

LIFE IN OUR HANDS

A joint work between Shanthamani M & the people of the Yorkshire Dales

The Joinery, Dawsons Court, Settle

23 Sept 2019 - 28 Feb 2020

"We are not just recording the people's history; we take the impression and the gestures of the hands of those who have worked many years shaping the land and its history."

About This Resource

This resource is for teachers and facilitators visiting the **Life In Our Hands** exhibition with their students. It provides a context for the exhibition, suggests topics for discussion and offers ideas for creative activities. All resources can be downloaded from the Settle Stories website at

www.settlestories.org.uk/hands-resources



About The Artist

Shanthamani Muddaiah is a visual artist who uses ephemeral, natural materials such as paper and charcoal in her work to create, install and display exhibits exploring complex ideas about the self, society and sustainability. *'Today's art is not about upholding human achievements, it's about time we look at lives around us in totality and sort out all the waste we have produced'* (Carbon Myths)

Originally from Mysore in India, Shanthamani uses art to connect to the world. She has exhibited countless group and solo pieces internationally and won numerous awards. Her most recent solo piece **Neither Tree nor Ashes** is on display in the Suzanne Tarasieve Gallery, Paris and her 2014 award-winning sculpture, *'Backbone'* is on display in Aspinwall House, Fort Kochi, India.

Find out more

www.shanthamani.com/frozen_phoenix

www.shanthamani.com/reflections

About The Exhibition



Life In Our Hands is a multimedia exhibition that focuses on the people living in and around Settle in the Yorkshire Dales and the stories they have to tell. In the process of creating this exhibition, internationally renowned artist, Shanthamani Muddaiah, sat with, chatted to and held the hands of a number of Settle's inhabitants: and whilst they talked she cast their hands. *'I have been privileged to have a space to listen to people's stories right in their homes. To me, it [also] served as a celebration of commonality as well as differences between our cultures.'*

Shanthamani developed this way of working with sculpture and story during the creation of **Reflections**, her 2012 multimedia exhibition: *'During my Journey on Ganga river, I figured out a way of making people sit down to talk and have a true exchange. The camera has the power to dominate and make people more conscious. Sitting down to cast their hand was a great opportunity to create an intimate space where they can talk and the camera became a third entity to witness this interaction.'*



By sculpting the hands of individuals who have helped shape the Dales' landscapes and communities, this project captures and celebrates the history and culture of the Yorkshire Dales whilst the contemporary nature of the installation helps bring those stories to life for younger generations.

Artist statement for Life In Our Hands

'I believe, every individual's imagination and innovations locate themselves in the community/society. Looking back to my own experiences, I could find when one looks deep into one's own aspirations and concerns, one sees the reflections of the structure and nature of a society. This art project; Life In Our Hands, is my effort to map the history and culture of Settle and its surroundings through personal stories of the people (accompanied by the process of making casts of their hands). It is a journey to understand the factors that have moulded its cultural landscape and integrated into the values and the social lives of the community.'

About Settle Stories - the home of adventurous storytelling.

We collaborate with communities and artists to create transformative experiences that ignite curiosity and reimagine storytelling. Our flagship festival, year round events and learning programme, welcome everyone to our idyllic home in the Yorkshire Dales. In our venue, The Joinery, we bring the world to Settle and show Settle to the world through our live and digital programme.

The Creative Process

The Hands

Shanthamani used plaster bandage, plaster of paris and handmade paper (she received a Charles Wallace scholarship in 2004 to study Paper-Making in Scotland, and a National Junior Fellowship in 2006-08 to work with paper sculpting.) to create the hand casts.



The Stories

Documenting what life was like in rural communities, the exhibition records dialects that are being lost and experiences that are uncommon in today's society. **Life in Our Hands** has captured the individual experiences that map the history of the Yorkshire Dales and its community.

Photographs by Tony Crossland

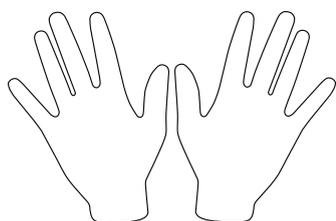
Sita Brand, Artistic Director & CEO at Settle Stories, accompanied Shanthamani on all her interviews, she commented; *"It has been an extraordinary experience for me. It has allowed me to hear stories from many unrecognised people in our community. Stories we don't often celebrate. The most moving part is how much everyone loves the area so much, and how committed everyone is to the community - that is a very beautiful, moving thing."*

Creative Activities



For **Life In Our Hands** Shanthamani used plaster bandage, plaster and handmade paper (she received a Charles Wallace scholarship in 2004 to study paper-making in Scotland, and a National Junior Fellowship in 2006-08 to work with paper sculpting.) to create the hands and video to collect the stories.

- Make hand-made paper with paper pulp. Add natural objects or organic materials into the layers of pulp to create your own sculptural paper.
- Use plaster bandage (mod-roc) to create your own hand casts or work in pairs to make a cast of someone else's hand.
- Get your model to tell you a story about themselves while you work. You could film these on an iPad or write them down afterwards.
- Display your hand cast alongside the stories you have recorded. You could invite visitors to your exhibition.



- Draw around your own hand(s) and write a story or poem inside the lines.

Poems/Songs about hands

- These are the Hands by Michael Rosen
- Digging by Seamus Heaney
- Cut by Sylvia Plath (1932 - 1963)
- I Wanna Hold Your Hand by The Beatles
- Hand In My Pocket by Alanis Morissette
- The Hand That Feeds by Nine Inch Nails
- My Own Two Hands by Ben Harper

Interesting Facts About Human Hands

- There are 27 bones, 29 joints and at least 123 named ligaments in the human hand
- What sets our hands apart from other animals is our opposable thumbs—this means our thumbs and fingers can work together (fun fact: koala bears also have opposable thumbs)
- Fingerprints are a completely unique DNA imprint that is different in every single human being. No two human beings in the world have similar fingerprints.
- There are tons of words that include the word 'hand': handy, handwriting, handiwork, handle, handbag, handsome, handball, etc.
- The average hand length for adult women is 6.7 inches. The average length for men is 7.4 inches
- Our fingers are even more sensitive than the eyes—the fingertips have a large number of receptors responsible for sending messages to the brain.
- Julius Caesar ordered the thumbs of captured prisoners to be cut off
- "In the absence of any other proof, the thumb alone would convince me of God's existence." (Sir Isaac Newton).
- Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's second wife, had six fingers on her right hand
- Divination by looking at the fingernails is called onychomancy.