

## Inspires, Uplifted and Proud

*Textile Portraits, A Black Arts and mental health project*

This Black Arts project was designed and delivered online by Michelle Ayavoro during national lockdown with service users from Recovery Pathways, a citywide service at Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust.

Michelle Ayavoro is a textile artist. She runs a social enterprise called HerArt and works part time as a Wellbeing Arts Tutor at Recovery Pathways.

Michelle says, “My passion is using my creativity and ideas to design and create workshops that make a difference in people’s lives and enables them to recognise and express their creativity.”

The work on show is a powerful testimony from those who have lived experience of mental ill health and recovery.

Recovery Pathways supports you to build futures through art, people and places and find what you need to move on in life at your own pace, close to home by offering a unique and creative range of opportunities for positive mental health and wellbeing.

Inspired by The Black Lives Matter Movement, Michelle had an overwhelming urge and drive to promote and celebrate positive images of Black people following the tragic death of George Floyd and rising exposure of inequalities and racism still prevalent around the world and in the UK today.

For further information please visit:

[www.gmmh.nhs.uk/recovery-pathways](http://www.gmmh.nhs.uk/recovery-pathways)

### 1) DSC9883 – ‘Emili Sande’ by Anon

**“If the world kicks you to zero, spread your wings like an eagle”.**  
Emeli Sande

**“Who needs feet when I have wings to fly”.**  
Frida Kahlo

*“My portrait is of singer/songwriter Emeli Sande. I’ve always been drawn to the warmth and beauty of her voice and the way that she writes about her personal experience of heartache and emotional vulnerability with such openness and honesty. I admire the way she uses her profile as a successful musician to support*

campaigns such as *Black Lives Matter* and raising awareness of *HIV* and *breast cancer*. She says *social justice* is the driving force in her life. She also has a degree in *medicine*. She is such an *inspiring role model* for women everywhere. *I wanted my portrait to reflect Emeli's passion for the work and life of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo, another woman who has been an inspiration to me. Like Emeli, Frida used her creativity to explore both painful personal experience and social injustice and to celebrate the power of women. I chose to focus on her painting "The Frame" rather than one of her more ambiguous portraits because I wanted my portrait to be celebratory. I took inspiration from the colours in that painting, the 'naïve' style Frida used and the life affirming symbols that appear in her work such as flowers, plants and birds. The birds in my portrait are based on African Bee-eaters to reflect both Emeli's African heritage and the many birds that appear in her songs as symbols of freedom and transcendence.*



*Emeli Sande - Original Photo*

*More personally, her music helped me through a very dark time when because of my mental health I was in hospital for several years. I was finally discharged in 2019, the same year that her album 'Real Life' was released. The songs on that album are all about surviving something very painful and coming out the other side overwhelmed by the joy of being alive, which was exactly how I felt at that time. They're also about challenging racism and the divisions between us. There is so much power and love and optimism in her songs it's impossible not to get up and dance!"*

## **2) DSC9884 – 'Beyonce' by Hamish Sempill**

*"For my piece I chose an image of Beyoncé taken from the music video for her song 'Brown Skin Girl' from her 2020 visual album 'Black Is King'. The track is such an uplifting song with lyrics that truly feel like a celebration of women of colour; I was so inspired by the empowering message in the song, and by the creative journey Beyoncé has gone through to develop herself as an artist. Her music and visual imagery lift people up, so I wanted to create an image that captures her vibrant aura and the positive energy she spreads with her songs.*



*Beyonce - Original Photo*

*This project has been wonderful to be a part of, I have really enjoyed having the opportunity to honour one of my favourite artists in this way. I've learned a completely new skill in the process of making this, I had barely even looked a needle and thread before I*

*started this, but it's become more than a skill, I've found a passion for expressing myself creatively through this piece. It's been an incredible journey, and I've enjoyed every moment of it."*

### **3) DSC9885 – 'Hazel Dorothy Scott' by Anon**

*"I chose this truly remarkable woman who found a way to thrive during a time of the hardest circumstances, not just being black but also being female.*

*An inspirational Trinidadian-born woman, who was a renowned jazz and classical pianist, singer, and actor. She was a critically acclaimed performing artist and an outspoken critic of racial discrimination and segregation. She also used her status as one of the best-known African-American entertainers of her generation to shine a spotlight on issues of racial injustice and civil rights.*



*Hazel Dorothy Scott - Original Photo*

*She was prominent as a jazz singer throughout the 1930s and 1940s. In 1950, she became the first black American to host her own TV show, *The Hazel Scott Show*, earning \$75,000 (\$1,065,111 today) a year,*

*Her unique swinging style and fusion of jazz and classical influences kept her in demand for performances through to the very end of her life. Inspiring today's musicians like singer-songwriter Alicia Keys. Scott was her inspiration for her performance at the 61st Grammy Awards, saying: "I've been thinking about people who inspire me; shout out to Hazel Scott, I've always wanted to play two pianos."*

*Her talent, strength and ability to raise not only herself but the lives of others should always be remembered."*

### **4) DSC9886 – 'Madame CJ Walker' by Alison Johnson**

*"I have found this art project to be inspiring and creative. I was unaware of successes and influences of most of the people chosen by the other members in the group but have learnt so much and been inspired by the uniqueness of each portrait and how they have created them. From start to finish, I have learnt so much. I had no knowledge of a colour wheel and even some of the materials and methods that*

have been used. I think the tutor has done a fantastic job by guiding us step by step through our art pieces in order to make them as good and creative as they are at the finish. I have found researching Madam CJ Walker has taught me a lot about what an inspirational and determined woman that she was, how she used her knowledge and wealth to build up her community and many others. It's great to know that still people are inspired by her legacy, to see the mural that has been done by an artist this year following the pandemic, just emphasises the power of her legacy and that she still is remembered for her work today. I am happy and proud that the tutor encouraged me to use Madam CJ Walker as my portrait, as I've found learning about her to be inspiring and motivational.



Madame CJ Walker - Original Photo

I've found that doing this activity has really helped me to focus and learn something new. Something that I have not been able to do for many years, in between trying to keep my head above water and trying to look after myself and family. This was my main goal and I'm so happy I managed to take the time to focus and complete it. I found that when I would be doing the art piece, I would be more relaxed. It has opened my eyes to art and the creative ways artists are doing their work. It has made me feel more confident about learning something new and trying other things that I have thought that I am not good at. I have enjoyed it all the way through and the tutor has been amazing!"

##### 5) DSC9888 – Maya Angelou by Stephen Davies

"I've learnt that people will forget what you say, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel"

I came across this quote from Maya Angelou at a particular time in my life when it was what I needed to hear. The more I discovered about Maya Angelou the more I became aware how she uses her own personal background to inspire us to be strong and push through life with confidence, she is someone who continues to inspire me.

I really hope that my portrait to celebrate this amazing woman represents her strength and creativity and is a true tribute to the one and only Maya Angelou.



Maya Angelou - Original Photo

*I enjoyed participating in this course on so many different levels. I had never created a portrait using textiles before ,the course was so clear, and well thought out we worked together through each stage of the process and really began to support each other .I found I had skills in sewing I didn't know I had!. I enjoyed listening to and learning about the stories behind each of the portraits as we chatted about our work and the people, we had chosen who inspire us. Looking at my portrait of Maya Angelou I get a real sense of achievement.”*

#### **6) DSC9889 – Margaret Busby by Michelle Ayavoro**

Margaret Yvonne Busby was Britain's youngest and first black female book publisher in 1960s when she co-founded publishing house Allison and Busby. She was Editorial Director for 20 years and published many notable authors.

In 1992 she edited the anthology 'Daughters of Africa' and its follow-up in 2019 'New Daughters of Africa'. Each book contains an international anthology of words and writings by over 200 women of African Descent from the Ancient Egyptian to the present.

*“I am inspired, uplifted and proud to read so many individual unique stories in one book written by women of African Descent.*

*Margaret not only enabled these women stories to be recognised but they are now documented in African history.”*



Margaret Busby - Original Photo

#### **7) DSC9891 – Bell Hooks by Catherine Fuller**



Bell Hooks - Original Photo

Bell Hooks (Gloria Jean Watkins) is a prominent author, professor, feminist, and social activist. She has written some seminal works in the field of race and gender, over 30 books and many scholarly articles including how Capitalism intersects to increase oppression and class injustice.

**8) DSC9892 – Self Portrait by Michelle Ayavoro**



*Michelle Ayavoro - Original Photo*

**9) DSC9893 – George Floyd by Michelle Ayavoro**



*George Floyd - Original Photo*

**10) DSC9895 – Breonna Taylor by Michelle Ayavoro**



*Breonna Taylor - Original Photo*