

## Where It Began – Osman Yousefzada

### Audio description transcript

Where it Began is a collective title of works situated in and around Cartwright Hall Art Gallery. Outside in Lister Park, as you approach the gallery, is where we begin.

In one of the circular beds, in front of the steps leading up to the gallery, is freshly dug earth with small plants dotted around. In the middle, the statue 'Diana the Huntress' has been entirely covered and is hidden in a huge, shiny purple bundle, about the height of 2 people.

We head up the steps, through an entrance hall that doubles as a shop and into the gallery which is a semi-circular space, with huge windows and sky light meaning the space is bathed in natural light.

We'll start on the left and work round. On the wall is the introduction where Osman invites us to contemplate themes of labour, social class, immigration and the impact of colonialism on human bodies.

The title itself serves as a metaphor that spans different timelines; from historical relationships between the British Empire and South Asia regarding textiles, to Yousefzada's father arriving in Bradford during the wave of Commonwealth migration in the 1960s to labour at Crofts Engineering foundry, to concepts of belonging, identity and homemaking.

Work in this hall showcases the artist's handcrafted textiles, sculptures and new wrapped artworks. Continuing his dialogue with site specific objects, the artist has wrapped various statues at the art gallery including a marble bust of Queen Victoria and the statue Humanity Overcoming war.

Next is a simply framed wall hanging, about a metre high and a little narrower in width. Against a charcoal black background, lengths of black

rope and threads have been wound together to make 4 circular shapes, a large one on the left, and 3 smaller ones – 2 below and 1 to the right.

They appear almost nest-like, with flecks of royal blue in the centre, and some of the threads have been plaited, and are a little like wheat stalks. One plait trails out of the frame and down onto the ground.

Next to this is a handwritten wall text – black pen on white paper

#### A Past Tense

Did it Began when Chintz resisted and draped fine bodies  
Did it Began when Romas painted the East offering its riches  
Did it Began because the Sun never set  
Did it Began when weavers cut their thumbs  
Did it Began when Dad arrived to find a New Life  
Did it Began when Bodies didn't require tongues  
Did it Began when Gunga din, was a better man than I

On the ground next to it is a collection of brass and copper objects sitting on a small rich red carpet. A plaited length of black yarn hangs from the wall just above.

Next is a square black and white photograph in a mill, with a large rectangular bundle in the foreground, that's full to bursting, standing next to a wooden wheel sack truck that doesn't look big enough to move the bundle! The trailing plait from earlier is attached to the top right corner of the photograph.

Set apart from the wall, stands a black flag on a simple wooden post set on a black wooden base. It's about 2 metres high.

To the right of it, in the centre of the back wall, is the embroidered chintz covered statue of Humanity Overcoming War. The statue was sculpted by Francis Derwent Wood in 1925.

The fabric completely hides the statue, but the marble plinth has been left – it's deep, dark green with white shards running through it. The embroidered chintz is cream, with olive green and dark red flowers. It's folded so the knot sit at the top.

Another wall text is on the back wall behind the covered statue. It reads..

Listen

I am writing this for you  
This is not a lament  
But a collective memory  
We are all a past tense  
Parts of us not here  
We are always arriving..

Below it, slightly to the right on the ground is a collection of 14 small bundles – all shiny, all with knots at the top. They cover objects that are similar in size – a small football – but their shapes differ – some are square, others are flatter.

Two are covered in pale cream, the rest are darker – midnight blue or oil slick black.

Next is one of a series of tapestries. They show figures, all inter-sex, without a Sex... The abstracted figures are suggestive of ancient Talismanic figures and storytelling. They are inspired by the Falnama, a book of omens which became a set of tarot cards for fortune tellers on the streets of Iran, Turkey and Mughal India in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The figures in the tapestries began to evoke notable figurines found in the ancient settlement of Mohenjo-Daro, namely 'the Dancing Girl' and 'the Priest-King' These figures represent agitators, the children of Gods and Jinns with a long history of struggle who do not see themselves as the good immigrant.

This first one hangs from the window ledge which is roughly 2.5 metres high, down to the ground. It's a rectangle of vibrant blue fabric with a human form, in black in the centre of it. The figure could be dancing, or marching – their body strong and purposeful in its movement.

On the ground, is a small knotted magic carpet, and on top is a marble bust of Queen Victoria sculpted by John Adams-Acton in 1877, that has been wrapped in the same chintz fabric as Humanity Overcoming War. On the carpet with her, neatly arranged, are 2 tins of mango slices, a carton of Rubicon Guava juice for £1.49, 2 pomegranates, a tin of lychees, and a china tea set, with a sugar bowl, for 1.

There are 2 more black and white photographs – these from the Bradford Conditioning House. The first shows thin lengths of material, like streamers, unravelling upwards from a dozen balls on the ground that are about the size of a tennis ball.

The second is of 4 large bundles of fabric – 2 are upright rectangles, possibly bigger than a person, and they're behind 2 smaller ones, all have multiple securing straps round them that make them bulge a little.

We're almost back to the doors now, and another tapestry hangs down from a much higher vantage point. It's the same as the previous one, a black figure on blue, only this time it appears as though the figure is caught in a web of black lengths of rope, perhaps being restrained.

A machine arm hovers over the figures head, and a black box covers their left foot. There are stains all over the fabric, like shadows.

In the centre of the space are 2 more objects – one is a woven bed, that has dark chunky wooden corner posts. The woven element is a mottled pink, and the weave is tight.

The other is a simple black rowing boat, that has been dipped in shiny black paint like tar, or oil – the colour of mourning. Queen Victoria's black, the black of colonial extraction... and now a climate emergency.

The boat is also signifier, particularly in Sufi thought (the concept of Paar - mujhe Paah Kar) it is a vehicle which takes you to the other side. A place of hope and fulfilment. It is not Suella's Boat to stop, as it's a boat of Transcendence of New Life. It hums to you, a maternal hum...

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Above, on the balcony is another story. A shrine to female migrants, or spaces of Agency in Patriarchy. Of stories that don't get told or documented.

At the top of the stairs, we turn right into the space, and here there is a pennant of chintz fabric hanging on a black wooden frame, about 2 metres high. The fabric has a cream background with flowers and leaves covering it in autumnal colours.

Beyond it is a simple, square wooden framed stack of shelves, each shelf housing a collection of bundles made of fabric, clay and glass.

They are similar in size and shape to the ones in the main space downstairs – they cover household objects, and the knots are all at the top. They are markers of identity and ownership, of consumerism, belonging, a signature of restraint, always arriving and never unpacking.

This work is a tribute to the hidden women who were not able to or did not possess the codes to integrate into new lands. The abundance of these objects has become an alter to female migratory experience. These are stories of our mothers and grandmothers.

Each shelf holds between 2 and 6 bundles. There are 7 shelves, and the stack reaches up about 3 metres, which is about standard ceiling height in a regular house.

Either side of the stack is a bench made of dark wood. Each has slightly different detail laid into the top, they're a little like wooden doors.

One has 4 square indentations, the width of the bench. The outside 2 have a mottled grey weave inside, the left centre square is painted a bright red and the right centre square has been left plain.

The other bench is divided into 3 – on the left is the mottled grey weave, on the right is a red circle and in the centre are 2 carved shapes, one on top of the other, almost like rectangles, except they echo the circular edge on the right, next to the circle.

Opposite the stack is another tapestry. This hangs down from the ceiling and is about 2 metres in length. On a black background are 3 figures, all appearing to be marching or dancing towards the right. One is placed slightly lower than the other two.

Above them is a sweeping cloud of fiery red. Then lengths of different, brightly coloured yarn are arranged into random shapes that either sit or travel around and over the figures.

There is also a short film playing entitled Spaces of Transcendence. Set in the fourteenth century Makli Necropolis in the Sindh province of Pakistan, Spaces of Transcendence reimagines the burial ground as a site of Sufi science fiction.

The site contains a secret language, protected by the wrapped figures carrying alams (flags) and requiring a marginalised voice to decode it.

Divine access is granted by the khawaja sara (a term that encompasses all gender variant identities) whose ritualised bathing in milk and repetition, of the hand and the head, leads to spiritual ecstasy. Spaces of Transcendence calls forth an Islamic Futurism that promises to free the oppressed from social and political realities.