

INTERNAL LANDSCAPES

by **Dima Karout**

This book is dedicated to the people who decide to say yes,
those who work with all their hearts.

STARTING / ENDING POINTS

In December 2021 Dima Karout, a London-based Arts Curator and Creative Director, was invited to take up residence at Lewisham Council. Selected via an open call as part of the Mayor's London Borough of Culture, the aim was for Dima to connect with policy makers, observe and comment on how decisions are made, test new ways of connecting residents with Council policies, and explore the intersections of migration and democracy. Her research focused on responding to the Council's key theme of sanctuary, to act as a provocateur within that context and work closely with those delivering Lewisham's vision as the UK's first Borough of Sanctuary.

Dima's project initiated conversations with different Council teams, community libraries and art institutions, aiming to encourage thinking from different perspectives to inform a fairer and more inclusive service. It opened up a creative investigation into places that are meaningful to Lewisham residents, sparked borough-wide conversations about how the places we inhabit contribute to our identity, and invited people to experience and reflect on how we create a welcoming, safe and inclusive society.

At the start, when asked about her vision, Dima said, "in a world constantly shifting balance, it is important that we ground ourselves within a vision of solidarity and welcome. This collaboration with the Council and communities will shine a light on the voices and actions of different local residents and institutions contributing to the harmony and wellbeing of Lewisham. Using art as a platform, together we will reflect, exchange knowledge and collaborate. We will work to adopt and empower a culture of generosity, respect and inclusion".

During her year-long residency, Dima has focused on the importance of partnerships. She designed and delivered a programme of creative conversations and curated walks, as well as printmaking and creative writing workshops run in collaboration with Crofton Park, Corbett, Manor House and Sydenham Community Libraries, with the support of volunteers from Lewisham Local.

Inspired by her research and encounters with over 25 organisations and 100 individuals, Dima designed this book. It assembles some of the stories, poems, prints, learning and experiences that this project has yielded from across Lewisham and further afield. It contains reflections from local people and partners on their experiences within their neighbourhood, and glimpses into the new and meaningful collaborations and connections that have been fostered by this project. Copies of this book will be offered to all participants and libraries and will stay as a legacy in the borough.

Dima is grateful for the support of Arts Council England whose recent award of a Project Grant allows her to expand the reach of her work, engage with more residents, and offer a new community building programme. A Learning Lab, produced in partnership with and led by Counterpoints Arts, will offer a space to deepen reflections, share learning and create new knowledge with Council members, the GLA team, fellow creatives and art and culture institutions.

Dima is also curating and producing a collective art exhibition that will be presented in partnership with the Horniman Museum and Gardens opening in November 2022.

THIS PROJECT / THIS BOOK

We Are Lewisham was the starting point for my research, and I have returned time after time to this phrase. I was interested in revealing the shared place that brings us together. The 'we' ignited my curiosity. In this project 'we' suggests something that binds us together, an elusive and inescapable connection.

In my Creative Investigation into Lewisham's meaningful places and how they inspire and shape its people, I wanted to bring locals together to talk about the place we all share rather than the diversity of our differences. I also wanted to highlight the generous people who actively contribute to the wellbeing of the borough. I based my proposal on neurologist and psychiatrist Boris Cyrulnik's work, into how our environments are sculpting our brains and contributing to who we are. This project reveals how the places we inhabit imprint themselves on our personal and collective identities.

The encounters you learn about here demonstrate art's potential to explore that unquantifiable territory. Its power in creating meaningful human connections, moments of reflection, and offering places where perspectives can be exchanged and conversations expanded. Where the understanding of what community is, what welcome means, what generosity allows and how sanctuary feels, can be developed between people. And where the wider meaning of sanctuary can be shaped and implemented.

This book came out of that investigation. It is a glimpse into moments that were created and shared over this past year, into the internal landscapes we discovered and explored together, revealing the layers of a place and what is held in the hearts of its locals.

This project and the community building programme we offered was designed for Lewisham residents, institutions and Council. My main focus was the process and for the project to spread horizontally, take shape and gain meaning through people's contributions and as we go. Designed to include and connect, our project was created in the spirit of promoting joyful collaborations, openness towards others, generosity and respect. We crafted a space that made people feel safe, interested and inspired and this allowed the sharing to come from an honest place. The intimacy of a workshop hosting a smaller number of participants provided space for longer, deeper conversations.

And this book was created in that same open spirit. Its combination of styles reflects the collection of experiences, backgrounds and the richness of Lewisham.

A project gains meaning when its life is expanded beyond the boundaries of a final production. And our Lewisham project, that I offer you a glimpse into in this book, is taking on a life of its own, and starting to grow. Over 100 voices and perspectives shaped this outcome, all of whom I engaged with personally. They informed and enriched this positive narrative of a place at a moment in time, its internal and external landscapes, and the people who contribute to its rich social fabric with all its colours, sounds, smells and textures. I hope you sit with these stories, places, people, and get inspired by them. I did, greatly.

Manor House.

They froze destruction outside the library
Surrounded it by nature.
Death and life standing guard
Outside of knowledge.
Echoes of a home I'd left
Many a country ago
Demanding that I do not forget.
There was a beauty in this.
A home in knowing that tools of pain
Can be repurposed.
I know it was my purpose to make
Something here.
A life... Art...
There's a power in creating
And I needed a place to create.
This place felt like a home
It was time I made one.

Story and Print by Dima
Poem by Tyrone Lewis
The Poetry Takeaway

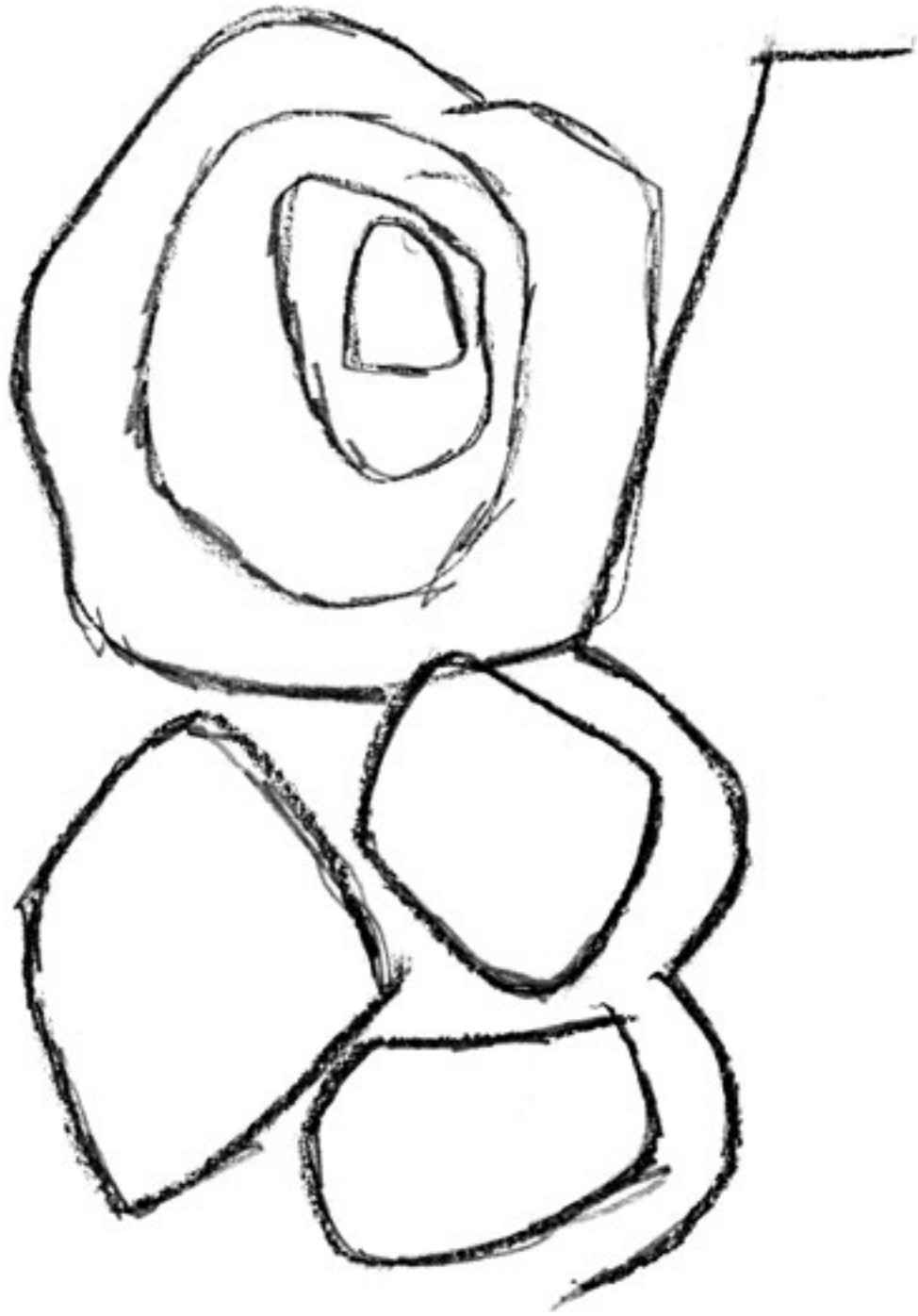


by Dima Karout

My story with Lewisham goes back to 2017, when I first moved to London. That year was a challenging one on many fronts. Leaving Montreal to start my life in the UK, a series of serious health issues and a deep exhaustion from the ongoing Syrian conflict. I felt exiled from my own body and country.

I started a quest to find an art space. In July, I was invited to view an art studio at Manor House in Hither Green. The moment I crossed the main entrance and stepped into the front garden, I was stopped in my tracks. There was a cannon directed at me - two of them, in fact. It hit me as an unexpected sign of destruction, and left a deeply uncomfortable impression. I walked into the scene and paused for a moment: in front of the two cannons, stood a tree. Full of green leaves, full of life. I was standing in the space in between a symbol of death and a proud tree, defying it.

And so, for the next three years, the art space on the first floor does become my art home. Every morning, across the different seasons, I will glimpse into that scene from above. The tree will suffer, lose its leaves, become a skeleton, and the whole scene will become grim. Then spring will slip in, life will flourish again and I witness what resilience is. It has made me reflect on the cycle of one human's journey, and how most people's existence can be understood as a suspension in vast darkness balanced by a glimpse of light. It also made me realise that humans are like trees, they follow the light.



CROFTON PARK COMMUNITY LIBRARY

Silvana Altamore,

Library Manager

The first thing that drew me to the library was the building itself. I had just moved to the area and felt that the library really had something special. I thought that volunteering would help me make connections and find out more about the place where I had come to live. Since then, I have learned and discovered a lot more than I expected.

Crofton Park Community Library is a free and safe space kept open by the generosity of our volunteers, and every day I am in awe of all they do. Every day I am also made aware of how much work is needed to connect people and build healthy communities. We help with what we know, and we try to find ways to support and inspire. We have a programme of exhibitions, cultural events, book launches, and creative workshops that we offer on a weekly and monthly basis.

Every time we open our doors it is a reminder how important it is that we take care of each other, and that this is what keeps the community together and improves our lives. Long live the library, long live Crofton Park Community Library!

Deptford Fore Shore.

This river has had boats going up and down it for years. I like to think the water remembers. Holds memories in the waves. Keeps echoes of history in every ripple.

There's a calmness here. A moment of mindfulness. Gather yourself in the quiet of the universe, here. There's a serenity hiding away from the loudness of Lewisham. This borough holds so many wonders in its heart but here, the stillness resonates.

The past brings itself to shore here, along with litter and pebbles and a multitude of things you can't help but pick up. Cleaning around and cleansing your inner self with the silence. You can't help but want to look after this place. Longing for the walls, the demolished building, you feel the height, the scale and how imposing it all is. Quiet and peaceful, strange but thrilling. Playing in the background of dog walks. The place where nobody is, the place where I feel the need to be.

Story and Print by Rachel
Text by Tyrone Lewis



Hilly Fields in Brockley.

Every day, no matter the weather,
From my house to Hilly Fields, I walk to my tree.
Gnarled bark and silver bellied. A soft, green explosion.
I see her wink at me or bow, greeting an old friend.
Her branches are curious, they reach out taking in everything.
I circle her every single day, slowly, taking my time.
I notice the swaying of her leaves, fascinating little dancers.
I take a picture. Every day.
She wears every colour of the seasons.
And I find something attractive about her every time.
Connecting to her, it builds my meaning.
We go on journeys of our own.
And since there's so much to cry about,
we laugh and sing and dance.
I used to think a cup of tea and a chat fixes everything.
Now, during lockdown, it's walking, and her. My routine.
Wind, rain, and brown earth.
Bursting with conversation.
My tongue makes full her whisperings.
She knows all my secrets.
Her sturdy makes me strong.

Story and Print by Silvana
Text by Bex Gordon



Nadir

Fresh cut grass, crunchy leaves, pines, lavender,
Can you smell the nature's aroma?
If I were small like a particle I would be floating in the air,
Pointing at the clouds.
How beautiful will be the park from here,
How many structures and paths come together in one place
Different origins, same direction.

Nadir is a term used in astronomy but also in cinematography:
here it indicates a perspective, seen from the top. My print
reflects the concept of roads in the park seen from above.

Story and Print by Nadia
Text by Nadia



Telegraph Hill Park.

When I had my first baby, I felt clueless. Alone, I stumbled through those early days, boundless waking, bell-heavy in the night's song. One day, going through Telegraph Hill Park, I saw a little gathering of new mothers going into a building. Light chatter dancing through the air. I didn't know anyone.

Afraid of how inexperienced in motherhood I was, thinking that I am the only one who lacks the knowledge, my invisible line of fear ran around the park like a barrier, a thick wall. I wanted so to enter. But I couldn't.

I started to observe, gently. I walked past regularly, not so far away, but a distance like a ravine; a growing barrier I could not cross. Every week, I walked around the group listening to their voices. I stayed outside.

Until, the leaves turning orange, I painted fat gold courage on my chest, and... I went in. A crossing that changed my life. Taken gently by the hand, I was embraced. Not just peace, but also tea, conversation, joy – those women carried my mind away from postnatal depression. They understood me. Once I stepped into my unknown, I realised just how good it all can be.

And when others did not see it, they tried to close the play club. But we lobbied. And here it stays. I use all parts of myself to tell my friends this story whenever we walk past.

I name the one sure thing: community.

Story and Print by B.R.
Text by Bex Gordon



Blythe Hill Fields.

It's bird songs and sirens.
Car horns, phone calls and wind.
It's pavement cracked under feet.
It's mud and grass.
It's a city in the distance.
It's the world stretching out. Rising up,
daring you to conquer it.

Tree trunk fingers bursting out
begging to be touched.
Barked flesh waiting for skin contact.
It's where the world stops.
Allows moments to breathe.
Invites in a new perspective.
Let thoughts blow away on the next gust.
It's a community of strangers
gathered in communion here to worship
the parts of London that dared to not
get a concrete makeover.
It's where brutalism meets beauty.
Revelling in the bittersweet duality.
It's people.
It's home.
It's Blythe.

Story and Print by Rachel
Text by Tyrone Lewis





Allotment in SE14.

Young enough to believe nothing will entertain her,
She pouts. Her father moulds red kidney beans,
Potatoes sprout in wet earth. It's 9am, and drizzling.
She'd rather be in bed.

His happy fingers, years before unwritten
Recipes were lost, now dent the pumpkin skins.
They're ready.

There is a country in each of us, he says,
so the allotment
Speaks his language.

Gifts straight from Jamaica.

Tomato leaves, fuzzy and pungent.

A pumpkin when ripe is called fit, he says,
and she laughs until a little
teenage awkwardness is set free.

They eat.

Old enough now to remember.

She was found in this here Eden,
amongst the green vines and flushed cheeks.

The vegetables simmer;

Her emotions cool enough to handle.

She grows it all, for the memory of him.

She cooks for anyone

Who needs a piece of home.

Story and Print by Lorna
Text by Bex Gordon

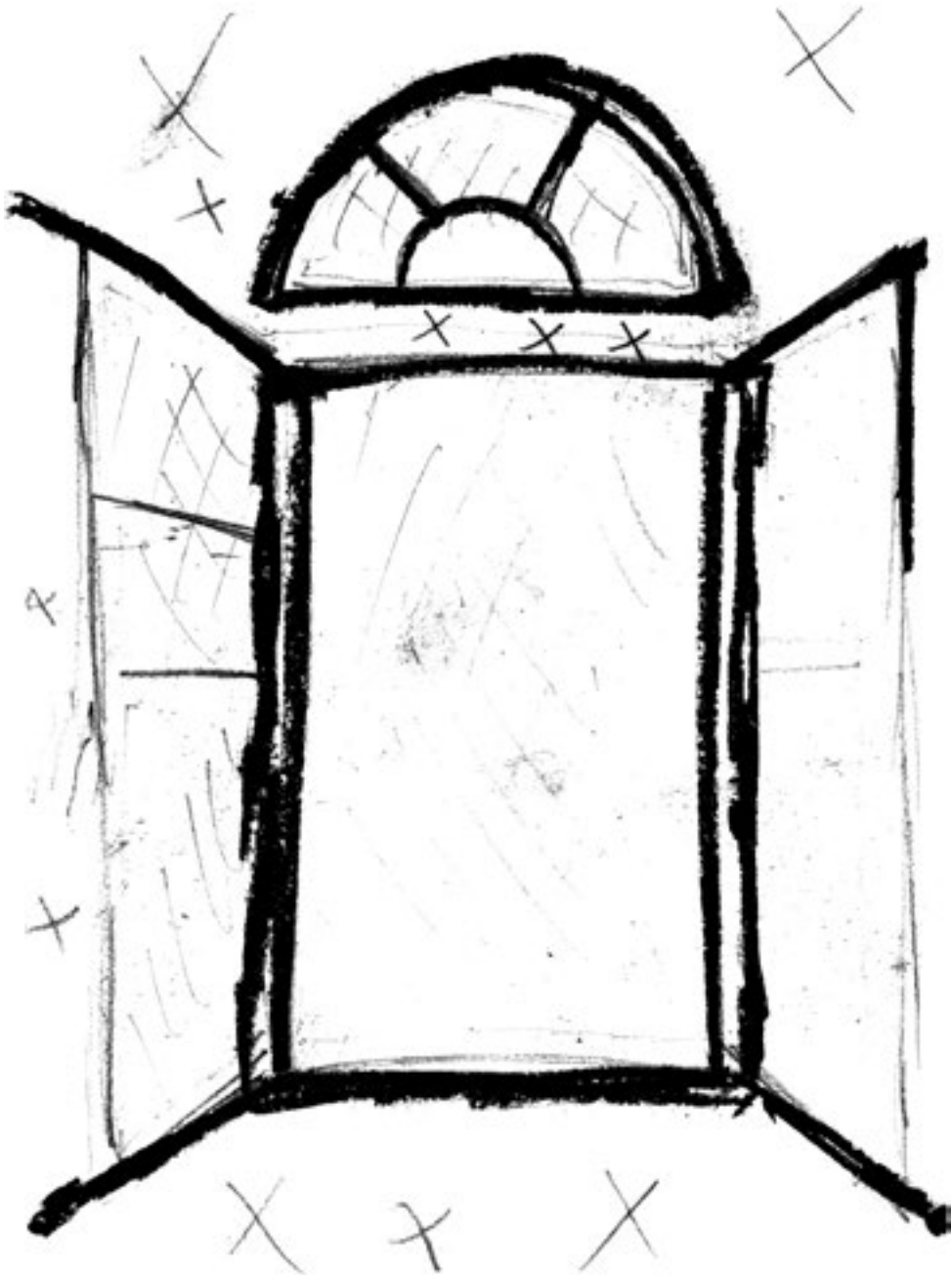
by Lorna

Four years after adding my name to my local allotment's waiting list, I was given keys to a plot with a shed on 15th March 2020 - five days before London's first lockdown.

Plot 44 became the place I reconnected with nature by preparing the land to nurture seeds. Meanwhile, our planet was able to heal – temporarily – while we allowed it to catch its own breath. No planes or trains meant bird choruses were heard throughout the day, and seasons to come.

Generous plot holders shared their seedlings. These ranged from purple sprouting broccoli, courgettes, red cabbages, Brussel sprouts, tomatoes, potatoes and of course pumpkins! Good weather coupled with the right balance of advice yielded a magnificent harvest, which I was able to share with my family, friends and neighbours.

Pumpkins in particular became popular with many people. Boiled, steamed or roasted, their fluffy, sweet, colourful presence on a dish or in a bowl is a wonder to behold as to what can be grown in the fertile soil in SE14. Here's to the many harvests to come.



CORBETT COMMUNITY LIBRARY

Caroline Lister,

Project Development Manager

Corbett Community Library has always drawn me like a magnet, with its beautiful Grade II listed building topped by a stunning glass dome, which mysteriously can't be seen from the road – a quirk that I rather like! The dome floods the central area of the library with light bringing the outside in.

Our library and community centre is powered by an amazing team of volunteers from the local community. People volunteer with us for all sorts of reasons and we couldn't operate without them. Apart from the obvious book loan service, hundreds of people of all ages visit every week to attend community hub sessions as diverse as our toddlers' rhyme time group to our always-busy online support service, which has just been awarded Lewisham Legend status for the tireless work of its two volunteers. Our community would be a much poorer place without all our services which would not run without our hard-working volunteers.

Rachel Braithwaite,

Project Development Manager

When you walk into the Corbett Community Library (CCL) you immediately have a sense this is a special, yet relaxed place. We are a friendly welcoming team who go above and beyond to make our customers feel safe and looked after. It's not just a library!

As well as usual library services we offer a range of regular activities and one-off large scale events. On a daily basis it is a hub for the community in which to gain knowledge, read, use the PCs, hang out, be given support or learn something new. When we have an event the space becomes vibrant and buzzing – that's when I really love it!

I've been working here 3 years now and I love the fact it has heart and soul. I feel completely at ease here as it's such a friendly and chilled environment. We are also blessed with the best volunteers, who each individually bring their own story and are a pleasure to work with.

Corbett Library.

I carved the door of the Corbett Community Library where I volunteer.

The Library, the community space, the art hub.
The second home of my scattered thoughts.
The place where anyone can hide and rest,
no matter where they come from,
no matter how heavy and big their luggage is.
The safety haven. The shelter.
The sanctuary of all lost souls.

The door... this door is always open to welcome you.

Story and Print by Arek
Text by Arek



Deptford Wharf.

There is something so powerful about water. From the mundane but necessary drinking of it, to watering plants, to bodies of water inspiring the emergence of cities. Water that carries boats. Water that becomes rivers. That becomes oceans. There's something mesmerising about the flow of it all.

These curved lines are a symbol of the flow. Interconnected. Mimicking waves, passing itself off as DNA, as lives. Evoking the flow of memories through time.

Until I was 19, I used to live by the sea. When London became a home, the Thames captured my imagination. I needed to reconnect to the water, and I ventured to discover Deptford Wharf thanks to my love for photography. I found someone who worked with boats. Converted them to make them bigger. Ready to return to water. I felt peace.

Everything returns to the water.

Story and Print by Caroline
Text by Tyrone Lewis

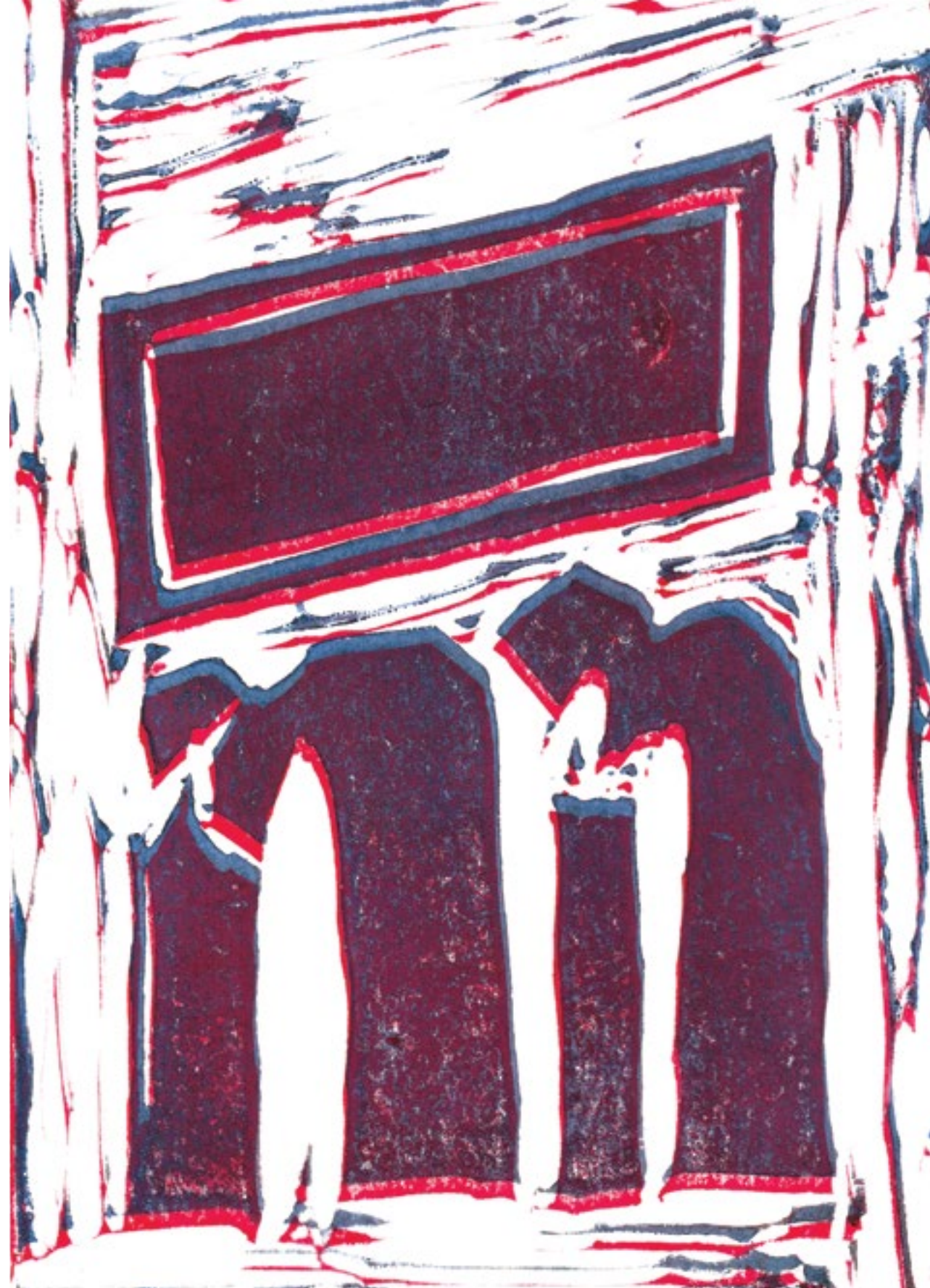


Bus 436.

There are few things in life that are constant.
Deaths, taxes and the 436 bus.
From Lewisham to Battersea
you'll be hard pressed to find
a more consistent partner.
Gentrification may change the streets,
people may move. I may move
but the 436 will stay the same.

Time is slipping badly and you'll risk the school crowd.
Stuck in a sea of uniforms
suffocated by secondary school spillovers.
But if you time it right
you're in for a Shiba Inu delight.
Proudly perched storefront in a beauty shop.
See, there's rituals and routines to this.
Aim for upstairs, behind the stairs.
It's all about the logistics. Train yourself
till this becomes second nature.
That whether 1pm or am
you can do this.
After a hectic day,
And months filled with reflections
About moving between countries
And your own evolving identity
This double decker dynasty
can be your home.
Find safety in the seatbelt-less seat.

Story and Print by Anoushka
Text by Tyrone Lewis



Deptford Streets.

The walls in Deptford are covered in layers of history. Each texture is a memory of the generations that have come before. The streets hold all the stories that have been lived here.

Growing up in Deptford was difficult, and it took growing up to realise how important our experiences are. How this neighbourhood shaped the person I am today.

Story and Print by Kellie
Text by Tyrone Lewis



River Quaggy.

I ask the river if she will always be this glorious.
A meandering ribbon of blue, a sparkling June,
We have so much in common.

As clear as crystal every morning.
Gentle, tender, ancient; children laugh with her by day.
By night, trembling lovers fall in love with her eyes.

Wild and strong.
Limitless, with no corners or edges,
I coaxed her back to spongy banks from concrete walls.

Spending time with her is healing.
The community crafts homemade boats,
they swell on her stomach,
Full of the warm afternoon.

The moment comes when she will disperse
into the ocean, and she will bow to meet the sea.
Until then, with her neighbourly breeze,

Come, see how she dances. Playful,
Elemental, dancing before a grave,
Nodding to a memory.

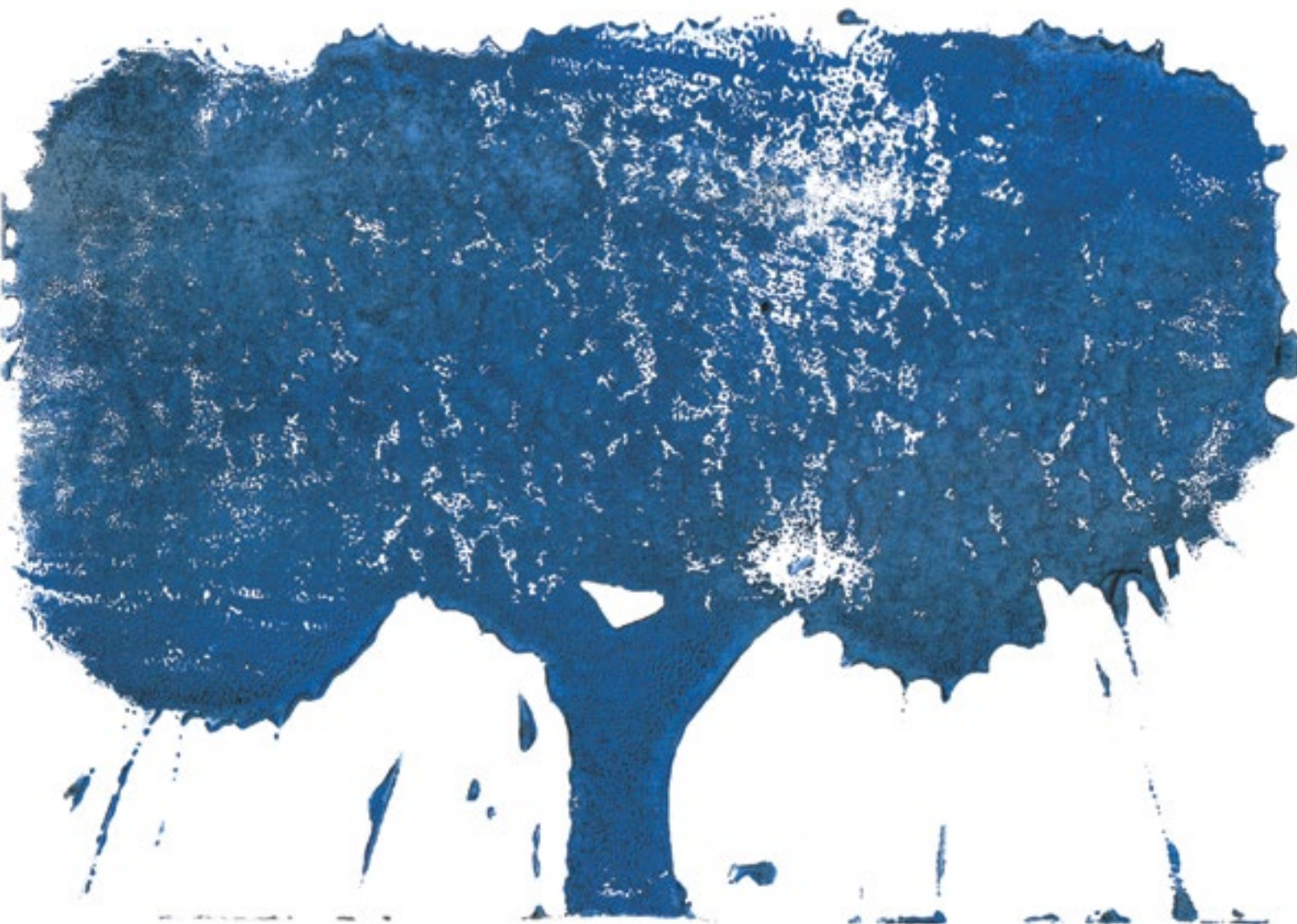
Story and Print by Paul
Text by Bex Gordon



by Paul

My design is inspired by shapes from the River Quaggy, from leaves and fish to the changing patterns on the surface of the water itself, as the river flows through Lewisham borough from Chinbrook Meadows in Grove Park all the way to Deptford where it enters the mighty River Thames.

In June 2017, the Lewisham community gathered at Chinbrook Meadows during the 'Float Your Boats' event to celebrate the life of Jo Cox. This is where the first major restoration of the River Quaggy took place twenty years ago. Everyone assembled to honour her and designed boats and crafts made from different materials, and they placed them all at the starting point, to float with the stream of water. It wasn't a race, it was a shared moment where you could feel that we are all next to each other and accompanying each other on a journey.



Mountsfield Park.

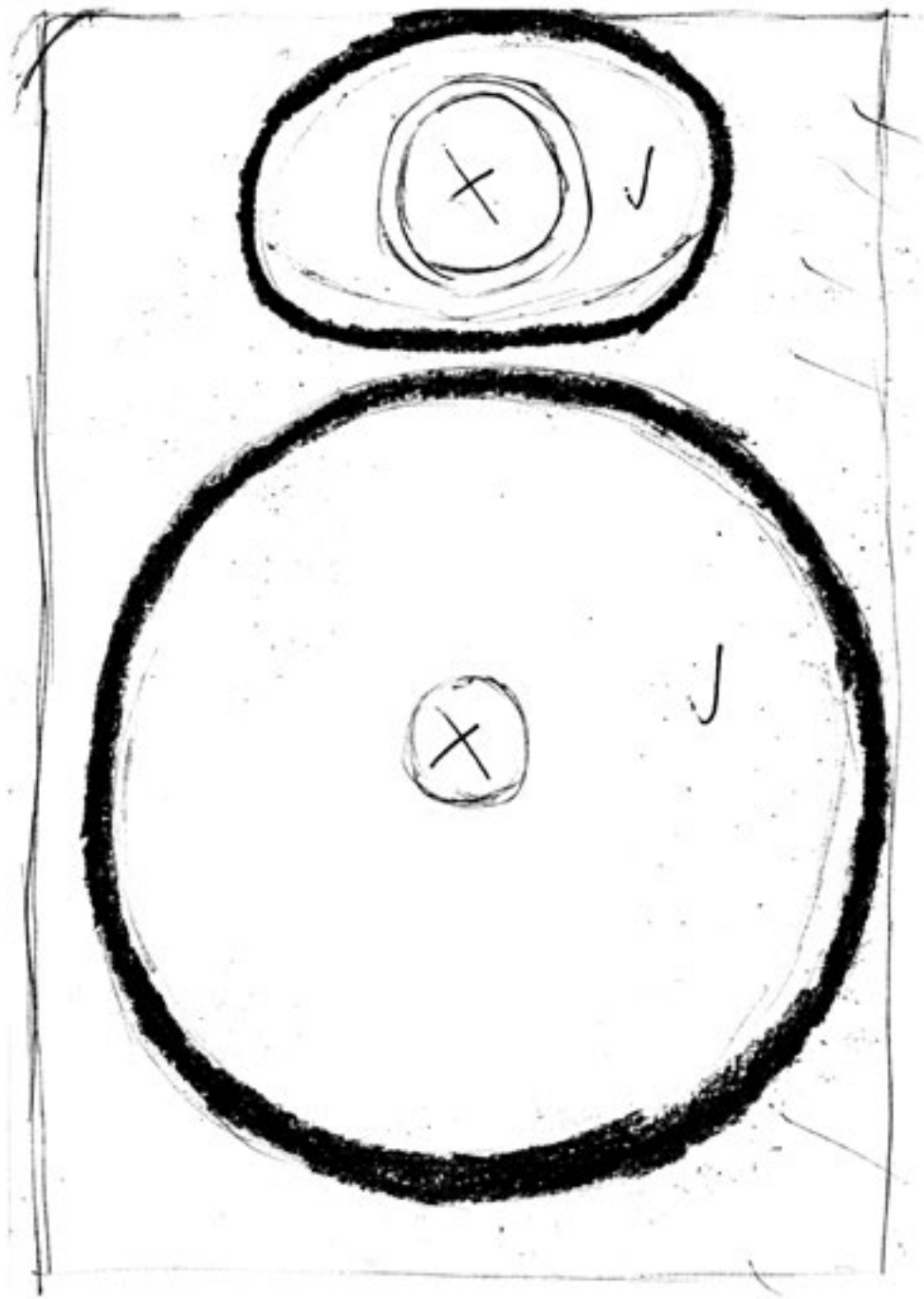
When life is getting you low, go to the library.
Inspect a quaint opinion,
Hold a century in your hand.
It might not feel so scary.

When life is getting you low, volunteer.
Crack a new day wide open like a runny egg,
Still your fragile heart, sharing stories over bread,
You might have a little less to fear.

When life is getting you low,
walk around your nearest park.
Stretch out over a view,
The blue and silver twinkles of the city.
You might not feel so dark.

When life is getting you low,
sit under your favourite tree.
Observe how it captures the light.
Let nature be a balm to your soul.
You may remember you've found home.

Story and Print by Cordelia
Text by Bex Gordon



MANOR HOUSE COMMUNITY LIBRARY

Simon Higgs,

Library Manager

If you try and distil a library into a paragraph or two then you will undoubtedly end up doing a disservice to the very thing you are trying to champion, for there are fewer things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our libraries.

Part of the reason that it can be a struggle for libraries to raise their profile and their funding is simply because, like so many of the books on the shelves they house, a library is so many different things to different people that it cannot be distilled into a single thought or position.

For some it is just a place to borrow books, for others somewhere to find information. These are, of course, the roots of a library, but stories are not just words printed on a page: they are therapy, they are lessons, they are heritage and soul, a way of rising up and educating. Libraries say - come in, stay as long as you wish, pay nothing in return, but please be quiet and calm if you are able, so that the rest of us might enjoy, and learn, and understand too.

Libraries are a gateway to other worlds and to the parts of this world that seem impossible to reach; they are help, they are light, and they are home. I fell into loving libraries and working in libraries by accident, but have seen the human story of how they can change people's lives for better and forever.

Goldsmiths Tavern.

A place is not just streets and buildings. It is the people in the space. It is a feeling. It's the speakers from a tavern in New Cross that no longer exists: the important thing is that it did once. That its energy is engraved in our memory. The streets will change, the people will change. They'll constantly change and yet keep being the same. You'll constantly change and yet keep being the same. You'll still remember the sound from a pulsating speaker and it doesn't matter what the truth says, you believe every memory of the beats.

When you leave, you'll take a snapshot of the place as you knew it at that exact time. Remember how you belonged in the culture and within the geography. The space will change because you have left. But when you come back, you'll call it home. You'll know that whilst the buildings are different, you are different, some lived moments will stay within.

Home is a feeling of connection.

Story and Print by Nancy
Text by Nancy and Tyrone Lewis



Lewisham Train Station.

When I first arrived here, Lewisham Station used to be rough. I don't know if it was me, my perspective on life or the station itself, but time has changed my feelings on it.

Now I take a moment to reflect on the transitory nature of it all. The movement. Trains passing through. People passing through. It has all left an impression on me. The energy, the flow. The wheels running on the tracks. Turning and turning towards a destination.

Story and Print by Heidi
Text by Tyrone Lewis



Catford Gyratory.

Little known fact:

Lewisham has a Black Hole.

Years ago scientists called it 'Catford Gyratory'.

When I moved here, I could feel
how much it sucked in life.

Captured all those stuck in traffic.

I could feel how depressing it was.

Today,

I can feel its pulling power.

See how hope gravitates around it.

Have felt the life in this place orbit
this Gyratory. Felt the energy

Catford has to offer

all circulating here.

Story and Print by Phil
Text by Tyrone Lewis



Hilly Fields.

Hilly Fields is the first thing I see when I open the door in the morning and the last thing I see when I return home. Just as the park marks my everyday routine, it has been a constant in my life. It is where I used to play with my siblings and friends. Where we had big picnics with local families. Where we rolled down the hills. Where we all met up to ring in the new year and watch the fireworks.

Returning to London after 10 years away, Hilly Fields continues to hold an important place in my life. Now, it is where I go to enjoy the sun, the fresh air, to clear my head, to think, to sit and read, to call friends. My many comforting memories here and this grounding green presence brings a strong sense of belonging.

Here it feels like home.

Story and Print by Helena
Text by Bex Gordon



Goldsmiths University Richard Hoggart Building.

There is such an interesting balance of things in London and you can see that in Lewisham.

This is a place where so much is happening all the time and sometimes it can be overwhelming. This city is massive and all-consuming... but also has so many places where you can enjoy the quiet. The nothing. The negative.

There's a negative space outside of Goldsmiths' Richard Hoggart Building. It's usually an empty place but this negative space became so important during this year's strike. A transitional space for many strike activities and people gathering. This negative space became a place of rethinking urban issues in South East London, and I have learned a lot about New Cross' reggae history and New Cross fire protests by participating in these events.

This space feels empty and only formed by simple boundaries, but at the same time the physical facilities encourage you to sit down. I've been thinking of how emptiness can create possibilities and conversations.

One year in Lewisham feels very short, but my time as an international student has connected me with this space. A place for exchanging ideas, making new friends, and talking about hometowns that are far away and yet so close.

Story and Print by Jasmine
Text by Jasmine and Tyrone Lewis



The Horniman Museum.

Planting a bulb with her lips,
She returns home. Intricate
Iron patterns and
Glass ceilings.

There is no more to
Living than here, the smell of Amsterdam,
The gardens of Tivoli, Sunday farmer's market
A kind of worship, a holy familiarity.

She comes here to travel.
Her camera tending to the tulips, the tarragon,
The South African grasslands,
Pink petals full of bees.

A mathematician, she reads the formulas
Of each new leaf, passion blooming
The rich stench of soil.

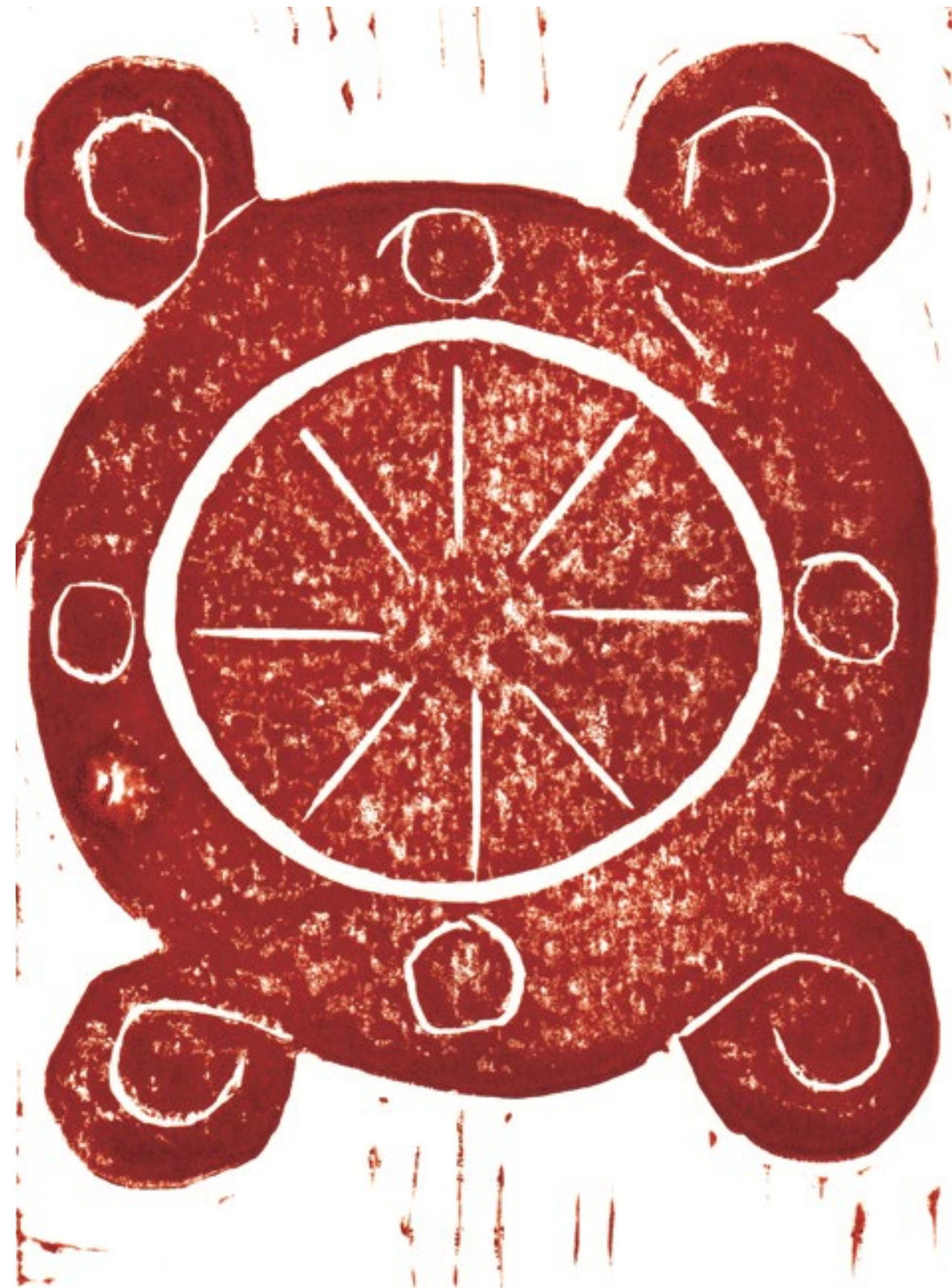
Once, she felt the arid land
Of days still and smothering.
There was no swell of rain
On the desert of illness.

She does not tell me how it felt.
Was she a garden, then?
Or inside an aquarium,
A fish afloat in a tank, alongside the ferns,

Standing on the bones of winter,
Tells me to remember.

This garden is alive, pungent with vitality.
Growing healthier every day.
Even when the most cautious of farmers had predicted
A flood.

Story and Print by Sanchia
Text by Bex Gordon



by Sanchia

I always gravitate back towards the Horniman Museum, and have enjoyed going for over 30 years. I've watched the buildings and gardens evolve over that time and I never fail to find something new and interesting to look at. It feels regenerative to go there: it is one of Lewisham's great places, definitely my favourite, and I adore spending time there!

The Horniman glass conservatory building and some of the cast iron panelling details were the inspiration for my print. I just love those ornate patterns within the panels... such fine detail, the symmetry draws me in and I find myself mesmerised!

We called my carving 'Horniman Evolving'.



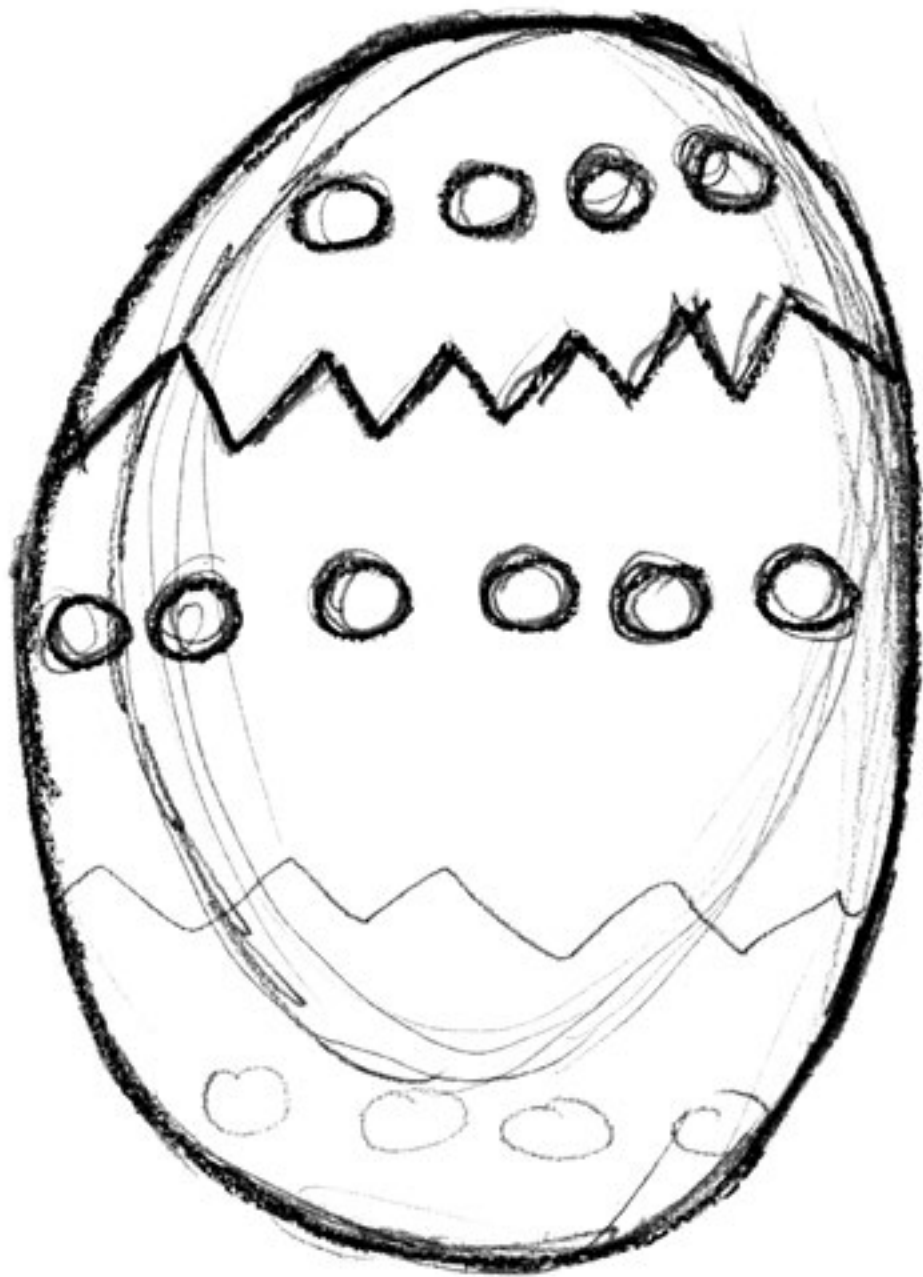
Hilly Fields Anna's Bench.

When I was a baby, my parents lived in a flat on Montague Avenue that was owned by an elderly woman called Anna. Anna looked after me as a baby, supporting my very young parents. Her name was my first word.

Sadly, we lost touch with Anna, and I only remembered her through photos of the two of us together.

Over lockdown, I was taking a walk through Hilly Fields with my family and came across a bench that is dedicated to her, just a few metres from where we lived together. It felt very special that we could sit on this bench, and pay tribute to someone who gave so much support and love to our family.

Story and Print by Eve
Text by Eve



**SYDENHAM
COMMUNITY LIBRARY**

Simon Higgs,

Library Manager

I started managing Forest Hill Library in the autumn of 2016 and then moved to oversee Manor House in Spring 2017, adding Sydenham Library in late 2019. Since then I have been operating as Director of the three libraries. Each building is different, and has its own quirks and unique set of users and functions, but they share qualities of being open, safe and welcoming places to visit, driven by a great deal of affection and dedication from teams of hard working volunteers and staff.

Marianna Datsenko was co-managing Sydenham Library at the time of the workshops, and she supported promoting and hosting the Creative Conversation at Sydenham Library with a team of wonderful volunteers.

Turnham Infant School.

I started my teaching career at Turnham Infant School in 1971. New and young, I lacked the experience. A class of children were given to me, but I didn't know how to deal with them. It was scary. My frustration acted as a mirror. I cried. They shouted.

Until Ruth. A magician. Her tender spells spun the most challenging into spider's webs – shining, skilled. With her, a small group of restless children sit decorating Easter eggs to take home and amaze their families. I had no idea until then what they were capable of.

She inspired me to continue teaching, and taught me how to hold space. Convinced me that this was the career for me - all I needed was belief. Tough kids soften into their self-worth. Days are full of opportunities made just inside their reach; they are the loudest colour of them on the spectrum.

Ruth showed me that even with the most difficult situations, we can do beautiful things. She guided me to form a special interest in those children who found school difficult. In that building, my adult professional life started. A significant place where we were able to make a difference.

Story and Print by Pat
Text by Bex Gordon



Deptford Market.

Did you know that this market contains the world? It may only exist in Deptford but when you walk it, you feel all the cultures. They each have a stall. Language lullabies being sung down the streets as dialects dance to ears.

This market reminds me of a home from the other side of the world. Sellers bargaining, negotiating in a language I was born into. Fish smelling like childhood. Workers greeting me, their native tongues keeping conversations flowing.

Have you ever walked through a memory on a regular basis? Every time I come here, the smells, the culture, the people... they are a light that reminds me of where my journey started.

Burning red flows through my body, reminding me of where I came from and where I will be back in a few months.

Story and Print by Cherelle
Text by Tyrone Lewis



Fordham Park.

I run youth groups in Lewisham, working to support young teenagers to develop themselves and their communities. During Covid, when we were allowed to meet, we had to be outdoors and we would meet in Fordham Park. The group is made up of some big personalities, and we laugh a lot together, even though it can be chaotic. Fordham became a central spot for us as a youth group, and we were surrounded by people in their homes on every side. It felt like we were really at the heart of our neighbourhood.

I live in New Cross now. Everything about New Cross is connected to that park for me. It is a central place and filled with the joy of meeting up with a bunch of energetic young people who are navigating their communities and identities in the same postcode as me. I pass through the park pretty much every day, it's part of my journey both to exploring London, and to home.

Story and Print by Sophie
Text by Sophie



Brockley Station Community Garden.

How did I not notice this before?
Alone in Brockley Station Community Garden
At sunrise. Dancing in the council's flowerbed.

How did I not notice this before?
Carrying his home on his back,
Two bobbing limbs from his head!
Hunting through heavy grass;
What are you searching for?

How did I not notice this before?
Silly and slimy on my palm.
Gentle, curious.
I'll make him a home with me;
A lockdown friend.

How did I not notice this before?
His passion for a cucumber slice, a siren;
Suddenly, a lettuce leaf in my garden is
A reunion around the green
A community meal for all the creatures.

How did I not notice this before?
How nourishing to interact with nature.
How privileged I am.

Story and Print by Tony
Text by Bex Gordon



Giffin Street Deptford Market.

There's always a unique energy to a market. The stall owners, the shoppers, the passers by, the locals, the tourists all join into one big movement. There's just so much life happening at a market that the energy is... inevitable.

The market outside The Deptford Albany puts the reality of everyday life next to the magic of the theatre. The place offered a sense of the possibilities of what can happen on the streets. I think it's where the blend of real and imagined happened in such a big way for me and Teatro Vivo.

I was part of a performance there, *The Odyssey*. Outside, playing a homeless man asking for money, the people heading to the theatre treated me in very different ways. Once inside, the ones who had behaved badly gasped and were visibly ashamed when they realised later that I was part of the show.

The roller-skating kids around had never seen theatre and asked if the director was Homer. They were intrigued. We let them come in and see the final scene, and when we restaged it a few months later we found them and they became the messengers of the gods.

I feel like their return was... inevitable.

Story and Print by Mark
Text by Mark and Tyrone Lewis



Broadway Theatre.

I am connected to Lewisham as part of my work with London Borough of Culture, being part of this project that is looking at how the 'place' responds to climate policy and ideas of welcome and sanctuary.

My first and recent trip to Catford was through Catford Bridge Station, then walking over, using my temporary mobility crutch, to the high street. If there was any expectation it would have been of another high street, bustling with life. What was unexpected was the site of the Broadway Theatre with its strong vertical column face. It reminded me of brutalist, socialist architecture.

I am very familiar with this kind of built environment, having grown up in Yugoslavia in the '70s and '80s. It felt viscerally familiar, and my first overriding reaction was 'it smells of socialism around here'. This initial feeling was entirely positive, like a greeting.



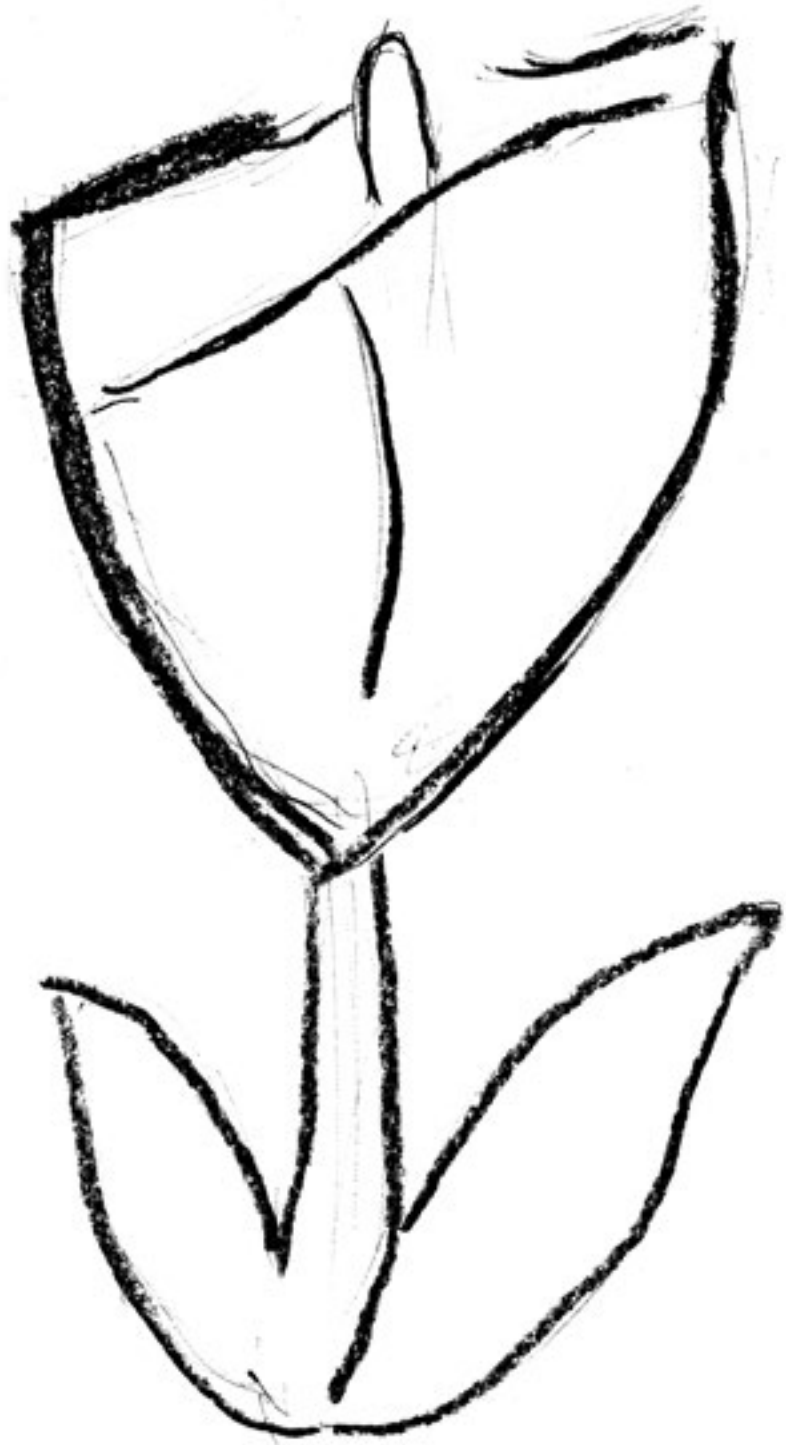
Story and Print by Dijana
Text by Dijana



The Venue.

Every room in the Venue has a unique decor,
Like the different themes of my life in Lewisham.
Life is everywhere
If you just know where to look for it.
Over there, my son first learnt to swim,
His fearful eyes rose up an octave
When he got the hang of it.
Down that road, he took his first steps,
Now he strides wherever he goes.
And over on that street is the Irish bar
Where I went on a terrible date.
And look, there's where I found out I was pregnant.
Witness us, our creative and diverse communities,
The old and the young,
Building lives here,
Building meaning.

Story and Print by Steph
Text by Bex Gordon



**BOW ARTS STUDIOS
CATFORD DEK**

Dima Karout,

Arts Curator and Creative Director

Beyond hosting our creative workshops, and work meetings, Bow Arts Catford Dek Studio enriched my research and understanding of the social fabric in Lewisham. From my 4th floor corner studio in the old Town Hall, I could glimpse into Lewisham's landscape and its busy streets, and keep an eye on Lawrence House, the Council Building!

During my few months' stay, I was grateful for the spontaneous conversations with Henry from Bow Arts who showed me around, and fellow creatives who occupied other studios on my floor. Mat the architect, Karoline and Stella the fashion designers, Fiona the artist curator, Fabiane the designer and lecturer: they welcomed me with their positive energy and smiles, and showed great interest in the Borough of Culture project I was designing for Lewisham. I also had exciting conversations with Nina, the security person with a colourful energy, which ranged from vegan chocolate to her interest in working in a kindergarten; Redcliff, who cleans our building, always leaves it spotless - once we stood by the window on the 4th floor, and looked at the busy street below and its restaurants, we talked about being vegetarian, and that he is a good cook, while I am not; and Vasile who was working on renovating the facilities on our floor - I invited him to visit the studio to learn about the project - in turn, he shared images of his work as a talented sculptor.

The art space allowed these exchanges, and I am ever grateful for and to these honest daily encounters.

Flower Shop.

Walking on Lewisham High Street.
Home snuck up on me in a flower shop.
Presented itself as a Caribbean flower.
One normally found in another geography appeared here.
The petals and the soils were all coated in the memories
of childhood and where I come from.
A little piece of home on the other side of the world.

Story and Print by Marilyn
Text by Tyrone Lewis



Asquith Gibbes Building.

Some see you, most don't.
I've not told the town about you.
You do not exist on Google, but you are there.

A house without walls.
Hiding in plain sight.
A sanctuary by Deptford Bridge station.
Named after the Lewisham anti-racist campaigner
Rooted in the local community.

The outside world feels like a formal interview for people
Who don't look like me.
They do not see
Our mothers etched scriptures into our tongues.

Here, we share our prophecies, revered.
We experiment and explore.
I can take the floor,
The microphone.
Here, we have each other.

I have stared at enough white walls to know this
Is an oasis of colour.
An independent creative community.
An exhibition space, a refuge.

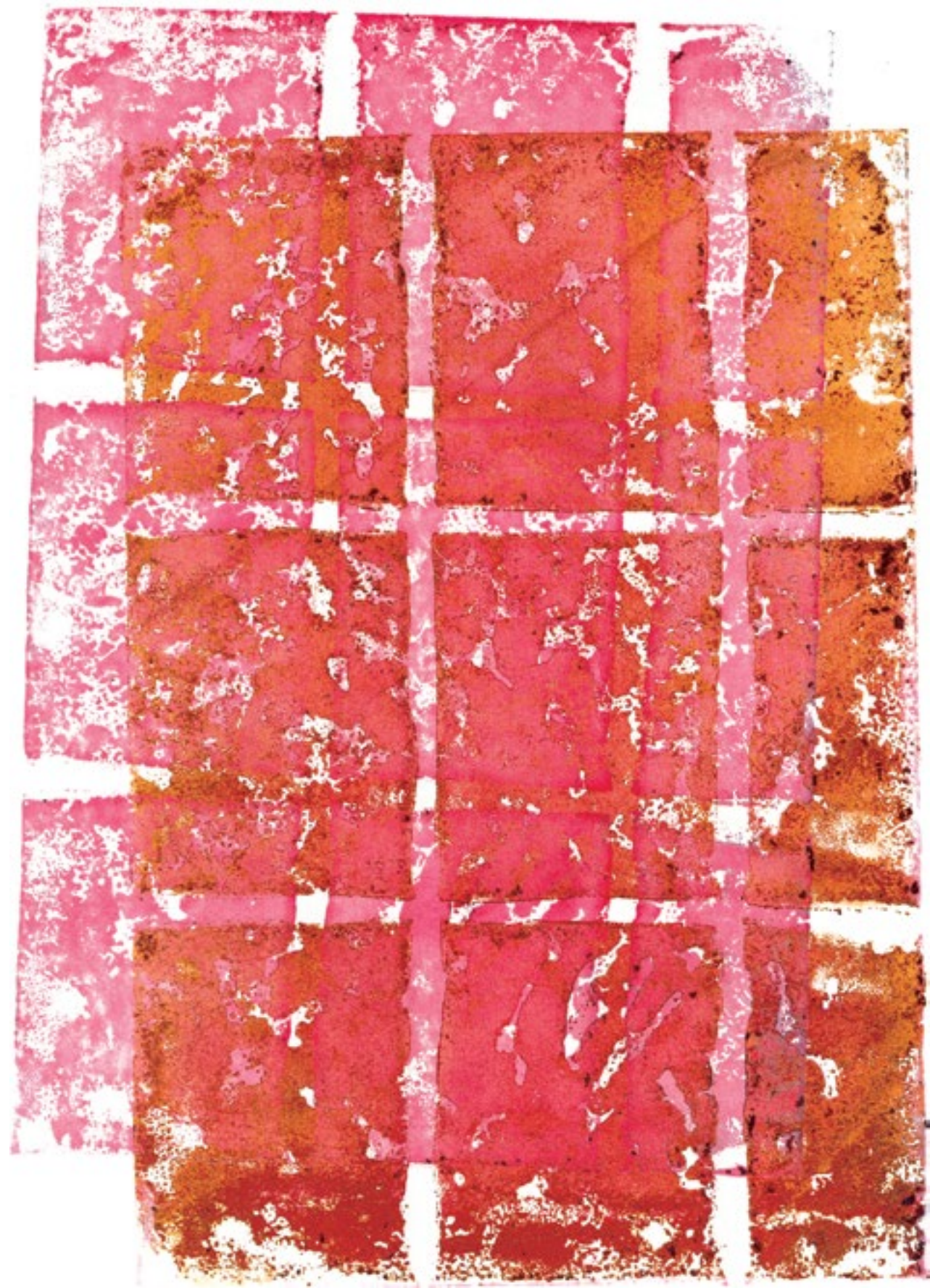
Story and Print by Huizi
Text by Bex Gordon



Telegraph Hill.

Have you seen the world
from Telegraph Hill?
Have you seen Lewisham's skyline
showcase itself. Front and centre,
the pride of London.
Have you let it heal you?
Lost your lockdown loneliness
atop it?
Have you let it free you?
Appreciated the irony of the cage
filled with future tennis stars
and understood the escapism
in this enclosure.
Have you felt joy?
I've heard it's better when you're high.
Have you heard the laughter on the hills?
Seen smiles at such a vantage point.
Have you felt the concept of solidity?
The stress relief of space?
The clarity of a clear mind?
Have you seen the world
from Telegraph Hill?

Story and Print by Ivie
Text by Tyrone Lewis



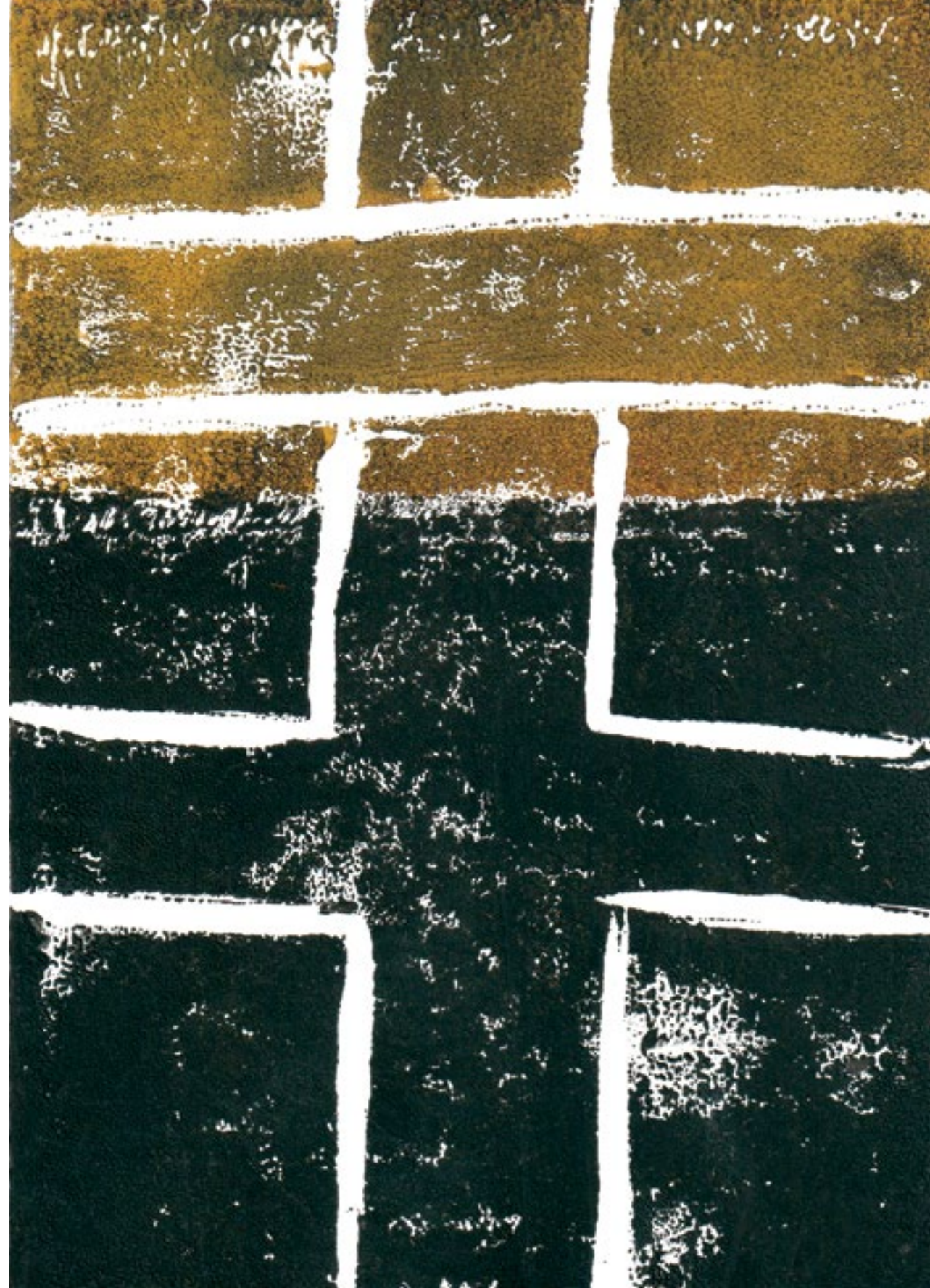
Deptford Market.

As a child I remember going to Deptford High Street Market on Saturday mornings with my Mom to shop for Caribbean groceries, visiting stalls and shopping for curtains. Along the way Mom meeting her friends and me getting bored of what seemed like endless chats. I remember people loaded with bags of shopping. I remember the Caribbean Bakery and queuing to get hot hard-dough bread, I can smell it now. Back then Deptford Market was vibrant, there were loads of stalls selling all sorts including branded clothes (now classed as designer wear). Another store that sticks in my mind is Fantos, just under the bridge, where you could pay in installments for goods.

I moved out of the area and visited Deptford occasionally with Mom who still lives locally. During Covid times she was unable to go out so I would go to Deptford for her, that's when I reconnected with my past. Like most people, Mom is particular about which shop she buys things from, so my instructions would be along the lines of "from the corner of Douglas Way go left, the shop on the way to Fantos", "it's not as far as the Cash and Carry" or "it's on the same side as Barclays".

The location of these shops, whether they are there now or not, are still part of my childhood memories, part of my history. As I went about with my shopping list, the thing that annoyed me most as a child I really missed; the hustle and bustle of the market, the smells, the sounds, and the meet and greet.

Story and Print by Jennifer
Text by Jennifer



by Jennifer

Deptford Market still exists, but not on the same scale as it was before: it was a destination, people used to visit from different areas. Deptford High Street is still vibrant today but in a different way. Some of the older shops have converted to bars, coffee shops and restaurants and like most places, what was there over time will become a distant memory.

I see Deptford High Street from a different perspective. Although a visitor, I still feel at home. I still reminisce with family and friends as we exchange thoughts about locations, about people who lived in Deptford, those now living there, and how it has changed. Like people, Deptford is on a journey, it has a history and it has a future. Maybe the future is the revival of Deptford Market.



Thames Path.

My body is the Thames.
I flow into the heart of the city.
Face and freckles, blood and skin.
A stream of fluctuating energy.
I arise in Lewisham, ancient as a brook,
Then rush from Deptford to Rotherhithe
Swelling with anticipation,
Neurons firing kinetic energy
into the Tower of London.
The morning silhouettes shadow my edges.
Sirens howl, but I am lost in the waves.
Sweating oil and tar, with logs adrift.
I am concrete and nature entangled.
My energy moves in parallel with the river.
The quiet to the noisy and back again.

Story and Print by **Ciro**
Poem by **Bex Gordon**



Beckenham Place Park.

Wild swimming is important to me, and has been during the last 2 years of lockdowns. Especially when you add in the fear that has curbed so much of the variety and adventure that sustains my life.

Finding a beautiful swimming spot near me has been amazing. During one of my sunny swims of 2021, I found myself swimming alongside a gorgeous little waterbird that kept ducking and diving beneath me. I later found out they're called Little Grebe or Dabchick. I was very happy to share my experience with a new friend!

I also think I connect to it, because I work in Lewisham shopping centre, very busy and hectic and it is really nice after work to go to the Swimming Lake at Beckenham Place Park, and the sun goes down. It gives a different time zone. When you are there in the water, everything calms down.

A special peaceful place.

Story and Print by Emily
Text by Emily and Tyrone Lewis

REFLECTIONS

Huizi Miao - Lewisham Local Volunteer

Participant in the workshop at Crofton Park Library

The Conversation and Printmaking Workshop was a brilliant event in Lewisham community, developing the arts and culture of this borough, making residents feel more connected or a sense of belonging to where they live. It was a well-organised creative encounter that explored the diversity and inclusiveness of Lewisham. Through conversation and printmaking, arts curator Dima led Lewisham residents to share unforgettable memories, stories in relation to different places in Lewisham where they live, work or study.

The session asked: do you think a place can change a person? One lady's answer resonated with other residents: she used to live in Lewisham and came back a couple of years later, and said, it is not the place that could change a person, it is the people you meet in that place might be able to make you a different person, because your experience or your memory is created by you and others together.

The induction including sketching, copying, carving and printing was very professional, practical, and highly interactive. The one to one / one to group tutorials were extremely detailed, helping the residents get to know the printmaking skill quickly, and creating a relaxed and joyful atmosphere for their creative expression.

Also, in this session, residents chatted about their neighbourhood while creating their artworks, therefore not only developing everyone's creativity, but also reinforcing the connection between each other.

Anoushka Narayanan - Lewisham Local Volunteer

Participant in the workshop at Corbett Library

The format of the workshop was really effective I thought. Having a discussion first allowed everyone to loosen up and also generate ideas for their lino print. It was laid back and not a pressurised environment, and especially when discussing something so personal it made it all the more easier to get into the groove of the workshop. Even though I was excited for the lino printing portion of the workshop, I really enjoyed the discussion – the topic was one I have always been interested in and the prompt questions about places, environments and our sense of belonging were really interesting and one can really talk about them for hours.

It was fascinating to hear about everyone's experience with a place; these might just seem like bits of the background to others but it's extremely special to that one person. Even though everyone else doesn't have personal experience of that place, I will definitely look or think of the place differently, remembering how it holds fond memories for someone else. Isn't it interesting how even hearing about a place you've never been to can automatically affect how you view it? The question of whether a place leaves fingerprints on the soul was discussed, and for the most part everyone agreed that yes, of course it does: it shapes and forms your soul and changes your personality.

An interesting thought I heard in a passing conversation was that a new version of a place is created every time you enter and leave it. You remember the place exactly as you remember it, but both you and the place constantly and immediately change. Someone recalled a memory of her father tending to a type of plant, and how she continues to tend to the plant long after he passed, and now that plant is a symbol of him. That tending to the plant was honouring him, if in a small way. Symbols like that are so easily created in objects and in places.

I do think while hearing the participants share their thoughts and experiences that they really enjoyed the process of the workshop. And the inclusion of using lino was a great way to introduce a physical aspect to the workshop, and give the participants a memento of the workshop and conversation.

Cherelle Angeline - Lewisham Local Volunteer

Participant in the workshop at Sydenham Library

The workshop to me was about connecting with old and new friends through memories of places in Lewisham. It felt like a gathering where we shared our changing memories of places, and of course, our identity as well. In an intimate room, we sat close to each other, with quotes and art on the wall and in front of us, away from our gadgets: it was nice to slow down, to be in the moment of living. The workshop was a moment to celebrate the history of humanity that is within us, in our tactile ability to create a printed relief and reflect on the identity of the library. I particularly enjoyed learning about the architecture in Nineveh, Iraq, and spots in Lewisham that have been explored by the participants, extraordinary places like libraries were discussed so enchantingly. The space was full of stories that reflect on the changes in our brain and environment. It was inspiring to hear the stories that are meaningful, able to be transformed into small pieces that define our collective culture. We reflected on parts of Lewisham that make us feel close to our hearts – parties and pubs, nature, studios, cats, childhood hobbies, food and markets, theatre, social movements: our bodily experience in our everyday architecture.

It was very calming to hear stories, energetic at the same time to be in the excitement of cutting the lino, rolling the paint, and quickly placing the paper before the paint dries. We bonded through seeing the results of the print transformed from a block which was super satisfying. Each print was a symbol of one's portraiture – what makes them a person, what excites them. It was a moment to trace back to our human instinct to express ourselves, to imprint our memory through artworks.

Dima facilitated the conversation very beautifully, listening to everyone sharing their experiences of growing up and in the recent years. It was very relaxing to hear about how Lewisham stays with the participants through time. It was a very joyful and warm experience: in a playful environment, I felt a deep appreciation towards each other and also respect for the art, and learnt the importance of symbolism. The space overall was full of creativity, encouragement, and love. I wish it had gone on for longer!

Jasmine Leung - Lewisham Local Volunteer

Participant in the workshop at Manor House Library

The session opened with some prompt keywords – “dream”, “images”, “healing”, “walking”, “travel”, “world/worlds”. The language was very diverse, some of them about a certain memory, some of them about a certain thing found in the neighbourhood, some about body/identity, personal experiences. I observed that it was a bonding moment and a mutually inspiring process.

I found this exercise both practical and inspiring as a warm-up for participants to connect and open up their imaginations. Something I only noticed coming to the UK is that events don't really start at the time it says. There will always be a buffer, a “door opens at X”, which is very different from my home city Hong Kong. As strangers arrive at different times and it is often difficult to open a first conversation, this exercise helped people connect as they would start talking about which word they found most impressive and shared among themselves before they did as a group. It was practical helping people ease up by having everyone speaking.

I did start focusing on my responses and setting my thoughts in the context of such quotes and images. I noticed how this process opened up a lot of ideas relevant to the workshop theme, such as:

Horniman Museum, its impressive glass house structure and always-evolving nature. Deptford Market, associated with childhood memories, family visits, communities and networks, happenings, past and present. Lewisham Station, memories of homecoming, transition, non-place, arrival. Hilly Fields, associated with roses and their smell, body memories. Catford, its one-way traffic system and inconvenience. The Bench, intergenerational, lost and found connections.

“Place/space” is a very broad concept but the guidebook and its questions were very helpful for participants to navigate their ideas and memories and centre their narrative. The stories that came out were beautiful, heartfelt and genuine. The practice of sharing them in a group chat also helped participants to connect and respond, and collectively construct what “Lewisham” is to each of them.

Ivie Bartlett - London Borough of Culture Programme Coordinator

Participant in the workshop at Bow Arts Studio, Catford Dek

We reunited in Dima's art space, an occasion to meet other Lewisham residents who participated in previous workshops and to discover the wider vision for the Internal Landscapes project and the stage it reached at that point. We had a glimpse at some texts, art pieces and inspirations Dima put on the walls, and as a collective, we started to look at each others' prints and discuss what they meant to us. We asked each other questions about the places we carved and it made for a heartwarming start.

Two writers, Bex and Tyrone, joined us – they were invited to look at our stories, and turn them into prose and/or poems. This provided a nice exchange where people were discussing their stories with the writers and then further with each other. I shared the idea behind my print with Tyrone, along with the feelings I had when I visited Telegraph Hill with friends, and the contrast of going by myself during the Pandemic. Tyrone engaged with my story and it inspired him to write a poem. There was also time allowed for those who wanted to print to continue to experiment with techniques and materials. Several people made prints which they took home with them, including myself. Some participants offered their prints to others in the room.

The energy was palpable and made for a really engaging and productive session. Dima facilitated the group well and allowed for things to flow naturally while still ensuring that all parts of the workshop were covered. Conversations I had with people included where they lived, what they felt about Lewisham and the Council, their jobs, passions and interests, as well as simply getting to know each other. Some participants had great things to say about Lewisham, others had issues or interesting anecdotes – it felt as if it was a confidential space where people could be honest and upfront. The space was welcoming and kind, and everybody I spoke to had an enjoyable session.

Rachel Harris - London Borough of Culture Senior Producer

Participant in the workshop at Crofton Park Library

This creative session was all about the welcome. The room at Crofton Park Community Library was laid out beautifully and people quickly felt at ease. The thought-provoking texts on display were appreciated. Tone was gentle which gave people the space to be themselves.

The 'right' number of people in the room and level of intimacy. Good mix of ages and gender. Reflecting Lewisham, it felt like 'the world' was in the room given the diversity of heritages of those taking part.

Very positive to see neighbours meeting for the first time – literally the place where we live was on the surface all we had in common but...

Single word prompt gave a good entry point to the session and enabled participants to begin to talk about themselves. 'Meeting point', 'destiny', 'wind', 'shade', 'power', 'blue' – all became personalised to people's experiences and journeys into the room, and into Lewisham. Subtly and mysteriously, the introductions became very personal and poetic – referencing the city as a living organism that will exist beyond our contributions; circular journeys and the choices we have to travel; people superimposing childhood memories of the sea onto Lewisham's landscape; how does 'our place' contribute to who we are – do we bring our previous selves and then see Lewisham through that lens?

Clear link between personal experience and the particular of a place, then reaching beyond that to find echoes in the group's broader experience.

"Spoken word...to carved line"

Nick Merriman

Chief Executive and Director of Content,
The Horniman Museum and Gardens

Although I had visited as a museum professional and as a parent over several decades, my deep relationship with the Horniman Museum and Gardens began in May 2018 when I took up the role of Chief Executive. It really is a unique place: it has wonderful views over central London, and it's unusual in combining living and heritage collections from all around the globe, inside and outside. Unlike other museums I know, it has long-term relationships with its visitors, over many generations, and people come again and again. I often meet grandparents bringing their grandchildren, who say they were first brought to the Horniman by their own grandparents. And I often meet people who say they visit every week.

All of this means that the word most often associated with the Horniman is 'love'. When I tell people what my job is, they say 'Oh, I LOVE the Horniman!'. They love its quirkiness, its animals and plants, its friendly welcome, its activities, and the enthusiasm it elicits in its young visitors. Above all, I think, they love it for the way it has persisted for 125 years, changing with the times, yet remaining the same. All of these things chime closely with my own values, which are about the importance of public resources which are great in quality and accessible to everyone regardless of their background.

The Horniman is a place of calm and recovery. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Gardens remained open throughout, and large numbers of people used them during the lockdown periods as a place to exercise, to experience fresh air and nature, and to clear their heads. We had so many messages thanking us for the role the Horniman had played in helping people cope with the mental challenges of the pandemic.

My own favourite place at the Horniman is at the very top of the hill, which is now a Prehistoric Garden. It is the location of Surrey Mount, the house that Frederick Horniman and his family moved to when they vacated Surrey House, which was then demolished to make way for the museum we see today. This was an act of huge philanthropy, which I often remind people literally means 'love of people'. From this location I can look out all over London, right across to the hills to the north (where I lived at an earlier stage of my life). I can see things that don't change, such as the slopes of the Thames Valley, and things that change quite quickly, such as the houses and offices in the city. It reminds me of the dual role of a place like the Horniman: to provide inspiring experiences to people in the here and now, and to look after our place and our collections for the very long term, for all future generations to come.

Dijana Rakovic

Senior Producer,
Counterpoints Arts

Lewisham was the first Borough of Sanctuary and this socially engaged art project created a space for reflections on a number of critical questions around the ideas of what sanctuary is. Throughout the residency, Dima found ways to interrogate what this might mean in actual terms, to the lives of those who are newcomers to Lewisham, and this country. Who is involved in enacting policies, what are the histories, who is in the local movement and what the long term vision for the Borough might be. The interrogation has been based on lived experience, honesty and curiosity, directness but also very much on creativity, research, care and inclusiveness.

For those of us involved and supporting the residency programme, we observed Dima's socially engaged practice persistently seek links between arts, culture and policy. We witnessed her navigate civic spaces and processes, engaging in the issues around health, feelings of safety, community and the physical environments. We experienced how strangers and neighbours who live, move, survive, thrive around each other can come together, and how this residency has been an opportunity for this very creative coming together to be looked at and considered by policy makers.

It takes skill and much experience to hold practice, policy-linked and creative conversations with many people over a number of months. I recognise the labour and the risk-taking, but also the care with which Dima gathered her collaborators at the different local community libraries. It is impossible to overpraise what libraries represent to cultural and civic life, and the libraries Dima has been working with are beautiful and welcoming spaces of 'sanctuary' for all local people.

At one point during the project, whilst reflecting on ideas around 'sanctuary', I was struck with renewed significance how crucial it is

to be making links between health and experiences of safety – one of our basic human needs. Therefore, how important it is to support the work that creates spaces where newcomers, those who have experienced trauma, who feel like they don't belong or are chronically fearful for their future, can experience feelings of being safe.

Taking action to make someone feel safe/er – accompanying people to the local library or sourcing coats for families for winter, taking time to teach language skills, supporting people to get to doctor's appointments or even protesting someone's deportation – this is what socially engaged artists are already taking on as part of their practices. It needs recognising, and it offers even more scope for collaboration with policy makers and advocacy networks.

In the wonderful and creative workshops in Lewisham community libraries, Dima invited local people with connection to Lewisham spaces – its built and natural environments that represent everyday life, as well as memory and identity – to connect around each others' stories. She designed a space for conversation and creation, for people who were almost entirely strangers to each other. For me the workshops offered a glimpse not only into other people's lives and how they felt about the place they lived in, but also into a way of working where connection was easy, generous and meaningful.

To end, residency programmes such as this are crucial if we are to understand each other, appreciate and celebrate each others' differences and grow appreciation for the spaces and environments we occupy, together.

Nancy Stridgen

Arts Development and Borough of Culture Producer,
Lewisham Council

It was such a lovely experience and meaningful to connect properly with projects that we commission: this happens less often for me now which I really miss!

The workshop space was perfect and very comfortable. The Corbett Community Library is a beautiful building and there was a very friendly atmosphere. I really appreciated the process of thinking more deeply and accessing our creativity, memories and connection before anyone started drawing. The group was really inspired by the texts and provocations provided and thought deeply about what is home, do you take it with you and does a place leave a fingerprint on your soul.

I got into a flow: a place is not just streets and buildings, it is the people in the space equally. The overall composition of these groups of people in areas is constantly changing, and staying the same for some. When you leave a place, you take with you a snapshot of what it was like at that exact time, and the space changes because you have left. New Cross when I was in my 20s is different to New Cross now and I have changed too, but some things remain the same. Home is a feeling of belonging that can happen over a period of time – or can happen suddenly, if there is a spontaneous sense of connection.

I loved each stage of the printmaking and it was timed very well. It was personally very impactful for me to reflect on how Lewisham has shaped me and how it has changed and I have changed. I found the experience meaningful and deeply reflective.

Phil Baker

Borough of Culture Programme Manager,
Lewisham Council

I personally have greatly enjoyed the collaboration with Dima. The outcome of this project was intentionally left undefined so it could be shaped by the conversations, the research and the process: this in itself can be challenging but is also compounded by working on a large scale and within a local authority team with a range of competing priorities.

We were hoping to commission someone with experience in managing and implementing socially engaged art projects, who would act as a critical friend to the organisation and shine fresh eyes on some of the issues around working with refugees and migrants. This has certainly happened, and the project has naturally evolved to create new partnerships in Lewisham, and to highlight the richness and generosity of the community work already being done within the borough. It developed to engage with some of the issues around social isolation, language learning, creativity and community building that can enrich the lives of local people. Key to our approach as a Borough of Sanctuary has been not viewing refugees or migrants as 'other' but rather as a group of residents who will have unique experiences and insights but also the same hopes, dreams and needs as any other Lewisham residents.

I have been incredibly pleased at the way the Creative Conversations that Dima designed have brought people together to reflect on these unique and common experiences, and how Dima allowed these encounters and conversations to inspire her creative work, and to help inform our internal policy and external advocacy. I know this book will reflect that process and that the work that has been carried out will leave a legacy in helping to make Lewisham a real Borough of Sanctuary.

Paul Aladenika

Head of Policy, Strategy and Executive Support,
Lewisham Council

For me, the geography of Lewisham is not its physical space, borough borders or administrative wards. Nor is it to be found in the historical sites, architecture or wonderful expanse of award-winning green space. Rather, the geography of Lewisham is a social construct, one that is defined by the diversity of those who live here. The residents of Lewisham trace their heritage from five continents and more than 70 nations. The last time I checked, at least 170 languages were spoken in the borough. To coin a phrase: 'the world is in Lewisham and Lewisham is in the world'.

It is Lewisham's social geography that speaks most fluently about the identity of the place that I call home. The people who live here have brought with them the richness of their lived experiences. This socio-ethnic diversity is 'marbled' across the borough. In Lewisham, you can feel as much at home in the north as in the south, and in the east as in the west.

On Saturdays, I walk a mile from my home in Telegraph Hill to the Deptford High Street market. There I am greeted by the multicultural richness that so characterises the social geography of Lewisham. Amongst the colourful fabrics on display in the shops and the unmistakable smells of spicy fare from the restaurants, are the faces of Lewisham. Here, people can be found in all shades and from all backgrounds. Men and women, young and old. There is chatter, laughter and the quietly spoken language of peaceful co-existence.

In Lewisham, people are not just welcomed and accepted, they are celebrated. It is hard to imagine a place that is as socially cohesive and harmonious as Lewisham. As a resident of the borough for more than 30 years, I feel proud to say that Lewisham is not a place where I have to live, but one where I choose to live.

ENCOUNTERS

I wanted this project to exist organically and in conversation with other projects. During this residency, I joined many celebrations of culture and creativity in Lewisham. And our project engaged in meaningful conversations with individuals and organisations who made the time to exchange, listen and question some of the systems we create and the practices we undertake as a society. They were open to sharing their knowledge, reflecting on problems, and dreaming of solutions. I will be always grateful to those who welcomed this project, cared about building an inclusive society, and were open to my direct and honest approach. During the life of this project, I also encountered people who contributed unnecessary negativity. We also learned from them. They reminded us what the real world is made of, and why it is crucial we do the work we do.

There was knowledge exchanged in every encounter and every conversation and all of that fed into my research. I wish I could expand upon all of them but to do them all justice, I would need to write a whole other book. However, I hope these next pages shine a light on a handful of encounters whose contribution to this project has been significant, by nourishing my thinking and understanding of the creative complexity of Lewisham. They show the potential of starting from the art practice perspective, what is possible when we lean in, when we say yes, when we use our powers to support a vision for an inclusive and generous society, and when we are most open about who 'we' are, and also who we aspire to be.

These encounters are retold from my subjective perspective. They all come from a loving place in my heart.

Lewisham Council - Paul Aladenika

Paul, despite his workload and busy schedule, made time to meet, discuss and clarify the processes and topics I wanted to understand. He was interested in our creative programme, and engaged with the conversation on how it could influence policy. He later shared with me the Sanctuary Strategy, as well as the Labour Manifesto. It made for an informative read, and I highlighted questions I wanted to ask and wrote down thoughts on how to turn these strategies into practical actions. How could this inform my practice? How could I participate in this vision and facilitate making it happen?

Midway through our project, I invited Paul to see the work at my art space in Catford Dek, to discover visuals, texts and share process and progress. Upon arrival, he told me that the Council used to be based out of this building and pointed out his old office, now full of colour and an art studio! At the start of the meeting, a question on the wall captured his attention: can a city travel with you? This led us on to further discussion. How do we foster a sense of belonging in Lewisham? What is a neighbourhood? How do we build trust? Paul believed in cultivating our collective intelligence and throughout the residency, asked me all the right questions. If we don't have an additional budget, how do we support the community with what we have? What else can be done with the available resources?

Paul explained that a Council has a duty towards all its inhabitants, and in order to protect minorities, we need to name them, know who they are and how many of them live in the borough. I appreciated this valid point, but also shared my approach from a community building perspective, which is that if we keep naming people by their differences, they will never feel part of this country. To protect and to build are two different starting points. How can we make them work together?

I learned a lot from Paul and he was a key person who provided insights into policy and Council structure. I sensed that he appreciated our expertise and the creative work we were doing. After looking at all the sketches, prints, stories and hearing me explain this programme produced with Lewisham community libraries, we started articulating how this project could influence policy, and how we can learn from its outcomes. Paul gave a listening space to the learnings

which validated the purpose of the residency. Being in an attentive conversation navigating the complicity between art and policy was empowering and felt like a real step in the right direction.

The Horniman Museum and Gardens - Nick Merriman

This residency allowed me to discover The Horniman Museum and Gardens, which later came up time and again in many conversations as a much loved place of reflection and nourishment. In a creative investigation about meaningful places, it made sense for our project to be presented somewhere that clearly meant so much to local people.

On my first visit, I sensed the welcoming vibe when I initiated conversations with Rebecca standing at reception, Eleanor from the schools' learning team, and Delma supervising the gallery downstairs. I explained my project to them and heard their thoughts. These positive encounters assured me that this institution was the right partner. I later attended the Celebrating Sanctuary Festival curated by Create without Borders, and met with the different organisations who came together to offer a meaningful programme at the museum.

When I met with Nick, the Horniman director, I was looking forward to hearing his thoughts on socially engaged art, the work we were doing in Lewisham, his vision for the museum and what sanctuary means to him. Nick was very welcoming. In our first conversation we sat in the garden café and exchanged on my research interests investigating the borders between artist, artwork and viewer, how these lines shift, alter and merge, and his book, about museum visitors and self-exclusion from cultural spaces, *Beyond the Glass Case*. I loved how he explained the original vision for the museum – to bring the world to Forest Hill in “international objects” – and how that has evolved into focussing on the human, opening itself up to the richness of the communities around the museum. I explained my vision to draw out an emotional map of the borough, and asked if The Horniman would be open to partnering with Internal Landscapes.

I believe institutions have the power to set the tone, and responsibility to shape a socially-engaged narrative in a country. I found myself ending my follow-up email with the line: “Please keep in mind that this project will take a meaningful positive turn if you agree to get involved. You do hold that power and I hope you decide to use it.”

Nick introduced me to his team and after I submitted a formal exhibition proposal, the Horniman team said yes. I am grateful to them for giving space and adding their voice to this important conversation.

There is a strong image from my first meeting with Nick that has stayed with me. We were moving between topics, from museums to migration, ownership and belonging, and he said something along these lines: if we think of Britain in the Ice Age, this whole place was a vast empty land. Nobody lived here, we all came later.

Corbett Library - Arek Golosz

I met Arek during an exhibition I curated at Manor House in June 2018. His t-shirt had Refugees Welcome on it. Discovering he was a photographer, I invited him to participate in the Branches exhibition I curated the following year, where his mystic light photography pieces captivated the visitors.

When I started my research, I contacted him. He lives in Lewisham, volunteers at Corbett Community Library and is a Lewisham roads expert. He introduced me to the wonderful library managers Caroline and Rachel, and they all became partners in our project. I wanted to discover more texture, streets, parks and to sense the surroundings, so Arek and I started roaming Lewisham together. We talked about personal identity, poetry, and places. Later, I asked him to be the official photographer for the workshops.

Arek engaged with the project in a very meaningful way, offering expertise and supporting the design of the creative walks. We also went to other Borough of Culture events together. One Saturday, I was attending AFRIL's summer celebration at the One Tree Hill allotments where after many virtual conversations, I had the chance to meet Helen the foodbank manager and Sophie the director in person, chat with some of the volunteers, trustees, and meet the families. I had wonderful conversations with young and older people and everyone brought something to eat. It felt warm, welcoming and full of love, a real celebration of a well-connected group, a big family.

Arek joined and we went to Mountsfield Park to attend the Trinity Laban production Hope 4 Justice. We sat on the grass with many enthusiastic parents waiting in anticipation and clapping with pride

at the performances. Involving over 1,000 young people, including students from 26 local schools, the mass protest performance wove together music, choreography and spoken word about the climate emergency.

Arek's help and Corbett Library's welcome were crucial in linking me and newly arrived local people with English classes offered for free by the generous Helen Nicholas. Throughout this project I witnessed Arek's instinct always to support the most vulnerable.

Colloquial Collective - Lorna Jackson

Lorna brought a warm vibe to the Crofton Park Community Library workshop and engaged in conversations with everyone in the room. She is a filmmaker and runs Colloquial Collective Ltd with her partner.

She invited me to the Lewisham Homes Film Festival, where I discovered the series of documentaries they had been commissioned to make on the theme of 'Celebration'. Each film centres around an individual or group of residents investing their time to enhance the lives of their fellow neighbours in a particular way, from planting an orchard on their estate or starting a community food store, to setting up a netball club for women and girls.

I sat next to Lorna at the screening, and when she introduced the project, she spoke movingly about how the partnership with Lewisham Homes had been vital as it had allowed unique access into the lives of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. She shared that of "the many highlights in this project, the main one was the generosity each individual gave us, by allowing us to enter their world and share a bit of their lives. Screening this series here in Catford Mews Cinema and in front of an audience full of people who appear in the films is a huge bonus."

I appreciated this important work, the honest approach and the ingenuity of the different projects the screening highlighted. I was touched by the documentaries, the hardship some people in Great Britain live under, the food banks... and I was uplifted by how people come together to support each other in such beautiful ways. There was something very powerful in the contradictions. I left with a sadness at just how challenging life was for those so nearby, and

an admiration for the creativity and resilience with which small grants could be used to make big impacts. Everytime I reflect upon what was shared that day, I understand a bit more what community means.

Quaggy Waterways Action Group - Paul De Zylva

Paul participated in the Corbett Community Library workshop, where he volunteers sometimes. He had this calm and creative energy. I learnt he is the chair of the Quaggy Waterways Action Group, an award-winning local volunteer community group helping people of all ages to enjoy and benefit from thriving, nature-rich local urban rivers.

Later, he joined the creative writing workshop at my art space. He explained how for too long urban rivers have been put underground or in deep concrete channels where they become dumping grounds for litter. My enthusiasm for this work of reclaiming the rivers was obvious, and he invited me to experience a guided river walk. I was thrilled to accept on the spot and shared that we used to do river walks as children when we visited our village.

In the week prior to the walk, Paul sent an email to ask: do you have waders? I paused, then went to google what that meant! On the day, he lent me a pair of olive green special boots and a stick. We started from Manor Park on this amazing journey inside the river. We observed wildlife such as damselflies and moorhens nesting. He explained the benefits of removing Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. He offered a crash course in flood prevention, river preservation, and talked of the already successful campaigns to rewilden the river Quaggy, freeing it from cement walls. He was very generous with his knowledge, and I sensed his expertise as a researcher and his love and informed care for the environment.

I learned about successful campaigns he had led, and we talked about Councils, how the city of London is organised, and his own commitment to social contribution. Coming from a place of disillusionment with how most politicians are so disconnected from the realities of the human experience, I found myself asking him if he still believes in campaigning to initiate social change. Paul said: it is the only way.

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Manor House Community Library
Sydenham Community Library
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Internal Landscapes Curated and Produced by Dima Karout

Created following a residency with Lewisham Council and communities.

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The book is available for consultation in all Lewisham Libraries and The British Library.

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