

CANDIDA STEVENS GALLERY

Within each other, portraits of ourselves

20 new portraits by Professor Alice Kettle



Isa, 2019 by Alice Kettle
Stitch on printed fabric, 92 x 54 cm



Mouti, 2019 by Alice Kettle
Stitch on printed fabric, 38 x 28 cm



Susi and Bri, 2019 by Alice Kettle
Drawing that will be scanned, printed and stitched, 38 x 28 cm

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 monumental textile works which employ a combination of stitch techniques using antique machines from early last century (Schiffli), to this new series of portraits that combine hand stitch and contemporary digital technology. Alice is passionate about sustaining traditional stitch ancestral knowledge, alongside new and emerging techniques, as part of the rich vocabulary of stitch. Her 'Thread Bearing Witness' project shown at The Whitworth in 2018 has encouraged contributions of stitch from communities. Building on this project she has worked with groups of women in Pakistan to co-create a work for the Karachi Biennale19. Supported with public funding from the National Lottery through Arts Council England, this work has brought together expert stitchers from villages and communities in the Sindh province. Alice is engaging with these same groups, as part of this on-going relationship to support sustainable practice and empower communities, in the creation of her new series of portraits.

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. 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 through 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 and political circumstances.

In her latest body of work Alice has drawn on her background as a painter and drawn a series of portraits. These are drawn, scanned and then printed on fabric, they are then overlaid with hand and machine stitching. She has invited a Syrian and Ugandan refugee to respond through stitch onto some of the works and others include stitching from the groups of women in Pakistan. The works examine notions of identity, of authorship and of stitch as a medium of integration across borders and technologies.