

# THE MIGRANTS, ME AND YOU MA PRACTICE RESEARCH

LAURIE PORTER

MARCH 2019

# The Research Journey



# The Research Journey

*The Migrants, Me and You*  
is a fine art practice research project  
with a focus on human migration  
which explores concepts of identity and  
how we - as migrants, artists and spectators –  
are placed and displaced

# The Research Journey

The practice research follows individual strands of creative investigation under the constituent parts of the title, *The Migrants, Me and You*.

These are interpreted respectively as:

- ▶ The Migrants - the visual representation of current migrant events and of the 'other'
- ▶ Me - the visual depiction of my personal experience of migration from apartheid South Africa
- ▶ You - consideration of how the viewer is placed or displaced by the exhibition of the artefacts from the first two strands, and displaced by the subject matter



# The Research Journey

- ▶ An ideal exhibition would have been the complete re-creation of the studio space
- ▶ Taking my co-exhibitors and the gallery space into consideration, I selected works for exhibition which complemented or challenged each other and, when brought together, would tell the full story





# The Research Journey

- ▶ Work on the 'Migrant' and the 'Me' strands happened simultaneously
- ▶ The 'You' strand (viewer) was considered throughout
- ▶ Themes and processes emerged such as
  - ▶ the use of layering techniques
  - ▶ representation of memory or dehumanisation
  - ▶ conscious use of scale, image, materials
  - ▶ significance of process as metaphor



Studio



# The Research Journey

- ▶ I worked in a reflexive and relatively unplanned way
- ▶ The research into the artworks dictated the next process or image
- ▶ Many works were abandoned along the way, as new ideas emerged that I was keen to capture and track
- ▶ There is acknowledgment that all work contributed to successive pieces



Studio



# The Research Journey

What follows is a record of the research journey including all relevant work (exhibited and not exhibited)

- ▶ The Migrant Strand
- ▶ The Me Strand
- ▶ The You Strand
- ▶ Exhibition



# The Migrant Strand



# The Migrant Strand

- ▶ The impetus for this practice research project was this single image in the media of a migrant boat with many people on board
- ▶ This led to the creation of a series of works based on images of migrant journeys by boat, in the Mediterranean



Credit: Massimo Sestini



## *Boats of Many Colours*

(not exhibited)

- ▶ Layers of painted boat shapes mark the numbers making the journeys across the Mediterranean
- ▶ The layers hide the many boats beneath the surface
- ▶ This layering becomes a theme in my work
- ▶ The 'people' in these boats were made using my fingerprints which, as markers of my identity, link to the imagined identities of the people on the boats



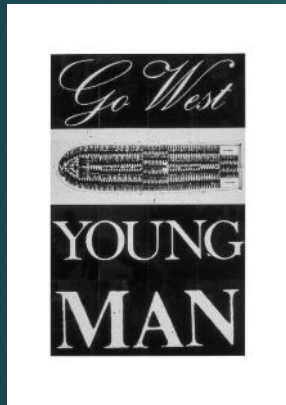
Laurie Porter (2016)  
oil on canvas



## Untitled Drawing

(not exhibited)

- ▶ Sketched layered boat shapes in colours reminiscent of architectural drawings or historic documents – a record or an archive
- ▶ Inspiration from Keith Piper and William Kentridge



Go West Young Man  
Keith Piper

<http://www.keithpiper.info/gowestintro.html>



Mine Shaft and Slave Ship  
William Kentridge

<https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/evidence/kentridge1.html>



Laurie Porter (2017 - )  
Pencil on paper



## Counting the Cost

(see 'Film' 00:01:45)

- ▶ Paintings on till roll inspired by media images on the internet when I the search the term "Mediterranean Migrants"
- ▶ Some remain as sketches as I struggled to find the source images again, when I came to paint them
- ▶ New media images appear on a daily basis as events unfold in the Mediterranean



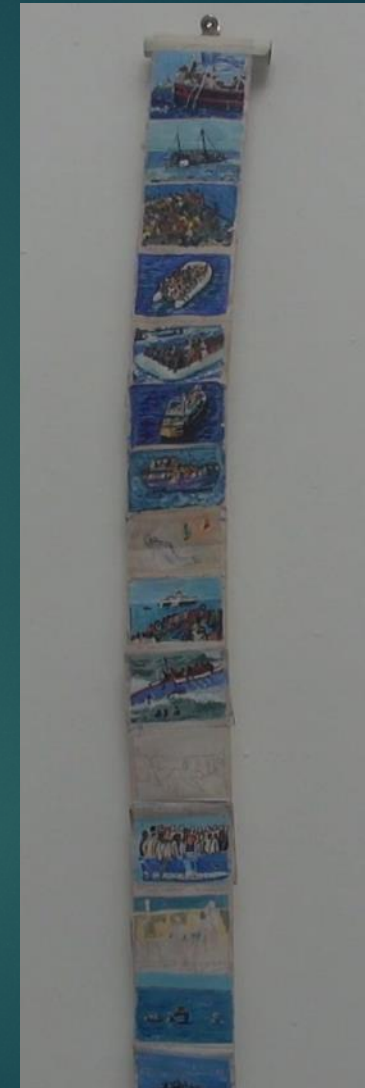
Laurie Porter (2016 - 2018)  
Acrylic on till roll paper



## Counting the Cost

(see 'Film' 00:01:45)

- ▶ Some paintings were framed and hung in a grid pattern on the wall
- ▶ Most remained on the till roll which hung alongside
- ▶ The individual paintings are included in the following slides (approximately to scale and in numerical order)



Laurie Porter (2016 -2018)  
Acrylic on till roll paper





No 1



No 2



No 3



No 4

Laurie Porter (2016 - 2018 )





No 5



No 6



No 7



No 8





No 9



No 10



No 11



No 12

Laurie Porter (2016 -2018)





No 13



No 14



No 15



No 16

Laurie Porter (2016 -2018)





No 17



No 18



No 19



No 20





No 21



No 22



No 23



No 24

Laurie Porter (2016 -2018)





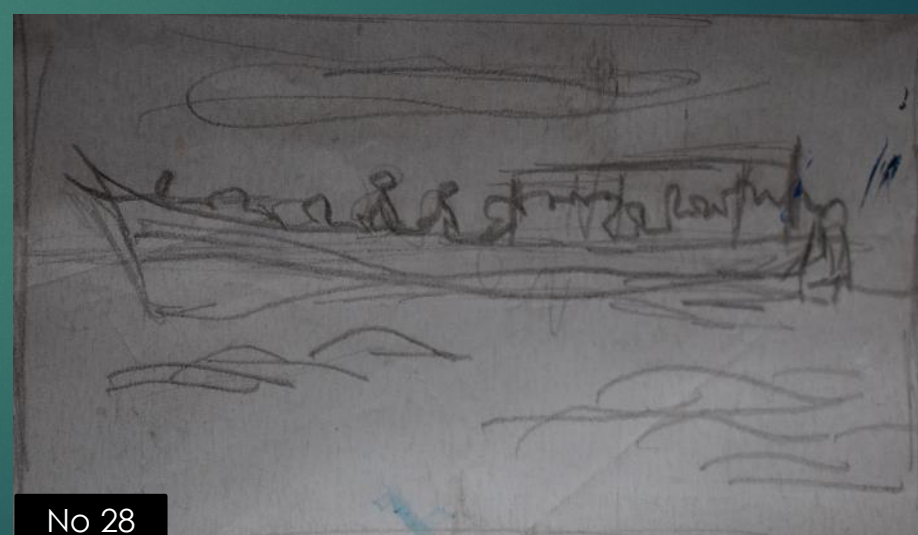
No 25



No 26



No 27



No 28

Laurie Porter (2016 - 2018)





No 29



No 30



No 31



No 32

Laurie Porter (2016 - 2018)

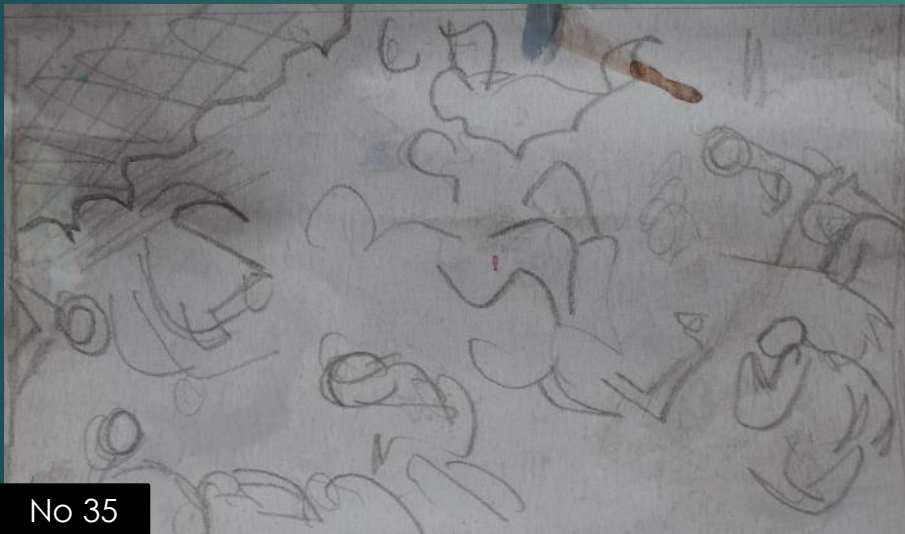




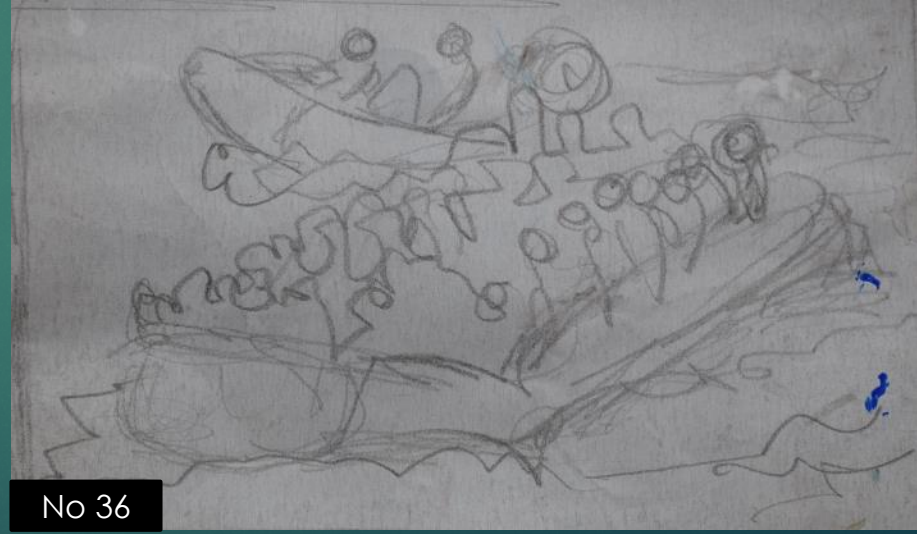
No 33



No 34



No 35



No 36

Laurie Porter (2016 - 2018 )





No 37



No 38



No 39



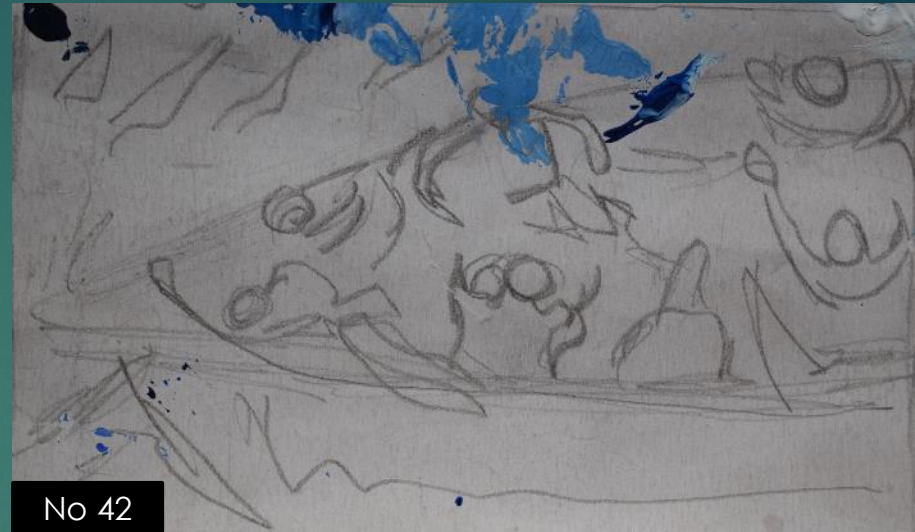
No 40

Laurie Porter (2016 -2018 )





No 41



No 42



No 43



No 44

Laurie Porter (2016 - 2018)





No 45



No 46



No 47



No 48

Laurie Porter (2016 - 2018)





No 49



No 50



No 51



No 52

Laurie Porter (2016 -2018 )

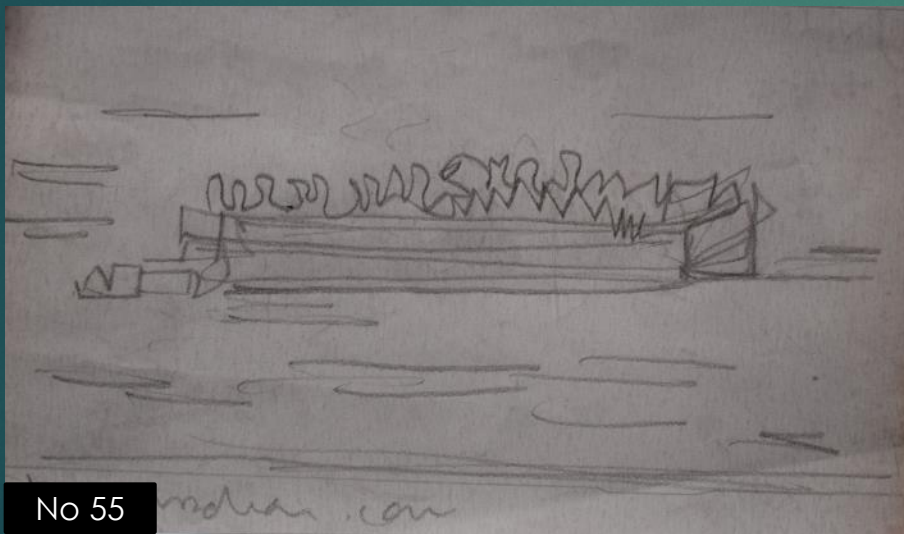




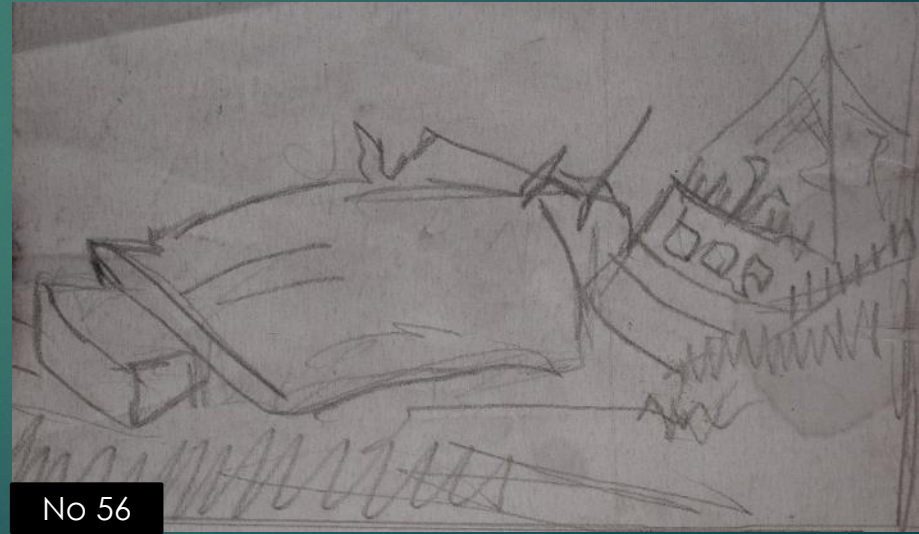
No 53



No 54



No 55



No 56



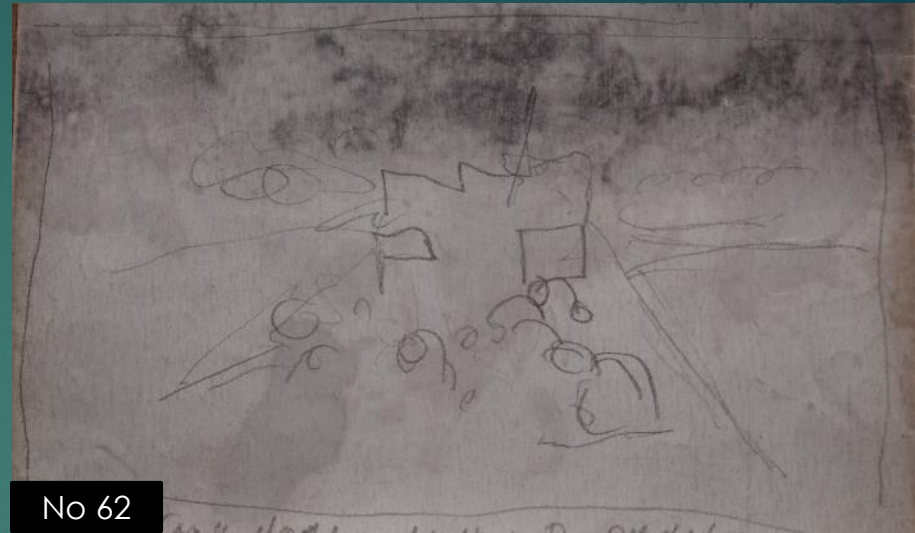


Laurie Porter (2016 - 2018)

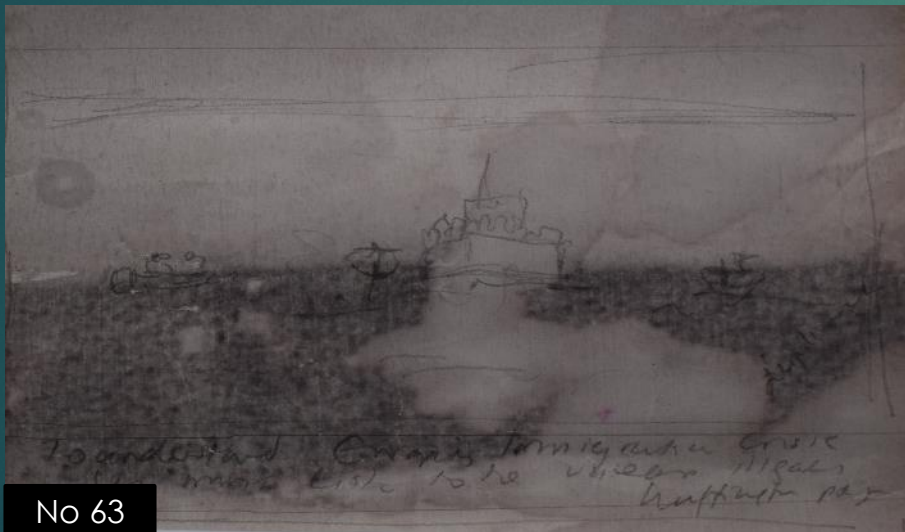




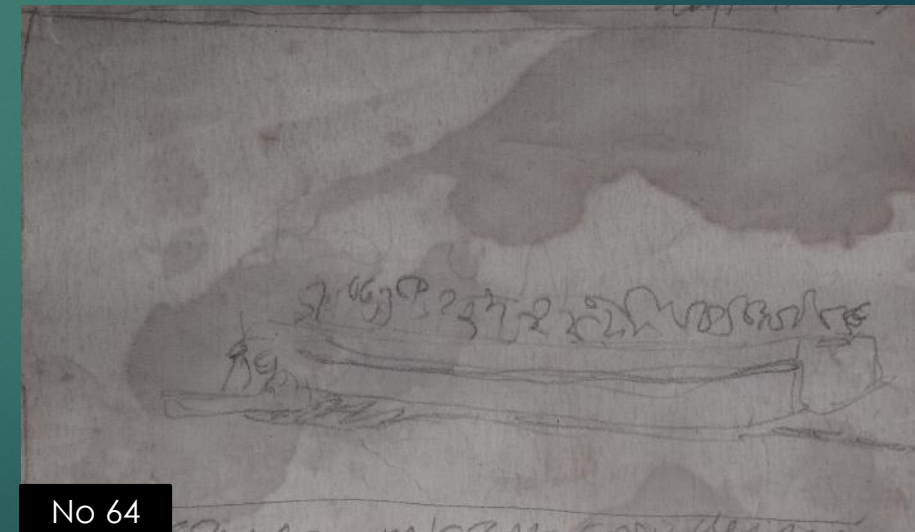
No 61



No 62



No 63



No 64

Laurie Porter (2016 -2018)





No 65



No 66



No 67



No 68





No 69



No 70



No 71



No 72

Laurie Porter (2016 - 2018)





No 73



No 74



No 75



No 76

Laurie Porter (2016 - 2018)





Laurie Porter (2016 - 2018)



## The First Boat (not exhibited)

- ▶ In this ongoing piece, I have gone back to the image that inspired the *Counting the Cost* work
- ▶ I have started to account for every passenger by numbering them and lifting them out of the image in the sketches that follow

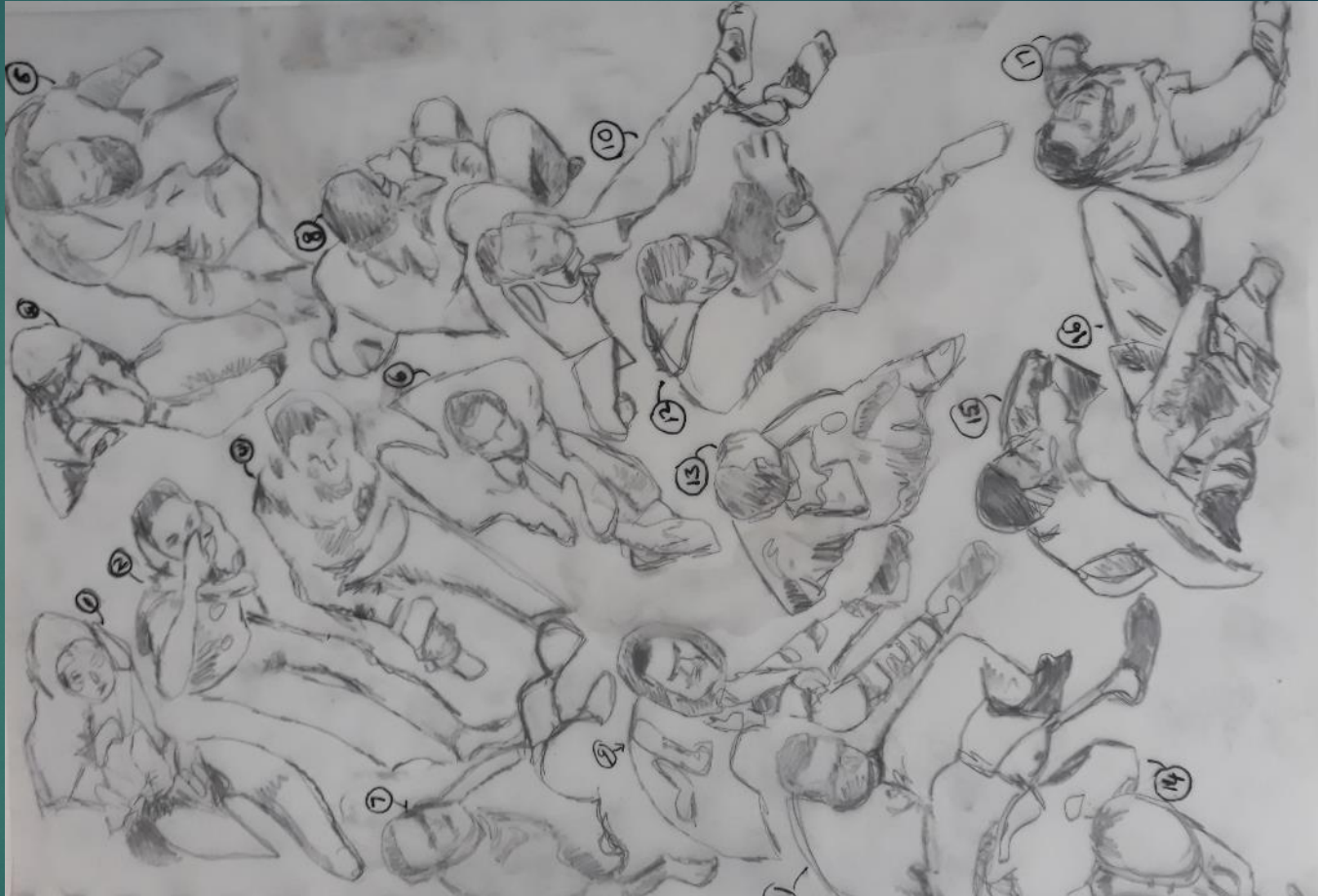


Credit: UNHCR / Massimo Sestini



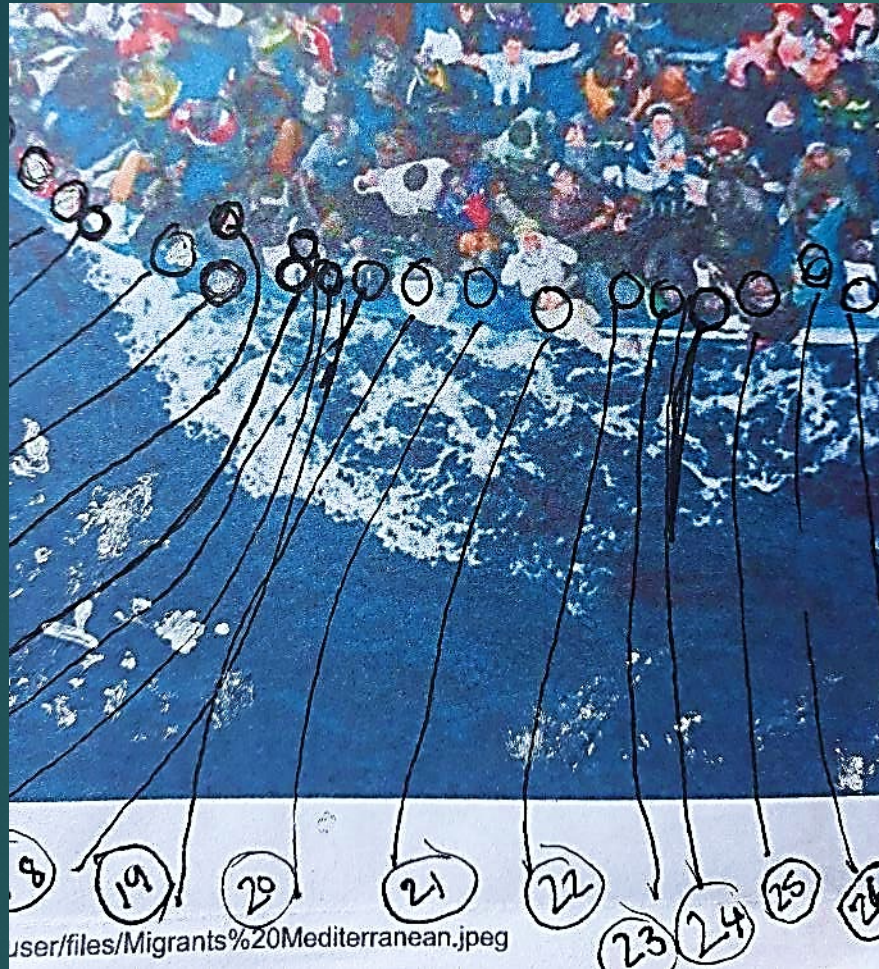
## The First Boat

- ▶ The figures are distorted by the aerial viewpoint
- ▶ Parts of their bodies have been hidden by the others, yet they are still recognizable as human
- ▶ The proposal is to display the individuals in a space in their own right and not as part of the crowd
- ▶ This idea of distorted or grotesque shapes still being appearing human, returns later in the *Displaced* artwork



Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Pencil on tracing paper





Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Pencil on tracing paper



*Boats*

(not exhibited)

- ▶ Further works followed in the Migrant Strand which drew inspiration from the previous works



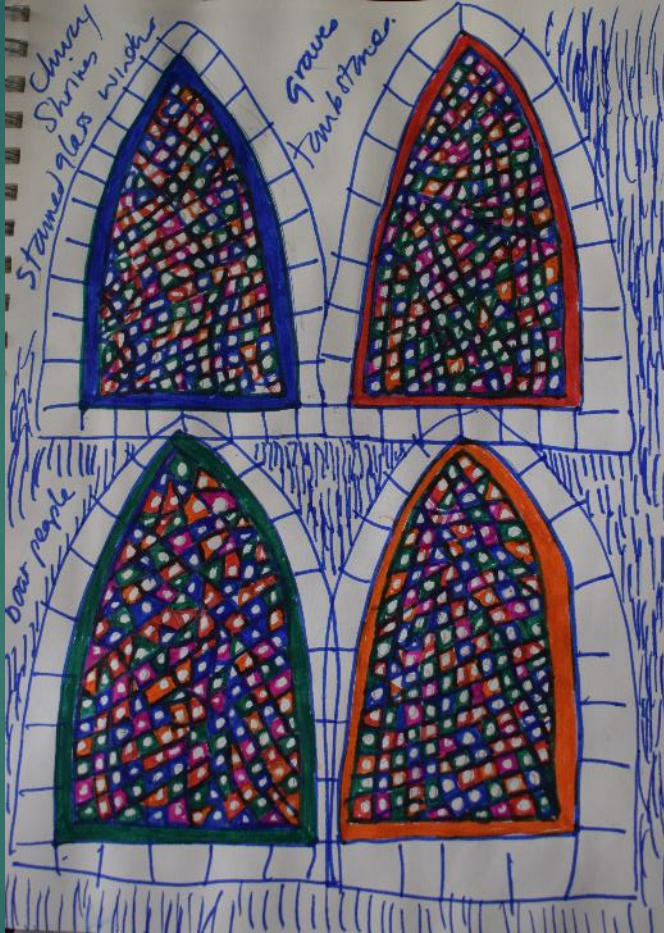
Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Acrylic paint on rubber sheeting



*Works in Progress*  
(not exhibited)



*War Table*  
Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Rubber sheet, beads, map



*Stained Glass*  
Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Pen on paper



*What is Your Position*  
Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Pen on paper



## Postcards from the Mediterranean (not exhibited)

- ▶ The Mediterranean, with its connotations as a holiday destination, also exists as a subterranean graveyard for so many who fail to make crossings to safety
- ▶ *Counting the Cost* paintings are presented as postcards with the reverse side, containing the written messages from real postcards from the Mediterranean –
- ▶ An incongruous match of holiday memories of privileged people and desperate journeys of the not-so-lucky



Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Photocopies on found postcards



## Shorelines (not exhibited)

- ▶ Shorelines are the threshold between safety and the sea, between home and leaving home
- ▶ They are the places where things (and sometimes people) wash up
- ▶ Collection of found objects and made objects, juxtaposing what is discarded (driftwood) with items that took time to create (portraits)
- ▶ The trays on the studio floor collecting debris – led to the later exhibited piece, *My Failed Boats*



Laurie Porter (2017 - )  
Found objects, painted objects



*Subverted Images*

(not exhibited)

- ▶ I was interested in the role dehumanisation plays in prejudice
- ▶ I experimented with subverting media images in a way that made the people featured in them unrecognisable, removing distinguishing features, making them less than human



Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Manipulated Photocopies



## Subverted Images

(not exhibited)

- ▶ Experimenting with copies of the *Counting the Cost* paintings resulted in images which were one further step removed from the source images
- ▶ This rendered the people in them unidentifiable – they appear as ghosts in an alien and ghostly seascape



Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Manipulated photocopies



## *Hazardous Materials (process)*

(see 'Film' 00:03:05)

- ▶ The subverted *Counting the Cost* images were transferred to the fabric of a hazardous materials suit of the kind used by workers on rescue ships
- ▶ I pasted gel medium to the paper images and applied the paper to the suit. Once the gel set, the paper was dampened and gently rubbed with a sponge to reveal the image beneath



Laurie Porter (2018)  
Photocopied images on hazardous materials suit



*Hazardous Materials  
(process)*

(see 'Film' 00:03:05)

- ▶ The suit was stuffed with bubble wrap to make the process easier
- ▶ The suit immediately took the form of a body
- ▶ As I worked, I found myself wondering if this was how it felt to wash a body



Laurie Porter (2018)

Photocopied images on hazardous materials suit



## *Hazardous Materials*

(see 'Film' 00:03:05)

- ▶ *Hazardous Materials* was hung centrally in the exhibition, so that viewers could walk around it 'reading' the images
- ▶ The work was displayed so that the other works in the exhibition could be viewed alongside, behind or through the piece
- ▶ The hope was that viewers would make the connections between all the works



Laurie Porter (2018)

Photocopied images on hazardous materials suit





Laurie Porter (2018)  
Photocopied images on hazardous materials suit



*The eerie sound of emergency blankets rustling on the deck of a ship*

(see 'Film' 00:06:01)

- ▶ Video footage of migrant rescues at sea, frequently features emergency blankets
- ▶ I included this found object in the exhibition as a foil to the *Hazardous Materials* suit
- ▶ The sheet rustled when visitors passed by
- ▶ It also served to reflect the viewer back at themselves



Laurie Porter (2018)  
Emergency Foil Blanket



*Hazmat Suit*  
*Found poem*  
 (see 'Film' 00:04:39)

- ▶ This found poem lifts phrases from instructions that come with biohazard suits
- ▶ I played with the way the phrases suggested the toxicity of the discourse about current migrant events and with the perception by some (and in the media) of migrants themselves

Laurie Porter (2018)  
 Found Poem

**Hazmat Suit**

Classic hooded coverall  
 with stitched external seams;  
 elasticated ankles, wrists, face;  
 elasticated (stitched in) waist.  
 Zipper flap. Antistat-  
 -ic (on the outside)  
 White.

Sturdy, lightweight, breathability;  
 optimised protection, durability;  
 comfortable, ergonomic for optimum fit.  
 Offers high freedom of movement.

Category III Certification.  
 Protects from radioactive contamination;  
 from sensitive products, sensitive processes,  
 biological and chemical substances.  
 Protects against contamination  
 by people.

Resistant to flex cracking and abrasion,  
 trapezoidal tear, to puncture, to penetration  
 by contaminated liquids,  
 blood borne-pathogens,  
 body fluids, blood.  
 Resistant to penetration  
 by people.

Do not wash.  
 Do not iron.  
 Do not machine dry.  
 Incinerate or bury  
 in controlled landfill.

*Phrases taken from specifications and instructions for use of hazardous materials (hazmat) suits.*



## *My Failed Boats* (process)

(see 'Film' 00:06:46)

- ▶ Attempts at making rubber dinghies had not been successful
- ▶ The boats were placed in the *Shorelines* trays
- ▶ The making of *Hazardous Materials* resulted in a by-product of tiny paper rubbings which fell into the boats and the trays beneath
- ▶ The pieces took on the appearance of bodies



Laurie Porter (2018)

Acrylic paint, paper rubbings, bubble wrap



## *My Failed Boats*

(see 'Film' 00:06:46)

- ▶ This piece contained four failed boat prototypes sprinkled in paper rubbings, presented in a way that mimicked how they occurred in the studio, beneath the *Hazardous Materials* piece
- ▶ My failed boats became symbolic of the unseaworthiness of boats used for migrant journeys
- ▶ This artwork, which had drawn on the previous work, now led directly onto the next



Laurie Porter (2018)  
Paper rubbings, bubble wrap, clear tubing



# *Displaced* *(process)*

(see 'Film' 00:07:37)

- ▶ I started using the paper rubbings to create people
- ▶ Sometimes, the paper would dissolve and the figures would fall apart or disappear, become lost
- ▶ The shapes dictated the postures, gestures and form – the people that these pieces of paper would become



Laurie Porter (2018)  
Paper rubbings, acrylic paint



# Displaced

(see 'Film' 00:07:37)

- ▶ This led, in many cases, to a grotesqueness in the figures
- ▶ They appear simultaneously to be depictions of people who are alive and on the move, and people who could be dead and floating in an un-human or unearthly way



Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Paper rubbings, acrylic paint



(see 'Film' 00:07:37)

Displaced



Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Paper rubbings, acrylic paint



# *Displaced*

(see 'Film' 00:07:37)

- ▶ The figures were presented in groups on an expanse of white wall like a wave of migrants
- ▶ When viewed from a distance they appeared as tiny specks that invited closer inspection
- ▶ The stepping towards the artwork and towards the subject matter became symbolic of the human gesture of engagement and welcome



Laurie Porter (2018 - )  
Paper rubbings, acrylic paint



# The Me Strand



# The Me Strand

- ▶ The second strand of my practice research involved an exploration of my own involuntary migration from South Africa during the apartheid years for political reasons
- ▶ Looking back at my own migration within the context of current migrant events inevitably led to considerations of my identity

1984, No. 43 of 1984. This Act is published in English and another South African official language and the English version shall prevail in the event of any inconsistency.

25  
30  
35

**STAATSKOERANT**  
VAN DIE REPUBLIEK VAN SUID-AFRIKA

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA  
**GOVERNMENT GAZETTE**, 11 APRIL 1984

**SOUTH AFRICAN CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT, 1984**

the date on which he attains the age of 15 years and six months,

5  
10

It is hereby appointed that the following shall be the general information:—  
No. 43 of 1984: South African Citizenship Amendment Act, 1984.

New Act means that

## Thousands will become citizens on Thursday

A very exciting and, for some, distressing piece of legislation comes into effect on Thursday, the South African Citizenship Amendment Act. With it comes success for South African citizenship for thousands of immigrants who are under 25 years of age and who will be also military training.

Some immigrants have already become automatic citizens by naturalisation and the State Act affects many others.

The Act addresses three groups of people:

- GROUP 1: Those who were given permanent residence permits before April 1984.
- GROUP 2: Those in whom permanent residence permits were issued between April 25 1975 and April 1984.
- GROUP 3: Those who have been issued with permanent residence permits since April 11 1984.

Any immigrant living in South Africa on a permanent residence permit who will be older than 25 on Thursday is not affected.

They must, of course, then be the country of birth or be automatically.

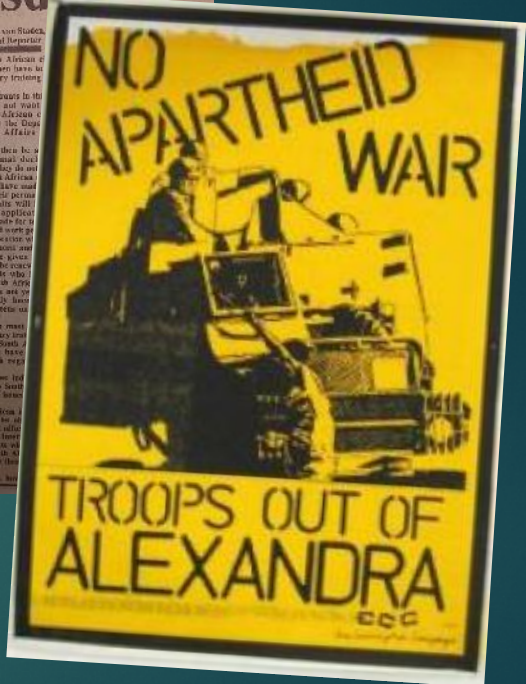
**GROUP ONE**

Those immigrants who fell into the group will become automatic South African citizens on Thursday.

Those who are affected are those who:

- Obtained permanent residence permits before April 1975.
- Have been resident in South Africa for five years.
- Are aged between 15 and 25 on Thursday.

These people automatically become South African citizens on Thursday.





*Subverted Family Photos*

(not exhibited)

- ▶ Using the same technique as previously, I subverted a photograph taken of my parents, on the day I left South Africa
- ▶ This time, the process spoke to me less of dehumanisation, but more of loss of family and relationships and the degradation of memory over time – fallout from my migration



Laurie Porter (2017 - )  
Photocopied images on canvas



*Subverted Family Photos*

(not exhibited)

- ▶ This work is unresolved – but was a step along the way in my research into the impacts of my own migration



Laurie Porter (2017)  
Photocopied images on canvas



*What Lies Beneath*

(not exhibited)

(see 'Film' 00:08:53)

- ▶ I began the exploration of my own migration experience by thinking in terms of my pre- and post- migrational selves
- ▶ I was frustrated in my attempts to define my South African identity in a single image



Laurie Porter (2017)  
Acrylic on canvas



*What Lies Beneath*

(not exhibited)

(see 'Film' 00:08:53)

- ▶ I covered the image in black paint and scratched sketches into the paint, of my "English Self"
- ▶ This continued the layering theme which had began in my original boat paintings and which continued throughout the Me strand
- ▶ Seeing my two identities in the same image was a significant breakthrough for me and became more meaningful in subsequent works



Laurie Porter (2017)  
Acrylic on canvas



*Grid Painting*  
(not exhibited)

(see 'Film' 00:10:04)

- ▶ In this *Grid Painting*, I continued the idea of trying to define my two selves in the same space using a grid
- ▶ I decided to work systematically through my two identities, using the elements of Heidegger's concept of the Fourfold – the earth, the sky, the mortals and the divinities – and a depiction of these for each of my selves



Laurie Porter (2017 - )  
Acrylic on canvas



Grid Painting

(not exhibited)

(see 'Film' 00:10:04)

- ▶ I photographed the progress of this work at regular intervals, a practice that was to prove key when I worked on the later *Between Worlds, Worlds Between* artwork



Laurie Porter (2017 - )  
Acrylic on Canvas



## Grid Painting (not exhibited)

(see 'Film' 00:10:04)

- ▶ This piece remains unresolved as I had already started work on the *Between Worlds, Worlds Between* artwork – which can be seen in the bottom right hand side of this photograph



Laurie Porter (2017 - )  
Acrylic on canvas



*Between Worlds,  
Worlds Between*

(see 'Film' 00:08:20, 00:08:33)

- ▶ This layered painting continued the exploration of my two selves within the same space
- ▶ Using the elements of the Fourfold, I tried to find ways to represent the earth, weather (sky), people (mortals) and (divinities) culture for each of my worlds
- ▶ The end result was a single palimpsestic painting representing my hybridized identity



Laurie Porter (2017-18)  
Acrylic on canvas



*Between Worlds,  
Worlds Between*

(details)

(see 'Film' 00:08:20, 00:08:33)

- ▶ During the process, sections of the painting were masked with small pieces of canvas, before the next images was painted over the top
- ▶ Removing the canvas masks, revealed "memories" of previous images beneath



Laurie Porter (2017-18)  
Acrylic on canvas



*Between Worlds, Worlds  
Between (unmasked)*  
Laurie Porter (2017-18)  
Acrylic on canvas

(see 'Film' 00:08:20, 00:08:33)





## *Between Worlds, Worlds Between*

(see 'Film' 00:08:20, 11:34)

- ▶ As with all my work, the process in making *Between Worlds, Worlds Between* was important
- ▶ Still images of the creation of the work capture a single stage in the making process
- ▶ Work that happened between the photos, may be lost forever beneath the layers
- ▶ Some of the still images were stitched together to create a time lapse film which was exhibited alongside the artwork



*Stills*

Laurie Porter (2017-18)  
Acrylic on canvas



(see 'Film' 00:12:40)

ME STRAND

Between Worlds, Worlds Between



*Between Worlds, Worlds Between*  
Laurie Porter (2017-18)  
Acrylic on canvas



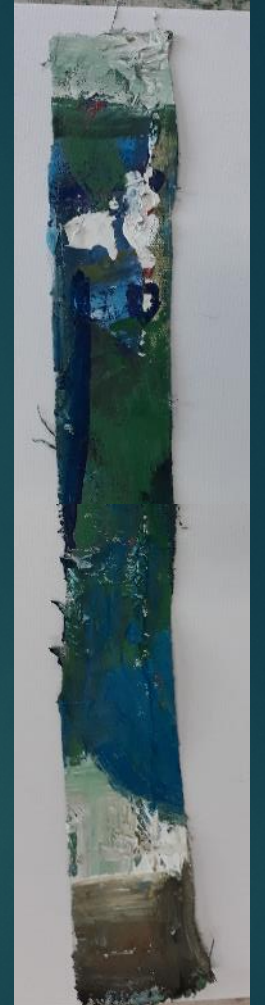
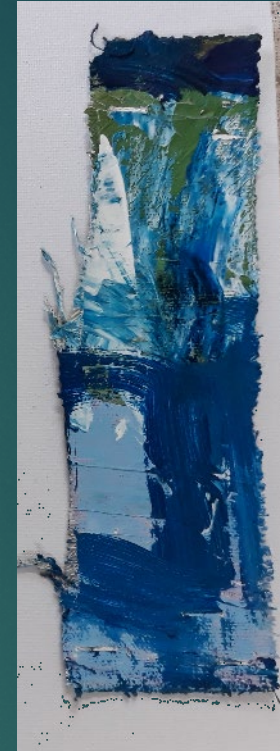
*Time Lapse*  
Laurie Porter (2017-18)  
Film



*Between Worlds, Worlds Between*  
*A Selection of Canvas Pieces*

(not exhibited)

- ▶ Some canvas masks were reused, and they became layered paintings in their own right
- ▶ Others were “archived” as memories or artefacts from the making process
- ▶ I was unsure how, or if these pieces would be used again



Laurie Porter (2017-18)  
Acrylic on canvas



## Reimaginary

(not exhibited)

- ▶ After contemplating the scraps for some time, I stapled them onto a board to create an alternative reality to *Between Worlds*
- ▶ The resulting reconstruction became something that spoke of a complementary but different hybridized identity – one built from what had been discarded
- ▶ This use of the “discarded” continues the theme that had found its way into my work

Laurie Porter (2017-18)  
Acrylic on canvas





## Reimaginary

- ▶ I realised this reconstructed piece was just another interpretation of the hybridized *Between Worlds* piece, that it shares the same creative DNA
- ▶ I enjoyed the way the two pieces worked alongside each other but I couldn't think of a way to exhibit this piece alongside its "twin" without it detracting from the dynamic between the *Between Worlds* piece and the time lapse film
- ▶ It was a difficult choice but I chose to leave this piece out of the exhibition



*Reimaginary*  
Laurie Porter (2017-18)  
Acrylic on canvas



*The Invisible Migrant*  
(see 'Film' 00:14:13)

- ▶ In the exhibition, this was the final painting in the “Me” strand
- ▶ It contrasts my safe and easy migration by plane with the desperate boat journeys being made by many migrants today
- ▶ I am the Invisible Migrant – that no one noticed or bothered about
- ▶ Many of the little boats below have already been lost
- ▶ The lands being left behind are burning red – Africa, Syria, Iraq, and they begin to close in on the white cliffs of Dover – a haven with its inviting lighthouse and rolling green hills



Laurie Porter (2017)  
Acrylic on canvas



*The Invisible Migrant*

(see 'Film' 00:14:13)

- ▶ Initially I was unsure about this piece and its place in the exhibition
- ▶ I felt it was very illustrative and just a way of bringing the “Me” and the “Migrant” strands into the same place
- ▶ Seeing all the works together in the exhibition, however, brought new insights, including the impossibility of telling someone else’s stories without bringing your own narratives to them
- ▶ Including this piece in the “Me” strand, rather than the “Migrant” strand, was an acknowledgement that, in fact, all I had ever done throughout this project, was tell my own story or document my own response to someone else’s story



*Detail*  
Laurie Porter (2017)  
Acrylic on canvas



# The You Strand



# The You Strand

- ▶ The consideration of the viewer was constant when making my artwork
- ▶ The intention was always for the artwork to undergo public scrutiny and this happened during the week long exhibition
- ▶ I realised that during the curation of the show, I was assigned the role as the very first viewer of my own artwork
- ▶ Seeing the works together afforded me new insights into the relationship between the pieces

in  
sight

You are warmly invited to the opening of the  
MA by Research in Media, Art and Design

**Exhibition Showcase 2018**

**Friday 15 June, 6pm-8pm**



**Francesca Flowers ♦ June Nolan ♦ Laurie Porter**

Exhibition dates 16 June - 23 June

SIDNEY  
COOPER  
GALLERY **150** YEARS

Sidney Cooper Gallery  
(Studio Spaces)  
St Peter's Street  
Canterbury  
CT1 2BQ

**FREE ADMISSION**

Tuesday to Friday 10.30 am – 5pm  
Saturday 11.30am – 5pm  
Registered charity number 109816

 Canterbury  
Christ Church  
University

*Private View Invitation*



# The You Strand

(see 'Film' 00:17:28)

- ▶ My artwork was in a shared space on the right hand wall, back wall and in the floor space
- ▶ The Private View was an opportunity for me to have conversations about my work with visitors
- ▶ The Private View and the Exhibition also gave me the opportunity to observe the viewers' interactions with the work



Private View - 15 June 2018



## *In Sight Exhibition*

(see 'Film' 00:17:28)

- ▶ Some of the audience interaction was as I had expected and planned – especially the way the viewers navigated around the work or stepped towards or back from it
- ▶ The viewers were also encouraged to look up and down and through the artworks



Private View - 15 June 2018



## *In Sight Exhibition*

(see 'Film' 00:17:28)

- ▶ Other responses were unexpected, such as the way viewers engaged with the time lapse film alongside the *Between Worlds* painting
- ▶ I noticed how viewers interacted with both pieces at the same time, picking out transitory elements in the film and trying to place these within the painting



Private View - 15 June 2018











The exhibition was the culmination of my practice research and was key to the bringing together of the three strands – the Migrant, Me and You strands.

It helped me to realise that, through the research, I had not only been on an artistic journey, a kind of creative migration, but this had also been a personal journey into my hybridised identity.

I had gained new insights into the difficulties of trying to tell someone else's story, but had also properly explored my own migration.

My hope was that the visitors to the exhibition, and others viewing my work, would have felt they'd been taken with me on this journey.

And the journey continues, of course, as I still try to make meaning of how all the research and the artwork and the exhibition served to challenge me and displace me, but also how I have been placed at the centre of all my research, within each of the strands.