

EXHIBITION LEARNING NOTES:

## An Uncommon Thread

This resource has been produced to accompany the exhibition 'An Uncommon Thread' at Hauser & Wirth Somerset from 8 February – 21 April 2025.



Nengi Omuku, Nzogbu Nzogbu, 2024 © Nengi Omuku. Haidas Collection. Courtesy the artist and Pippy Houldsworth Gallery, London. Photo: Todd-White Art Photography

### About 'An Uncommon Thread'

'An Uncommon Thread' features 10 contemporary artists living and working in the UK. The group exhibition highlights the transformative power of unconventional mediums in evoking personal and collective memories. Each artist demonstrates an unwavering commitment to the integral role materials and techniques play in their creative process; employing unexpected painting surfaces, adapting formal craft traditions and repurposing discarded products into compelling works. Through individual investigations of identity, tradition, nature, fantasy and the environment, the artists invite viewers to engage with the rich stories woven into each work.

## Who are the artists in 'An Uncommon Thread'?

**Rachael Louise Bailey** (b.1975) has a sculptural practice rooted in the reuse and reclamation of man-made and organic materials. She engages with local and global environmental concerns through an ongoing investigation with a plastic marine pollutant used in oyster farming, which she refers to as 'the black stuff.' By incorporating such material into her sculptures, Bailey encourages a dialogue around ecological responsibility.

**Max Boyla** (b.1991) explores themes of reality, illusion and communication through his painting and installation practice. Satin often forms an important part of his work, which he uses for its quality as a composite fabric made from both natural and non-natural materials. In doing so, Boyla draws attention to issues around environmental balance and sustainability.

**Jack O'Brien** (b.1993) is known for his exploration of desire and cultural codes through sculpture, painting and installation. His works often involve materials like cellophane, industrial polythene and chrome-plated steel, using wrapping and restraint to critically probe themes of consumerism, commodification and the body. Repurposing found objects like historical horse-racing carriages, trumpet horns, glasses, bottles and forks, he transforms them into charged sculptures that evoke queer aesthetics, the erotic and the alienating.

**Charlotte Edey** (b.1992) is a British artist whose work spans textiles, illustration and installation to unravel issues of selfhood and spirituality. Edey engages in a process of world-building through using weaving, embroidery and beadwork, approaching her textile practice with the language of drawing. Drawing on symbolism and surrealist elements, Edey's compositions are characterized by soft, dreamlike palettes and intricate detailing. Central to her practice is the interplay between the tactile and the ethereal, using processes like hand-embroidery, tapestry, looming and tufting to create textured narratives that delve into femininity, the domestic, diaspora and the metaphysical.

**KV Duong** (b.1980) is an ethnically Chinese artist with a transnational background—born in Vietnam, raised in Canada, and now living and working in the UK. He examines the complexities of Vietnamese queer identity, migration and cultural assimilation through personal and familial history. During his MA studies at the Royal College of Art in London, UK, he created work on latex highlighting its historical connection to French colonial rubber plantations in Vietnam, while simultaneously embracing its sensuality and symbolic association with the queer experience. The recurring motif of a door or portal in his work signifies access and the limitations imposed by societal constructs, particularly those associated with colonial and LGBTQ+ history.

**Nour Jaouda** (b.1997) investigates the intersections of displacement, memory and cultural identity. Based between London, UK and Cairo, Egypt, Jaouda's practice incorporates textiles, sculpture and installation, often using elements of weaving, stitching, dying and deconstruction to create works that evoke a sense of fragmented belonging. Rooted in her own experiences and diasporic narratives, Jaouda's art is an exploration of place and its absence, blending traditional craft techniques with contemporary abstraction. Her use of fabric as a medium becomes a metaphor for identity—layered, torn, cut and reassembled—reflecting themes of migration and cultural hybridity.

**Lindsey Mendick** (b.1987) is a multidisciplinary artist celebrated for her vibrant and narrative-driven works that merge ceramics, installation and storytelling. Her practice delves into themes of memory, anxiety and the surreal aspects of everyday life, often with a humorous and deeply personal lens. Known for her intricate and theatrical installations, Mendick crafts immersive environments that juxtapose domestic associations of clay with the fantastical. Her works

frequently draw on autobiographical experiences, blending them with cultural references to explore vulnerability, relationships, identity and a challenging of the male gaze.

**Nengi Omuku (b.1987)** is a visual artist who works between Lagos, Nigeria and the UK. Using the subject of the body to translate interior experience, Omuku's expressive paintings portray abstracted figures among spectacular, celestial landscapes that draw from the natural world, horticulture and creationism. Her images are rendered in oil paint and painted on strips of Sanyan; a precolonial western Nigerian fabric, created from woven threads of wild moth silk and blended with industrial cotton. For the artist, the blend of oil paint and Sanyan speaks to living between cultures yet firmly contextualising her work within her local setting of Nigeria.

**Tai Shani (b.1976)** has a multidisciplinary artistic practice comprising performance, film, photography and installation. Her work often explores themes of mythology, feminism and the body, weaving narrative and visual elements into complex, immersive experiences. Shani is also recognized for her use of experimental writing, which she integrates as a core component of her creative process. This approach allows her to investigate language and storytelling in innovative ways, often engaging with speculative and allegorical narratives that challenge conventional structures of power and identity.

**Georg Wilson (b.1998)** is a British painter whose practice explores ecology and history, translated through personal experience and folklore. Her paintings follow the seasons, so that her subject and palette changes with the turn of the year. Her scenes are populated with creatures, more 'animal' than any particular gender. Defying classification, they exist outside a human hierarchy of domination or exploitation.



Nour Jaouda, Silent Dust, 2024 © Nour Jaouda. Courtesy the artist and Union Pacific

## How is the exhibition curated?

The exhibition begins in the **Bourgeois Gallery**. Nengi Omuku's hanging paintings are created with oil and collage on a fabric called Sanyan, traditionally used by Yoruba communities in Nigeria. This type of textile is often used for special occasions and its color often determines the color palette Omuku uses while creating her works. Tai Shani's installation imaginatively blends mythology, feminism and surrealism, envisioning a utopia where hierarchies and conventional gender roles dissolve. Bringing together vibrant colours, patterns, otherworldly and organic forms, Shani's work evokes visual symbols from ancient mythology but with a contemporary framing. Jack O'Brien shows the tension that can exist between objects and materials, combining chrome-plated steel, wood, cellophane, concrete and domestic items.

The **Rhoades Gallery** sees Max Boyla's paintings blurring the line between reality and illusion. His canvases consist of dyes applied to satin. As satin is made from both natural and non-natural materials, the artist prompts the viewer to think about individual daily attempts at being environmentally sustainable. KV Duong's series of paintings 'Where Water Remembers Fire 1 - 5' (2024) reflects the enduring legacies of colonialism in Vietnam, poignantly depicting a bomb crater left behind after the Vietnam War. Duong's use of latex alludes to its sensuous qualities within a queer context, while also highlighting the material's connection to French colonial rubber plantations in Vietnam. Nour Jaouda's works 'Silent dust' (2024) and 'Where the fig tree cannot be fenced' (2024) use hand-dyed textiles that have been reconstructed and sewn to create sculptural tapestries. Her collaging and layering of colored cloth are inspired by the natural world and her belief in the ability of nature and place to hold memories. Lindsey Mendick's glazed ceramics explore topics that have a personal resonance for her around issues of mental health and wellbeing. Her work such as 'You took all the words out of my mouth' (2024) often take exaggerated forms that hint at consumption, decay and emotions that words cannot capture.

Within the **Pigsty Gallery**, Charlotte Edey's works 'Limp Bindings' (2025) and 'Stab Sewn' (2025) explore processes of binding, weaving, embroidery, beadwork, drawing and their interconnections, blurring distinctions between the real and what she wants to represent. Georg Wilson's paintings take their inspiration from myths, legends and fairytales, in which she often reverses the traditional roles given to characters in these stories. The changing nature of the seasons is a regular theme within her work.



Rachael Louise Bailey, Rest, 2019 © Rachel Louise Bailey. Courtesy the artist and Alice Black. Photo: Theo Christelis

The **Workshop Gallery** contains work by KV Duong, Tai Shani, Georg Wilson, Jack O'Brien and Rachael Louise Bailey. Rachael Louise Bailey's ecologically conscious installations transform plastic detritus washed up on our coastlines into ambiguous sculptural forms. This is seen in her installation 'Rest' (2019) which combines discarded objects such as pill packets, inhalers, headphones and smoke alarms to form the shape of a human figure.

The exhibition ends in the **Engine Room Gallery** with an immersive staging of ceramics by Lindsey Mendick. Her work 'I Asked You Not to Hurt Me' (2025) weaves autobiographical themes with references to mythological figures such as Philomela and Medea, evoking powerful narratives of betrayal and the violence endured by women.

## **What are the major themes within the exhibition?**

### **Tradition**

Many of the artists in the exhibition incorporate traditional crafts and techniques into their contemporary practice, bridging notions of past and present. These creative approaches link to their individual and collective cultural heritage while engaging with modern themes and concepts. For example, Nengi Omuku and Nour Jaouda draw on their African and Arabic heritages through engaging with tapestry and local materials, whilst artists such as Lindsey Mendick and Charlotte Edey utilize the traditional craft techniques of ceramics and weaving to communicate sociopolitical concerns around gender and racial identity. This use of traditional mediums in contemporary practices challenges the divide between fine art and craft, emphasizing the handmade and slow over technological means of creation.

### **Identity**

Exploration of self-identity emerges as a central theme within the exhibition, encompassing works that deal with cultural, racial, gender, sexual and personal identity to challenge dominant societal perspectives. KV Duong introduces narratives around queer experience through his use of latex while spotlighting colonial history in the production of this material. Nengi Omuku's use of traditional sanyan cloth serves to express her Nigerian identity and that of the Yoruba people. Lindsey Mendick's ceramic works offer deeply autobiographical insights into the mind of the artist, opening vital space for discussion around self-image, anxiety, mental health and wellbeing.

### **Fantasy**

The theme of fantasy appears throughout the exhibition as artists explore unconscious, surreal and mythological realms. Georg Wilson draws directly from folklore to create undefinable characters that inhabit in her paintings. Similarly, Max Boyla's imagery initially suggests recognizable borders or zones within our known world, only to dissolve into other unworldly dimensions. Through fantasy, these artists blur the boundaries between reality and imagination, inviting viewers to question and reconsider their accepted beliefs. This interplay between the real and the imagined serves as a powerful catalyst for dialogue and introspection.

### **Materiality**

The physical, tactile and symbolic qualities of materials are central to the exhibition, highlighting the connection between artists and their process-driven practices. Whether through weaving, casting or assemblage, the deliberate manipulation of materials becomes a defining aspect of their work. Jack O'Brien's work creates tension between his use of found and repurposed familiar objects by surrounding them with shrink wrap, fabric and plastic. Charlotte Edey's mark making and gesture are explored through extensive hand embroidery and beading on tapestry. Her working processes create direct relationships between line, thread and surface.

## Environment

The exploration of the environment through sustainable and natural materials, as well as the repurposing of industrial waste, is a recurring theme in the exhibition. Rachael Louise Bailey highlights environmental concerns by incorporating marine pollutants from the oyster farming industry, drawing attention to the ongoing threats to coastlines and ecosystems. Nour Jaouda bridges rural and urban landscapes by integrating elements such as handmade vegetal dyes to stain her fabrics, reflecting a deep connection to natural processes. These artists underscore the relationship between art, sustainability and environmental awareness.

## What other artists does work in the exhibition relate to?

**Firelei Báez** (b.1981) is a New York-based artist who casts diasporic histories into an imaginative realm, reworking visual references drawn from the past to explore new possibilities for the future.

**Louise Bourgeois** (1911 – 2010) was a French-American artist. Best known for her large-scale sculpture and installation art, Bourgeois was also a prolific painter and printmaker. She explored a variety of themes over the course of her long career including sexuality and the body, as well as her mother's identity, death and the subconscious.

**Bharti Kher's** (b. 1969) use of found objects is informed by her own position as an artist located between geographic and social milieus. Her way of working is exploratory: surveying, looking, collecting and transforming, as she repositions the viewer's relationship with the object and initiates a dialogue between metaphysical and material pursuits.

**Christina Kimeze** (b. 1986) explores tactility as an essential element of her practice. Freedom is expressed not only through subject matter but also her experimentation with surface texture and material effect. Working on napped suede or velvet canvases, Kimeze combines dry chalks, oil pastel and wet paints, applying, crushing and merging them into the fabric.



KV Duong, Where Water Remembers Fire no 1, 2024 © KV Duong.  
Photo: Damian Griffiths

## **Glossary**

### **Allegorical narratives**

Stories that use symbolism to represent abstract ideas, conveying deeper moral, political or philosophical meanings.

### **Autobiographical**

Insights into a person's own life and experiences.

### **Celestial**

Relating to the sky, heavens or outer space, often associated with divinity, the cosmos, and a sense of the sublime.

### **Craft**

The use of manual skills and experience to produce objects. Craft objects can be made from a wide array of materials and be either functional in purpose or created solely for aesthetic reasons.

### **Curation**

The process of selecting, organizing and presenting materials, such as artworks or ideas, to convey a cohesive theme or message.

### **Diaspora**

The movement or displacement of people from their homeland, often leading to the preservation and transformation of cultural identity across diverse locations.

### **Queer aesthetics**

This refers to artistic expressions and visual styles that challenge traditional notions of beauty and identity, embracing fluidity, non-conformity and the celebration of diverse expressions of gender and sexuality.

### **Yoruba**

An ethnic group of people in West Africa with a rich culture, language and history.

## Discussion questions

### Key stages 1 – 2

- Many of the artists in 'An Uncommon Thread' make work using objects and materials that are personal to them. Think of an object you have at home that you could transform into an artwork. What object would you choose? What would your artwork look like? Does it tell a real or imaginary story?
- Fabric and textiles play an important role in the exhibition. What textures can you see in the artworks? What emotions do they make you feel - warmth, comfort, or something else?

### Key stages 3 – 4

- Some of the works in the exhibition reflect the artist's cultural heritage through the use of textiles and materials found in their environments. How can material choices explore cultural history? Can you think of a specific artwork in the show that does this, and how?
- Personal storytelling is central to many of the works in the exhibition. If you were to make a work that reflected elements about your own life and identity, what story would you tell? What materials, colors and shapes would you use to express it? Draw what your artwork might look like.

### GCSE and A-Level

- The artists in 'An Uncommon Thread' often blend traditional craft with contemporary concerns. How do you think the works reflect current social and political issues through their choice of materials and techniques? How does this straddling of old and new enhance their message?
- How do some of the artists in the exhibition explore the interplay between painting and sculptural mediums and methods? What effect do you think this has on how a viewer experiences the exhibition?

### Creative activities – During your visit

- Many of the artists in the exhibition explore different ways of framing their work through a variety of structures, shapes and materials. Using your sketchbook or a piece of paper, cut out your own frame to take with you through the exhibition. Collect drawings, key words and textures to build around your frame. Look at how artists such as Noar Joad, KV Duong and Nengi Omuku expand their frames by tearing and layering as a way of shaping narrative. Reflect on the narratives that you form within and around your frame.
- Look at how each artwork in the exhibition has its own unique identity through the abstract shapes, colors and forms the artists have used. If you could give these artworks a voice, what would they say? What would they sound like? Invent a conversation between two or three artworks of your choosing.



### **Creative activities – After your visit**

- Artists Rachael Louise Bailey and Jack O'Brien use materials and objects they source from the world around them to make their sculptural works. Create your own sculpture using materials you find from your immediate environment. Consider how your sculpture could tell the story of where the materials came from.
- Artists Charlotte Edey, Nour Joada and Nengi Omuku explore the medium of textiles and tapestry in ways that reflect their individual voices and cultural identities. Use recycled fabrics, magazines and newspapers to collage a tapestry composition that tells your story, conveying your unique interests and values.

### **Supplementary research**

[Hauser & Wirth Somerset: An Uncommon Thread](#)

[Tai Shani at The Cosmic House | Wallpaper Magazine](#)

[Jack O'Brien's Charged Objects | Frieze](#)

[KV Duong | The Royal College of Art](#)

[Nengi Omuku's Paintings Traverse Physical and Psychological Realms | Frieze](#)

[Nour Jaouda | The Royal College of Art](#)

[Max Boyla | Royal Academy of Arts](#)

[Rachael Louise Bailey Interview | 'It's good to work with something that stirs you' | Studio International](#)

[Lindsey Mendick's Courageous, Confessional Ceramics | The Guardian](#)

[Georg Wilson | The Royal College of Art](#)

[Charlotte Edey | She Curates](#)