



University of Brighton

NICOLA ASHMORE

GUERNICA REMAKINGS

An investigation of craftivism and iconography in
recreations of Picasso's 'Guernica'

RESEARCH OUTPUT

Guernica Remakings is a body of research into the processes and meanings that surround community activist versions of Picasso's 1937 painting, 'Guernica'.

Nicola Ashmore developed documentary films and curated a touring exhibition of works in order to investigate how meaning is constructed and held in material form by textile crafting communities to reveal local and global political issues. This was contextualised by a collection and study of exemplar politicised uses of 'Guernica' in arts around the world.

The research was conducted and brought to the public domain through three outputs:

- A curated exhibition, first shown in 2017, and subsequently touring to:
 - The Working Class Movement Library, Salford (31 January - 20 March 2019)
 - The Plaza, Municipal Town Hall, Rose Hill, Mauritius (1 - 19 April 2019)
 - The National Poetry Library, Southbank Centre, London (26 July - 22 September 2019).
 The exhibition included the fifth 'Keiskamma Guernica' (2017) tapestry, commissioned by Ashmore in South Africa, and was accompanied by a publication and outreach events.
- A series of 12 documentary films, 'Guernica Remakings South Africa' made on location and examining the making of a series of tapestries in Keiskamma. Ashmore specially commissioned a fifth Keiskamma Guernica to explore the principles and methods behind the crafting. <http://guernicaremakings.com/about-guernica-remakings-south-africa/>
- A website, hosted at <http://guernicaremakings.com>, that includes contextual Guernica remakings, writings, opportunities for connectivity and further documentary films.

The research gains insight on a number of issues in the process of contemporary politicised remakings, including those of translation, art as activism, witnessing pain and distress, and the value and currency of 'Guernica' in the twenty-first century.



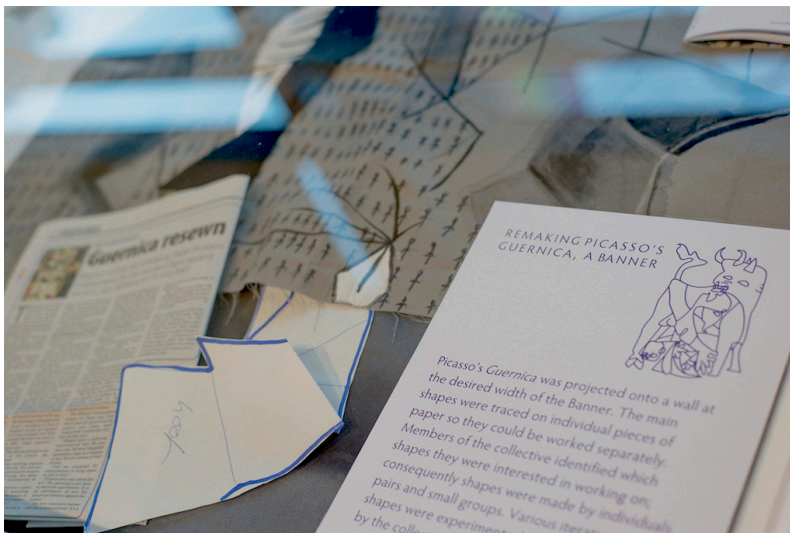
(top) **Guernica Remakings exhibition**
University of Brighton Gallery, 2017
Exhibition installation view

(bottom) **Guernica Remakings, South Africa**
Still from episode two of 12

Guernica Remakings



(above)
Keiskamma Guernica, 2017
held by makers
Embroiderer Zoleka, designer
Veronica and embroiderer
Nombulelo, makers of the 2017
work commissioned by Nicola
Ashmore, holding their creation in
front of the earlier, large-scale
Keiskamma Guernica, 2010



(left)
Guernica Remakings exhibition
Vitrine with samples and details
of production methods

Guernica Remakings



Guernica Remakings
University of Brighton Gallery, 2017
Exhibition installation views
(top) Map showing countries involved in the bombing
of the town of Guernica on the 26 April 1937
(bottom) Costumes and viewing area for a recording
of *Guernica, a play* (2011 - 2012)

Guernica Remakings

KEISKAMMA ART PROJECT



Guernica Remakings, 'South Africa'
Episode one of 12

Access to film at <https://vimeo.com/297174264>



Guernica Remakings, 'South Africa'
Episode five of 12

Access to film at <https://vimeo.com/297194736>



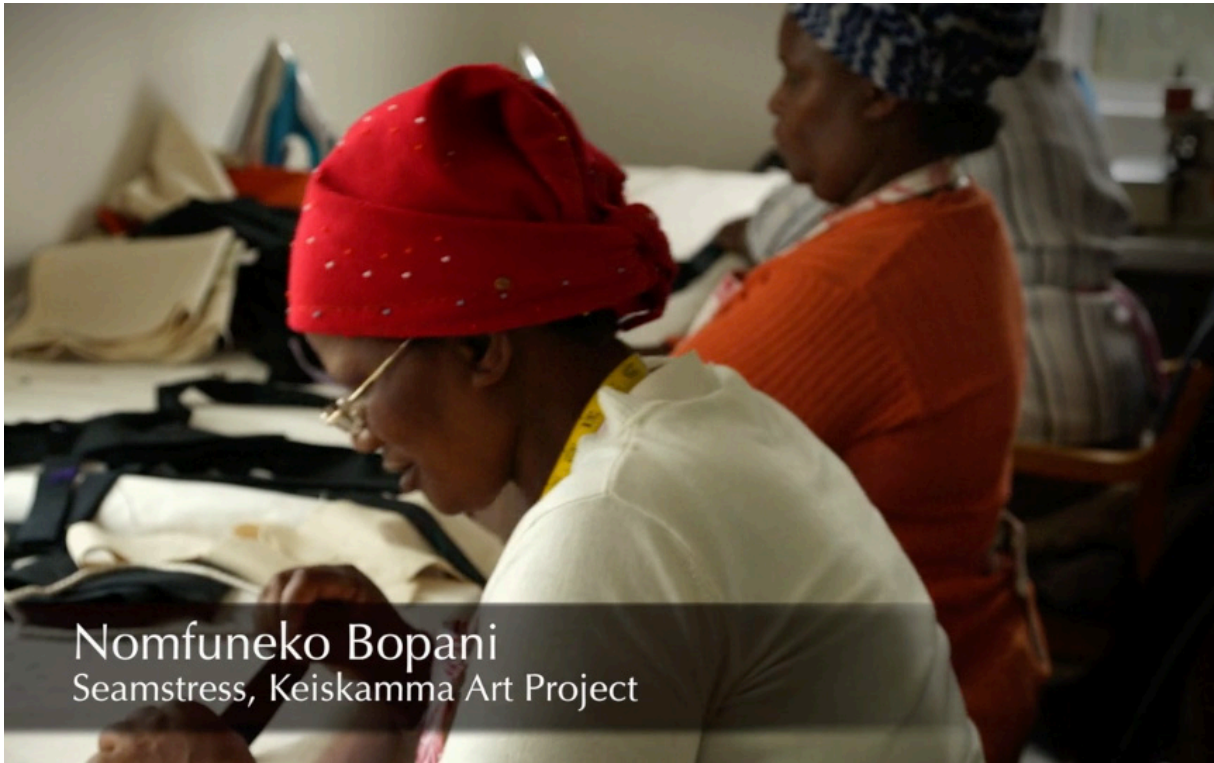
Guernica Remakings, 'South Africa'
Episode seven of 12

Access to film at <https://vimeo.com/297514149>

Linked samples of the 12 documentary films researching South African making used in the curation Guernica Remakings.

The suite is available at <https://vimeo.com/channels/guernicaremakingsafrica/page:1>

RESEARCH QUESTIONS



Nomfuneko Bopani
Seamstress, Keiskamma Art Project

**Guernica Remakings,
South Africa**
Still from film two of 12

Ashmore's research investigated what makes the acknowledged psychoanalytic significance, narrative content and religious meaning of Picasso's painting 'Guernica' translatable to global communities in distress when it is remade through local collaboration.

It specifically asked:

1. How does collaborative activist craft practice foster solidarity, empowerment and socio-political engagement?
2. Why does the painting 'Guernica' in particular resonate when translated from its specific reference to a historical moment and culturally specific situation into apparently different contexts?
3. How can curatorial exhibition practice support visitor engagement with Guernica's humanitarian message - compassion for civilians' suffering?

RESEARCH CONTEXT



Guernica Remakings investigates the social and political motivations and outcomes of recent remakings of the iconic painting. It focuses on one example, 'Keiskamma Guernica' (2017), commissioned by Ashmore. Through it, she was able to explore motivation and iconography with the makers, using filmed interviews alongside footage of the making process and investigations of social and political factors.

Keiskamma Guernica, 2017
200 cm x 100cm

Ashmore's research included interviews with the makers of this, the first of five Keiskamma Guernicas to date, in 2015.

The contexts Ashmore uses for the research are far-reaching and are curated on the website at <http://guernicaremakings.com>. These include four earlier iterations of the Keiskamma Guernica, first made at full-scale in 2010, as well as a review of artworks from around the world that were based on the iconic painting in a re-made or re-contextualised form.

Picasso's 'Guernica' has been widely-reproduced and referenced since it was completed in 1937. Ashmore considers the significance of this activity in the critical history of the original work, the understanding of craftivism and the meanings that can be harnessed by made objects. Ashmore draws on the critical history of the work, particularly those aspects which detail its psychoanalytic significance (Arnheim, 1962), narrative content (Russell, 1979), and religious meaning (Granell, 1981). Of particular import to Ashmore's research was Gijs van Hensbergen work on the status 'Guernica' has accumulated as a twentieth-century icon (Hensbergen, 2004). Equally, the growing critical response to artists' referencing of the work provided academic context, notably Wells (2014) and the exhibition and catalogue, *Nelson Rockefeller's Picassos: Tapestries Commissioned for Kykuit* (2014-2015).

The Keiskamma Art Project remade Picasso's 'Guernica' as a series of textile artworks four times between 2010 and 2015, before Ashmore commissioned a fifth. The first, 2010, is a large-scale textile piece created at the same size as Picasso's original (7.8m x 3.5m); the other four are smaller, measuring approximately two metres in length by one metre in height.

The Keiskamma Guernicas were known to have challenged the South African government's refusal to comprehensively respond to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. In investigating the motivations and benefits to the community she was researching, Ashmore drew on increased academic interest in the therapeutic effect of community textile production. Schmahmann (2015) examines the use of textiles as therapeutic work, while the exhibition *Positive Living: Art and AIDS in South Africa* (Peltz Gallery, Birkbeck University, 13 Nov 2015 - 16 Jan 2016) included a small-scale Keiskamma Guernica (2015) commissioned by the curator Annie Coombes which, alongside other artworks, was contextualised as a therapeutic practice for HIV/AIDS sufferers and their relatives allowing self-representation and memory work to be performed. Ashmore's enquiry into social collaboration through craft was also informed by recent growth in scholarship on collaboration and connection through textile making (Hemmings, 2014; Kettle, Felcey and Ravetz, 2013; Gauntlett, 2011).

As well as the examples of tapestry making in the region of the Keiskamma river, South Africa, Ashmore used her documentary method to build knowledge on the wider socio-political motivations of activist craftspeople and artists who have used the 'Guernica' painting as a basis for their work. This included documentary with the makers and organisers of an early remaking of 'Guernica' in Britain and India, including Ashmore herself. 'Remaking of Picasso's "Guernica" as a protest banner' was created in 2012 - 2014 and made connections between historic and contemporary government-led aerial attacks on civilian populations (Ashmore, 2017b). It was exhibited at *Conscience and Conflict: British Artists and the Spanish Civil War*, Pallant House Gallery, Chichester (8 Nov 2014 - 15 Feb 2015). The new films allowed a reflection on the process and the aftermath of the creative product.

Two major iterations contributed to the artistic contexts Ashmore drew upon. Goshka Macuga's 'The Nature of the Beast' (2009-2010) was an archive intervention and installation at the Whitechapel Gallery where 'Guernica' had been displayed on a tour to Britain in 1939. *Guernica, a play* (2011 - 2012) was written and produced by Erika Luckert and performed at Nextfest, Edmonton. For the gallery curation, Ashmore also acquired, on loan, Vasco Gargalo's 2016 large-scale illustration 'Alepponica', using its unusually specific references to contemporary political figures involved in the Syrian conflict as a reference point when examining the selections and crafting choices made by the Keiskamma community.



Weeping Women workshop for Keiskamma Guernica, 2010
Image courtesy of Irene Nielson

Guernica Remakings

(right)
Keiskamma Guernica, 2012
Photographer Stephen Wreakes

(below)
Keiskamma Guernica, 2015
Photographer Nicola Ashmore



Guernica Remakings



(top) Remaking of Picasso's Guernica as a Protest Banner (2012-2014)



(left) Protest march with banner being carried

Research made a critical evaluation of the remaking project including participants' reflections on the outcome.

Guernica Remakings



(top) **Guernica, a Play**
Performed at Nextfest,
Edmonton (2011-2012)
Written and produced by
Erika Luckert

(right) **The Nature of the Beast**
Goshka Macuga
Whitechapel Gallery (2009-2010)
Courtesy of the artist and
Whitechapel Gallery Archive.
Photograph by Patrick Lears



(bottom)
Alepponica
Ioan Vasco Gargalo
2016



DOCUMENTARY FILMS, A BANNER



Remaking Picasso's 'Guernica', a Banner

Part one of three documentaries

Access to film at https://youtu.be/aD4uzvYeJ_I



Remaking Picasso's 'Guernica', a Banner

Part two of three documentaries

Access to film at https://youtu.be/mdo_2_AEaeQ



Remaking Picasso's 'Guernica', a Banner

Part three of three documentaries

Access to film at <https://youtu.be/5VUOWEG4vkM>

RESEARCH PROCESS

Ashmore approached this research as both a maker and an art historian. In 2015, she made a series of field trips to carry out archival research, to interview and film people involved in collective remakings of 'Guernica'. She visited London, UK; Hamburg, South Africa; New York, USA; Montreal and Edmonton, Canada.

These experiences fostered a deeper understanding of the materiality and physical context of the process of remakings. With support from the AHRC's Global Challenges Research Fund, Ashmore commissioned the fifth 'Keiskamma Guernica' in order to investigate the process, motivations and values of remaking the iconic painting. It was subsequently displayed as part of the *Guernica Remakings* exhibition in Brighton in 2017.

During the making of 'Keiskamma Guernica, 2017', Ashmore used documentary techniques, working between field interviews, filming and the scripting of critical historical responses in order to produce 12 short exploratory films. These have been screened at conferences in the UK and in South Africa and are available as an element of the wider website at <http://guernicaremakings.com/watch-the-guernica-remakings-south-africa-documentary-series/>

In the documentary films, Ashmore was able to question the Keiskamma makers and explore their processes. Through this she gained accounts that were highly personal and which reflected the deeper connections with the social challenges of their community. The interviewees shared their observations of the making process and their insights regarding the visual translation of 'Guernica', and its relationship to their experience of the HIV/AIDS crisis in South Africa, their shared ideas, local need for change and visions of the future.

Within the first phase of the research programme, Ashmore took the banner she had co-created in 2012-2014 when meeting participants for the first time. This created a spirit of sharing which informed her methodology. She used documentary film specifically to develop a form of representation that conveyed the multiplicity of voices and an active practical engagement that is central to the banners' value and is not transparent in the object itself.

Her method aimed to understand the contribution of multiple individuals and how they worked together within the crafting community process. This cross-disciplinary approach informed methodological advancements in art and design history practice, recognising documentary film as a research tool that was able to offer an immersive insight into the context of creation as well as a medium that communicated the lived experience of the makers. The films feature in the curations alongside examples of the works produced to ensure the many voices involved in the remakings are heard.



**Zoleka, Veronica and Nombulelo,
makers of the
Keiskamma Guernica, 2017
commissioned by Ashmore
Hamburg, South Africa
January, 2017
Photographer Joe Hague**

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

Ashmore's research, consisting of the production of documentary films, the curation of a touring exhibition along with public participation events, the commissioning of the 'Keiskamma Guernica, 2017' tapestry as participatory practice-based research and her curation of the website, contributed to three distinct fields of enquiry: the understanding of collaborative art and craft processes and craftivism; the referencing of iconic works in the history of art and the function of their translation into new contexts; and the dialogues around museum and exhibition practice as to the communication of meanings that are voiced by makers.

Her work demonstrates how collaborative activist art practice can foster solidarity, empowerment and socio-political engagement, evidencing through the documentary practice that the makers needed to spend time together creating, learning and contributing. This act of making was shown to connect people, strengthening bonds within communities. The act of remaking 'Guernica' is also an act of solidarity with all of those who have been moved to remake it before, an aspect which is evident in the public outreach around the exhibitions.

Investigating how one historical moment and culturally specific situation is translated across to another context, Ashmore found that Picasso's use of a personal iconography in his 'Guernica' readily inspired others to work with imagery relevant to their own lived experience and cultural influences.

Through this adoption of personal parallel imagery and culturally significant materials, the Keiskamma Art Project translates from the Spanish Civil War to the Eastern Cape of South Africa and the makers' lived experience of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the twenty-first century. The powerful history of the fabrics used to create the Keiskamma Guernicas is significant, reflecting traditional Xhosa women's skirts, as well as handmade felt and traditional Xhosa beadwork, while the grey backgrounds are formed from the blankets used at the hospice established by Carol Hofmeyr in Hamburg, South Africa. The ways in which these local specifics developed from the iconography in the Picasso painting is not simply conveyed in the documentary film, but is revealed by it, allowing a deeper understanding of the multiple participant voices.



(top) End screen for documentary films

(bottom) Kids' Guernica
Detail with participants, Mauritius, April 2019
Outreach programme during touring exhibition of
Guernica Remakings

The children collectively had responsibility and control over all the decision-making and crafting of their creative vision and, for many, this was the first time they had experienced this level of control and influence.

Guernica Remakings

The Keiskamma Guernicas bear witness to pain and suffering and recognise the universality of the abstracted symbols in Pablo Picasso's painting 'Guernica' (1937). Each remaking positions the viewer as witness to the atrocities within the image, because Picasso's 'Guernica' not only depicts suffering but also necessitates the viewer complete the scene by witnessing the aftermath of the market day bombing, eliciting compassion and solidarity. In the Keiskamma Guernicas the motifs and symbols used express a complex array of emotions focused on witnessing and enduring pain and misery caused by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The grief of a mother is expressed through the woman cradling her lifeless adult child; the women gathered together in mourning at a funeral mark the loss of a son; running the length of the textile are the names of those who died at Hamburg's hospice.

Guernica Remakings was taken to four exhibition spaces: the University of Brighton Gallery; the Working Class Movement Library, Salford; the National Poetry Library, Southbank Centre, London; and The Plaza, Rose Hill (Mauritius). Post-colonial Mauritius, was considered a fitting venue for the continuation of the research because of its similar socio-political legacy of oppression to post-Apartheid South Africa, and the similar approach to tackling the legacy of social injustices. These publicly accessible sites enabled the project to engage with diverse audiences by transcending the usual art gallery walls and meeting the interests of visitors beyond the traditions of the art gallery, for example, history, peace movements, activism and poetry.

As the exhibition toured to each new location, a set of local connections were consciously developed. Ashmore worked with local artists, and charities to develop a programme of Learning Lab activities to accompany each exhibition. This strategy was inspired by Picasso's use of a personal iconography in 'Guernica' and the Guernica remakings on display; these also translate 'Guernica' and utilise cultural iconography connected to the respective makers. The process uncovered new perspectives as to how users engage with exhibitions and where material cultures can develop relatable messaging about their creators and the circumstances of their creation.

This body of research also responded to the increase in activity surrounding remakings of 'Guernica' (Wells 2014, Rudolph 2014), adding to the critical literature by giving recognition to the international use of 'Guernica' in the twenty-first century as a form of activism through translation, community engagement, esteem building and poverty alleviation.



Guernica Remakings
Tapestry After Guernica (1953)
exhibition timeline, created
for the *Guernica Remakings*
exhibition researched by
Nicola Ashmore designed by
Ryan Wooding (2017)

DISSEMINATION

Guernica Remakings was first exhibited in 2017 and subsequently toured in the UK and Mauritius. It was accompanied by a catalogue publication. Ashmore gave illustrated curator talks and organised Learning Lab events, including children's activities, and the exhibition provided a background for related activities by activist artists. It is represented online through the dedicated website curation <http://guernicaremakings.com> including all the documentary films made.

- *Guernica Remakings* (31 July - 23 August 2017) University of Brighton Gallery
 - <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/whats-on/gallery/gallery-exhibitions-2017/august-2017/guernica-remakings>
- *Guernica Remakings* (31 January - 21 March 2019) Working Class Movement Library, Salford (UK), accompanied by illustrated talk by Ashmore:
 - <https://www.wcml.org.uk/whats-on/events/exhibition-guernica-remakings/>
 - <https://www.wcml.org.uk/whats-on/events/nicola-ashmore-talk-guernica-remakings-/>
 - <https://youtu.be/aNwNOF4fBCk>
- *Guernica Remakings* (26 July - 22 September 2019) National Poetry Library, Southbank Centre, London.
 - <https://www.nationalpoetrylibrary.org.uk/guernica-remakings>
- *Guernica Remakings* (1-19 April 2019) The Plaza, Municipal Town Hall, Rose Hill, Mauritius.
 - <https://ionnews.mu/video-les-chagos-vus-a-travers-le-guernica-de-picasso-040419/>
 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wch8dMGmts&feature=emb_logo

The project was featured on websites by organisations with activist and humanitarian interests and included by the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte in their resource to the exhibition *Rethinking Guernica*.

- Africa in Words <https://africanwords.com/2017/07/26/the-fifth-keiskamma-guernica-guernica-remakings-an-exhibition-brighton-uk/>
- Decorating Dissidence <https://decoratingdissidence.com/2020/06/12/guernica-remakings/>
- *Rethinking Guernica*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte <https://guernica.museoreinasofia.es/en/document/guernica-remakings-exhibition-catalogue>



Guernica Remakings, 'North with South'
Still from film detailing aspects of the exhibition tour
Access to film at <https://youtu.be/aNwNOF4fBCk>

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Exhibitions

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- Goshka, M. (2009-2010) *The Nature of the Beast*. Whitechapel Gallery, London.
- Martin, S. (8 November 2014 - 15 February 2015). *Conscience and Conflict: British Artists and the Spanish Civil War*. Pallant House Gallery, Chichester.
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(overleaf)
Keiskamma Guernica, 2017
detail
 200 cm x 100 cm

Guernica Remakings

