

ABBA



The Black Artisans

an interview with

Jo Sealy

Jo Sealy began this interview by describing her varied career in marketing and communications, including copywriting, and a period working in radio and television. Alongside this, she pursued a secondary career as a business adviser, focusing particularly on small creative businesses.

These roles brought her into contact with many creative individuals. She explained that, although she herself is not an artist—despite having studied photography—she has consistently worked with creative people. She began reflecting on the invisibility of the Black community, particularly Black makers and artisans.

One of her major concerns was the lack of education and opportunities in the arts, with little emphasis on making in schools and few role models for young people to emulate. She was also troubled by the absence of business training in schools. Securing funding for 'The Black Artisans' project, which led to the photographic exhibition at the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow, Jo sought to raise the profile of Black makers and artisans. She collaborated with the Heritage Crafts Association, which already lists the craft of steel pan making and tuning on its Red List of Endangered Crafts.

For the project, Jo visited studios across the UK, photographing makers in their workshops and recording their stories. She discovered a wealth of overlooked talent and, to date, has documented 36 artisans.

“The first Black Artisan I met was Chris Bramble, the respected ceramicist and sculptor. I was struck by his meditative approach, blending European and African traditions.”

In an interview for this exhibition, Jo shared reflections on her encounters with some of the first artisans she photographed.

“The first artisan I met was Chris Bramble, the respected ceramicist and sculptor. I was struck by his meditative approach, blending European and African traditions. He shared his background, including his training at Glasgow School of Art, and how he now shares his studio with his students. I feel he is somewhat under the radar, although his daughter, Freya Bramble-Carter, is well-known on social media and The Great Pottery Throw Down.”

One of Jo’s aims is to highlight the careers of older makers who may be less connected via social media. When she met Doreen Gittens of Archipelago Textiles, whose workshop is based in the Oxo Tower where she has worked for 25 years, Jo recalled: “I was awestruck by the size of Gittens’ loom and the timeless beauty of her weaving. While photographing her drafting a weave, Doreen spoke about her earlier career, her story was deeply inspirational, as was the location of her studio overlooking the Thames.”

Jo also discussed the career of David ‘Satch’ Botwe, a French horn repairer who now runs his own business in Southwark. She photographed him in his workshop but was equally keen to share his life story. “As a schoolboy, Satch joined the Compton Swing Collection as a trumpeter, a unique school band that worked with stars like Stéphane Grappelli and Cilla Black. Realising he wouldn’t make it as a professional musician, he took an instrument repair course at Morden. Now, he reaches out to young people, giving talks in schools and sharing his expertise.”

Jo’s journey also led her to jeweller Melanie Eddy, whose career spans sculptural jewellery, design, manufacture, critical writing, and creative development. Melanie has collaborated with institutions such as Swarovski, the Victoria & Albert Museum, Central Saint Martins, and the British Council. In 2010, she completed a two-month creative residency at Turquoise Mountain’s Institute for Afghan Arts and Architecture in Kabul. Jo was captivated by the beauty of Melanie’s workshop and the inspirational objects with which she surrounds herself.

“This project is far from complete.”

Jo went on to describe photographing the renowned West African musician Moussa Dembele, a griot from Burkina Faso, on a hot day in South London. She captured him repairing a balafon, one of the many instruments he plays with his band, Koroleko. Jo noted his dedication to music and his belief that his instruments possess agency and a life of their own.

Her final artisan was Ray Clarke, a former fashion designer who retrained as an upholsterer in 2009 at London Metropolitan University. In 2015, he moved into a large workshop, Atelier Ray Clarke. Jo was struck by the calm busyness of his studio, filled with tools, fabrics, and furniture awaiting his craftsmanship, which spans both modern and traditional styles.

Jo emphasises that there are many more artisans she has encountered and been inspired by, such as leather bag designer Dolores Swift of Neoma Design in Brighton, steel pan tuner Dudley Dickson, inventor of collapsible stages and steel pan stands, and Toussaint Clarke from Bath, a key member of the Rainbow Steel Orchestra.

Jo also extends her thanks to Paul Tucker, for his significant contributions to The Black Artisans project.

“I see all the individuals I have met through this project as ambassadors and role models. I admire every artisan I have encountered on this journey. Their work has demonstrated the importance of introducing craft into schools and ensuring access, so that young people can discover the wide array of skills that exist.”

The Black Artisans Exhibition is still touring, but this fascinating project is far from complete. Jo's ultimate goal is to record and photograph 100 artisans or more.

Excerpts taken from The Art Workers' Guild Magazine, written by Tanya Harrod, Design Historian.

In association with

Creative Lancashire

The Black Artisans

The Black Artisans

a biographical overview

Donald Baugh

Designer-Maker
Wood

Donald crafts stunning sculptural vessels and lighting that showcase the natural beauty of wood. His work blends traditional craftsmanship with bold, contemporary designs. He selects wood carefully, embracing its natural characteristics to create unique pieces. Passionate about sustainability, he works with the Forestry Commission to responsibly source materials.

A graduate of Rycotewood Furniture School, Donald has been designing bespoke furniture for clients worldwide since 1996.

Angela Benjamin

Jeweller

Angela Benjamin, or AngeB, started making jewellery as a hobby before launching AngeBdesigns in 2016. She creates ethical, handmade silver jewellery, reusing materials where possible. Each piece reflects her belief in quality over quantity, blending traditional techniques with modern style. Ange handcrafts all her pieces in her garden workshop, affectionately called 'The She Cave'.

Marcia Bennett Male MRSS, QEST

Stone Mason
Scholar

Marcia Bennett Male, based in Thames-Side Studios, trained as an architectural stone carver and stonemason. Her freelance work includes prestigious projects such as Hyde Park's Italian Gardens and a plaque for Olaudah Equiano at Westminster Abbey. She has taught at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park for 18 years and run workshops at major UK galleries.

David 'Satch' Botwe

French Horn Repairer

David 'Satch' Botwe started his musical journey at 13, later joining Paxman Musical Instruments in 1975. Over his career, he became an expert in French horn repair and craftsmanship. Now running his own company, Satch's expertise is unparalleled in the industry.

Chris Bramble

Ceramicist

Chris Bramble's ceramics reflect African heritage and European influences, blending cultural elements with modern techniques. His work captures the spirit of those around him, and he runs workshops from his London studio, collaborating with his daughter, Freya as Bramble & Bramble.

Lorna Hamilton-Brown RCA MBE
Knitting

Lorna is an artist and independent researcher focusing on knitting and crochet. Her work offers social commentary on issues like racism and mental health. An acclaimed researcher, she holds a Master of Arts from the Royal College of Art and explores the black presence in crafts.

Jules Hogan
Knitwear

Jules' timeless knitwear collection features subtle colours with seasonal highlights. Known for British craftsmanship and hand-finishing, her pieces are made using the finest fibres, ensuring lasting quality.

Dionne Ible
Mosaic Artist

Dionne Ible creates vibrant mosaic art inspired by African symbolism, landscapes, and the feminine form. Her work has been featured on ITV and in magazines like Good House-keeping. She conducts workshops for both children and adults, sharing her passion for the art form.

Dalia James

Textile Designer-Maker

Dalia James is a woven textile artist inspired by Bauhaus and 20th-century design. Her vibrant, geometric works blend printmaking, collage, and weaving. Selected for the Craft Council's Hothouse programme, she creates both retail products and art pieces in her East London studio.

Dudley Dickson
Steel Pan Tuner

Dudley Dickson became a prominent steel pan tuner after migrating to the UK. His innovative 'collapsible folding stand' and tuning expertise have made a significant impact on steel bands globally. He is a founding member of the UK Steel Pan Tuners Guild.

Melanie Eddy
Jewellery

Melanie Eddy's sculptural jewellery merges traditional techniques with geometric exploration. Based in London, her work spans design, writing, and professional development, with a focus on bespoke pieces. Her background includes work with leading institutions like the V&A and Central Saint Martins.

Jahday Ford
Glassblower

Jahday Ford, a Manchester School of Art graduate, fuses glassblowing with digital design to create innovative textures and forms. His award-winning work, including the 'Breathe' project, has been exhibited widely across the UK.

Doreen Gittens
Hand-woven Textiles

Doreen weaves luxury textiles like scarves and throws from silk, wool, and linen. From her Oxo Tower studio in London, she creates bespoke pieces for clients worldwide, known for their fine quality and attention to detail.

Ray Clarke
Upholstery

Originally trained in fashion, Ray turned to upholstery after restoring a friend's chairs, discovering a passion for furniture reimaging. He re-trained and opened his first workshop in 2009. His work has appeared on TV and in magazines like Vogue and The Sunday Times.

Toussaint Clarke
Steel Pan Tuner

Toussaint Clarke began tuning steel pans at age 12, trained by mentors from Trinidad. He now tunes for renowned steel bands worldwide and is a founding member and Vice Chair of the UK Steel Pan Tuners Guild, dedicated to promoting the steel pan art form.

Emefa Cole
Jeweller

Emefa Cole creates bold, sculptural jewellery inspired by her Ghanaian heritage. Using recycled metals and ethically sourced stones, her work meditates on themes of belonging and migration. Her designs are known for their quiet boldness and tactile elegance.

Moussa Dembele

Balafon and Kora Maker

From a Griot family, Moussa crafts traditional West African instruments like the balafon and kora. A master musician, Moussa has toured internationally and builds exquisite instruments, continuing his family's craft tradition.

Maya Njie
Perfumier

Inspired by her Gambian and Scandinavian heritage, Maya Njie creates artisanal, vegan perfumes that evoke personal memories and moments. Founded in 2016, Maya Njie Perfumes handcrafts each fragrance by blending raw materials with essential oils, aroma compounds, and resins—where nature and science meet to tell her story through scent. Her unique background in surface design influences the packaging, adding an extra layer of artistry to every bottle.

Carla Sealey
Ceramics

Carla Sealey, a former environmental scientist, now crafts ceramics from black stoneware and porcelain. Her work, based in Bedfordshire, explores human boundaries and reflection, using hand-building and slip-casting techniques to create functional and sculptural pieces.

Seneke Sillah

Djembe/Drum Skinning

Seneke Sillah, born in The Gambia, is a skilled djembe drummer and drum maker. After moving to the UK, he founded Mbilla Arts and performs with African fusion bands. He teaches and performs across Europe, promoting traditional West African music.

Annette Taylor-Anderson
Creative Director
Designer

Annette Taylor-Anderson founded ATADesigns in 2006/7, creating award-winning wall-coverings and fabrics for the hospitality and corporate sectors. Her work has appeared internationally, and she is passionate about integrating nature into her designs.

Judith Annakie-Eriksen
Ceramic Artist

Judith Annakie-Eriksen is a ceramic artist and owner of JAE Ceramics, a home-based pottery business founded in 2020, and located in Essex. Judith creates ceramic pieces mainly with porcelain clay using the pinch and coil building methods or on the wheel, which are then decorated with patterns, slips, oxides and glazes.

Monochromatic tableware forms the main part of the product range, which can be used as functional or decorative display pieces. Inspiration is drawn from the simple and elegant forms of Scandinavian design, the patterns of traditional South African textile prints, and contemporary jewellery design.

Francisca Onumah
Metalsmith

Based in Sheffield, Francisca creates sculptural metalwork with an anthropomorphic quality. She layers hammered patterns onto sheet metal, blending intentional and organic textures. Her work has been exhibited internationally.

Johnette Taylor
Leatherworker

Johnette Taylor is a leather goods company created from the talents of Californian, now London based Johnette Taylor. Johnette has taken the inspiration from America and life in London to create personal leather goods and small accessories.

Jeanette Sloan
Knitwear Designer

Jeanette Sloan has been a knitwear designer for over 20 years and written or contributed to many books on hand-knitted accessories. Founder of BIPOC in Fiber, a database of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour working in fibre.

Darren Appiagyei
Wood Artist

Inthegrainn is a design company created by Darren Appiagyei, which focuses on creating bespoke pieces with a wood orientated theme. Every piece created has an underlying story based on personal experience or inspired by everyday life.

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Ronaldo Wiltshire
Ceramic Artist

Ronaldo Wiltshire is a London-based ceramic artist known for his functional and decorative works. His creations are inspired by the vibrant landscapes of Barbados, where he grew up, reflected in his custom glazes of blues, greens, and whites.

Raised in a family of potters, he learned ceramic techniques from a young age, working in his father's workshop. He later pursued formal studies in Art & Design at Croydon College and Product Design at Ravensbourne. He gained wider recognition after competing in The Great Pottery Throw Down in 2020.

Marcia John
Designer-Maker
Woven Textiles

Marcia John is a designer-maker, specialising in woven textiles, located in South London. The cultural influences of her native country, has been a contributory factor to her deep-rooted passion for working with natural materials.

Resources from the surrounding environment such as coconut fibre, bamboo and palm leaves are all familiar materials. They each form an integral part in her weaving processes, which allows her the scope to be highly experimental. The varied collection of materials are used in different combinations, to produce functional and non-functional art pieces for interior spaces.

Merissa Hylton
Ceramicist
Sculpture

Merissa Hylton is a multidisciplinary artist and educator based in London. She works across a variety of media employing both traditional and experimental techniques in her creative process. With a focus on ceramics and sculpture, her work explores ancestry and identity through the use of symbolism, abstract imagery and portraiture.

Grafton Yearwood
Steel Pan Tuner

Grafton Yearwood, a skilled steel pan tuner, grew up around steel pan culture but only embraced the craft in the mid-1980s, apprenticing under his father 'Biggs' and Dudley Dickson. In 1991, he co-founded the 'Happy Drum' company and began working internationally, particularly in Switzerland with Martin Grah.

Yearwood has tuned for many top London bands and is a founder of the UK Steelpan Tuners Guild, helping elevate the craft of steel pan tuning worldwide.

Adaesi Ukairo

Sculptural Works

Adaesi Ukairo expresses in tangible form the fluid movement of energy. Using hammers and forming stakes she raises her sculptural forms from flat sheet, moulding and shaping intuitively, creating distinct, highly textured and patinated pieces of work.

Victoria Ajoku

Fan Maker

Victoria Ajoku seeks to revive the concept of the fan right across the entire UK, as the craft of Fan Making is listed as a critically endangered craft in the UK. Victoria's goal is to ensure that there are frequent fan making workshop experiences' available for people to buy as therapeutic online or in person classes.

Tihara Smith

Designer Maker

Tihara Smith is the founder of a heritage influenced fashion, accessories, and lifestyle brand inspired by the Caribbean and the Windrush Generation.

Meron Wolde

Jewellery Artist

Meron Wolde is a Swedish/Eritrean Jewellery Artist working in recycled silver and gold, following an environmentally friendly studio practice. Meron crafts minimalistic designs forming pieces by hand, heat and traditional silversmithing techniques.

Dolores Swift

Leather Bags

Ceramics & Silverware

Dolores Swift transitioned from card making to leatherwork, opening her first boutique in Lancashire. Now based in Brighton, she crafts leather bags that celebrate the rawness and natural beauty of the material, alongside ceramics and silverware.

Kingsley Thompson

Leatherworker

Kingsley Thompson, a self-taught leatherworker from Cheltenham, produces durable wallets, belts, and accessories. His journey began in 2013 when he sought to create a wallet that would outlast those on the market. Today, he handcrafts premium leather goods from his home workshop.

Godfrey Morris MBE

Master Saddler

Leatherworker

Godfrey Morris is a leather Artisan located in London, who produces traditional and modern bespoke leather goods to suit your everyday needs. His timeless handcrafted leather goods, are made from oak bark, vegetable and chrome tanned leather. Each item is made using traditional methods and a combination of hand and sewing machine stitching.

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With thanks

Thanks to everyone who have contributed to this project.

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Design LSC

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Jo Sealy extends her heartfelt appreciation to all the artisans, and individuals whose selfless support and encouragement have made The Black Artisan project a reality.

Paul Tucker
Ed Matthews-Gentle
Luigi Carnovale
Tanya Harrod

G . F
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The Black Artisans
a project by Jo Sealy

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