

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of East London (UEL)		
Unit of Assessment: 32 Art and Design; History, Theory and Practice		
Title of case study: Empowering presence of marginalised people through participation in political art		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Susan Stockwell	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Senior Lecturer	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2014 – 2020
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 – 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Stockwell's method of developing and enacting inclusionary projects serves the dual purpose of engaging and empowering vulnerable groups in traditional museum spaces while serving to extend the reach of the institutions and assisting them as they integrate marginalised narratives. Through her projects, Stockwell and the co-creators confront ideas of cultural institutions' hegemony in the socio-cultural narrative to provide novel and diverse perspectives. Stockwell developed artistic expression for individuals, diversity in museum collections and international dialogue about the themes in her projects.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Stockwell's methodology aims to recontextualise inanimate objects, intending to connect her artistic co-creations to modern people and problems. Textiles feature throughout her work, often paired with thematic representation of femininity such as in her *Territory Dress*, or consumerism in works like *Rumpelstiltskin (R1)*. Stockwell deals with colonial heritages and its implications, subverting its imagery and iconography to do so using the skills and hands of those affected to undermine its hegemony. There are three major research areas to her work:

1) Trade, human migration and currency boats

The recurring motif of boats are recontextualised to confront aspects of trade and human migration. A prominent example of her boats is the installation contributed to **Boîte-en-Valise: Generator (R2)**. Six artists were commissioned to create their transportable work with supplies they could bring in a suitcase to the Venice Biennale, Italy, and reinstalled in Syracuse, New York, USA. The iterations of her installation responded to and dialogued with the Cuban Artist, Abisay Puente, to address the themes of transiency and migrancy, challenging her audiences with the nature of borders, boundaries and injustice.

Likewise, her 2016 exhibition **SEA-MARKINGS**, at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon, questioned the modern understanding of plays such as Othello, demonstrating the relationship between contemporary views on sea-faring and trade in the wider context of historical colonialism (**R3**). In 2019, she revisited the currency boats in *Trade Winds*, St Peter's Church, Cambridge as part of **Migrant Knowledge: Early Modern and Beyond**, a

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study on human migration with the University of Cambridge. In this instance, Stockwell examined personal relationships with money, as a freeing or restrictive mechanism.

2) Joining pieces together

Peace Makers (R4) was the final commissioned work (*Piece-makers*) following a 2-year project with the National Army Museum. It addresses the issues facing soldiers returning from conflict through a patchwork quilt inspired by the museum's collection and the soldiers' experiences, pieced together from decommissioned army blankets. The additional embroidery invokes the veterans' understanding of, and challenges around, duty, solidarity, joy, loss and pride.

As Artist-in-Residence at the City law firm Pinsent Masons, Stockwell embarked on a project with staff to co-create a quilt (**R5**). Originally intended as a response to impending Brexit concerns and the need to re-establish community bonds between staff of many nationalities, Covid-19 shifted the focus of the work to remote co-creation as a meditative unifying process. Stockwell continued to explore unity in the Patrick Heide Contemporary Art and Bartha Contemporary, London, where she participated in a group exhibition called **Should I Stay or Should I Go? (R6)**, exploring Brexit through emotions, rather than politics.

3) Change, mass production and consumerism

Rumpelstiltskin (R1) depicts transformative greed by using blue fabric fed through sewing machines, alluding to the textile industry and its impact on the modern market and environment. For the duration of the installation, Stockwell used co-production events to juxtapose the consumerism of her piece with remedial work in the community (2017-2019). During her time in Portsmouth, Stockwell expanded, developed and adapted her collaborative methodology to engage with different groups such as homeless people, families, visually impaired people, drug addicts and the general public.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1. *Rumpelstiltskin*. 2019. [cloth, sewing machines, tables]. Exchange at Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth, UK: July – September 2019.

R2. **Boîte-en-Valise: Generator** [collaborative exhibition]. 2017. Venice Biennale 10 – 11 May 2017, Italy; Point of Contact Gallery Syracuse New York, Syracuse, United States: 19 October – 15 December 2017.

R3. **SEA-MARKINGS**. 2016. [solo exhibition] Royal Shakespeare Company, Waterside, Stratford-upon-Avon, UK: April - September 2016

R4. **Peace Maker**. 2014. [recycled army blankets, cloth, thread, silk, wood, ribbons] in *Created in Conflict: British Soldier Art from the Crimean War to Today 2018*, Compton Verney, London. 17 March – 10 June 2018.

R5. <https://www.pinsentmasons.com/about-us/announcements/pinsent-masons-appoints-susan-stockwell-as-fifth-artist-in-residence>

R6. *Jerusalem-by-Exit*. 2019. in **Should I Stay or Should I Go?** [group exhibition] Patrick Heide Contemporary Art and Bartha Contemporary, London. 28 February – 18 April 2019. Acquired as part of permanent collection.

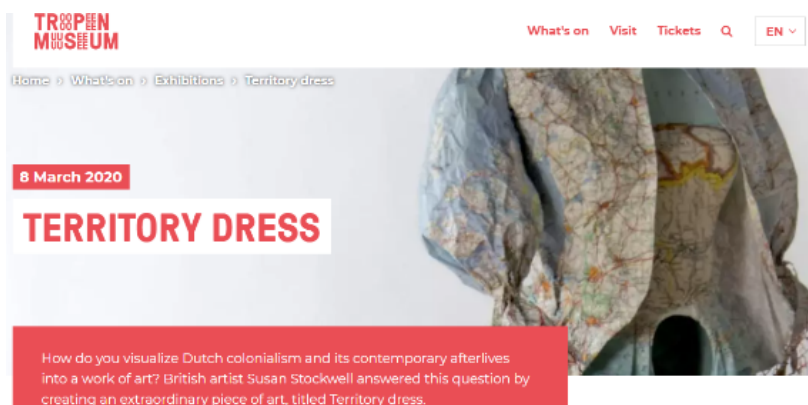
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4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

1) Fostering understanding and learning through participatory projects

1.1 Enhancing cultural experience and public understanding

The broad appeal of Stockwell's highly-political work facilitates international touring and exhibition, where the local context is emphasised, for example, the relevance of her work



Territory Dress to Dutch audiences when it was exhibited at the Tropen Museum, Amsterdam (S1).

Through **Boîte-en-Valise: Generator**, Stockwell and her co-artists were able to bring emotional comprehension to topics such as political and artistic refugees.

Figure 1. Tropen Museum Website Homepage

“Art galleries in Cuba closed their doors to me and here I am now, writing on the wall of this gallery, fragments of my story, freely” – Abisay Puente, artist (R4)

These issues are pertinent as many countries, including the UK and USA, erect barriers by enacting policies restricting travel and immigration. By supporting her co-artists, Stockwell and her work helped to empower people disenfranchised by their governments, so raising awareness of this issue in a compassionate and contemplative manner.



Stockwell was commissioned to create *Jerusalem-By-Exit* for the exhibition, **Should I Stay or Should I Go?** which generated national interest and media discussion (S2), challenging visitors to weigh the psychological consequences of Brexit. Stockwell uses the relationship between the private self and wider society as a tool to promote social awareness, such as with her mediations on currency in **Trade Winds** or the modern relationship with historical colonialism in **SEA-MARKINGS**.

Figure 2. Feature in The Guardian

1.2 Decolonising textiles, museum spaces and collections. Stockwell's choice of subject matter and material questions colonialization, globalization, trade and migration. Her work has been internationally recognised as part of an important shift in the curation of museum spaces to decolonise their collection (S3).

1.3 The Commemoration of Rehabilitation, Reconciliation and Peace.

Stockwell's extensive **Peace Maker** project, commissioned by the National Army Museum, has toured six regimental museums showcasing the struggles and rehabilitation of the participating soldiers. Throughout the project, Stockwell worked with soldiers to lead them through an exploratory, creative process which helped them



Figure 3. National Army Museum website

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build self-confidence, artistic development and personal understanding of their experiences. By focusing on rehabilitation and reconciliation, Stockwell expressed an aspect of the soldiers' lives which is often not commemorated in artistic works but remains crucial to soldiers living today (S4).

1.4 Incorporating methodology into corporate spaces. Stockwell's durational project at Pinsent Masons has enabled the company to address a pressing need for closeness and therapeutic outlets in trying times for the 500 staff in their London office. During the pandemic, Stockwell develops methods to continue co-creating, safely and inclusively, providing an important outlet for positive mental health behaviours for staff. The project, which will be displayed in the office when completed, fosters a continued engagement with art and promotes the sustainability of mental wellness and social equity in the workplace.

"Susan brings exciting new perspective to the residency in her approach to sustainability and collaboration" – David Isaac, Chair of Pinsent Mason Art Committee (R2).

2) Nurturing creative culture for a more inclusive society

2.1 Sustained participation and cultural engagement with marginalised groups. With her extensive outreach programmes, Stockwell has empowered many marginalised groups by guiding the artistic progression of the participants, especially those under-represented in artistic spaces. Projects of such extended duration, such as the workshops in Portsmouth, provide life-long skills of making and mending which benefit participants long after completion. Stockwell has influenced participant's methodology including understanding the importance of collaborative working practice.



Figure 4. Crossan with **Brothers in Arms**

"There was a sense of inclusiveness to our sessions despite our wide range of levels and experience" – Michael Crossan, former soldier and artist (S5).



Figure 5. Tweet about Stockwell's workshops

Crossan is exemplary of the lasting impact of Stockwell's methodology. Following the **Peace Maker** project, he has progressed onto leading projects of his own with the homeless and other vulnerable people, using similar practices to Stockwell and encouraging co-creation in art (S6).

2.2 Pushing boundaries and carving spaces for women Her continuing work as a women sculptor who specialises in traditionally feminine mediums such as textiles has earned Stockwell recognition alongside Rachel Whiteread, Maggi Hambling and Louise Bourgeois in the history of women and sculpting in the 2020 book, *50 Women Sculptors (S7a-b)*. The medium of Stockwell's sculptures and the subject matter in works like *Territory Dress* specifically target both the spaces women inhabit and are absent from.

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5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

S1) <https://www.tropenmuseum.nl/en/whats-on/exhibitions/territory-dress>

S2) <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/mar/01/british-art-responds-to-brexit-michal-iwanowski-susan-stockwell>

S3) <https://www.wereldmuseum.nl/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020%20Provenance%201%20e-book.pdf#page=75>

S4) <https://vimeo.com/297359751>

S5) Testimonial of Michael Grossman

S6) <https://www.refettoriofelix.com/about-us/news-stories/news/interview-artist-teacher-michael-crossan/>

S7a) Robson, C., Sperryn-Jones, J., & Hamnett, M. (2020). *50 Women Sculptors*. Aurora Metro Books.

S7b) According to Amazon.co.uk Best Sellers statistics as of December 2020, the book ranks 269th in the category of history of women in art and 456th in sculpture.