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The Fabric of Protest

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August 2021



A monthly textile workshop by People's History Museum (PHM) and artist Helen Mather. Learn new techniques and discuss the issues that matter to you.

This resource introduces some of the ideas and techniques that will be explored during the online workshop on Saturday 28 August 2021. Use it to prepare for the workshop or as inspiration for your own textile projects.

Recommended for 11+ (under 18s must have an accompanying adult present during the session).

A British Museum Spotlight Loan

Crossings: community and refuge

A powerful installation highlighting the perilous journeys made by refugees and the ongoing humanitarian crisis; featuring the Lampedusa cross alongside an installation of 12 tiny boats.

On display at People's History Museum (PHM) until Sunday 5 September 2021.



The Lampedusa cross, Francesco Tuccio, 2015, wood © Trustees of the British Museum



Issam Kourbaj (b. 1963), 'Dark Water, Burning World', 2016, repurposed bicycle steel mudguards, extinguished matches and clear resin.
© Trustees of the British Museum.

Reproduced by permission of artist Issam Kourbaj

The Lampedusa cross is made from the remnants of a refugee boat wrecked near the Italian island of Lampedusa in 2013. It was made by the Italian island's carpenter Francesco Tuccio and carries messages about kindness, community and the indifference faced by many refugees.

Alongside the cross is a display from Syrian-born Issam Kourbaj's series 'Dark Water, Burning World'. Made from repurposed bicycle mudguards tightly packed with burnt matches, the artwork represents the fragile vessels used by refugees to make their perilous voyages. It was created as a response to the ongoing tragedy in Syria.

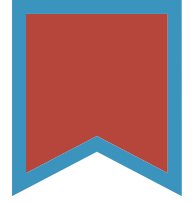


The Lampedusa cross,
Francesco Tuccio, 2015, wood
©Trustees of the British Museum

The boat, that was wrecked off the coast of Lampedusa on 11 October 2013, was carrying Eritrean and Somali refugees attempting the crossing from Libya to Europe. Tragically over 300 people drowned. The island's inhabitants helped to save 155 others, risking their own lives in the process. Francesco Tuccio, moved by the refugees' experiences, but frustrated that he could not make a difference to their situation, made a cross for each of the survivors as a symbol of salvation and hope.

The cross is approximately 39cm high x 28cm wide; it is made from two pieces of brightly painted wood that have been fitted together. The paint is worn away in parts, revealing the natural wood colour underneath. The upright piece has a straight edge with a slight curve towards the end; worn yellow and green paint reveals light brown wood underneath. The transverse piece has bumps along the top edge; worn blue paint reveals the dark brown wood base.

Fabric patchwork cross



The Lampedusa cross is an object that represents the crossings that people make out of desperation, in the hope of a better future. It is the open arms of people coming together in hope and help.



In this workshop we will be making a fabric patchwork cross in response to the Lampedusa cross. Using the Japanese boro patchwork technique with sashiko (or running) stitch, which is used to repair clothing, we will be patching pieces of fabric together into the shape of a cross. The patches and the action of piecing together reflects the need for healing, and people coming together from suffering and hope.



Prepare

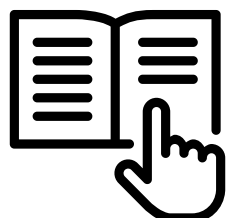


If you have time before the practical session, use the links below to find out more about A British Museum Spotlight Loan, *Crossings: community and refuge*.

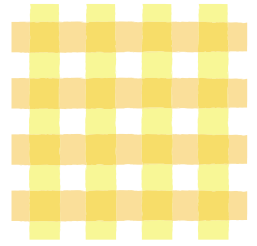
- Read [The Lampedusa cross](#) a blog by the British Museum's Head of Britain, Europe & Prehistory, Jill Cook.
- Watch PHM's June 2021 Radical Late online [Exploring Crossings](#).
- Watch [Objects of Crisis: the Lampedusa cross](#), where Director of the British Museum Hartwig Fischer chats with playwright and British Museum Trustee, Pat Cumper.

You might like to read further information on boro textiles:

- The V&A's description of [boro patchwork](#)
- Eye on Design's History of Design 101 - [Japanese Boro Textiles Tell Histories of Labor and Love Through Patchwork](#)



Materials



Gather some materials from around your home.

You will need:

- Fabric: a piece of fabric around 20cm x 20cm
- Smaller scraps of fabric for piecing
- Embroidery thread
- Embroidery needle
- Pins
- Scissors



Assembling the shape

1

Pick out four different fabric pieces for the cross shape.



2

Cut and assemble your four pieces to make the cross shape. Like the wooden cross, the shapes don't have to be perfect. Your pieces could be frayed, overlapping and not straight.



When you are happy with your composition, pin each piece in place.

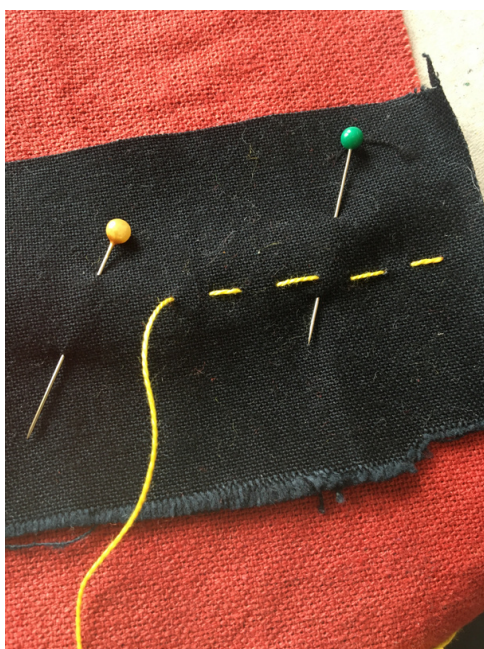
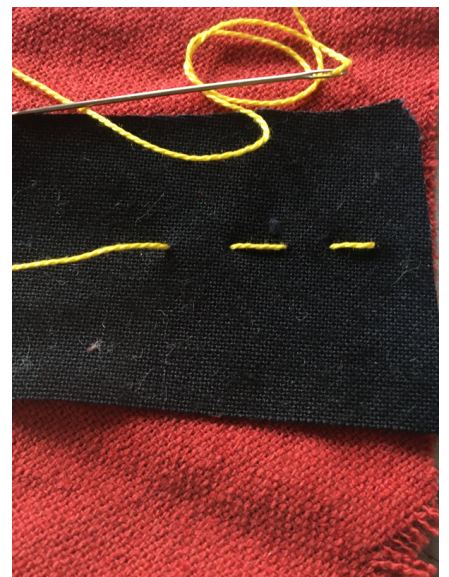
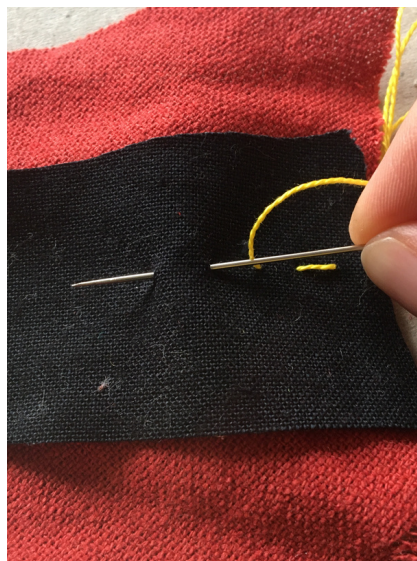
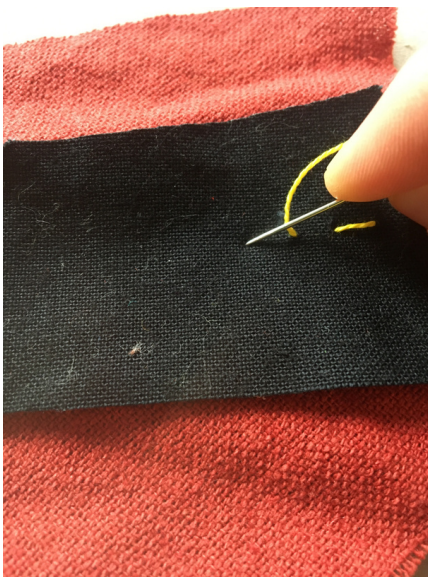


Running stitch

3

Thread your needle and start to do a running stitch in the centre of the vertical strip, from one end to the other.

Running stitch: to start your running stitch, take your threaded needle and pull it up from the back to the front. Push your needle into all the layers of fabric and back out a stitch length away. These stitches are around 0.5cm in length.



4

Turn the fabric around to come back with the running stitch about a stitch length away from the last line. Continue until the vertical strip is fully stitched onto the backing fabric. Don't worry about the stitches being in line, it's better if they are not.



5

Stitch in the same direction onto the horizontal strip. Start from the vertical strip and stitch out to the sides.



6

When the horizontal strips are all attached, start to stitch over the existing stitches in the opposite direction; creating a cross. You can play about using different colours of thread to make crosses if you like.



Join us on Zoom to get creative!

If you would like to join artist Helen Mather and others to stitch, chat and share ideas inspired by this resource, [book onto the online Zoom workshop.](#)

Don't forget to bring a cuppa!

This month we'll be online on
Saturday 28 August 2021
2.00pm - 3.30pm.



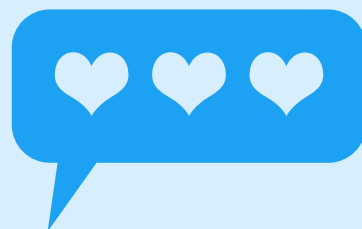
Share what you have created

We would love to see what you have created!

If you use social media, please share photos of your creations using #FabricOfProtest.



Or if you prefer you can email a photo of your creation to learning@phm.org.uk.



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