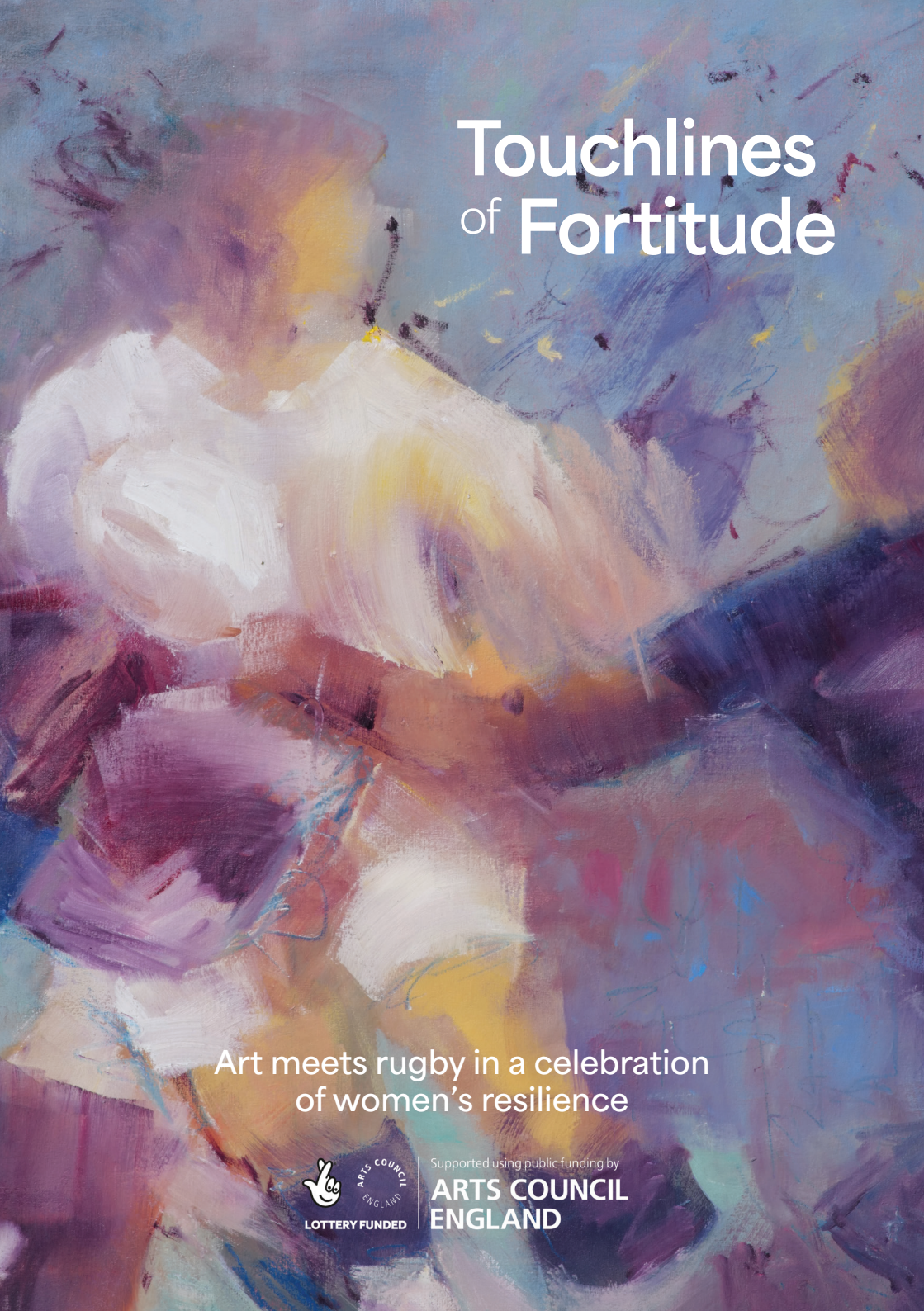


An abstract painting with thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of purple, blue, yellow, and white. The composition is dynamic and textured, with various colors blending and overlapping.

# Touchlines of Fortitude

Art meets rugby in a celebration  
of women's resilience



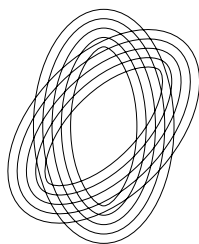
LOTTERY FUNDED



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ENGLAND**





# Touchlines of Fortitude

**Exhibition Catalogue**

**12 September - 5 October 2025**

Presented by Agnieszka Lokaj  
in partnership with The Beach Gallery  
& Arts Council England

# Touchlines of Fortitude

**Touchlines of Fortitude**

[www.fortitude-touchlines.com](http://www.fortitude-touchlines.com)

Cover image

*ToF: Emily Scarratt*

**Agnieszka Lokaj**

Designer: Jamie Jones

Editor: Toby Waller

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# Introduction

Welcome to Touchlines of Fortitude: a creative celebration of female strength, resilience and expression in all its forms – and there has never been a more relevant time to talk about what women’s strength means, and how we can keep the conversation around it alive and vibrant.

With the 2025 Women’s Rugby World Cup shining a global spotlight on women’s sport – and aiming to be the most inclusive women’s sporting event in history – Touchlines of Fortitude’s extensive programme of art exhibitions, vibrant creative workshops and engaging community events is a chance to expand and amplify the boundary of the conversation beyond the pitch – offering a unique cultural response, and letting us explore how resilience, teamwork and creativity connect sport, art and everyday life.

Creativity is a powerful tool for self-expression and building confidence – helping us boost our mental health, empowering women to build resilience, and nurturing the opportunity to be part of a like-minded community of artists and storytellers. Equally, art and storytelling also offer a chance to highlight underrepresented voices – from female athletes to neurodiverse artists and community leaders–sparking broader, richer conversations around what strength means and why it matters.

Our ultimate aim for Touchlines of Fortitude is to inspire and empower future generations of girls and young women to have the confidence to think differently, break boundaries and to tell and share their story – making this not just a moment, but a movement.

Finally, I’d like to thank some of the amazing organisations who have provided valuable support to help us in our goals for Touchlines of Fortitude – especially Arts Council England for their invaluable funding, Hobbycraft for acting as a valued sponsor and providing materials to our artists and events, and The Beach Gallery for hosting our exhibitions, workshops and awards evening.

**Agnieszka Lokaj**

**Touchlines of Fortitude event organiser**

# The Beach Gallery

'The Beach' gallerista, Mark Vellacott FRAeS, is delighted to have the opportunity to host the Touchlines of Fortitude exhibitions and writing workshop.

'The Beach' was established as a gallery, studio and café in Teddington three years ago, providing a vibrant fine-arts venue where local artists can exhibit alongside the work of established local, national and international artists, and where inclusivity is of vital importance.

Mark's well known sculptor mother, Avril, and silver working grandmother, Olga, were both wonderfully talented and resilient women, and their example has shaped Mark's attitude to life, his ambitions, and his love of sports – Mark previously played rugby at London Welsh and Harlequins, and continues to row at Molesey Boat Club. He is also a British Rowing Umpire.

Having had his own ups and downs, Mark has first-hand experience of the importance of artistic and creative endeavours in supporting mental resilience, and values the time he was able to spend caring for and learning the art of portrait sculpture from Avril during 'lockdown' before her passing from stage 4 cancer.

Avril exemplified fortitude and resilience during this time, and is remembered for her contribution to the sport of women's rowing with the 'Avril Vellacott Cup' for the Elite Coxless Four Event at the premier Henley Women's Regatta.

Viewing the themes of female resilience, creativity and empowerment through the lens of rugby and visual art are therefore close to Mark's heart – and he welcomes you all to enjoy this visual arts and community engagement project.

Touchlines of Fortitude:

# Exhibition

Gina DeCagna  
Agnieszka Lokaj  
Tahira Mandarino

Fri 12th Sep - Sun 21st Sep

# Curator Introduction

The occasion of the Women's World Cup 2025 has been the catalyst for this exhibition, Touchlines of Fortitude exploring rugby, art and female resilience. It has been my pleasure to work on the presentation of work by the exhibition's three featured artists Gina DeGagna, Agnieszka Lokaj and Tahira Mandarino.

Each artist has taken their own uniquely personal approach to exploring women's stories of strength and empowerment to create a display with diverse and thought-provoking imagery.

Influenced by personal experiences each one of us viewing the exhibition will have our own interpretation of the work. Please take time to explore and enjoy the works to discover your own stories within them.

Gina explores how stories are shaped. For me Gina's depictions of woodland in Mowhawk Park evoke the enduring power and resilience of nature helping it to thrive and survive over time. The tranquility of the woodland scenes and inherent power of the trees brings a sense of calm reassurance, or is it hope that our world will endure through nature.

By contrast Agnieszka's work in this exhibition captures the sheer physicality of women's rugby. These dynamic portrayals of powerful women on the pitch would not have been possible if it not been for the determination of girls and women to pursue the sport they love.

Tahira tells us that her work explores resilience as a quiet inner foundation, something we discover about ourselves when pushed to our limits. The portraits and photographs exhibited capture visible and unseen aspects of strength; resilience is at the heart of the portraits Beckie and Rochelle, women reclaiming their inner strength after abuse.

Explore Touchlines of Fortitude to discover your own stories of female resilience.

**Lynn Szygenda**

**Touchlines of Fortitude exhibition 1 curator**



Lead artist

## Gina DeCagna

After experiencing burnout, I started slowing down and building up habits of noticing nature again, and connecting to it – to both return to and nurture my inner self.

Resilience is about holding onto your core self, values, dreams and visions, no matter how difficult the circumstances. Female resilience, for me, is doing this in a society that is patriarchal, hyper-capitalist, and continually employing extractionist techniques that devalue.

Whilst being protected and feeling safe within nature, I feel I can access these raw components of who I am.

These art pieces are more than landscapes. They depict scenes of foliage in the wooded park nearest my childhood home, which I still visit to this day in order to gain clarity within my thoughts, and to feel safe and protected whilst doing so. In that sense, they show touches of my interiority, interlacing with the exterior natural world.





**Mohawk Park I, Cranford,  
New Jersey**

75cm x 110cm

Pastel and gouache on  
paper

**£1800**



**Mohawk Park II, Cranford,  
New Jersey**

75cm x 110cm

Pastel and gouache on  
paper

**£1800**



Lead artist

## Agnieszka Lokaj

I've always been fascinated by the idea of what female strength and resilience means, how they can take many different forms, and why they matter. In 2024, when I was made redundant, it was a life-changing moment for me in terms of exploring and rediscovering my own strength and sense of self-belief. Painting and creativity gave me a much needed boost to my confidence and mental health.

As someone with ADHD, I'm very aware of how my emotions around anxiety, self-esteem and my feelings of imposter syndrome affect all aspects of my life, including my art. So, focusing purely on exploring my creative side really did wonders for my wellbeing.

In today's world, we all need ways to process our emotions, build confidence, and feel supported. Creative expression and physical activity – moving our bodies through sport – can offer us this. They give us a chance to reflect, release, and reconnect with ourselves and those around us.

My works for Touchlines of Fortitude have been inspired by England's Red Roses and the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup, because they represent so much more than sport. Rugby is a powerful metaphor for resilience, strength, and teamwork – qualities that women embody both on and off the pitch.

Through my paintings, I want to capture the energy, courage, and solidarity that women's rugby brings into focus, while also celebrating the broader stories of female empowerment, and endurance. The 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup offers a global stage where these qualities are visible and can be celebrated – my art translates that same spirit into visual form, offering viewers an emotional and reflective way to connect with those themes.

I had the opportunity to see the Red Roses train, so I naturally took my sketch book to find inspiration. I wanted to capture the sense of their strength, their power, their energy, their confidence, and their speed – and the emotion of how it feels to watch them as a spectator. This is what it means to see true strength in motion.



**ToF: ZoeH**  
50cm x 70cm  
Oil  
£745



**ToF: Megan**  
70cm x 80cm  
Oil  
£945



Lead artist

## Tahira Mandarino

Through the use of drawing, painting, textile film, photography and site specific, Tahira brings to light aspects that are often hidden or overlooked. Central to the work is the theme of exposure, capturing moments of vulnerability and emotional unveiling, while also embodying the paradox of being seen but not seen.

Simultaneously Tahira explores the absence of the father, delving into the emotional and quiet void left by his departure. Through this exploration, the work sparks a conversation about loss, identity, and the complexities of relationships, allowing each viewer to form their own understanding and connection to the themes. Tahira embraces a symbiotic approach, emphasising that nothing exists entirely by itself.





**Milana**

30 x 40 cm

Oil on canvas board

**£895**



**Rochelle**

30 x 40 cm

Oil on canvas board

**£650**

Touchlines of Fortitude:

# Exhibition

## **Open call group exhibition**

Works selected from an open-call by a panel including art critic and writer Tabish Khan, award-winning artist Karen Turner, The Beach gallerista Mark Vellacott, and artist and curator Agnieszka Lokaj.

Thu 25th Sep – Sun 5th Oct



Touchlines of Fortitude: exhibition 2

# Curator Introduction

The theme we asked our artists and writers to examine for this Touchlines of Fortitude open-call exhibition was 'Female Resilience'.

We knew that female strength and fortitude come in, and can be expressed in, a wealth of shapes and guises. The aim of Touchlines of Fortitude is to be a true celebration of that strength in all its forms. Equally, we know the positive effect that art and creative storytelling have on mental health.

We've been absolutely astounded and inspired, though, to see how so many creators have brought those themes of confidence, empowerment and resilience to life, and how they've expressed it in so many innovative and unexpected forms. The works you see before you really do explore and celebrate a rich multitude of ways in which women rise, persist, endure and transform.

I've always defined the success of a work when it genuinely connects with someone, when it sparks reflection, or even a small shift in perspective. And that's what we want to encourage through this open-call exhibition - a broader, richer conversation and discussion about what women's strength means to <you>, inspiring future generations of girls and young women to push their boundaries, express their creativity and share their story.

**Agnieszka Lokaj**

**Touchlines of Fortitude exhibition 2 curator**

## Stella Alexander

---



### **Anxiety**

29.7cm x 42cm

Lino cut

£150

## Ronn Beattie

---



### **'The Family Bag'**

50cm x 27cm

Ceramic, leather and gold leaf

N/A



## Boxio3

---



**Illusion of Being**

21cm x 29.7cm

Photography

£100



**Undisclosed**

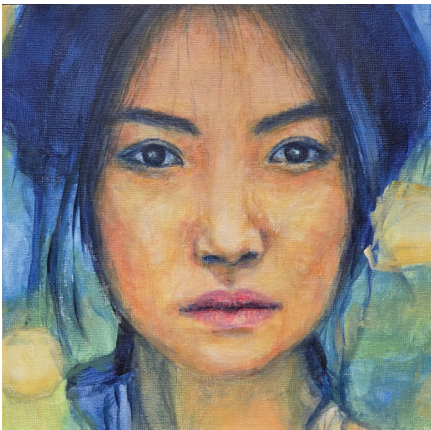
29.7cm x 42cm

Film photography

£175

## Sheena Bulpitt

---



**Grace and Grit**

25.5cm x 25.5cm x 3.2cm

Acrylic

£240

## Terry Burke

---



**Persephone**

18.5cm x 27cm

Mixed media

£320

## Cody Choi

---



**Above the clouds**

40cm x 30cm

Photography

£395



**Miss Bouncy**

30cm x 40cm

Photography

£395

## Judy Clarkson

---



**Carlisha on Red Ground**

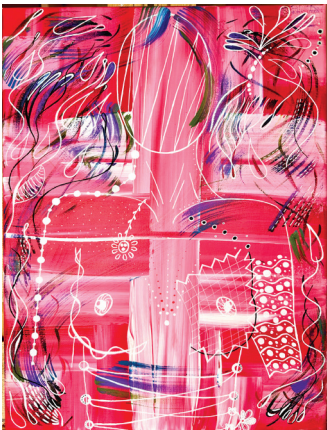
30cm x 40cm x 4cm

Oil on canvas

£900

## Alona Courtney

---



**Fighting for survival**

30cm x 40cm

Acrylic and pen

£150

## Rachael Doble

---



**The light within to transcendent with each tread**

25cm x 10cm x 12cm

Sculpture

**£3000**

## Hillary Emetuche

---



**Drawing of Ezinne**

60cm x 80cm

Charcoal and graphite

**£5000**

## Jill Iliffe



**Office Drawing**

Unframed: 19cm x 9cm      Framed: 36cm x 27cm

Graphite

**£300**



**Evelyn (and her Factory Team)**

49cm x 60cm

Oil

**£2000**



**The Day Out**

Framed: 50cm x 40cm

Graphite

**£320**



## Sal Jones

---



**Christine the Brave**

40cm x 40cm

Oil on canvas

£850



**She Has No Choice**

40cm x 50cm

Oil on canvas

£1000

## Glynis Lamond

---



**'Dancing In The Moonlight'**

Framed: 42.5cm x 32.5cm

Ink on cartridge paper

Framed: £370

## Linda Landers

---



**Meeting**

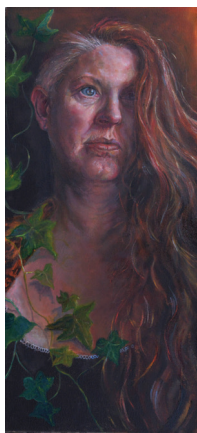
40.8cm x 49.2cm

Aquatint etching

**£320**

## Charity McArdle

---

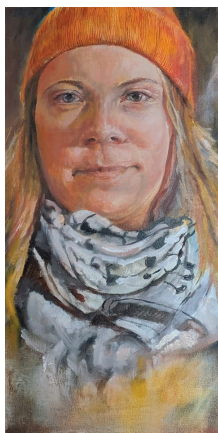


**Tara with Ivy**

30cm x 70cm

Oil on canvas

**£1200**

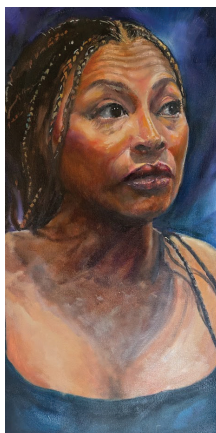


**Greta**

30cm x 60cm

Oil on canvas

**£1200**



**Shante**

30cm x 60cm

Oil on canvas

**£1200**



## Doina Moss

---



### **Fragility**

40cm x 50cm

Oil on canvas board

**£300**

## MUSI

---



### **The Dive**

48cm x 30cm

Limited Edition giclee print on Hahnemühle Bamboo Paper

**£755**

## Jessica Ozlo

---



**Sedimentos**  
40cm x 50cm  
Textile  
£680



**Arroyo de hilo**  
30cm x 30cm  
Textile  
£420



**Meandro**  
30cm x 30cm  
Textile  
£460

## Teresa O'Hara

---



**From Scara to Strength**  
25cm x 25cm  
Textile  
£75

## Morgane Pairain

---



### Monthly

40cm x 40cm

Acrylic on wooden board

£180

## Pauline Rafal

---



### Knitting, Variation I

21cm x 24cm

Linocut

£175



### Knitting, Variation II

26cm x 35cm

Linocut

£250

## Usha Rajagopal

---



**A TRIBUTE TO MY MOTHER'S CARER**

36cm x 46cm

Acrylic

£300

## RainwoodGB

---



**After the Storm**

13cm x 18cm

Cyanotype, botanical collage, paper cut, line drawing and tea staining

£170



## Amanda Ribbans

---



**River Swimmer**

Unframed: 29.7cm x 21cm   Framed: 50cm x 45cm

Multiblock linoprint

Unframed: £100   Framed: £140

## Sue Roe

---



**Beatrice**

10cm x 10cm

Original collagraph print

**£130**

## Nadiia Rom

---



### **Balance**

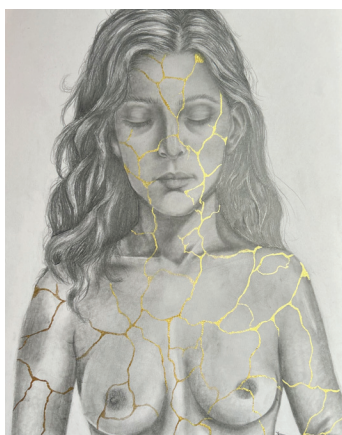
40cm x 50cm

Oil on canvas

**£1500**

## Marie Rowley

---



### **Kin no Michi (*The Path of Gold*)**

29.7cm x 42cm

Pencil with gold powder

**£150**



### **Hidden in plain site**

29.7cm x 42cm

Digital art

**£100**



## Jana Rychvalska

---



**'Artist Assigned At Birth'**

45cm x 180cm x 30cm

Sculpture

£4500

## Maha Satish

---



**Monthly conversation**

40cm x 40cm

Oil painting on canvas

£680

## Yiyi Song

---



### **Syntax**

24cm x 9cm x 14cm

Ceramic sculpture

**Not for sale**



### **Soft Unfolding**

17cm x 17cm x 18cm

Sculpture

**Not for sale**

## Mary Swift

---



**The Wings of Courage**

30cm x 30cm

Acrylic on canvas

£500

## Sato Sugamoto

---



**Balance**

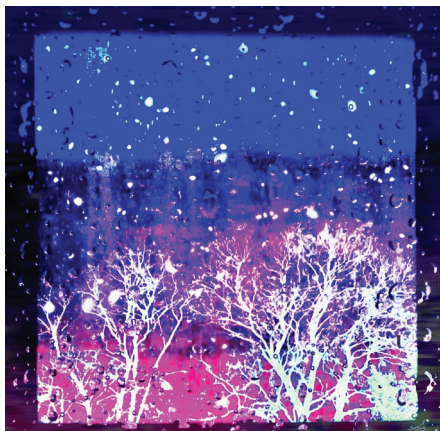
30cm x 37cm x 10cm

String, yarn, cloth, foam and aluminium

£900

## Riley Tang

---



**WCID (When Spring Has Sprung)**

30cm x 30cm

Digital art, printed on aluminium

**£199**

## The Little Potter

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**Blue Pilgrim Vase**

24cm x 30cm

Stoneware ceramic

**£550**



**Large Blue Moon**

22cm x 24cm

Stoneware ceramic

**£375**

## Georgina Westley

---



**Noor Inayat Khan**

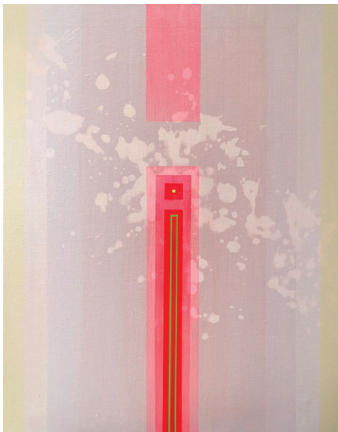
35cm x 35cm

Acrylic

£450

## Heather Weston

---



**Core Strength**

35cm x 45cm

Acrylic paint and pen

£390

## Hanzhi Zhong

---



**Internal Censor**

29.7cm x 42cm

Monoprint

£550



Touchlines of Fortitude:  
**Written Works**

# The Forgotten

By **Greg Williamson**

They sat on the shelf.

They sat on the shelf.

For years upon years.

In a jar, in a wrapper,

Indefinitely, in fear.

Smothered in dust.

Surrounded by flies.

Weightless and brittle,

lifeless and dry.

Melted together.

Bonded as one.

Too big to get out.

Stuck at the bottom, while others moved on.

But inside, a sweet.

Still good.

Still fine.

In the jar.

On the shelf.

With nothing but time.

# Heard the one about the gynaecologist and the artist?

By **Becky Nuttall**

Once I was a young artist raised in the Sixties and living the Seventies. To the art school came the man raised in the Twenties and living the Reformation. He is the Assessor. He sallies forth into the studio and parks his tweed bum against the desk. He measures me up a bit, taking in the merry Oxford bags and platform heel, rolls his eyes over me a bit more, both measures and rolls his eyes over my life class work and says obscurely “Ladies shouldn’t wear trousers unless, of course, they are Marlene Dietrich” With that he stands up straight, unbalancing the desk top, sending everything crashing to the floor. He leaves me to clear up the mess he made, women shouldn’t wear trousers when painting naked women because it is not ladylike and women tidy up accidents.

After the birth of my first born in the 1970s I am in need of the services of a gynaecologist. My two midwives, before and during the birth, had been single women without children and the gynaecologist is male, neither unusual at that time. The midwives are just on the right side of convent virgin bossy, the gynaecologist just on the wrong side of over familiar. He is an arrogant man giving me an examination with creepy familiarity. He explains the problem with my cervix with all the empathy of a porn film director, violates me with patronage, condescension and sneaky contempt. His perspective of my cervix comes from another angle completely.

In 2018 I receive an art award for two paintings which it is thought necessitates some explaining. I launch into details of how the work reflects the inner workings of my past adolescence fears and longings, how it references my influences of religious piety, religious violence and art history. Two males speak. One, the judge of the awards, talks about the perspective, planes and tone and the other male asks where I got it framed. My perspective is lost in the theory.

On social media I respond to a male art critic, asking if a female art critic may better understand the works of the female Surrealists. I am told I'm being ridiculous.

I watch a programme about Dora Carrington, carefully inclusive, the critics both male and female. All mutual admiration until the male critic cannot help but laugh at the suggestion that Dora's perspective was clouded by the want of love and security before the love of art. In his perspective, her tone, the plane, the frame speaks more than the artist. Dora ended her artistic life by shooting herself when love died.

To women critics interested in telling the back story of female artists, speak up a bit louder please. Our perspective is being drowned out by the men banging in nails to construct frames of a different perspective while we ooze out unseen underneath. Or am I still being ridiculous.

# Claudi, Instructions for an interactive poem

 By Claudi Piripippi

Instructions for an interactive poem: make approval or disapproval sounds according to each word's liking

characterises  
categorises  
documents  
genderises  
personifies  
disciplines  
legitimises  
represents  
officialises  
sexualises  
simplifies  
classifies  
inscribes  
identifies  
legalises  
registers  
instructs  
archives  
controls  
records  
defines  
shapes  
brands  
codes  
tracks  
labels  
signs

I have changed my name

illegal  
uncoded  
unofficial  
unsigned  
untracked  
unshaped  
undefined  
unlabelled  
illegitimate  
unbranded  
unarchived  
unrecorded  
unidentified  
uninscribed  
unclassified  
uninstructed  
uncontrolled  
unregistered  
indisciplined  
unsexualised  
unpersonified  
ungenderised  
uncategorised  
unrepresented  
undocumented  
uncharacterised

UnDone

from loose roots to loose ends  
from the past I walk a vowel lighter  
I've truncated, broke a chain  
regenerated my expression  
purged origins and organs  
changed-my-end  
freed-my-future  
self-tailored-cut  
I named myself

Call Me

claudi



# Stepping Back

By **Zena Farel**

Drawn to unaccustomed sunshine  
Spilling through parted shutters  
The morning stillness  
Of that empty room  
Softly cushioning  
The rawness of being  
Someone new unidentified  
In an untried place

Stumbling through parted shutters  
And finding  
By chance by design  
A long-abandoned book  
The spiral of pages  
An arc  
Of stepping stones  
Filling the empty terrace

Unaccustomed sunlight  
Spilling on an empty terrace  
Spilling on symbols  
Spilling on lines  
I'd once known well  
Words forming flesh  
And rhythm and rhyme  
Clothing head and feet,  
Till there was someone  
I half - remembered  
Stepping back  
Through parted shutters

# The World's Retreat

By Haley Haddow

I ask the question out loud now.  
Not into the dark, but into the thinning air  
of a world growing quieter around us.

What will happen to my child?  
I see how cruel the world can be.  
It sharpens its edges on the soft,  
on the vulnerable.

Do you have patience?  
The kind that grips like a paralytic chokehold.  
He doesn't know  
how to wait, or how to apologise.

He is challenging, yes.  
All-consuming, demanding  
but not on purpose.  
He is the sea, not the storm.

What will happen to my child?  
If I'm not here?  
When I'm not here?

He doesn't do well when the world rearranges.  
He struggles when things aren't just so,  
when they move in ways he cannot follow.  
Do you understand?  
You must move like breath around him.  
I know his rhythms.  
I have loved him through every version of himself.  
Do you love him?  
Not tolerate, but *love*.

And what happens  
if you don't?

Did I do too much, or not enough?  
This Olympic maternal marathon  
with no medal, no spectators.  
Just laps around a life.

Eighteen years.  
Only now, this dawning grief  
the finish line of childhood  
just another beginning.  
An epiphany:  
he needs more, forever.  
They seemed to care more  
when he was small, cute, and easy.  
Now, I watch the kindness thin.  
The tenderness doesn't grow with him.

He's five foot ten.  
No longer small enough to be forgiven,  
but still a child inside.  
He needs the world to bend,  
but it won't.  
It stiffens around him.

What will happen to my child?  
If I'm not here?  
When I'm not here?  
I try to ask him.  
Not with words.  
With my eyes.  
With gestures that shape meaning from the quiet.

What do you want?  
Tell me your dreams.  
I know you have them,  
I see them flicker behind your eyes.

But I cannot hear them. You do not say,  
despite knowing the language of your silence.  
I fear I'm the only one who ever looked.  
Perhaps I could ask.  
Could someone else learn?  
*Would anyone ever choose him... like I do?*

Is there a heaven?  
Let there be.  
Where I can still see him, love him,  
be what the world won't be:  
safe, constant,  
home.

This myth of strength  
has railed against me,  
now battered and bruised,  
and yet I wear it still,  
since the day I first held him.

Because if I'm not here.  
What will happen to my child?  
If I'm not here.  
*When I'm not here.*

# Small Truces

By The Poetry Beast

Pain arrives like weather:  
a drizzle of ache pooling, cooling,  
like a fang pressed against silence.  
A sudden squall shrinks her world,  
tilts the walls of life.

Storms where words for pain  
dissolve into lies,  
where breath alone  
keeps back madness.... She abides.

*The Poetry Beast*

The world seeping. The back door sighed. The kettle clicked. The hallway fan rattled unless I pressed its base with the edge of my foot. Each morning began with these small negotiations: a click answered, a rattle silenced, a sigh coaxed into stillness. One truce after another, until the house finally yielded and silence allowed me to pass.

I move through the house as though each object must be reasoned with. I hook a chair with my hip to shift it aside. I lean into doors until they agree to swing. I press the latch with my chin until it clicks. Every success is quiet, unremarkable, yet each feels like morning itself—fragile permission to continue.

The storm inside me has its own rules. I do not try to name it. Naming only makes promises I do not keep. Instead, I measure it by the things it distorts: the weight of a spoon I can no longer lift, the tap I must coax with my shoulder, the light that falls on the sink too harsh, too revealing. Breath becomes the truest measure: in, and the walls tilt; out, and they steady again. In, and language deserts me; out, and a sentence returns, carrying me one more step.

When silence finally comes, it is never peace, only a narrow corridor through which I can pass. I take it. I set the kettle boiling, though I may not drink the tea. I stand in the kitchen, watching the steam drift upwards like thought losing interest. Beyond the window, a van door slams, and a dog gives a tentative bark before thinking better of it. The back door sits still, almost closed, as if it never invited the world in. I let it pretend. I pretend along with it.

By the time the kettle cools, the ache has eased. The storm has emptied itself. I do not celebrate. I nudge the fan once more with my heel and cross the room carefully, as if I've been granted an amnesty—moving softly through the house that has taught me, and that I have taught in turn, the hard art of small truces.

# Do you know what they do to women like you?

By Miriam Calleja

Weary as you may be  
you have been know for smart solutions  
for weathering decades  
cooking more meals  
mending and measuring.  
Your body the result of shifting trends  
you decided to abandon—  
your cauldron deep  
with medicine and curse.

What they don't understand  
makes them want your blood

discomfort makes          their palms itch

And so, they throw you  
from the belltower every year  
it is a spectacle for the children  
and every year you  
take more punishment  
barely lick your wounds.  
The town speaks of it  
until the next distraction  
(they are easily distracted)

They throw an effigy of a black cat  
think to test the tower and its height  
the ground beneath—  
babes sticky with candy floss  
look on, their dumb mouths agape.

# Rising Through the Silence

By Ingrid Brown

As a woman navigating the art world, I have often found that the most profound challenges are the ones unseen. Quiet obstacles have at times made the journey feel almost impassable. Opportunities sometimes seemed tied to paths I could never take without losing myself. I chose to stay true to my own vision, even when it meant exclusion or delay. It was precisely in these moments that I discovered the resilience that has come to define my practice, and my idea of success has changed dramatically as a result.

Persistence, I have learned, is not always loud or celebrated. It is found in the quiet act of returning to the studio, in trusting one's vision even when others do not. Every rejection, every whispered doubt, became an invitation to reflect, to refine, and to strengthen my work. The challenges I faced were not merely professional, they were deeply personal. Yet, within that tension, I cultivated patience, self-belief, and a sense of purpose that could not easily be shaken.

Transformation comes in many forms. Sometimes it is visible, in the evolution of a piece of art; sometimes it is internal, a subtle reshaping of how I understand my own voice and value. One of the most powerful and transformative acts for me has been learning to listen to what feels right and true, again and again. It has been a difficult exercise, requiring me to fail repeatedly and to observe how often I had ignored my instincts in order to fit in, accommodate others, or navigate lingering unhelpful societal expectations.

Honouring my core beliefs and staying true to my values, even discovering what those values truly are, has allowed me to slowly build a network of individuals who share a similar approach and mindset. This practice of listening to myself, of honouring my own vision, has been essential in a world that often pressures women to conform, even perform, where femininity or sensuality are sometimes leveraged to get noticed.

Rising is not always a dramatic ascent. Often, it is found in small, steadfast choices: to continue, to create, to assert one's presence even in spaces that are not always welcoming. As women, whether in studios, on stages, on the field, or anywhere, our persistence is a form of quiet revolution, a refusal to be diminished or silenced.

Through these experiences, I have come to understand that endurance and transformation are intertwined. The challenges we face shape us, but they do not define us. What endures is our ability to rise again, to meet each moment with courage and intention, and to find within the struggles the raw material for creation, expression, and ultimately, liberation.

# She

By **Orode Faka**

She lays her head down travelling seas on dreams.  
wandering lands;  
playfully.  
Free.  
searching her destiny.  
Imagining what could have been  
if geography and science not intervened.

She is they  
imprisoned behind fears' gate  
wondering if she's safe  
whilst Poverty stands guard  
fully armed  
with hopeless-filled rifles  
ready to stifle  
minds that see beyond the illusion.

She is history  
His story  
held in a time that he said existed,  
ideologies twisted,  
shaped as protection instead a deception  
and the truth  
really  
will  
set  
her  
FREE.

She is we  
had the ifs of fate shifted by one degree  
so that she not we  
wakes in a world where possibilities explored  
can't be ignored  
and choice  
is the dreamer's reward  
for all the battles fought.

She deserves the best.  
To be equipped and discover her quest.  
To create,  
to give,  
to receive,  
to rise,  
to fall  
and to rise again  
to live  
and do her best  
to always be  
HER version of SHE.



# Trembling Hands

By Preena Mistry

You said Yes...  
Like you had a choice  
One meeting  
No words  
Just a glance  
Then the rings

The tea cup clattering in your hands.

Whatever is best  
Just do what's expected  
Unquestionable trust  
For a life you deserve

Those trembling hands  
Sweep away your childhood  
Seek the feet of your parents  
Gripping on for a moment  
To the sweetness and the spice  
Fresh masala and chai  
Her soft silk sari  
The honk of the taxi

Landing head first

To a cold reception.

His Fiery Words

Not an ounce of affection.  
Those trembling hands  
Shaped two loving children  
Rolled out their roti  
Massaged their pain  
Washed their hair  
Scrubbed out their stains

Fed us when you could not eat  
Bathed us when you could not drink  
Prayed when you could not speak

Those trembling hands  
Still holding us steady  
Our home in your palms  
The weight so heavy.

# Mother

By Dr Katy Chisenga

My body is brilliant,  
My body is strong,  
My body withstands.

I lay there,  
While they cut into me.  
I bleed.  
There is blood.  
So much blood.  
Your cry sounds like a dream,  
As I float in and out.

But my body withstands.  
Because my body is strong.  
My body is brilliant.

Recovered but weak,  
Or so I thought.  
I take you home,  
I mother you.  
I am strong for you.  
But not strong enough.

My body feels hot,  
My heart beats fast.  
Sweat drips down my face.

Infection.  
Sepsis.  
Near death.

I lay there,  
While they cut into me.  
I open.  
There is pus.  
So much pus.

I wake to see you in Grandma's arms  
I fight for you.  
I am strong for you.  
I come home for you.

I go slow,  
I go steady.  
I recover, but I am changed.  
I live.  
Try to thrive.  
I survive.

Because my brain is strong,  
My brain is brilliant.  
My brain withstands.



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“The 2025 Women’s Rugby World Cup aims to be the most inclusive women’s sporting event in history. That makes it the perfect platform for Touchlines of Fortitude, amplifying this moment through art and storytelling. As an artist with ADHD, I see neurodiversity as a strength that drives my creativity and resilience”

**Agnieszka Lokaj, Touchlines of Fortitude founder**

“Creativity is a powerful tool for self-expression and resilience. This partnership reflects our commitment to nurturing creativity in communities and celebrating empowerment.”

**Joel Pickering, Head of Marketing at Hobbycraft**



# Touchlines of Fortitude

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