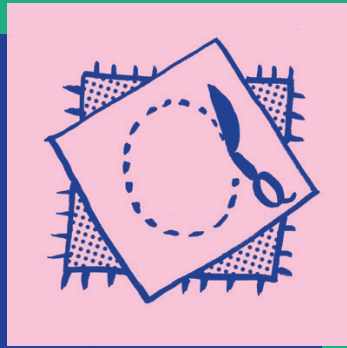
A special thank you to Chnar Rauf and Helen McCormack for your kindness, steady support, and readiness to help. My gratitude also extends to Eve Gilmore from Camden Inspire for being the first to believe in this project, and to the whole team at Camden Giving—especially Natasha Friend and Puja Bose—for your unwavering support.

Thank you to Lilan Lemouchi from the British Library; Jenny McCall at Be Lifted Now; Emma Rodwell and Ben Ledden from TAOG and Green City Projects; and Roisin Power at the London Irish Centre. I am grateful to Emily Momoh from the Camden Black British History Hub, Aoife O'Sullivan and Tessa Havers-Strong from Forum+, and to Angela, Jade, Joanne, and Chnar at Stitch by Stitch, as well as Cristina Cellini Antonini and Chiara Canal from We Restart.

To the headteachers and staff who welcomed me into their schools—especially Cherry Robinson, Amy Hagemann, Laura Donoghue, Annabel Levin, Ian Mowforth, Cora Reilly-Bolsom, Kirstie Hampshire, and Laura Lien— thank you.

And finally, to everyone who shared their stories. Your voices are the heart of this work. This book and quilt are for you.

Make your portrait with fabric!



1 Cut lots of shapes from different fabrics or use pre-cut shapes



2 Stick the pieces of fabric with the glue stick on the square of fabric. Try to cover the whole piece of fabric with glue and leave 2cm (about two fingers width) all around.



3 Once your portrait is finished, write your name and age with a pen. Well done!

What you need:

1 square of fabric
1 pair of scissors
1 glue stick
1 pen
Some colourful fabric



Book created in 2025 on the occasion of the WMC 170th anniversary exhibition

Designed and edited by Joana Monteiro

Illustrated and designed by Maciej Rackiewicz

Photography by Joana Monteiro, Maciej Rackiewicz, Claudia Cantarini, Sam Rockman, Simon O'Connor, Creators Media UK and Umpf Limited.

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CAMDEN
INSPIRE



BRITISH
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forum+

STITCH BY STITCH
Community Sewing
Somers Town

TAOG

