
Press release

New exhibition takes you on an immersive journey into the lives of migrants in Britain

Room to Breathe

1 November 2018–28 July 2019

Migration Museum at The Workshop, 26 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7AG



Room to Breathe is a new immersive exhibition opening on Thursday 1 November 2018 at the Migration Museum in London, inviting you to discover and explore personal stories from generations of new arrivals to Britain.

In the face of the external 'hostile environment' and fierce debates about immigration policy, *Room to Breathe* invites you into the personal and communal spaces created by people starting new lives in Britain. Journey through a series of rooms – from a bedroom to a classroom, a kitchen to a barber's shop – in which unique stories of creating a home, finding work, navigating hardships and making friends are brought to life through audio, films, photographs and personal objects.

By opening drawers, picking objects off shelves, or settling into an armchair, visitors will discover stories from over 100 people who have created new lives in Britain. These include *Windrush*-era arrivals from the Caribbean, NHS workers from across the world, refugee arrivals from the 1930s to the present day, as well as chefs, students, artists, teachers, entrepreneurs and musicians.

Visitors will be invited to make these spaces their own by creating art and contributing stories and objects. The exhibition will also serve as a setting for residencies by refugee and migrant artists, as well as a varied programme of events and activities, from cookery classes to flash performances, storytelling evenings to art and craft workshops.

"*Room to Breathe* brings to life the struggles, joys, creativity and resilience of living in a new land," says Sophie Henderson, director of the Migration Museum. "We aim to humanise and bring to life a subject that is so often discussed in terms of numbers, policies, cost and benefit, by inviting visitors to immerse themselves in the personal stories, spaces and experiences of generations of people who have made new lives in Britain."

Room to Breathe is the latest exhibition from the Migration Museum, which shines a light on how the movement of people to and from Britain across the ages has shaped who we are – as individuals, as communities and as a nation. The museum is currently based at The Workshop in Lambeth, London. For more information, visit migrationmuseum.org.

For more information and to attend the press view from 4pm–6pm on Wednesday 31 October, followed by the exhibition launch party, please contact:

Matthew Plowright (Email: matthew@migrationmuseum.org Tel: +44 7585 117 924)

Notes to editors

Visitor information

Room to Breathe

Dates: 1 November 2018–28 July 2019

Opening hours: Thursdays 12pm–8pm, Friday–Sunday 12pm–6pm

Venue: Migration Museum at The Workshop, 26 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7AG (Nearest tubes Vauxhall, Lambeth North and Westminster)

Admission: Free

About the Migration Museum

The Migration Museum is shining a light on the many ways that the movement of people to and from Britain across the ages has shaped who we are – as individuals, as communities, and as a nation. We are doing this through the creation of an inspiring national Migration Museum, a far-reaching nationwide education programme and a knowledge-sharing network of museums and galleries across the UK. Our museum is currently housed at The Workshop, a temporary arts and community space just off Albert Embankment in London provided by U+I, a regeneration and investment business.

Acknowledgments

Room to Breathe is supported by Arts Council England, Cockayne – Grants for the Arts, the Doris Pacey and Dr Michael and Anna Brynberg Charitable Foundations. The Centre for the Study of Migration at Queen Mary University of London. Vauxhall One are sponsoring a number of roundtables and events associated with the exhibition. We would like to thank all of the many contributors, researchers, advisors and volunteers who have shared their stories, creativity, time and expertise with us. We are grateful to all of our funders and donors, including Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Alfred Caplin Charity Settlement and Unbound Philanthropy. We would like to thank U+I for enabling us to host our museum at The Workshop.



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

COCKAYNE



Centre for the
Study of Migration



Queen Mary
University of London



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Resources

Audio trailer

[Click here to listen to an audio trailer for *Room to Breathe* \(opens in Soundcloud\)](#)

Selected exhibition images and stories



Dad's two-tone shoes, 1956 (Image courtesy the Cornwall family)

"Dad was born in Jamaica in 1922. At the outbreak of World War Two, he volunteered with the Jamaican Home Guard and then, in 1944, enlisted with the Royal Air Force. After the war, he worked for British Railways as a signaller until he retired.

This type of brogue shoe was all the rage in the 1940s and 50s. Dad's wearing them in the photo with me and Mum in Trafalgar Square in 1956. He was always particular about the way he looked and I suppose he wore these if he was going somewhere he thought was special. His workmates nick-named him 'The Duke'. I suppose firstly because of his surname, and secondly, because he was a snazzy dresser."



School photo (Image © Mais Peachey)

"I arrived here in the UK with the intention of seeing my parents in a week. But circumstances changed, and they were stuck in Iraq.

While everybody else was getting dropped off at school by their mums or dads, I was getting dropped off every single day by a black cab because there was nobody around to pick me up and take me to school, which was really weird. Imagine you are already having trouble fitting in because you don't speak the language and you're in an alien country, and now there's a black cab that comes and drops you off!"



Habib (Image © Sue Partridge)

"When I was in the detention centre, I was always thinking about what was going to happen to me, how long I was going to be there. It was a challenge mentally. I found out there was an art room and the moment I saw it I felt better. I thought: 'I can spend my time here.' I started to make things. I made rugs from old fabrics, clay temples and paintings. I'd spend all day there. I was always planning what to make so my mind was free of everything. There have been difficulties and darkness in my life, but something has always happened that has given me the power to keep going. As long as I can keep active, make art and do what I can to help other people then I can find my resilience."

Habib will be one of our artists-in-residence during the exhibition run



Bora (Image © Ben Walsh)

"I left Turkey in 1992. My mum made me come. She said: 'You're not safe here.' At that time, we weren't allowed to speak our own language, use our own Kurdish names or even listen to Kurdish music. I'd got into trouble with the Turkish police and, when I was 12 years old, I was put in prison.

We had a fruit and veg shop back home and I was working on the till when I was 12, so I knew the business well. We bought this shop about ten years ago and I'd work 100 hours a week, early in the morning till late at night every day, including Christmas, until one of my customers said: "Go home, Bora, shut the shop and have a break!" I can't imagine life without the shop. I'll never retire and I don't want to go back home. I feel free here. When you come from a hard life, you appreciate the freedom this country gives you. This is the best fruit and veg shop in London and I feel proud of it."



Akua (Image courtesy Korantema Anyimadu © Nana Ama)

"When we were kids, me and my sister used to put tights on our head, pretend we had long hair and play grown ups. Now, I wear tights to protect my hair, which definitely came from my mum, who moved here from Ghana about 27 years ago. She used to pay for us to get our hair steamed at the hairdressers and if we didn't wear tights to bed and messed up our hair, she would get so mad. I would always do it, except later when I was staying over at friends' houses – I was a bit too embarrassed."

For high-res images and more information, please contact:

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