

CANDIDA STEVENS GALLERY

Within each other, portraits of ourselves

A new series of portraits by Professor Alice Kettle



Woman Thinking, 2019 by Alice Kettle
Stitch on printed fabric, 95 x 60 cm



Three Women, 2019 by Alice Kettle
Stitch on printed fabric, 42 x 35 cm



Mother and Child II, 2019 by Alice Kettle
Stitch on printed fabric, 37 x 30 cm

Textiles offer a powerful medium through which to explore themes of cultural heritage, journeys and displacement. This exploration was central to Alice Kettle's ambitious *Thread Bearing Witness* project shown at The Whitworth, Manchester and the British Textile Biennale in 2018 and 2019. Through this project Kettle connected communities and individuals across the UK with the making of three monumental works inspired by the strength, resilience, and hospitality of refugees and asylum seekers. This new project *Within Each Other, Portraits of Ourselves*, launched as part of *Threading Forms* curated by Candida Stevens for the London Art Fair, sees Alice extending her reach beyond the UK, to incorporate communities around the world.

As part of the Karachi Biennale19, Alice worked with groups of women in Pakistan to co-create a stitched piece. These same women, along with women in England contribute to this series of portraits by offering floral motifs and decorative backgrounds which Alice incorporates into her work. This project has brought together expert stitchers from villages and communities in the Sindh province. Individuals based in England; Asmaa from Syria, Monica from Iran Susan from Uganda are also very important as contributors to these portraits, some of which are collaborative. Alice is engaging with these groups and individuals as part of an on-going relationship to encourage sustainable practice and empower artistic creativity. She is passionate about supporting traditional stitch ancestral knowledge, alongside new and emerging techniques, as part of the rich vocabulary of stitch. By working with these communities and individuals she is encouraging the retention of their knowledge and their cultural and artistic identities.

Alice Kettle's new series of portraits can be seen in the context of this opening out of her practice to engage more emphatically through stitch with others - some are made solely by her and others are co-created, enabling a shared authorship. This reflects the ability of stitch to intersect across divided spaces and connect with others through a common language of making. Textiles and pattern have historically migrated, facilitated by the movement of people and trade. Agile and mobile, textile is a material carrier for the imagery and symbolism of stories. These new works create a quiet space for action where stitch can encounter what it means to be human. The works simultaneously explore individual and collective identity, divided and shared through social, political and economic circumstances.

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In her role as Professor at Manchester School of Art, Alice Kettle has researched the meeting place of traditional analogue stitching skills and digitised contemporary methodologies. She has developed a unique practice, creating textile works which employ a combination of stitch techniques, bringing together the use of antique machines from early last century with hand stitch and contemporary digital technology.

This series of portraits consists of layers of imagery, so appropriate for a series of portraits, for we ourselves consist of layers, some apparent, some hidden. Initial pastel drawings are scanned and printed on fabric, they are then overlaid with hand and machine stitching using the threads to 'paint' areas of gestural colour and texture and to incorporate the collaborative elements. Metallic threads shimmer, while the obscured backgrounds suggest the possibility of hidden figures. Enticing and engaging this work explores new territory for Alice, created on a domestic scale, while looking closely at the individual and the community simultaneously. The works examine notions of identity, of authorship and of stitch as a medium of integration across borders and technologies, but also at the mystery of the individual and its place within and without these borders. Kettle's *Within Each Other, Portraits of Ourselves* is supported with public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England.

Elsewhere in 2020 Alice Kettle presents a solo show of work *Alice Kettle, Sustainable Stitch* at Saïd Business School, Oxford from January to April and is an invited artist for "*Untitled, 2020*" at Punta Dogana in Venice curated by Thomas Houseago, Caroline Bourgeois and Muna El Fituri with the Pinault Collection from March to December 2020.

Candida Stevens, 2020.



Beneath the Tree, 2019 by Alice Kettle
Hand and machine stitch on printed fabric
93 x 167 cm

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