

BARBER



HOME

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# THE BARBER COLLECTIVE



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Our collection, your place

## THE BARBER COLLECTIVE

Prior to an enforced break due to Covid-19, The Barber Collective was a space for young people aged 16-21 to experience, re-imagine and reinterpret the Barber's collection through free, bi-weekly meet ups and workshops.

The Collective was formed in October 2017. The programme brings contemporary artistic and educational practices to a historical collection and aims to create a space of shared ownership and experimental creativity. To do this we collaborate with artists and arts professionals to consider objects from the Barber's collection. The range of practitioners we have worked with includes visual artists, dancers, musicians, tattoo artists and jewellers leading to interdisciplinary workshops that have included digital, print, illustration and dance.

Over the last three years, The Barber Collective has developed young people's art making skills, discursive and written skills, public speaking skills and a sense of belonging to a group with shared interests.

*"A new way to look at art differently, gave me some new ideas, inspiring".*





Members have joined us from across the Birmingham community. To raise awareness of the programme the Barber's Learning & Engagement team host workshops at local schools and colleges to share The Barber Collective and encourage new members to come along. The Barber Collective is a space open to anyone between the ages of 16-21, with no prior experience required. The range of ages and backgrounds represented in the group create a space for cultural exploration, discovery and understanding.

As part of the University of Birmingham, The Barber Collective also welcomes students who can encourage younger members of the group, share life experiences and help to build social confidence and critical thinking. Some members stay with the Collective for multiple years and some join us for just one project.

The Barber Collective aims to nurture, inspire and support the development of the next generation of cultural creatives, change makers and leaders. Some members of the group have progressed to volunteering with the Learning & Engagement team to support our Family and Barber Lates programmes.

Here, through the lens of Barber Home, we're reflecting back and celebrating The Barber Collective by highlighting two projects that took place earlier this year in Spring 2020: *Reclaiming the Teapot* and *The Order of Dwellers*.

*"The collaborative effort at the end of each session is very rewarding :) "*

## PEER PANEL

The Peer Panel, made up of young volunteers, supports the delivery of The Barber Collective, assisting with the organisation, research, planning, marketing, evaluation and documentation of projects. It supports members to take ownership of the group, reflecting on their work and selecting artists to work with in the future.

This voluntary role is designed to support recent graduates or long-standing members of the Collective, particularly those who wish to pursue careers in education, culture, heritage and the arts.

*“My experience of The Barber Collective Peer Panel has been amazing and I have really enjoyed it! Before joining the group, I was interested in how history was conveyed to the public in different ways to cater to different audiences. This interest has been refined by my involvement with The Barber Collective. I really loved that each week engaged with different pieces of art and attempted to convey meaning to The Barber Collective in different ways. This is a skill, which I will take with me in future roles- I am currently hoping to become a history teacher!”*

- Peer Panel member 2018.





## THE SHOWCASE

Each year The Barber Collective participants showcase and celebrate their work in a public exhibition held at the Barber Institute.

The collaborative process of designing, planning and promoting these exhibitions has included members of the Barber's Curatorial and Communications and Marketing teams who have worked with the Collective to realise each exhibition. Each year the Collective actively share their exhibition with the public delivering public talks and workshops.

As we cannot stage a physical exhibition this year we have decided to showcase the work of The Barber Collective through Barber Home. We hope you've enjoyed finding out more about the programme and seeing what we were thinking about and responding to earlier this year.

Collaborative projection piece  
for Arts & Science Festival  
2018: 'ReAnimation' with  
artist Antonio Roberts.



## RECLAIMING THE TEAPOT OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2019

Objects can provide us with a window into the past. They can tell us stories about individuals, groups, societies and the world. Asking questions about objects can help us to build a picture of the past and consider how that past affects our present and future. *Reclaiming the Teapot* was a collaborative project between The Barber Collective and Birmingham-based artist Navi Kaur. The project took *Teapot with Stand* (1785), an object in the Barber's decorative arts and sculpture collection, as a starting point for discussion and creative responses, particularly exploring its specific histories and the legacies of colonialism.



Unknown English Maker.  
*Teapot and Stand*, 1785, gold with wooden handle and bone knob  
© The Henry Barber Trust, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts,  
University of Birmingham.

*Teapot with Stand* was purchased by the Henry Barber Trust in 1948. The teapot was originally commissioned by Thomas Beckford in 1785. Thomas Beckford was described in his lifetime as 'England's richest Son' due to the wealth that he inherited when he came of age at 21.

The Beckford family's wealth was gained through the enforced labour of enslaved Africans in Jamaica. Beckford plantations produced mahogany and molasses to sell for a high price in a global market. It is possible that the



wood of the teapot's handle is mahogany. The Barber Collective discussed the source of Beckford's wealth and the implications of historical wealth generated by the international slave trade.

The history of this teapot is an example of how the exploitation of enslaved people for material gain can be evidenced in the wealth we encounter around us today. As the teapot is made of solid gold it cannot actually be used to brew tea due to the low melting temperature of the material. What was the teapot for if not to brew tea? As gold is seen as a precious and expensive material it is likely that the object was decorative rather than functional and its purpose was to display Beckford's wealth and status.

## WHY A TEAPOT?

Beckford chose to have a decorative object made for him from solid gold, but why did he choose a teapot? Tea was considered a luxury item in the 1700s but to understand more about this teapot and what it might have symbolised, we need to think about the role the British played in the international history of tea.

## THE BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY

The British East India Company (EIC) began as a group of merchants who were given permission by Queen Elizabeth I in 1600 to sail to India to trade wool, metal and silver for spices, pigments, textiles and tea. The EIC was similar to any company we may have today like, Google or Amazon. Unlike Google or Amazon however, the EIC had its own army. For a century, the EIC traded peacefully with India but fought with other European traders from France, Portugal and the Netherlands for the best trade deals with India.

However, in the 1740s British and French military battles spread from the sea to Indian soil. The British defeated the French and struck a bargain with the Mughal Emperor in India for the right to all of the trade in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. This provided more money to develop the Company's military presence in India. The EIC continued to gain land in India during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and this cemented the change in the Company's role from mere trader to a hybrid sovereign power.

Slowly, over the years, Britain's power grew in India and in 1749 the company had 3,000 regular troops stationed at its settlements, by 1763 this had grown to 26,000 and by 1778 the East India Company's army had 67,000 men (making it larger than the British Army). One of these soldiers included William Beckford's uncle, Colonel Douglas Hamilton.

## THE TEA TRADE

In 1826, the EIC took over the region of Assam in India from the Ahom kings through the Yandaboo Treaty, after starting large-scale production of tea there a few years before. In the 1850s, the tea industry rapidly expanded, taking large amounts of land for tea plantations.

By the turn of the century, Assam became the largest producer of tea in the world. There was so much demand for tea that, although tea was smuggled into England, the only way to legally purchase tea was through the EIC. The EIC sold tea at a much higher price than was necessary and the British Crown added significant taxes to each pound of tea. These very high prices kept the middle and lower classes from being able to afford legal tea.



## NAVI KAUR

[www.navikaur.com](http://www.navikaur.com)

Navi Kaur (b. 1993) is an artist and arts educator based in Birmingham, UK.

Inspired by the lives of her paternal grandparents, Surinder ('Budimom') and Karamjit ('Baba Ji'), Navi's work intimately and playfully documents themes of domestic, cultural, and spiritual significance.

She traces interpersonal dialogues and daily activities through digital photography, film, and installation, demonstrating the abounding resilience of first-generation immigrants, the wonders of the everyday, and the compelling expressions of the Sikh Dharam. Thus, Navi's artistic process doubles as a method of self-inquiry, facilitating investigations into the physical and intangible dimensions of her cultural heritage.

Navi is currently investigating and documenting the lives of the South Asian communities who have settled and worked in the rural West Midlands for a photographic series commissioned by GRAIN Projects. She has exhibited her work across the UK and overseas, including Reminders Photography Stronghold, Recent Activity and Gallery Celine. Upcoming shows include a solo exhibition at New Art Exchange and group exhibitions at Grand Union Gallery, Herbert Art Gallery & Museum and Moseley Road Baths. Navi is also a qualified arts educator, formally teaching at a Handsworth-based secondary school and facilitates workshops in artist-led and museum spaces.

*Written by Harr-Joht Takhar*

Image below: *From Whom we receive our nourishment, 2019*



## RECLAIMING THE TEAPOT: ARTIST REFLECTION.

*Reclaiming the Teapot* developed into a series of workshops through initial conversations around the social and political power that reclamation holds for minority communities and voices, and how the physical and emotional act of 'reclaiming' power over shared histories can be a catalyst to empower and uplift the under-represented. This act of taking ownership of something that is rich in so many cultures was something I wanted to explore further, through investigations into the history of the teapot and how the origins of tea (leaves) found their way to the West.

Over the course of 5 workshops, working with the fantastic young people at The Barber Collective, we were able to discuss and dissect the troubling and questionable histories of the *Teapot with Stand*, owned by William Beckford, exploring ideas of empire, wealth, exploitation, as well as creative methods of reclaiming these histories. Together, we talked, planned and developed creative responses to the teapot which manifested into our very own clay teapots.

All of the teapots held meaningful and important messages, with

some directly challenging the British Empire and how it took from the subcontinent and commonwealth countries.

Following this, as a group, we transported our teapots to the gallery and continued our discussions around trade, wealth, privilege and exploitation. We questioned whether we viewed the golden teapot in a different light and why that was and whether we felt it was fair that Beckford owned this item and what owning such a luxurious item (which effectively has no use other than to look nice) meant.

To bring the workshops to a close, we created individual zines which encapsulated our thoughts and reflections on the project and what we had gained from learning more about these histories. This was a really great way to bring the project to an end and produce ephemera which archived our personal responses.

A huge thank you to all of the young people that took part in the project, it truly was a wonderful thing to have been a part of.

*Navi Kaur*

## RECLAIMING THE TEAPOT: PEER PANEL REFLECTION.

I found the *Reclaiming the Teapot* Project to be a thoroughly interesting and creative experience.

*Reclaiming the Teapot* was an engaging initiative, which brought people from different backgrounds together to reinterpret a contentious object. Britain's colonial past hangs on the walls and sits in the display cabinets of our galleries but projects like this allow a new diverse generation to reclaim this history.

A strength of the project was Navi Kaur; she was approachable and encouraging about everyone's artistic takes on the project. She spoke to different members of The Barber Collective about their artistic interests and shared her artwork.

Starting the project with the teapot itself was an effective way to tie in our art with the collection. Personally, I liked the idea of choosing an object that related to the current issue of decolonising Britain's galleries. Recognising our colonial history is a pressing matter, which has been emphasised again with the recent Black Lives Matter movement and is especially relevant to a diverse area such as Birmingham. This project allowed the group of young people to explore an important political debate in an interactive manner. Also, I found the freedom to communicate over the session rewarding. Younger people sometimes do not like to talk as much in discussions but once everyone was working on their projects, the

group began to share their thoughts on what the teapot meant to them. It was an enriching chance to get to know one another through their creative endeavours.

Another aspect that I loved about the project is that we worked with the medium of clay. Students can easily use pens and pencils but rarely get to engage with 3D projects. I found it therapeutic to physically create art and the nature of clay lends itself to trying out a range of ideas. In my opinion, all members of the group were grateful of the opportunity to use the resources from their local gallery.

A personal favourite aspect of the Barber Collective sessions for me was the consistent peer feedback. Every member interpreted the project in a unique way, which provided an imaginative environment. During and at the end of the sessions, the members complimented one another's pieces, which created a positive atmosphere.

*Catrin Osbourne, Barber Collective Peer Panel Member and UoB Student.*

*"From engaging with everyone's work, I view the object in relation to everyone's cultural perspectives"*

*"I am more sceptical of different art pieces, but I appreciate art more."*

-The Barber Collective Member



## TEA, TRADE & YOU.

Historical objects can tell us about the history of trade across the world. Through discussion The Barber Collective found that different people have different relationships to tea, many of which originate in different parts of the world. Use the questions below to reflect on the themes in *Reclaiming the Teapot*.

Q. Take a look around your home. What do the objects in your home tell you about Britain's relationship to global trade today?

Q: What do you drink? Tea, coffee, Coca Cola... Think about the origins of your drinks of choice.

Q: What relationship do you, your family or your friends have to tea today?

Q: Reflecting on the history of Beckford's teapot, how would you re-design your own teapot?

## THE ORDER OF THE DWELLERS. HIPKISS AND GRANEY

JANUARY – MARCH 2020

Hipkiss & Graney responded to the imagery and symbolism seen in the Barber's temporary exhibition *Truly Bright and Memorable* to build a project with The Barber Collective. The journey started with the 16th century art of Jan de Beer and culminated with a consideration of how to build a world through art.

Through world-building, ritualism, manifesto-writing and creating sigils (a type of symbol used in magic), The Barber Collective created '*The Order of the Dwellers*': a group of artists dedicated to tackling social and environmental issues in all communities and landscapes. *The Order of The Dwellers* was an eight-week long imagining of the ways that artists can wield their practice to directly and tangibly aid communities and ecosystems throughout the United Kingdom.



## HIPKISS & GRANEY

Hipkiss & Graney are a visual arts duo based in Birmingham, UK. Their practice explores ideas around collectives, community and counter-movements through socially-engaged workshops, large-scale interactive installations and performative outputs. Their performances discuss political and environmental issues, often involving magic realism and fictional organisations.



## JAN DE BEER

Jan de Beer (c. 1475 – 1527/28) created dazzling altarpieces that appealed to churches, patrons and collectors. Living and working in Antwerp, de Beer was famous in his lifetime and for several generations after his death but then disappeared into obscurity. Approximately 40 works by de Beer are known today, mostly devotional paintings, but also drawings and stained-glass windows made for churches.

The exhibition, held in 2019/20, brought together for the first time all of de Beer's paintings and drawings from public and private collections in Britain and focused on the Barber's own double-sided panel which formed part of an altarpiece featuring *The Nativity* and the *Joseph and the Suitors*.

This panel is painted on both sides and it formed part of an altarpiece illustrating the life of the Virgin Mary. She is shown in a nocturnal scene adoring the infant Christ. Two shepherds approach through the door to the right, and Joseph with a lantern enters from the left. A different note is struck by the angels who are grief-stricken by the realisation of Christ's fate. The infant lies on a stone, symbolising the altar used for the mass, and on a wheat sheaf, representing the communion bread.



Jan de Beer, *The Nativity (Verso)*, 1515/20, oil on wood  
© The Henry Barber Trust, The Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham.

## THE ORDER OF THE DWELLERS: PEER PANEL REFLECTION

Before meeting Hipkiss & Graney, world-building was a concept I'd confined to sci-fi and fantasy movies. Of course I knew of painting, sculpture, installation and performance in their individual forms but world building in art was a concept almost unknown to me.

It was, then, an eye opening experience to meet the duo and discuss their upcoming work with the Collective. The project we were planning examined the very nature and use of art in the modern world: Should/Can art be used to solve social issues? What is the role of the artist? These were the core questions around which the project would revolve.

Perhaps it was due to the size of these questions that I was at first a bit nervous about collaboration. Hipkiss & Graney's artistic practice is so different from that taught in school, I was worried members of the Barber Collective could find it intimidating or even alienating. However, as the planning around the project crystallised, we found ways to make the project accessible.

A large part of this was framing the project in the context of the Barber, particularly its permanent collection and exhibitions. As a starting point, we examined the use of symbols and storytelling in the gallery's Jan de Beer exhibition. The artist's symbolic uses of colour and attire to represent wealth and status in a Biblical scene, for example, was a look into the historic building of rich worlds. Taking this into a modern context, our first session focused on using symbols to question today's world

through art. We were presented with printed images of anything from Kandinsky to caterpillars, as well as an array of multi-media materials. We used these to construct alternate worlds in which we could inspect social issues more directly. One member combined images of nature, technology and art to present a new world in which the three disciplines grow and expand each other.

A workshop I thought we all responded particularly well to was our introduction to Artist Manifestos. These manifestos focused on our own beliefs in the role of art and the artist. The Barber's mission statement to exist 'for the study and encouragement of art and music' is a grounding example of this, underlining the gallery's focus on education and engagement in fine art.

For our members, manifestos were realised with numerous different objectives, and reminded me of the many ways art can and should be used to solve social problems. Discussions on the positive affect of art on mental health was so moving, and would never have been possible without these frank conversations around the diverse uses of art.

I absolutely loved seeing this project develop from planning to realisation. The group responded to the concepts and workshops better than I imagined, and ultimately seemed to thrive in exploring art in such a different way. Our focus on collaboration was key to this, as we all shared ideas and perspectives to ultimately produce an extremely satisfying array of diverse alternate worlds.

*Sauren Blamey  
The Barber Collective Peer Panel  
Member*

## THE ORDER OF THE DWELLERS: ARTIST REFLECTION

Q: When we discussed this project, initially we had no idea what the collaboration between you as artists and The Barber Collective would produce. What is your reflection on how The Barber Collective members responded?

A: The whole project was a test to see how young people would respond to ideas of creating better worlds. And how they would respond to the question of how can art make individuals in communities happier. Because it was all about how they would respond, it was a learning curve for me and Dale, we were very nervous about their responses, even on the second and third week. However, we were blown away by how thoughtful and what compassionate thinkers they were and all of the different cross-disciplinary ways in which they approached problems. They did exactly what we hoped they would do, in the way that they came at these issues from a wide range of perspectives. We were blown away by the positive response.

Q: Your practice involves a lot of community engagement, but I think responding to a historic art collection

was a new thing for you both, how did you find this process?

A: Challenging, having to review the artwork and contemporise it for a modern audience, not just an audience but a workshop audience, we had to really think about how artists from a few centuries ago were thinking about world building which they definitely were, even if it was through the lens of Christianity. We are looking at it through the lens of sustainability, which is what we were working with and with the group of young people too.

Q: Has working on this project had an effect on the way you see your practice?

A: At the start of this year Dale and I spoke about doing more workshops, and this was a way of developing our way of working with communities. The answer would be that, it's informed our work and given us strong experience of how to work with groups and strengthened our practice.

*Q&A Jonny Graney, Hipkiss & Graney*

## RENAISSANCE IMAGERY AND WORLD BUILDING

Historical artworks often use symbolism to convey meaning. The Barber Collective looked at some of the symbolism within works by de Beer. Some of the most intriguing symbols included dragons to show evil, and the objects or attributes of different saints that related to their lives to help viewers identify them. Use the questions below to reflect on the themes in *The Order of the Dwellers*.

Q: What objects, postures or clothing would you include as symbols to identify you in an artwork?

Q: If you could build a world using art, what would be different in your new world compared to our world today?

Q: Hipkiss & Graney asked other contemporary artists what their personal Sigel (or sign) would be. Take a look at them and perhaps have a go at imagining your own.



Thanks to all our artists & partners for working with us  
over the past three years.

## ARTISTS & EDUCATORS

Antonio Roberts  
Zoe Robertson  
Hope Rosemary  
Lucy Hutchinson  
Anna K Horton  
Navi Kaur  
Hipkiss & Graney  
Maxene Brown  
Ian Andrews  
Becca Randall  
Flora Kay  
Matt Pagett  
Emma Margetson  
Olive Elmer Burke

## SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

Bournville College  
Joseph Chamberlain College  
Lordswood Girls School  
South & City College  
Turves Green

## PARTNERS

Birmingham Weekender  
Eastside Projects  
Ikon Gallery  
Ort Gallery

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The Barber Collective & Peer Panel Members.

To find out more about The Barber Collective contact:  
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