

**The Train Track
and the Basket
Dr Claire Barber**

The Train Track and the Basket

Dr Claire Barber

Project Description



An installation created for the main entrance/exit vestibule of Hull Paragon Station that investigates and responds to the transmigration phenomena in Hull's history and was exhibited/installed as part of a major programme of temporary art commissions called 'Look Up' as part of the "Roots and Routes" thematic season for Hull UK City of Culture 2017.

The research explored transmigration through the idea that craft skills and belongings traverse routes of passage, alongside people. The artwork provided specific consideration of the history held in Hull's Paragon Interchange Station adding sensitively to the memorials already in situ in the building. The social history of transmigration and the reference to different styles of weaving from different cultures were central to the work and the process of double weaving emblematic of how users might engage with The Train Track and the Basket as they crossed paths entering into and out of the station.

A supporting photograph Train Track Study refers to elements of this history and was exhibited as part of the Photography Textile Image Salon at the 8th Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art, Museo del Traje, Madrid 2019. 'The Train Track and the Basket: Interpreting transmigration within a site-responsive practice' is a commissioned piece of writing that unravels the research underpinning The Train Track and the Basket and is published in Issue 1 of The Critical Fish (2019, pp.44-49).

The Train Track and the Basket [installation].
Exhibited at Hull Paragon Station, Hull 31 March - 31 December 2017.

Research Aims & Objectives

Project Duration:

Research and development phase:
July - September 2016

Detailed proposal and sample development:
September 2016 – February 2017

Installation completion:
31st March 2017

Funder:

Total budget £30,000 + £3,000 R&D element, funded by Hull UK City of Culture Limited.

£200 Arts Council England funding for the commissioned writing 'The Train Track and the Basket: Interpreting transmigration within a site-responsive practice'.

Research Partners, consultants, collaborators:

Hull Paragon Station.

Hull UK City of Culture Limited.

Research Aims & Objectives:

- To investigate and respond to transmigration as a significant factor in the history of Hull.
- To reflect on how craft skills as well as people traverse routes of passage.
- To investigate the significance of woven structure as an aesthetic experience within a site-specific practice in response to these concerns.



The Train Track and the Basket [installation]. Exhibited at Hull Paragon Station, Hull
31 March – 31 December 2017.



Roots & Routes Season Guide: Apr - Jun 2017 accessed https://issuu.com/hullukcityofculture2017/docs/hull2017_seasonguide_rootsandrout



Evaluation Report Creating the Past: Hull UK City of Culture 2017, pp.56-57. Accessed <https://www.hull.ac.uk/work-with-us/research/institutes/culture-place-and-policy-institute/report/hull-2017-hlf-outcomes-evaluation-combined-report.pdf>

The 8th Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art was supported by a 180-page 21 x 21cm full colour catalogue, published by World Textile Art Association.



The Train Track and the Basket: Interpreting transmigration within a site-responsive practice. In The Critical Fish: Beneath the surface of art and visual culture, 1 (1), pp. 44-49. Retrieved from: https://issuu.com/thecriticalfish/docs/fish_v3_issuu



Research Context

In 2017 Hull became UK City of Culture, the second city to hold the title, and the first in England. Hull 2017 aimed to produce transformative culture through a range of diverse and high-profile events and projects. The year was broken down into four 'thematic' seasons which informed the programme; "Made in Hull", "Roots and Routes", "Freedom", and "Tell the World".

As part of the overall artistic and cultural agenda a major programme of temporary art commissions for the city centre were proposed to respond to, and reveal in new and surprising ways Hull's architecture, streets and public spaces. I was one of a number of international artists (others included Nayan Kulkarni, Bob and Roberta Smith, Michael Pinsky, Tania Kovats, Sarah Daniels and Claire Morgan) invited to create new work for the 'Look Up' series of commissions as part of the "Roots and Routes" season. It is estimated that 73,320 people engaged with The Train Track and the Basket at Hull Paragon Interchange (for more information refer to 'Evaluation Report Creating the Past: Hull UK City of Culture 2017' 2019, pp. 56-57).

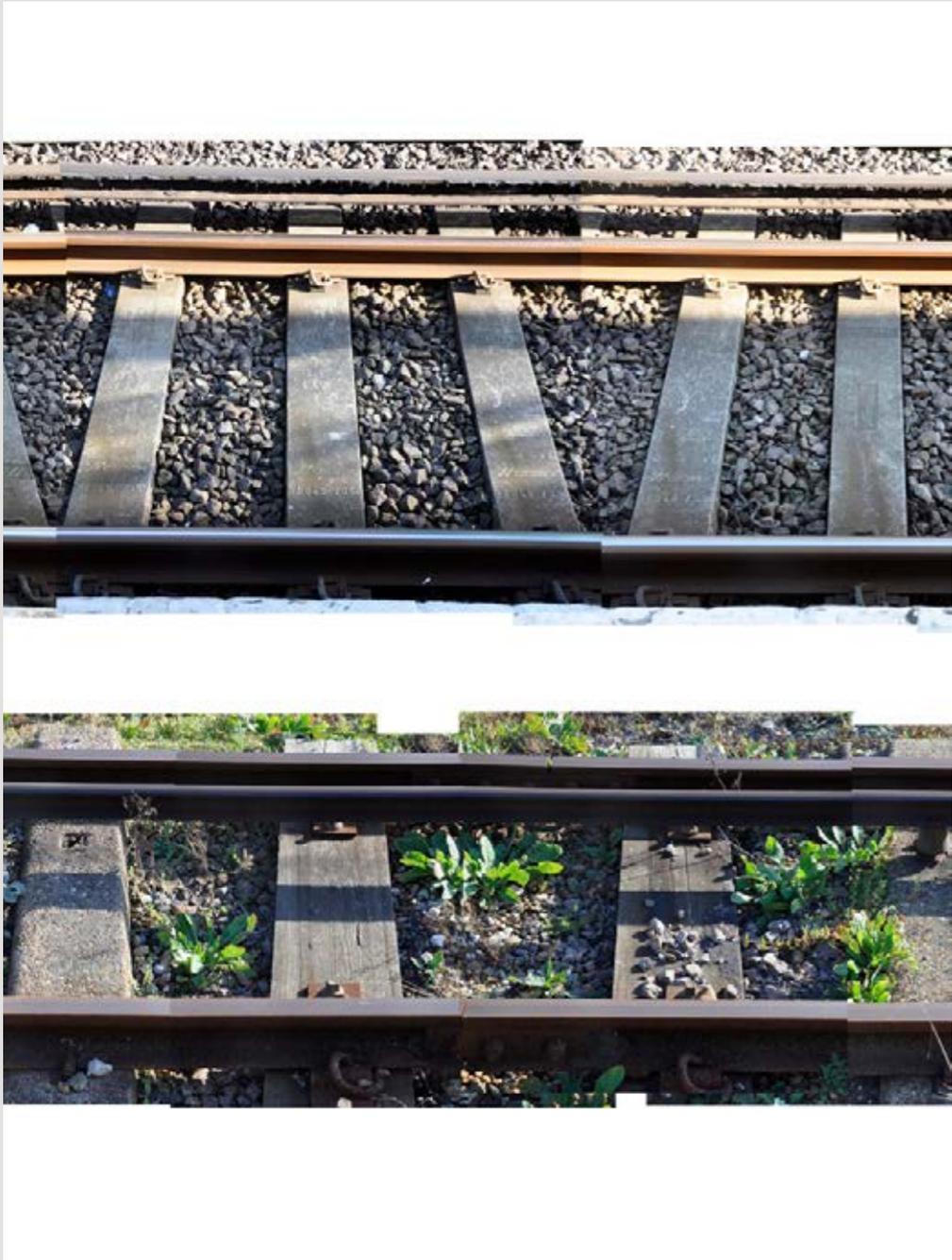
A progression of this work Train Track Study was presented at the 8th Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art at Museo Del Traje, Madrid in 2019 as part of the photography textile image salon (Jury: Silvia Fedorova, Andrea Fischer and Sofía Rodríguez). I was the sole British artist selected with other contributions from Netherlands, United States, Chile, Poland, Mexico, France, Korea, Spain, Colombia, Argentina, Turkey, Japan, Uruguay, Ukraine, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Latvia, Canada, Finland, Peru, Russia, Serbia, Czech Republic, Lithuania, Brazil, New Zealand, Norway, Bolivia, Costa Rica and Portugal. My photographic work involved reformatting photographs of train tracks, the construction of which could be likened to a type of fibre used in basket weaving and created for practical purpose.

The article The Train Track and the Basket: Interpreting transmigration within a site-responsive practice (2019) presents my imaginative commemoration of the historical route of

transmigration from Eastern Europe to America, and the woven baskets containing personal belongings, carried by migrants as they passed through Hull, often escaping persecution and prejudice. This was commissioned by Jill Howitt and Lauren Saunders with support from Arts Council England for the peer-reviewed journal The Critical Fish - Beneath the Surface: Art and Visual Culture (May 2019, pp.44-49).



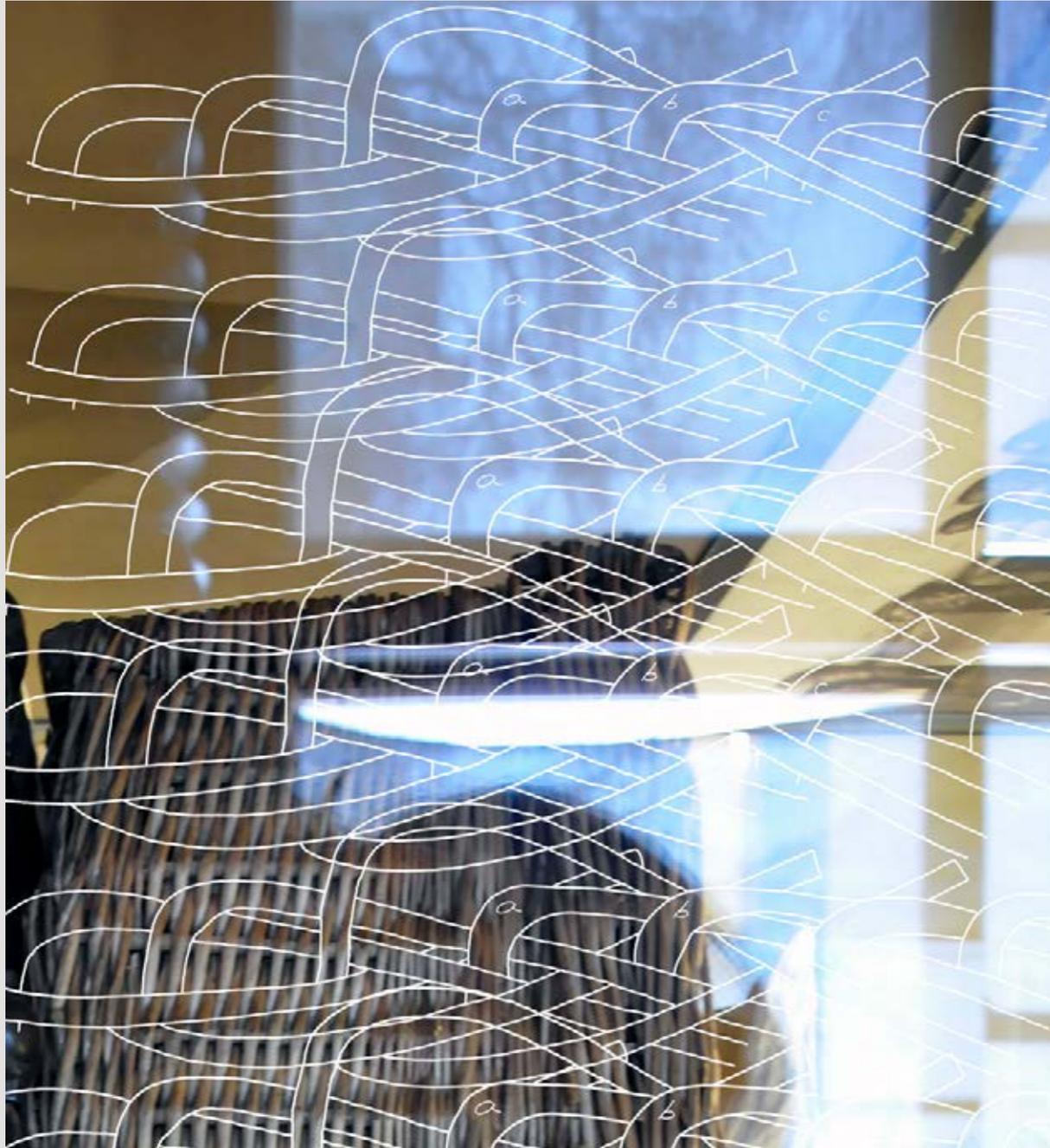
Train Track Study [Photograph]. Exhibited at Museo Del Traje, Madrid
17 September - 3 November 2019.



Photographic collage and digital manipulation 2017.



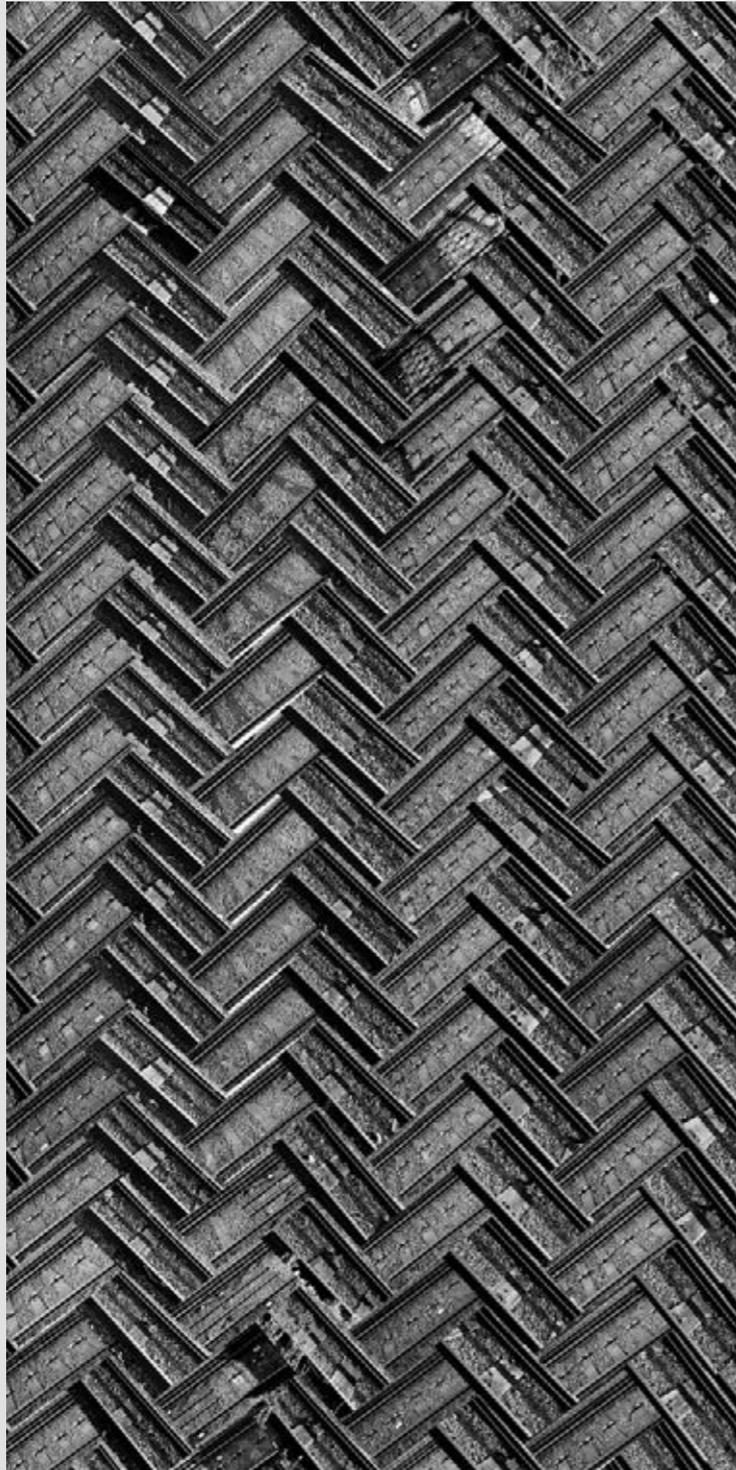
Research Methods & Process



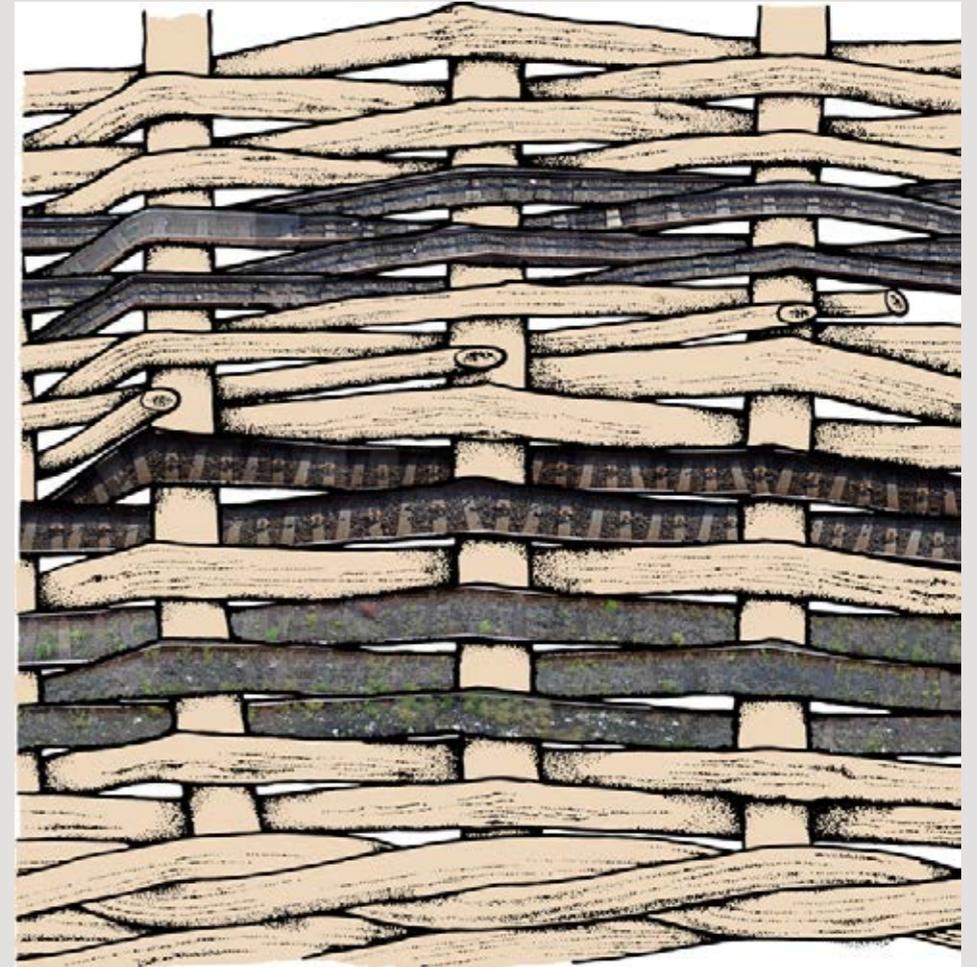
Photographic collage and digital manipulation, 2017

The research considers the way hypothetical investigations and practical work intertwine and challenge each other in the consideration of transmigration as an historical subject specific to Hull and as an elusive subjective experience which constitute human engagement with Hull Paragon railway station in the present. The interrelationship between designed materials and objects that are woven on the one hand and are personal companions to experiences on the other – is at the heart of my enquiry, whereby experiments with diagrammatic drawings of baskets, investigations of baskets at museums, alongside photographing train tracks and collaging them together as woven structures are combined to gain a better understanding of the position of transmigration within my creative practice. This has led me to ideas in the thinking of the anthropologist Tim Ingold, particularly his essay “On weaving a basket” (2009) and his consideration that for hand-woven baskets the form does not emerge from the makers initial idea, rather form, he proposes, becomes unfolded through the engagement the practitioner has with his or her materials. The relevance of Ingold’s theory to this project is the metaphorical resonance of skilled movement as a mode of enquiry to inspire strategies of thinking-through-making in the analysis of the interrelation of transmigration, woven structure and identity relationships within a site-specific practice.

The design process of the project began in July 2016 with initial research, consultation and site visits in order to develop a proposal which included a written rationale and concept; description of materials and process; and outlines of technical information, costings, fabrication and installation methods. Following this detailed plans for the project including fabrication, risk assessment and maintenance requirements were developed and the final artwork was installed in the 14 large window spaces in Hull Paragon Station on 31st March 2017.



Photographic collage and digital manipulation, 2017



Photographic collage and digital manipulation, 2017

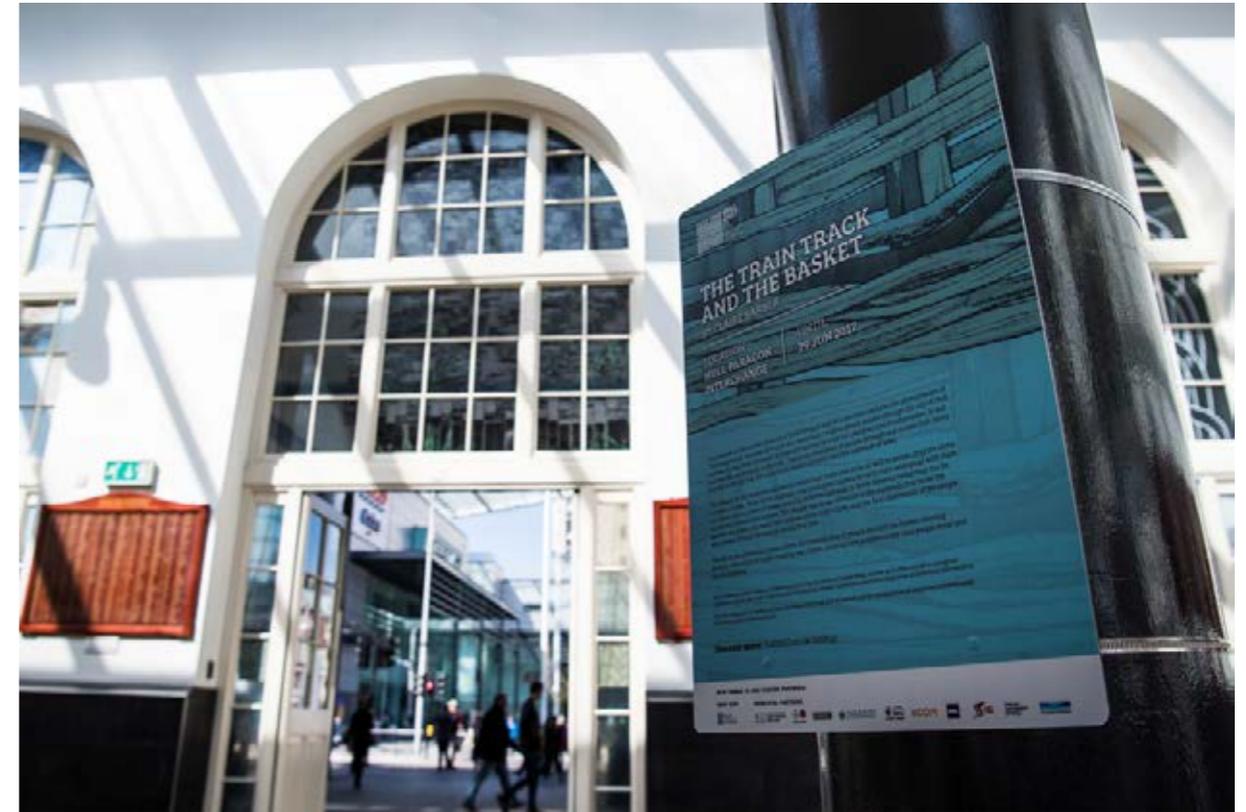
Research Outcomes & Dissemination

Project Outcomes:

The Train Track and the Basket consists of 14 large scale vinyls applied to the semi-circular window spaces above the exit doors in the main entrance/exit vestibule of Hull Paragon Station. These explore the ways that skills migrate along the transport routes, as well as people, their hopes and expectations. Many migrants used traditional baskets to take their belongings on their journey, and there are a number of basket weaving patterns and skills now present in North America that can be traced back to northern Europe. The images also make reference to other elements that interweave with this history – the materials that make the baskets, the plants and seeds that migrate along the train tracks, and the final destination of the people who passed through the station. The site of the artwork is a place where the constant moving of people today mirrors the weaving process which creates textiles and baskets – the action of layers crossing over layers, creating new patterns every time people enter and exit the building.

Within the editorial for *The Critical Fish* Jill Howitt summarises her perception of the work:

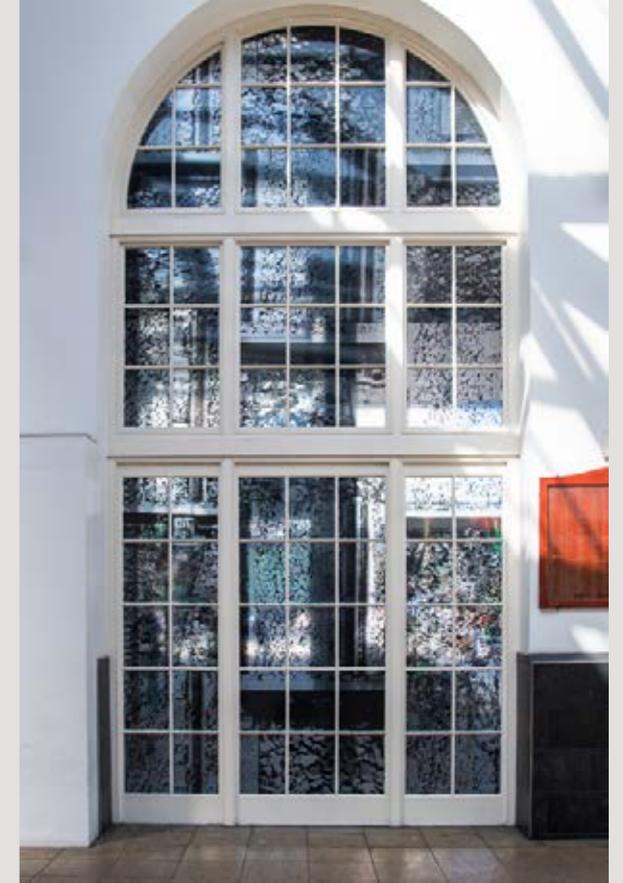
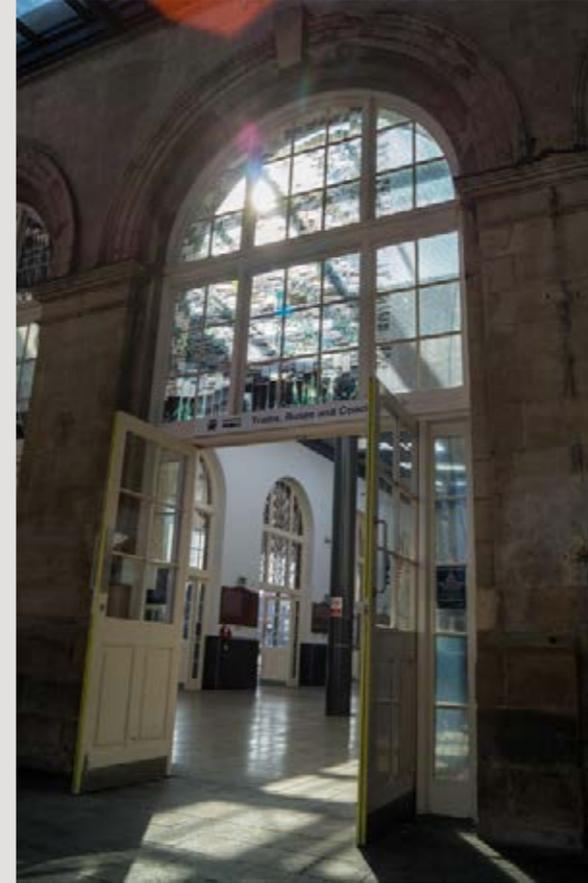
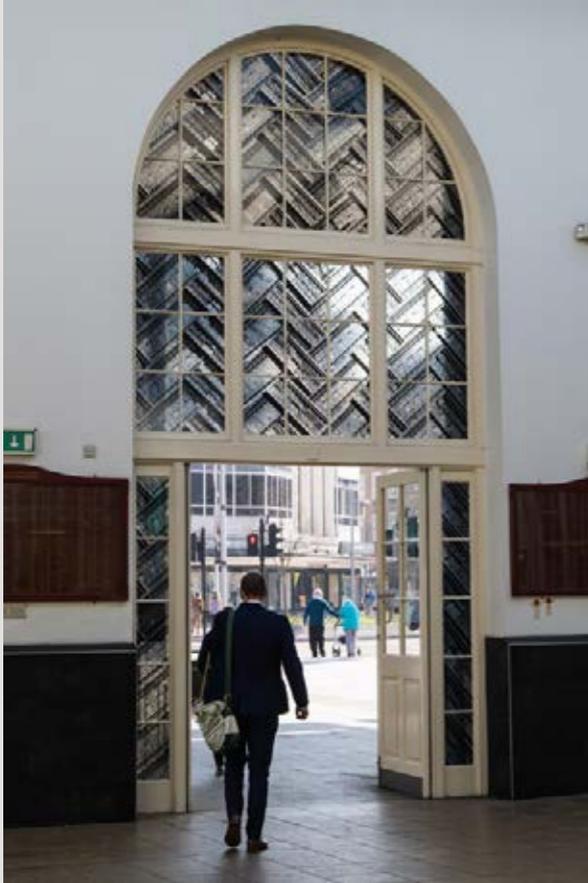
I've always liked this work because of its relevance nowadays and for its celebration of history and identity through connection. I'm now able to think about the hurried, uncertain, meandering paths trodden across Paragon Station as part of a larger dance or performance as well as picturing individuality and community in terms of distinct threads in a piece of woven material. (2019, p.6)



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**Public and Community
Dissemination:**

31 March – 31 December 2017:

Roots and Routes (as part of the 'Look-up' series of commissions for Hull UK City of Culture 2017), Hull Paragon Station, Hull.

February 2017:

A guide supported the Roots and Routes season with cultural events on each double page spread including the Train Track and the Basket. Published by Hull UK City of Culture. Also accessible as an online guide:

https://issuu.com/hullukcityofculture2017/docs/hull2017_seasonguide_rootsandroutes

Hull UK City of Culture is supported by a Wikipedia page, with a section on the Roots and Routes season from April to June 2017

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hull_UK_City_of_Culture_2017

A final evaluation report 'Creating the Past: Hull UK City of Culture 2017 An Evaluation of Cultural Programming Inspired by Heritage within Hull UK City of Culture 2017' includes a double page on the role of transmigration in Hull's history as explored in The Train Track and the Basket (2019, pp.56-57). Accessible at:

<https://www.hull.ac.uk/work-with-us/research/institutes/culture-place-and-policy-institute/report/hull-2017-hlf-outcomes-evaluation-combined-report.pdf>

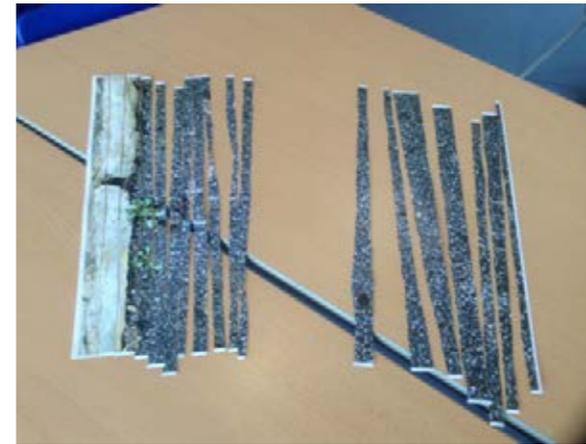
July 2019:

The 8th Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art was supported by a 180-page 21 x 21cm full colour catalogue, published by World Textile Art Association with an image and caption on each exhibiting artist's work alongside a dedicated website of the 8th Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art:

<https://madrid2019.wta-online.org/>

February 26 and March 13 2020:

Discussed The Train Track and the Basket in relation to railways and textiles topic and develop carousel of related weaving and photography activities with pupils from Denby C of E First School, Goose Green, Upper Denby, Huddersfield.



Pupils from Denby C of E First School, Huddersfield working on weaving and photography activities inspired by The Train Track and the Basket February 26 and March 13 2020.

Academic Dissemination:

Monday 22- Tuesday 23 May 2017:

The Transmigration Project attended as keynote speaker in the 3rd International Congress on Visual Culture hosted by Universitat Abat Oliba, Barcelona, Spain.

Thursday 21 - Friday 22 September 2017:

The Train Track and the Basket. Conference paper presented at Making Futures V hosted by Plymouth College of Art, held at Mount Edgcumbe, Plymouth.

Thursday 12 April 2018:

The Train Track and the Basket: The aesthetic dimension of textiles within a site-specific practice. Conference paper presented at Textiles and Place hosted by Manchester School of Art and the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.

May 2019:

The Train Track and the Basket: Interpreting transmigration within a site-responsive practice. In *The Critical Fish: Beneath the surface of art and visual culture*, 1 (1), pp. 44-49. Retrieved from: https://issuu.com/thecriticalfish/docs/fish_-_v3_issuu



References

Ingold, T. (2009). "On Weaving a Basket." In *The Object Reader*, edited by Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guins, 80-91. London: Routledge.

Output Type:

Original artistic works, creative body of enquiry,
contribution to collaborative group exhibition,
journal article, conference contribution