

Gaining Ground

Learning from global
craft practices

13 April – 25 June



Gaining Ground is a new exhibition at the Crafts Council Gallery that foregrounds knowledge about global craft practices that carry an understanding of, and value for, soil, biodiversity, local materials and production systems.

Nine collaborative making projects, drawn from the British Council's Crafting Futures programme, are represented in this exhibition through a display of films, photography, audio, handbooks, raw materials and craft objects. Collaboratively developed by makers, designers and researchers in Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guyana, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Philippines, and the United Kingdom, they advocate craft as a form of 'living knowledge' that shapes cultures and our relationship to nature. Although they are each informed by specific geographic, social and historical contexts, collectively these projects question how craft can inform climate action and help build a more sustainable future.

The exhibition has been designed as a site for learning, through reading, discussion and exchange. Interrogating the role of libraries and archives as prisms through which histories and narratives are constructed, the exhibition invites visitors to question how knowledge is produced and accessed. In particular, it draws attention to territories where colonialism and capitalism have threatened natural resources and prevented craft knowledge being passed onto future generations. Several projects address this through self-managed, open access digital platforms and handbooks that map and uphold heritage crafts that support social and environmental sustainability in these regions. Developed in dialogue with the makers safeguarding these practices, the tools have been designed to ensure ethical visibility of their material cultures and knowledge.

Gaining Ground brings together research from the British Council's Crafting Future initiative, a global initiative supporting research on sustainable futures through making and collaboration.

**Artisan voices:
Dialogues for sustainable practices
Argentina and India, 2019 – ongoing**

An initiative from Crafting Futures Argentina with Craft Revival Trust, India, and REDIT, a textile and apparel design network of universities in Argentina.

Building on the research carried out by the British Council Argentina in 2019 exploring sustainable futures for the craft sector, this project proposes seven principles for fairer working conditions and practices for makers and designers - Respect, Recognition, Consent, Attribution, Shared Benefits, Protection and Active Listening – outlined in a new handbook. These principles are intended to encourage the construction of a society that is more equitable, sustainable, respectful of cultural diversity and in harmony with the natural world.

britishcouncil.org.ar/programas/artes/arquitectura-diseno-moda/artisans-voices-dialogues-sustainable-practices

**Building a library for the future
Brazil, 2021 – ongoing**

A collaboration between Chief Domingos Munduruku (Belterra, Pará, Brazil) and Teal Triggs, Matt Lewis and Tai Cossich (Royal College of Art, London), Celia Matsunaga and Matheus Almeida (University of Brasília, Brazil).

This project brings together 60 Munduruku inhabitants of a village in Bragança, along the lower Tapajós river, Pará – a tributary of the Amazon – with design educators at the University of Brasília and the Royal College of Art to build a virtual library for the future. The project seeks to develop co-operative communication practices and inclusive digital tools for shared learning that 'rediscover' local craft traditions and Indigenous knowledge, and enhance access to the digital resources. This virtual platform facilitates intercultural and intergenerational dialogue, and reinforces the craft and social identities of the Munduruku.

**Cultivating an earth-based practice
Mexico, 2021 – ongoing**

A collaboration between artist Ione Maria Rojas, ceramicist Gustavo Bernal and founding director of art and ecology centre Guapamacátaro in Mexico, Alicia Marván.

In 2019, artist Ione Maria Rojas travelled to Michoacán, Mexico, to collaborate with Alicia Marván, founding director of Guapamacátaro Center for Art and Ecology, and Gustavo Bernal, a local ceramicist who digs and works with wild clay at his studio, Taller Escuela Ceramica. Through developing a series of simple hands-on workshops, their research investigated how working with wild clay can catalyse a reconnection with soil, earth and the local environment.

guapamacataro.org
[@ionemariarojas](https://twitter.com/ionemariarojas)

**Karighor archive
Bangladesh, 2021 – ongoing**

A collaboration between design collective Peut-Porter, architecture studio Paraa, the National Crafts Council of Bangladesh and textile artisans in Bangladesh and the UK.

Bangladesh has a rich history of textile crafts. However, due to the rise of digital production, globalisation, and climate change, the meaning of craftsmanship has changed. Small-scale and localised textile production in Bangladesh that relies on natural resources is becoming endangered. The Karighor archive is a tool for makers in Bangladesh to digitise their heritage craft processes and display their work. The online platform will develop gradually in dialogue with these makers alongside a UX designer to create an open and participatory process.

**Kilubukila
Democratic Republic of Congo,
2019 – ongoing**

A collaboration between designer Jess Kibulu, weavers and linguists in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Jess Kibulu is a designer based in Kinshasa whose work explores the relationship between craft, language and identity. For this project, he developed an atelier to revitalise traditional Kuba cloth textiles - a fabric woven with fibres from the leaves of the raffia palm and unique to the Democratic Republic of Congo. The atelier supports female weavers and linguists to apply Mandombé - a pan-African language - as a new pattern on traditional Kuba textiles in Kinshasa. It is traditional for Kuba textiles to be woven by men and the embroidery and appliqué work carried out by women.

kilubukila.com

**Making nature
Indonesia and the United Kingdom,
2021 – 2022**

A collaboration between design educators Prananda Luffiansyah Malasan (Institut Teknologi Bandung, Indonesia) and Nicholas Gant (University of Brighton).

This project uses open access digital technology to highlight and map craft and maker enterprises in Indonesia and the UK that consciously support nature and biodiversity and propose more symbiotic relationships with natural systems. Driven by concerns over loss of habitats and species extinction, it places craft at the centre of the climate debate and argues that it can contribute to environmental sustainability. It does so by collating, connecting and convening a new network of makers in disparate parts of the world whose practices and products minimise human impact on the environment and maximise the potential for species proliferation and biodiversity.

community21.org/partners/makingnature

**Promoting Indigenous
identity through pottery
Guyana, 2021 – ongoing**

A collaboration between activist, ceramic artist and researcher Jay Mistry, Indigenous potters and social enterprise Wabbani (Yupukari, Guyana).

This project explores how strengthening ceramic practices of Indigenous potters in the village of Fly Hill, Yupukari, Rupununi, Guyana, can promote collective identity, self-worth and economic development. Working with Makushi potters, Jay Mistry recorded different forms of ceramic traditions, their visual representations and local uses, as well as the meanings and stories they carry that link to Indigenous identities. Together, they explored the sustainable potential of distinct locally sourced clay types and decorative processes such as slips, sgraffito and wood firing.

cobracollective.org
[@glazedexpressions](https://www.instagram.com/glazedexpressions)

**Relocating the loom: Handweaving
Philippines, 2019**

A collaboration between Rachel Kelly, Michelle Stephens of Manchester School of Art with Analyn Salvador-Amores and the CordiTex project (University of the Philippines, Baguio) to explore the loss of weaving traditions within Itneg ethnolinguistic communities who live in three villages (Manabo, Abra and Mindoro and Santiago in Ilocos Sur) near to the low-lying delta of the Abra river in Northern Luzon, Philippines.

The collaborators in this project developed a Learning Tool Kit to document traditional weaving information from textiles held in the archive of the Museo Kordilyera at the University of the Philippines, Baguio. Portable looms provided a replica of the method of traditional backstrap weaving, to facilitate design testing without significant loss of material. The tools build on traditional oral teaching methods and enable weaving communities to reconnect and retake stewardship of their textile culture and heritage.

e-space.mmu.ac.uk/625578

**Womens' earth-building
revival and 'magic mud'
Nicaragua, 2019 – ongoing**

A collaboration between the women's organisation Asociación Mujeres Constructoras de Condega (AMCC), Nicaragua, carpenter and earth-builder trainer Helen Shears and lime-stabilised soil consultant Bee Rowan (Strawbuild). Their collaboration was built upon an early 1998 womens' building brigade from the UK, supporting the AMCC's reconstruction work in the wake of Hurricane Mitch.

This participatory action research project took place at AMCC's training centre in Condega, Northern Nicaragua, with the aim to reinforce the value of a supportive environment and training centre for young women and heritage craft. It proposes that stabilisation with lime could contribute to an earth building revival in Nicaragua, in the construction of durable, climate-adapted buildings. In addition, if sufficiently taught and supported, lime-stabilised earth building could provide economic resilience and social support for women within their communities.

mujeresconstructoras.org/en/home

**Gaining Ground is curated by
Ligaya Salazar**

Crafts Council Gallery

44a Pentonville Road
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Opening hours

Wednesday – Saturday
11am – 5pm
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