

The background is a solid blue color. Overlaid on this are several white, hand-drawn, chalk-like marks. A large, thick white circle is partially visible on the left side. In the upper right, there are several intersecting white lines and loops, resembling a scribble or a stylized drawing. The text is centered in the middle of the image.

**TOWN
ISLAND
MATHESON
BENAIAH**

TOWN ISLAND
BENAI AH MATHESON

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SAH School of Art and Humanities, University of
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Town Island Benaiah Matheson [Exhibition]
25 Jan – 22 March 2025
Sovereign Design House, University of Huddersfield.

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INTRODUCTION

Town Island emerges at a pivotal moment in contemporary art where questions of identity, place, and belonging take centre stage. Through this landmark exhibition, artist Benaiah Matheson maps the profound connections between Huddersfield, a northern English town, and Carriacou, a Caribbean island.

For artist Benaiah Matheson, ‘Town Island’ is more than an exhibition title - it is also the name of his practice. In his own words he considers it:

“a philosophical framework rooted in the dual heritage of Huddersfield and Carriacou. The name Town Island embodies this duality making it a conceptual lens through which I understand and express all my creativity. The flags, the paintings, the tapestries and everything I am working on are all expressions of Town Island.”

The exhibition’s journey began in the UK before traveling to The National Museum of Grenada, and subsequently to the 60th Venice Biennale (20 April-24 Nov 2024), where Matheson worked in partnership with Yorkshire Contemporary. Now, in an expanded collaboration with Huddersfield Art Gallery and the *Cultures of_* Programme (University of Huddersfield), *Town Island* returns home to Huddersfield, showing at Sovereign Design House (25 Jan–22 March 2025) on the University campus.

At the heart of *Town Island* are works that celebrate the enduring connections between

Carriacou and Huddersfield. Through large cotton tapestries coloured with pomegranate, sorrel, and turmeric dyes, Big Drum soundscapes, woollen tufted landscapes, and Grenadian nutmeg shell installations; Matheson creates a material dialogue between these two places and their shared histories.

This homecoming exhibition includes new works and features a participatory programme exploring oral histories, creative health, and climate change, connecting to the 2024 and 2025 *Cultures of_* Programmes. Through a pre-show interview included in this catalogue, Matheson discusses the healing properties of his place-specific, mixed-heritage artworks as they embody essences of Huddersfield and Kayak (Carriacou people) identity.

This catalogue brings together all voices of the partnership working on *Town Island* in Huddersfield. Beginning with Yorkshire Contemporary, we trace the exhibition’s development within Matheson’s artistic career and co-creative processes. We then explore the Town (Huddersfield) and Island (Carriacou) sections, and continue with a presentation of selected artworks. The catalogue concludes with insights into the *Cultures of_* Programme and the Huddersfield Art Gallery Curates Programme, of which *Town Island* is a vital part, before closing with the artist interview.



YORKSHIRE CONTEMPORARY

Sophie Bullen

Yorkshire Contemporary is the new name for 'The Tetley. Our relationship with Benaiah Matheson began in 2021 when he was selected as one of four artists as part of The Tetley Associate Artist Programme. During the year-long tailored programme, Matheson took residence in the Artist's Studio at The Tetley. At the end of his residency, he opened his studio to the public where he first showed the tapestries now shown in *Town Island*. In 2022 Matheson was shortlisted for 'The Tetley x Tower Works: Public Art Proposals for Leeds' South Bank. His proposal referenced the three towers that influence the site's name which are inspired by architecture in Florence, Verona and Tuscany. He used stained glass as a nod towards this history.

In 2022, we partnered with Matheson again to support his Venice Biennale presentation, securing funds from the British Council Biennials Connect grant which enabled us to explore partnerships in the Caribbean and enable the creation of Matheson's work. Our Exhibitions and Artist Development Curator, Georgia Taylor Aguilar, accompanied Matheson to Grenada where he was in residence at Art House 473. During this visit he also worked with students at T.A. Marryshow Community College to co-produce the 'flags' for the Biennale. They used locally sourced charcoal as well as 'pomegranate leaf brown', 'sorrel red', 'turmeric yellow' pigments and explored different kinds of mark-making. These responses were weaved together to form the flags presented in the piece *1000 FLAGS* both in Venice and at *Town Island*.

Bryony Bond, Director of Yorkshire Contemporary:

"It has been an honour to support Benaiah's multifaceted and generous practice over this period of time and see him benefit from the exposure of the most celebrated international art gathering at the Venice Biennale. His work exploring the rich relationship between a Caribbean island and a Northern English town has brought out the complexities, commonalities and differences between these two specific places, but also talks about how identity can be shaped, understood and celebrated. It is a great pleasure to be able to support Benaiah, and work in partnership with Huddersfield Art Gallery and the University of Huddersfield to bring this work to Huddersfield, not only his hometown but a source of great pride and inspiration. I would like to thank the support of the British Council and our continuing support from Arts Council England, that has made this project possible."

BENAIAH MATHESON

The presentation of *Town Island* in Huddersfield in 2025 marks a defining moment in Matheson's practice, arriving in the wake of its prestigious showing at the Grenada Pavilion, Venice Biennale.

Born in Huddersfield in 1985, Matheson embodies a unique second-generation dual identity - his parents, of Carriacou heritage, are themselves Huddersfield-born, while his Windrush-generation grandparents established the family's deep connection to both places.

Matheson's artistic journey began with formal training in Graphic Arts at Liverpool John Moores University, leading to his first major venture, The Connoisseurs Independent Trading Post (The CITP) in Huddersfield's Byram Arcade (2010). For nearly a decade, he developed and ran his successful namesake clothing brand from this location, using it not just as a retail space but as a canvas for artistic expression through fashion and a hub for community building through various events. This period was crucial in developing his artistic voice and understanding of community engagement. A 2020 mural commission from Kirklees Council, titled 'Togetherness', marked a pivotal moment that inspired Matheson to broaden his artistic practice beyond fashion, employing continuous line drawings and an optimistic colour palette to celebrate community spirit.

Working across drawing, painting, textiles, installation, and social practice, Matheson's work transmutes oral traditions into visual narratives. This approach is particularly evident in his sound piece *Plenty* (2024), which creates a temporal bridge by combining recordings of his great grandparents singing and drumming in Carriacou with Huddersfield Town sounds and football chants. His personal narrative parallels significant oral history initiatives documenting Caribbean settlement in Huddersfield, including *Girl's Night Photogroup* (1986), *Artimedia* (1996), and *Moving Here* (2005-2007).

This rich cultural dialogue culminated in two significant tapestries: *Carriacou Was Eden* (2023) and *Carriacou In Huddersfield* (2023), which draw inspiration from his grandmother's rug-making techniques to create a conversation between ancestral craft and contemporary art. Running parallel to these works, his ongoing project 1000 FLAGS investigates the visual identity of a Huddersfield-Carriacou union through community workshops in both locations. This exploration of identity through symbolism has evolved from the initial showing of 1000 Flags at West Yorkshire Playhouse (2023) to its international debut at the Grenada National Pavilion, Venice Biennale (2024).



TOWN

Huddersfield, a substantial Yorkshire town in Northern England, holds a rich textile heritage that stretches back to the Middle Ages, when local communities spun sheep fleeces into yarn, and farmers wove them on household looms. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw this cottage industry transform through industrialization, with numerous mills rising across the landscape. These mills specialised in fine worsteds and high-quality cloths, establishing Huddersfield's reputation as a centre of textile excellence and bringing considerable wealth to the region.

The post-war period marked a pivotal shift in the town's story. As Britain grappled with austerity, invitations were extended to Commonwealth countries, including Grenada and Carriacou. The response brought a significant Kayak community to Huddersfield, among them Matheson's family, who sailed from Grenada to Britain. Many found work in the local textile industries, a heritage directly referenced in Matheson's work *Carriacou in Huddersfield* (2023). Today, Huddersfield hosts one of the largest Carriacou communities outside the Island itself, contributing to a vibrant long standing multicultural tapestry that includes South Asian, Polish, and Ukrainian communities - each adding distinct threads to the town's unique identity.

The Springwood district, west of Huddersfield's centre, became the initial heart of the Kayak settlement. However, the community's physical cohesion was later disrupted by the construction of a ring road - a development that would significantly impact the neighbourhood's social fabric. These experiences and challenges found voice through various oral history initiatives, notably Dr Sally Jones's work with *Artimedia* in 1996. Based in nearby Batley. This pioneering project recorded and published interviews with Huddersfield's Afro-Caribbean community on the then-new World Wide Web, aiming to 'raise the self-esteem' of the older community members.

This intersection of place, community, and wellbeing resonates throughout Matheson's work and is further explored in his recorded interview (transcribed below), which also features in the *Cultures of Creative Health* publication (2025).

ISLAND

Carriacou, one of the Grenadine islands, is part of the independent nation of Grenada in the South-Eastern Caribbean Sea. Though small in size, Grenada's landscape is richly diverse, featuring pristine rainforests, mountains, lakes, fertile land, and beaches that attract international tourism. Known as 'Spice Island,' Grenada holds its position as the world's finest producer of nutmeg - a heritage that Matheson incorporates into his work through installations featuring nutmeg shells.

The Island's agricultural bounty - nutmeg, cacao, sugar and cotton - carries complex historical weight, connecting directly to the Atlantic slave trade and, by extension to the expansion of textile industries in northern English towns like Huddersfield. These intertwined histories find expression in Matheson's tapestries and installations, which weave together the shared narratives of both places.

For Matheson, like many in Huddersfield's Caribbean community, these connections are deeply personal, rooted in family ties that span both locations.

The urgency of maintaining these connections was dramatically highlighted during *Town Island's* Venice presentation, when Hurricane Beryl struck Carriacou on July 1, 2024, devastating the island's infrastructure and affecting its entire population. This catastrophic event underscores a crucial aspect of *Town Island's* Huddersfield showing: the vulnerability of small island communities to climate change impact, caused by larger nations. This theme resonates particularly with the University of Huddersfield's 2025/2026 *Cultures of_* Programme, a research festival launching as part of the exhibition's programming.

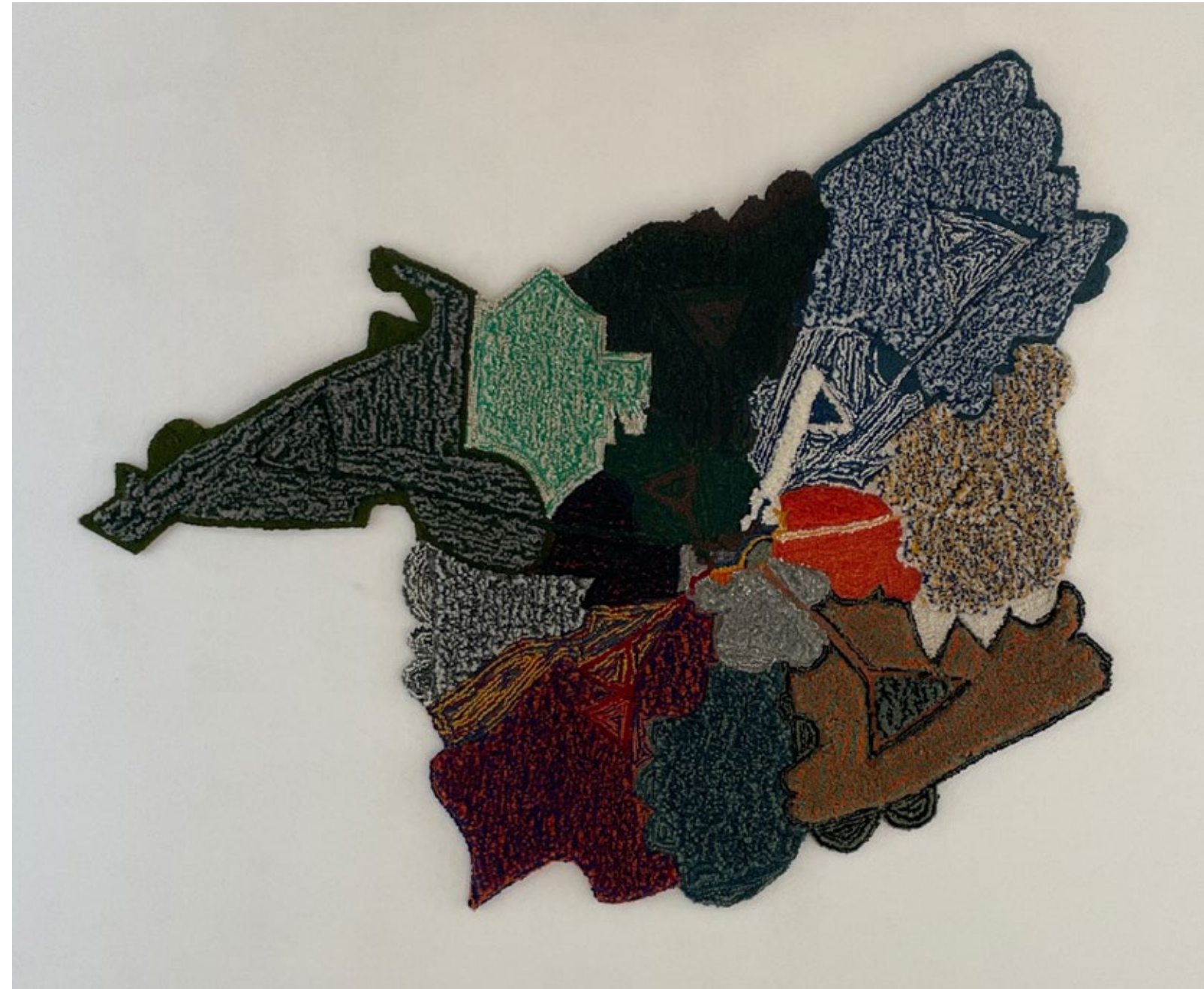
SELECTED ARTWORKS

Carriacou in Huddersfield (2023)

Wool on mixed media

Through the medium of locally-sourced Yorkshire wool, this tufted textile work maps both physical and psychological geographies of displacement and belonging. Centred on Huddersfield's Springwood area, the piece charts the Carriacou community's presence before and after the construction of the town's ring road in the 1970s. Matheson employs texture and colour to articulate the paradox of visibility and invisibility experienced by Black Caribbean communities in northern England - "seen yet unseen" in their adopted hometown.

The work's materiality creates a dialogue between Yorkshire's textile heritage and the Caribbean diaspora, while its cartographic elements trace how urban development fractured established community networks. Through this mapping of displacement, the piece reveals how the Carriacou community evolved, from a concentrated centre to a constellation of connected yet separate enclaves across Huddersfield. A pattern that serves as both specific historical document and broader metaphor, for the breakdown of community in Western society.



Photograph by Samuele Cherubini

Carriacou was Eden (2023)

Wool on mixed media

Drawing from oral histories and familial archives, this work explores the complex dynamics between homeland and diaspora through the lens of Carriacou, a 13-square-mile Caribbean Island. The piece reimagines Eden not as paradise lost, but as a delicate balance of necessity and abundance, community and sacrifice, rooted in the agricultural rhythms of kitchen gardens and seasonal harvests.

The work integrates motifs of traditional Carriacou life - the cultivation of *callaloo*, the rhythms of Nation Dance and Big Drum, the sensitive intimacy of multi-generational households - with the “blood, sweat and tears” of migration. Central to the piece is the notion of “torsion” - the tension between the gravitational pull of home and the centrifugal force of diaspora that sent community members to England and America.

Based on extensive research and interviews with first-generation Carriacou immigrants to Huddersfield and their children, now in their 60s-80s, the work explores how memory and place interweave across generations. Matheson draws on family history, including research by their uncle Franklin, to examine how the brave decision not just to come, but to stay, transformed both the immigrants and their adopted hometown.



Photograph by Samuele Cherubini

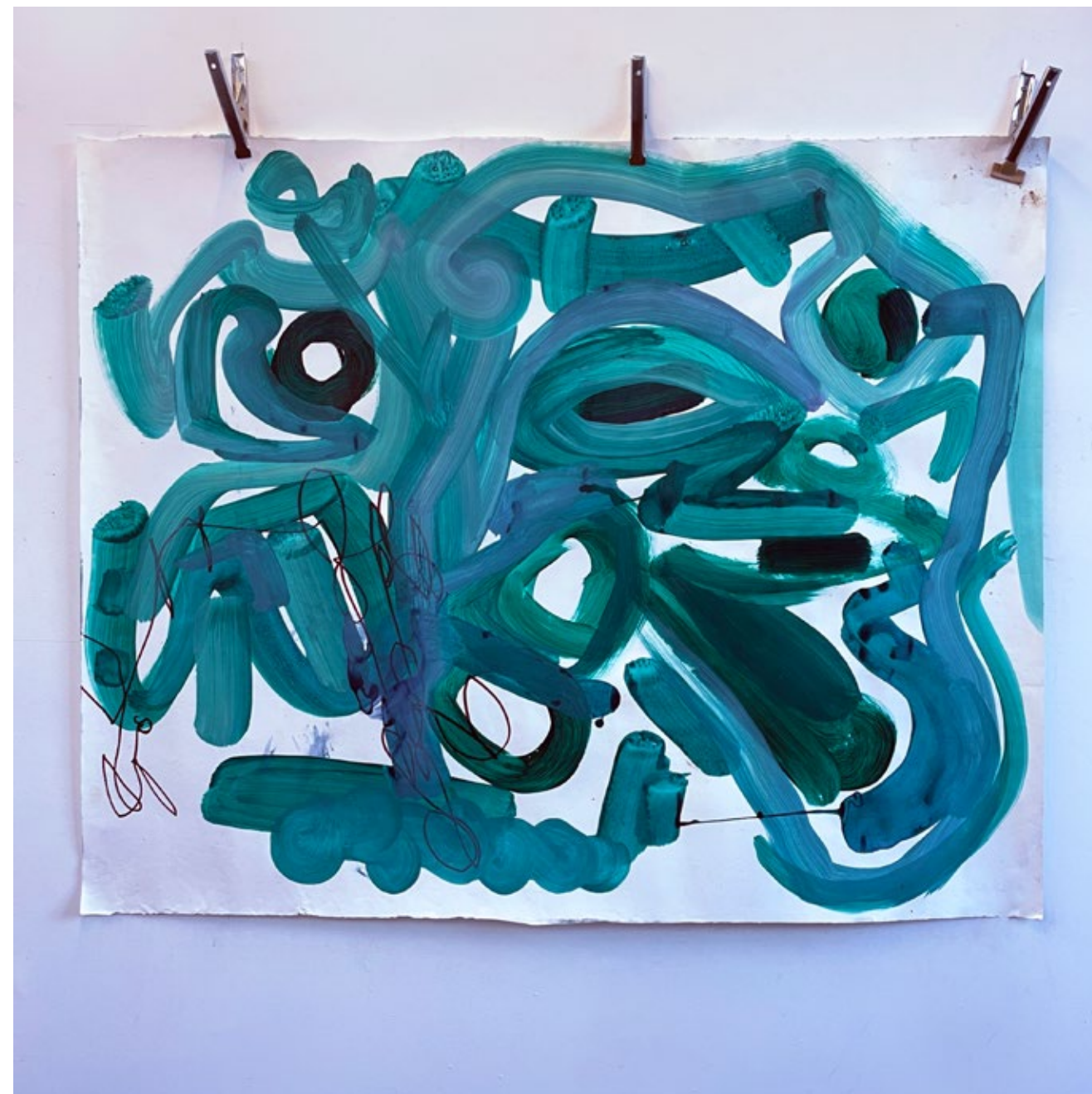
The Green Piece from Under the Plum Tree (2023)

Acrylic on heavy paper

Created in Harvey Vale, Carriacou, this work explores the liminal space between ancestral memory and present experience. Working in the backyard of his grandparents' home just off the front road, Matheson engaged in what he describes as a "conscious connection with light and its movement across the canvas" to capture the ineffable qualities of return and belonging.

Conceived as an ode to Matheson's grandparents and great-grandparents, the work serves as a meditation on intergenerational presence. Through its verdant palette, the piece manifests what the artist terms "expressions of authenticity, expressions of gratitude," creating a visual dialogue between past and present, memory and moment. The work was created in a state Matheson describes as meditative and hypnotic, where "the colours, the paints and the mediums take hold through the readings and the expressions."

Created in the ancestral space of Harvey Vale, the work embodies what Matheson describes as "expressions of life that no matter how much I use, words can never be truly understood and explained." The piece serves as a visual testament to the way memory, light, and place intersect in the creation of meaning and identity.



Reading Light a Place Called Home (2023)

Acrylic, graphite, soil & mixed media on heavy paper

Part of Matheson's ongoing "reading series," this work investigates the paradox of familiar unfamiliarity. Created in Harvey Vale, Carriacou, the work emerged from what the artist describes as "a setting, a contemplation and a knowing that an expression is coming." The piece explores the sensation of "picking up hints of being familiar and unfamiliar with a place that we know, but is always called home."

The work captures what Matheson calls "lighthouses of wonder" - moments of connection between generations, between mainland and island, between memory and presence. Through its creation in the ancestral space of Harvey Vale, the piece represents a crucial exploration of Caribbean diasporic experience, where light becomes both medium and metaphor, carrying messages between past and present, between Carriacou and away, between the collective and the individual.

Serving as what Matheson calls a "true reading," the work forms a profound meditation on the nature of home, belonging, and the transmission of familial memory through artistic practice. The piece embodies the complexity of return and belonging, creating a visual dialogue between physical presence and remembered space.



Readings VII, VIII & IX - From this world (2023, 2024)

Acrylic, ink, marker pen on heavy paper

A profound exploration of domestic memory, this work emerges through Matheson's meditative approach where "being still and sitting" transforms into active remembrance. The artist captures the rhythms of family life: workshop moments with his father, the nightly rhythm of his mother's overlocker, Doris Day Sundays, and precious moments laying on warm linen fresh from the dry cleaners.

The piece emerges from what Matheson describes as "the complexities of their relationship," his parents' love flowing "as pure sediment through their three children." Working in a space of contemplation, where creaking studio floors echo childhood memories, the artist creates a visual testimony to familial bonds.

Through his process, Matheson stays "really close" to these memories, exploring the textures of family life through what he terms "expressions of life that no matter how much I use, words can never be truly understood and explained." The work becomes a meditation on love that, in the artist's words, has "no sense of destination, purpose for each other to one another, allowing it to rest and flow."



Readings X, XI (2024)
Acrylic, ink, marker pen on heavy paper

Plenty (2025)
Sound piece



Carriacou Nutmeg (2024)
Ezra Lloyd Jackson, Scent piece

“I built this fragrance around the Nutmeg Oil Benaiah provided me, sourced directly from GCNA in Grenada. An incredibly layered material, bright and loud, tart and crisp, before turning roasted and gravely in texture. I made a response, using other materials sourced from the Caribbean: Bay Leaf from Jamaica, Vetiver from Haiti, as well as supporting elements of Cumin, Lavender, Basil, and Olibanum. The nutmeg character is surrounded by a warm and humid climate, opening with it’s green, fruit-housed form, before drying and warming in the sun. Multifaceted yet unified, mirroring the olfactory aesthetics of a diasporic palette.” – Ezra-Lloyd Jackson



Nutmeg shell (2025)





CULTURES OF_

Dr Rowan Bailey

Cultures of_ is a vibrant celebration of creativity, collaboration, and cultural exchange. Through exhibitions, installations, performances, workshops, talks, and discussions, it brings people together to reimagine the possibilities of placemaking and shared knowledge. As part of Temporary Contemporary - a visionary partnership between the University of Huddersfield and Kirklees Council - the programme has been breathing new life into the high street since 2018, transforming Queensgate Indoor Market and The Piazza Shopping Centre into dynamic hubs of cultural activity. The programme's inaugural publication, *Temporary Contemporary: Creating Vibrant Spaces to Support the Conditions for Creative and Cultural Activity* (2020), captured the energy and vision of its early days with essays and striking visual stories. From this foundation, *Cultures of_* has flourished into a series of bold, year-long, place-based cultural explorations, including *Cultures of Place* (2021/22), *Cultures of Sound* (2022/23), *Cultures of Creative Health* (2023/24) and *Cultures of Climate* (2024/25).

Each project strengthens the programme's unwavering commitment to fostering meaningful connections between people, ideas and spaces. By championing participatory experiences and cultural dialogue, *Cultures of_* inspires new ways of thinking and engaging with the world around us.

The launch of *Cultures of Climate* is marked by Benaiah Matheson's insightful exhibition, *Town Island*, which invites audiences to grapple with the urgent realities of climate breakdown. Through the lens of contemporary aesthetics and critical practice, we seek to ignite reflection, spark dialogue, and mobilise collective action - revealing the profound role that creativity and imagination can play in shaping a more sustainable, just, and hopeful future.

See: Centre for Cultural Ecologies in Art, Design and Architecture - University of Huddersfield: <https://research.hud.ac.uk/institutes-centres/ceada/>

PRE-SHOW INTERVIEW

This is the full interview with Matheson and Dr Janine Sykes taking place 24 July 2024 at the artist’s studio in Huddersfield. The questions touch the exhibition themes of belonging and identity, while exploring creative health and wellbeing which were the focus of the *Cultures of_* Programme at the university of Huddersfield in the academic year 2024/2025.

Here artist Benaiah Matheson spoke ahead of his exhibition *Town Island* arriving in Huddersfield in January 2025.

JS: Janine Sykes

BM: Beniah Matheson

Some parts of the transcript have been altered for clarity.
[00:00]

JS: Please describe, Beniah, the processes, stages, and places of Town Island? Because it is quite nomadic, isn’t it?

BM: Yes, the processes themselves are quite broad. There’s like, the specific processes as to how the pieces were actually put together, but then there’s the contextual process and understanding and connecting with that actually, like right, so the processes here is about... I wanted to build in the materiality of the two locations.

JS: Yes.

BM: The town and the island and when I looked into that side of things it felt really vague, ‘cause I was trying to figure out like, what materials are specific to Huddersfield and specific to Carriacou and Grenada and I think that’s where like the idea of scent came in. So, I worked with Ezra-Lloyd Jackson who is a scent artist to create a specific scent for the space because I knew that walking into the space and the immersive aspect of experiencing the work was like experiencing the physical work is one dimension,

but then what about the space and the unsaid contextual space?

JS: Yes, it’s the other, sensory...

BM: Yeah, and like food and scent is very important to Carriacou people and to Grenadian people cause everything you cook with has a fragrance and a scent and it’s something that maybe I am anosmic to in Huddersfield that maybe people from other places that come to Huddersfield they’ll be able to pick up on scents. Whether obviously if you go out into the Dales you’re going to smell the animals but there’ll be scents that are connected with Huddersfield, but I didn’t know what to hold on to there.

JS: Engineering oil?

BM: Yes, yeah, yeah

JS: But then that’s changed.

BM: That’s a contextual thing in itself. If you’re going into the mills, if you’re going into engineering, then you’ll connect to those scents but then, on the physical side of things, I knew that cotton was going to come into play and then there was light, and then there was wool, and wool and cotton are very similar and very different in their scents. I mean wool is definitely from Yorkshire. You’ve got all the sheep and that’s where the wool is coming from.

JS: Yes, the textile industry.

BM: But then the connection between cotton and like er, I mean just landscape of the slave trade, the Atlantic slave trade, and the connection between well Britain, Yorkshire, and the Caribbean that’s a material that is synonymous with that but then there’s the water in between and the Atlantic. So, there’s this travelling backwards and forwards and knowing that there’s like this idea that these pieces that are going to get woven together to make some sort of sail, or sails, and that’s the travelling backwards and forwards.

JS: Yeah.

BM: The wool was specific because the tufted pieces of Town Island were made using Yorkshire wool. They were made in Halifax at ‘McAndrew’s Textiles’, and I know that in the 50s and 60s there would have been people from Carriacou working in the mills in Halifax, in Huddersfield, literally working with the wool.

JS: Kirklees, Cleckheaton.

BM: Yeah. One of my Great Aunts used to work at ‘Gannex’ in Halifax. Yes. They made, like, beautiful coats and jackets for the royal family. So, really beautiful pea coats and dresses and all kinds of stuff but she was based up in Halifax, but she lived in Huddersfield.

JS: There is still some quite high-end textiles and cloth still made here isn’t there? There’s contracts with Burberry and Savile Row?

BM: Yeah. I remember there’s a mill called Pegasus, and they do all the swatches for the mills in Huddersfield.

JS: Right.

BM: And I remember early on in my relationship with them they were making a series of fabrics for Dior. So Ozwald Boateng, he’s a Saville Row tailor, he’s been spotted in Huddersfield coming to get fabric from here and if you go to Savile Row and you want a suit, the most expensive suits are the ones that have ‘Made in Huddersfield’ on the fabric. If it says ‘made in Huddersfield’ that’s the top, top tier. So, it still is that. So, it was definitely the materials in both places and the pieces of materials that connect both places was really important so the pieces that were made in Grenada, the inks that are used over there, I

used pomegranate leaf, I used sorrel, which is a very erm cultural drink.

JS: Right.

BM: So, you have the flower, the sorrel flower, and we make this really beautiful drink with the flower itself. You boil the dried flower, or the fresh flower, and it makes this deep like magenta colour and then you add sugar and spices in there and it’s really nice.

JS: ...and pretty, probably?

BM: Yeah. Beautiful, but also, if you spill that on your clothes it’s not coming out. It’s gonna stain. So, I knew this was something that would stain and then turmeric another one that is, another root, but er spice and connection material wise. We’re using a lot of food, but again if you if you spill that on your fabric, on your clothes, it’s not coming out.

JS: It is going to dye it.

BM: Yeah, so I used dry turmeric, I used fresh turmeric, I used sorrel and used pomegranate leaf, ink, and then on top of that, I use acrylics, but the majority of inks used in Grenada with TAMCC college over there and their workshops that was with natural pigments and some acrylics but then when I came back to Huddersfield and did the town aspect of the works, they, I, used mainly light and cotton as a material. So, I used light in the sense that there was a special ink called cyanotype type, and that is a light sensitive, light reactive paint. So, you have to coat it in the dark. Yeah, which is interesting in-itself, if you think about the dark and the unseen and like the context of how people perceive darkness, in the positive and the negative sense, but then when it’s exposed to the light, then it changes the different shades of blue. So, the blue in the works is actually a light reaction to the cyanotype type, then there were the motifs that were made out of cotton stencils that Netherhall Learning Campus, and Conscious Youth and We Infront, the walking group, and other members, yeah.

JS: Three different places around Huddersfield. That’s nice because you’ve gone nice and smoothly into the stages as well. Am I right in saying it was first in Huddersfield?

BM: Yes. Yep.

PRE-SHOW INTERVIEW

JS: Working co-creatively....

BM: So, some of the pieces were part of a previous body of work which was exploring the idea of a flag that represented the Carriacou community in Huddersfield.

JS: Yes

BM: And some of those pieces were woven into this as well because it made sense in terms of like the context of this of being a flag and sail.

JS: It's a visual banner isn't it, a flag?

BM: Yes.

JS: There's a massive collection of banners at Tolson [Museum]

BM: Is there? Really?

JS: Textile banners. A lot of them are to do with activism, with workers in Huddersfield.

BM: Okay.

JS: Campaigning for workers' rights and conditions, but it was also in the material and textile banners. Anyway. I don't want to divert too much, but it's connected.

BM: Okay but I'm going to have to come and have a look at those! Yeah, yeah, there's many different avenues. We'll, signpost that for another time.

JS: So, we've got, that's really clear about the processes. The stages - starting in Huddersfield, then going over to Grenada...

BM: Yes

JS: and then working with the College?

[10:00]

BM: Yeah T.A. Marryshow College which is short named as TAMCC

JS: and you worked with the community there, co creatively, making them together.

BM: Yes.

JS: With the materials you described and the workshops. Did you do a series of workshops there?

BM: We only did one, but it was because the group wasn't a big enough group to do more than one, and it made sense to do. Yeah, so we did a workshop there. Did an installation at the National Museum in Grenada, and then after we did the installation, we did an exhibition in Grenada as well in a different art gallery.

JS: Right. So, it's already travelled from...well Town Island as a whole has travelled from Huddersfield to Grenada.

BM: Yes,

JS: ...and Grenada being the mainland Carriacou, Grenadine Island.

BM: Yeah.

JS: So, were there any workshops actually on Carriacou, or were they all in Grenada?

BM: No, it was all Grenada. I'd like to go back and do some, and continue the Town Island works, in Carriacou.

JS: But because of the nature of the Islands, that is kind of part of, it's not seen as separate, really.

BM: Yes, and there was some of the youth who made the pieces who were from Carriacou that made the pieces.... I should also say that once the work had come back to Huddersfield, is when the largest part of the works happened with 'Netherhall Learning Campus', and 'Conscious Youth' and 'We In Front'. So, there was an initial phase over here, and then a significant phase in Grenada and Carriacou, and then the main phase coming back and...

JS: ...it's got bigger. So, it's expansive...

BM: Yeah, and then it was all pieced together here.

JS: Got you...made in Huddersfield.

BM: Yes, but it was also pieced together with another artist, a friend of mine, Desiree Shaw, she is Town Island in her existence, cause she's dual heritage. So, her mum is from Huddersfield and her dad is from Carriacou. Which you get a lot of in this town.

JS: Yes.



PRE-SHOW INTERVIEW

BM: So, we and we’re using the wool physically to bind the sections of fabrics together.

JS: So, it’s working on a very, on different meta levels here. It has different metaphors working right the way through it.

BM: Yeah. So, she’s actual Town Island. I’m Town Island in a very different way. Like, I’m born and raised here, but my ancestors and my heritage come from there, but I connect with both.... so that was the full-on process.

JS: Yeah. Thank you.

BM: Yeah. The initial start here, and then going over there and making the body of works with TAMCC, then coming back and working with the three organisations and schools and then making a larger sail and exposing it to, it was exposed to Huddersfield light. Do you know what I mean? The light in Huddersfield, in Yorkshire.

JS: Place-specific. That’s important.

BM: So, the blue is Huddersfield blue, not because the tones in Huddersfield, because of the light of Yorkshire and Huddersfield.

JS: Fantastic. Thank you.

JS: Which communities co-created Town Island and why were they chosen? We’ve kind of covered the which. Perhaps clarify why? Why those particular communities?

BM: OK. The community in Grenada was chosen because I received funding with The Tetley [Now Yorkshire Contemporary] and The British Council to go over and connect with the community over there and the areas that their remit could facilitate was Grenada. So, it was really good to be able to go over and do that. TAMCC was chosen because it’s the main college and art isn’t really taught to a high level in a lot of areas in the Caribbean.

[15:00]

JS: Okay

BM: So, it was an opportunity to go and connect with art students over there and start the initial phase of being able to go back and help facilitate more workshops and

more connective ways of maybe bringing more students from over there over here. So it was really good to build relationships with them over there. I had existing relationships with Netherhall Learning Campus by doing talks and workshops with them over the years.

JS: Just clarify, where Netherhall is?

BM: It’s in Rawthorpe, Huddersfield. Yeah, it’s not too far from Tolson [Museum], really.

JS: So, it’s not far from the centre of Huddersfield?

BM: No, not at all. No, it’s just the top of the valley, on the edge. So, the town is in the middle of the valley, and you’ve got these different areas that bank off.

JS: So, you’ve got, would you say, personal connections with the college and then there’s new relationships....

BM: With Conscious Youth, which is a youth community group. They’re based right in the in the middle of town.... they work with youths from eleven up to eighteen and it’s I think it’s six days a week that that youths, after school or college, go there they have different programmes on they’ve got loads of facilities and they do lots for that age range all over Huddersfield. So, and it’s multicultural by default as well, because you find that in Huddersfield that most schools and colleges they have like a very wide array of ethnicities.

JS: Yeah, and also the music is very important to this town and multicultural music. A lot of history and legacy.

BM: Yeah. Which is also included in the work as well.

JS: What health benefits do you think co-creating the art in the moment with different communities has for the people within them?

BM: I think there’s a core part of this which is by default being quite selfish but in the way that my own personal anxiety with knowing that this town is really multicultural.

[20:00]

BM: Yeah and seeing lots of people but not always knowing how to connect with different cultures here has become part of my practice.

JS: Okay.

BM: Where my connection with Carriacou and the Carriacou community in Huddersfield, actually means that I have to connect with all the other cultures in Huddersfield because everyone else is also in the same Town. So, like the work hasn’t been sectioned into people specifically from Huddersfield and people specifically from Carriacou and Grenada. It’s about those people who make up those places by default, so I, like, me knowing that that’s something that I’m exploring through this and helps my maybe social anxiety or social awareness is healthy for me and I know that that should hopefully be helpful for other people that they get to learn about the other people within their community. Like them not knowing that most of the black people, or at least fifty to sixty percent of all the black people they see in this town are from this one specific place, and it’s kind of like a twin.

JS: Yeah.

BM: There are both hilly green places that are smaller, and a lot of people have not heard of, but they’ve been part of each other, for almost 80 years now.

JS: But why don’t we know that or why? Why? Why is it?

BM: The more you know about people around you the less ignorance there is the more connection there is because there’s understanding there.

JS: Yes. Yes.

BM: So that is the core of the work, but it’s also really healthy for everyone involved. When I was speaking at the schools and colleges and the walking groups and the community group. Speaking to them about the dynamic of what the work is about and the geographical, the cultural, the multicultural landscape of the work, but then also wanting to find out where everyone else is also from, helps everyone to understand that this is like a wonderful soup.

JS: Yes. Yeah, yeah. And we’re all part of it.

BM: we’re all ingredients in the same soup.

JS: Thinking back to the actual acts of making. How is that, it’s like communal making, how is that different to [individuals’ making], and good for people?

BM: Well, they all know that they’ve had a hand in this. When they see the work physically. It’s not a work where,

like it could have been done in a completely different way where I go around and I speak to people, I get the ideas, I record, take pictures, and then I go away and I physically go and make some work. But that’s, it didn’t feel right to go about it like that. They can see very little of themselves in it. Whereas this way, they physically can see “Oh, I made that piece”, or “we made these areas”, and so they physically have their own energy in the pieces, but then in the making of each individual piece they got to actually...

JS: ...It’s side by side isn’t it? Shoulder to shoulder. It’s making with other people. Is that healthy? Is that kind of good? Do you think it’s good for people to make things together?

BM: Yeah. It made me break out of my comfort zone. Because I’m used to creating for a lot of my years I was creating by myself. I’m in my bedroom or I’m in the studio and I’m creating by myself, but actually for all of this work, like 95% of it, was made by being around other people, explaining, connecting and then they’re making a work, and I don’t physically know exactly what’s going to come out, but it’s not about that, it’s about our connection together and what they’ve made.

JS: So, it’s they’re conversations that were naturally, organically happening with people. Is that good for people?

BM: Yeah, it is. It’s really good for them...

JS: Social bonding.

BM: Yeah. They all know that they’ve made this work. They’ve all connected at the same time, and they can go away remembering, not remembering, until it’s reignited again that “oh actually I was part of this”.

JS: Yeah. Do you think it’s blurring also the kind of artist/ audience a little bit? They’re taking part in the art so they’re part of owing the art.

[25:00]

BM: Yeah. They’re taking part in the art, but then they’re also part of something that they might not have experienced before. They might not have been to galleries before. If they have, they might not have felt comfortable in those spaces. Or if they did feel comfortable then they might have only experienced it once or twice before, but it

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builds their connection with the idea of the art so that it's not something that...

JS: ..someone else does?

BM: yeah yeah that they can be part of it

JS: Fantastic.

JS: **There is a legacy of oral history recordings in Kirklees with the diaspora communities in Huddersfield. What benefits could the spoken-form art in Town Island have for the people of Huddersfield today?**

JS: We found [previous] projects aimed to raise self-esteem. That was one from an earlier one in the 1980s. I think the phrase was 'the self-esteem of the elderly in the community', to record their lived experience, because it's valuable. So, that was written down in the newspaper cutting we found [in the archives].

BM: So that's multi-layered, as well, like the impact that the audio could have on people of Huddersfield today and in the future because it helps those who are from Huddersfield and Carriacou, who are of dual heritage like myself, or they're biracial. That they can actually hear the words of someone who is from their communities speaking about their existence, their experiences, after the fact, so you don't know until you hear about these things. So, it's planting seeds for the future that people could connect with, and not just in a book, they can actually sit and hear these things. It's like audible, oral stories. They connect in a different way because before and not too long ago there was no way of recording sounds and recording audio it was all oral [door slams]. So, by recording the audio, it really helps solidify that for future generations. It also, in the same respects as the empowering the confidence in in elder generations, I don't see it as something that is only for the younger generations. It's for anyone who experiences it. It helps. It helps to recontextualise the landscape of how people perceive Huddersfield. Having been born and raised in Huddersfield, from whatever background you're in, you're actually understanding the layers of this because you could be listening to someone who is 100% from Yorkshire, or part Ukrainian, or part Polish, or 'cause there's an old Polish and Ukrainian community here going back to like the 1800s.

JS: Specifically, to Huddersfield?

BM: Specifically, to Huddersfield Yeah. So, you're just hearing the voices of people here and you can't place a skin-tone on that. You can read the transcript or the description of the person and their heritage after the fact or before the fact, and then you understand where they're from and their place, but anyone can listen to and understand that I'm from Huddersfield and this is someone from Huddersfield and these are the layers that have made this place that I'm from.

JS: **How do you think a greater knowledge and understanding of identity and sense of belonging, achieved through co-creativity, can impact people's well-being?**

BM: You know what I think? The greater knowledge is seen in how people treat each other and the greater the knowledge, the less room there is for people to have any ignorance or fear within their own personal dynamic, their own personal character and perspective. Because if you understand the landscape and the multiculturalism and the layers of the community that you live in, then then you're just connecting with all of that, as opposed to seeing a person, not knowing anything about them, It's easy to stay away from them and form your own opinions. But you form your own opinions in a vacuum. You need to understand the people around you; it is healthy when you do do that and a lot of methods in society don't actually want you to do that or aren't targeted in a way where it allows you to do that. So, by going out speaking to people it helps everyone to understand a lot more.

JS: Yeah, and that impacts on your well-being if there's less fear.

BM: Yeah. Then you just see neighbours as kin... you have more empathy for people.

JS: So that will change how you self-identify 'cause it's about self and how you connect with other people. So that's definitely going to impact on your wellbeing.

BM: And it's also quite interesting in that Huddersfield has a very strong identity and Carriacou has a very strong identity away from Grenada. Grenada has a strong identity, Carriacou has a strong identity. So, you have two places that have strong identities but are twins and they should

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understand each other much more. So, by default the hope of the work is to help each place form even more of its own identity but together.

JS: This moves quite nicely into “what are the health benefits of sharing knowledge about the unique cultural identity”?

BM: The legacy is quite fragile actually its understanding something that is not guaranteed to continue forever which is- so much can be lost if it's not held on to and understood and moving forwards the relationship between each place could actually get further and further away they could drift apart and by doing so it does a disservice to both places and it could affect – well it will affect each place but no one can say in what way. By doing as much now it means there is at least a body, a source, of work that will help with the future.

JS: There'll always be the kind of ancestry but the bonds to that ancestry could, if not looked after and cared for....

BM: ...it could dissipate. And even leaving less and less ingredients behind, and people are clutching onto fragments in order to form relationships with themselves and their dynamic. Huddersfield is a place of many many cultures is a microclimate in itself where it's best off with all ingredients knowing and being together as opposed to separated off into different areas. So, it's really really healthy for the future I'd say it's quite imperative for the people of Huddersfield.

JS: Someone once said to me something like studying or understanding history it's not about the past it's actually about the future and I think it's something like that isn't it about the wellbeing of the future that you understand the history really well.

BM: Yeah. Because the now is the past and it is the future whenever that is. In ten years' time will be the now then, and in order to understand the now then then they have to be thinking about the future and to understand the future then you have to understand the past to really understand what the now means It means less work for future generations really. If they learn about these things when they're two three years' old and they're forming words and

they're eating foods from people from Lahore, or Nairobi, or Gahana, or Carriacou, or Skipton. You know they might be eating fish and chips that's got some garam masala on it and some hot sauce or something and that might just be normal in Huddersfield but only in Huddersfield do you get this multicultural fish and chips.

JS: It's [Huddersfield] quite a big town actually.

BM: Yeah. Everyone in Huddersfield thinks that it's the biggest town in the UK as well. I did until a few years ago. It's not. It's like number 10 or 11 in the country. I had it tattooed on my chest at uni that it was the biggest town in the UK, if not Europe. I used to preach that so strong. Like “where you from?”, “Huddersfield” “what Huddersfield?” “It's the biggest town in Europe, biggest town in the UK”, “really?”. There was no Google to check off your phone straight away to tell you you were wrong.... Unfortunately, it's not but we still have a strong presence. Anywhere I go in the world I always meet somewhere who's either from Huddersfield or connected to Huddersfield. Don't matter where I go.

JS: What are the potential healing properties of the visual and the sensual elements within Town Island for the visitors to the forthcoming exhibition?

BM: I think that's the hope. That's part of the goal and the hope is that there is a healing to this in that people feel connected to the work in a way they want to engage with it during their time there. During the time at the exhibition and after the exhibition, that they actually engage with the work in reality. Of all ages, that it draws people in to engage with the work the drawing in is engagement in itself, the arrival is engagement, the engagement with the work itself, the time with it is engagement, that it really is a fully holistic experience.

JS: You've got all the senses isn't it: the visual, the sound, the aroma.

BM: And the guiding through this as well because a lot of the times when I said about like the smells in Huddersfield if -when you said 'engine oil' I smell engine oil, but that's how the brain works, so then there'll have to be some sort of guiding through the works to allow people to actually be aware of their senses because in a lot of ways we are quite desensitised so to remind people when they're

coming in to be aware of the smells and to be aware of the sounds and to take time with the sounds. Because we hear stuff all the time it's quite easy to switch things off but to actually say no “this area is arranged for sounds”, “this area is arranged for visual”, and to actually make people aware of that, specifically and on the subtle layers.

JS: The last question. Have you any plans to build on the Town Island project? So, with more creative work perhaps with the communities of Huddersfield?

BM: Yeah. I think that from when we've gone to see the archives it's really highlighted that the archives need a lot of investment by the Carriacou community, not just the Carriacou community but the communities that connect with Carriacou, so like you could have a whole area in the archive which is people talking about the Carriacou community but culturally being outside the community. So someone whose either their best friend is from there but they're white European. Their descriptions of their experience either going round to their friend's parents' houses growing up there that's all very important. I think more work with other schools and colleges, educational institutes, in Huddersfield is really important and it all feels like research and study. To go into an area of study that's more official that actually brings even more weight and significance to the continual work of Town Island cause it's not just a body work that's now finished there's so many layers and conversations that I wanna explore through there. It's a continually evolving conversation so the work is essentially you could describe as something that is never going to stop.

JS: Yeah, it's part of the ecology and the ecology of Huddersfield and that's what the departments in the School of Humanities at Huddersfield would call that, the ecologies of culture,

BM: Okay.

JS: The Carriacou and Huddersfield cultures can be part, very much a strong part, of that. Along with the others perhaps there is perhaps your Town Island can help to reveal this form ... so more research needs to be done and like you say your work in the archive has revealed that and maybe the categories and the way that it's collected you can promote that as well?

BM: Some people look at the categorisation in archives and museums as something that is um historically quite negative. I don't know maybe it's just the way my brain works but I feel that there's actual positives to that categorisation because if you're wanting to then go into a body of research and you wanna find out specific areas the categories help you to go into and know where you're gonna find things.

JS: You can go towards the Caribbean and then you go towards the particular islands.

BM: Potentially yes

JS: You need the broader categories too, without being offensive

BM: No no not at all

JS: It's just a signpost maybe...

BM: Without the signpost you're just going to take the work... and then just... I mean there's the glossary in a book but then you can turn the pages to wherever you want to. So, to be able to just go into the archives and say “I'm going to go into here ”, great, but if you actually want to find specific things, specific names, specific practice, or culture, or detail, then that needs to be put there. It also helps with the collecting of things as well. It helps other people understand what they're contributing towards. Like “Okay if we sit down and speak the audio of this will go in the audio archives and will be stored there”. So, you can tell anyone in your family or friends or the future that's where my interview is. I contributed towards that.

JS: Thank you very much that's all the eight questions. Thank you very much for contributing to the Cultures of Creative Health.

CONCLUSION

Town Island is a conceptual artistic framework and the title of this exhibition in Huddersfield (25 January - 22 March 2025) celebrating the multiplicity of histories, dual identities and cultures within Huddersfield and Grenada. All voices of the partnership working on the exhibition are present in this catalogue, which began with an account of how Yorkshire Contemporary continues to support Matheson throughout his career. Now an artist of international standing, fresh from Venice Matheson's *Town Island* captures an important moment, when Huddersfield Art Gallery and partners celebrate his artistic achievements in this solo show in his home-town.

Town Island is proudly, the first exhibition of the 2025 'Huddersfield Art Gallery Curates Programme', which sees us working with a variety of partners and popping up in venues across the region. Although Huddersfield Art Gallery (the building) is currently closed while the major regeneration scheme *Our Cultural Heart* is at an early phase, we are continuing to create new opportunities and innovative ways for people to access and enjoy visual art.

As outlined, many of the artworks in the show were co-created by educational and community groups in both the Town (Huddersfield) and Island (Grenada) and it is thereby fitting that *Town Island* partnered with the *Cultures of_* research festival, with its bold place-based cultural explorations. The strong presence of the artist's voice in the catalogue alongside invitations for the co-creators of the artworks to be involved in the dialogues at the programmed events, is part of the 'Blended Curation' approach implemented in the show. Both the artistic and curatorial nature of *Town Island* embraces polyvocality - where different voices from the Town and Island are involved in meaning-making with the artist.

BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Janine Sykes [Ed.] is a Curator, Visual Arts (Huddersfield Art Gallery) and Lecturer (School Art and Humanities, The University of Huddersfield). In 2024 she achieved a PhD in formulating a new model of Blended Curation practice, designed to achieve high-quality public engagement. Her projects could be described as messy rhizomatic assemblages, where publics drive meaning-making with artists and curators.

Dr Rowan Bailey is a Reader in Cultural Theory and Practice with an interest in place-based thinking and making in the public realm. This includes collaborative partnership working with different creative communities. She is also Director of the Centre for Cultural Ecologies in Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Huddersfield and Principal Investigator of the Creative Health Hub for West Yorkshire.

Artist Benaiah Matheson

Through his work, Matheson transmutes oral traditions into visual narratives. His tapestries *Carriacou Was Eden* and *Carriacou in Huddersfield* exemplify this approach, drawing inspiration from his grandmother's rug-making techniques to create a dialogue between ancestral craft and contemporary art.

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