

## ANNUAL REPORT 2021

### 1. Social [Distancing] Fabric

The project “Social [Distancing] Fabric” is a collaborative embroidery project, started in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 lockdown. With the rhythm of our days so monotonous, we wanted to offer a creative and collective experience, from home—at a distance. We sent each participant a needle and thread, along with a hand-made drawing on fabric by Karim Adduchi, a Moroccan fashion designer known for reinventing traditional crafts in contemporary designs. We asked people to complete the embroidery at home, and send it back to us. Then, upon receiving the finished embroidered works, we stitched them together, fashioning the separate pieces into a singular “Social Fabric.”

Those who joined were people from different cultural backgrounds and virtually all age groups. No selection process was applied; we felt strongly that absolutely everyone should have the opportunity to take part in our Social Fabric. So, we simply accepted the first 200 names on the list. That said, we did take care to reach out to vulnerable people, those on the margins. Fortunately, some participants had the same idea; they reached out to others as well. Mothers embroidered with daughters; fathers joined, too. Friends and colleagues stitched together. Younger people collaborated with elderly neighbors.

We acknowledged that the moment the fabric left our hands, we wouldn't be able to influence the process of making, the colors chosen, the techniques used. We purposefully chose to do so, to reflect the lack of control we have all been experiencing. In the final stage of the process, we worked with all of the embroideries that had been returned to us—regardless of their state of completion.





### **Social [Distancing] Fabric: how it started**

This project started in a small community centre in Amsterdam-West. And as with many new ideas, it started with a slip-up.

Since 2019 we've been working with women from the neighbourhood on sewing and embroidery. Many make and repair clothes for family and friends. Many are familiar with Moroccan embroidery techniques, such as Fez-stitch and *randa*, a lace stitch. With migration these skills often get devalued. We connect these makers to local design, and provide a platform. We started by mapping their skills, and trying out how their expertise can be combined with non-traditional designs.

One of the things we tried was a hand-made drawing by Karim with three faces to embroider. The fabric was small: sitting closely together, two women could work on it simultaneously. Hence, they decided it would be easier and more efficient to cut the fabric up. One pair of scissors later, the fabric was cut in three pieces, right through the middle of the drawing, its edges jagged. What to do?

Karim has always embraced flaws and imperfections in his designs. He works with the irregularities of fabric or highlights its hidden side. Tears are simply an event in the life of a fabric, a contribution to its authenticity, not a reason to discard it.

That is how we decided to mend the fabric so the repair would highlight the damage, not conceal it. The mended lines illustrate its story. Hence, we sat with the women, and together we stitched the strips of fabric into a whole.

This piece was the inspiration for the Social [Distancing] Fabric. It seemed to symbolize perfectly the rips and tears the corona-lockdown caused, and the patience, persistence and ingenuity necessary to heal them.



With thanks to the women of [stichting Aminah](#), Amsterdam-West.

### **Social [Distancing] Fabric: The book**

The act of embroidering, with its soothing repetitiveness, allowed makers to reflect on their lives—and on world events—as they were unfolding. The slow, steady layering of colors and textures turned into a visual metaphor of this unprecedented period.

We asked makers to share with us their experiences during lockdown. People sent stories about sewing face masks for the homeless, about the first time they embroidered with their mother or grandmother. They confided stories about losing jobs and about illness. They wrote about their hopes and dreams for the future.

In this book, we display both embroideries and stories. The first part contains the 200 embroideries, the second part the stories. Each piece of embroidery is numbered and corresponds to the maker's story. Some embroideries were lost: we make their absence present through blank pages. We've chosen to simply list all participants' names—without mentioning who made, or said, what—in the back of the book. After all, the events people wrote about are recognizable, universal: these are the experiences of so many others.

The pandemic has reminded us that we are nothing more than tiny stitches on the canvas of the cosmos. This period has also reminded us that we're all interconnected.

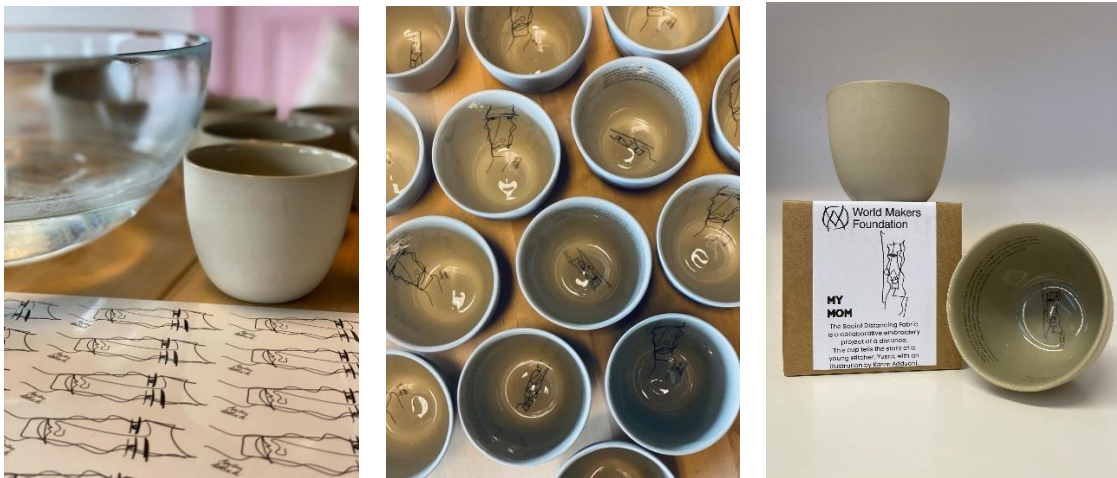
It is said that a fabric stitched by many hands imbues that fabric with spiritual energy and protection. We hope that by engaging in the symbolic act of stitching on a simple piece of cloth, we are reminded that each of us can contribute to mending our real-life social fabric.





### Social [Distancing] Fabric: Cups of Stories

We received so many wonderful stories from the participants of Social [Distancing] Fabric, we wanted to share them with the world. Hence, we teamed up with [Global Storytellers](#) to whom everyday objects are just a wonderful excuse to share an unusual story. Together we've made coffee cups with on the inside a "small moment" story from a Social [Distancing] Fabric participant on their experience of stitching during Covid lockdown, and a drawing by Karim Adduchi. The cups are made by [Cor Unum](#) out of left-over clay.



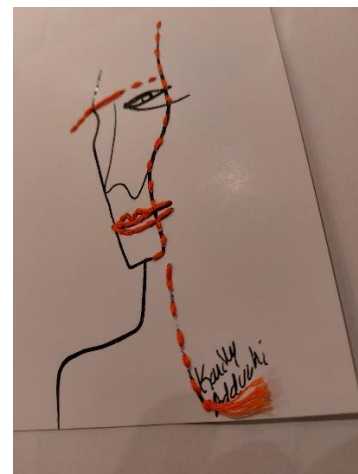
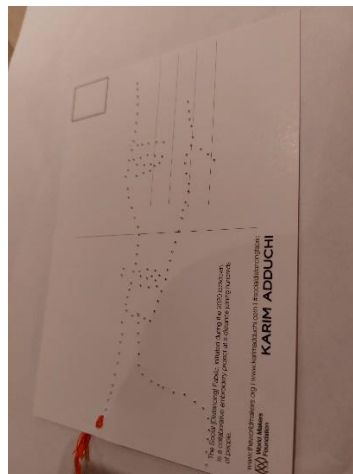
### Social [Distancing] Fabric: embroidery kits

We have made a limited edition embroidery kit in collaboration with Karim Adduchi. Each kit has a unique handmade drawing by designer Karim Adduchi, embroidery floss and needles. Even the box itself contains a drawing which you can frame. People ordered it to embroider it to brighten their house or send it to a loved one as a reminder of love and connection.



### Social [Distancing] Fabric: Communications

Next to the books and cups, we produced post cards with pictures of the SDF as well as line drawings of Karim Adduchi which could be embroidered on paper. We also produced a [video](#) of the development of the SDF.



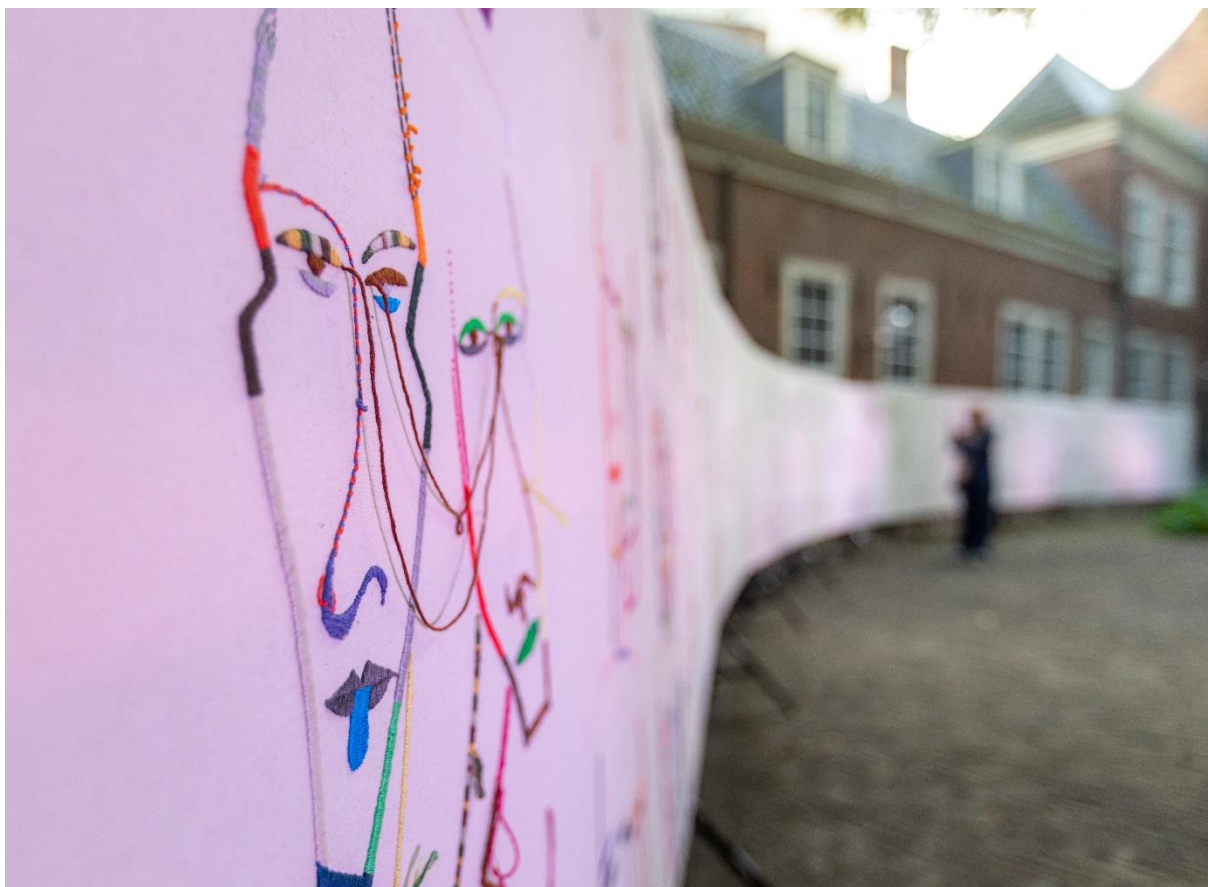
Participants of the Social Distancing Fabric were asked to share their work on social media with the hashtag #socialdistancingfabric. Hundreds of photos were shared.





### Social [Distancing] Fabric: exhibitions

The complete Social [Distancing] Fabric was exhibited at the Amsterdam Museum on 25 September 2021. All participants were invited to attend, as well as other artisans and designers. A video on the making of the SDF, the book and one embroidery was shown at Dutch Design Week in October 2021 as an example of social design.



The Social [Distancing] Fabric publication was made with the generous support from Stimuleringsfonds, Bylandtstichting and Prins Bernhard Cultuurfonds.

The Social [Distancing] Fabric embroidery kit was made with the generous support from the Stimuleringsfonds.

The Social [Distancing] Fabric exhibition at the Amsterdam Museum was put together with the generous support from Stadsdeel Amsterdam West.

## **2. Busy Mess**

Busy Mess was a collaboration with entrepreneurs Shadi Alhakimi and Khaled Alayami and lawyer Erdem Aslan. They noticed that the information for starting entrepreneurs with a refugee-background was very fragmented. Also, the language is often too legalistic, formal and complex to understand for people who have recently moved to the Netherlands.

The plan was to make a guide for newcomers who want to start a business. We received funding from stadsdeel Amsterdam West to make a start. In the guide was described the different phases of entrepreneurship, Dutch regulations and institutions that, as an entrepreneur, you will have to deal with. We did this in a clear, easy-to-understand language. It was written in English

The Busy Mess guide was made with the generous support from Stadsdeel Amsterdam West.

## **3. Enter: The Hub**

This is a [three-year project](#) (2020-2023) to develop a hub to support refugee-entrepreneurs. The project has a transnational framework with partners from The Netherlands, France, Germany and Ireland. In spring 2021 a prototype hub was tested in France, with all partners providing input and being present for the evaluation. All other partners will roll out their hub based on French prototype in 2021- 2022.

In The Netherlands the main partner is Newest Art Organization (NAO). The World Makers provides expertise on systemic change, organises workshops for a community of creative entrepreneurs with a refugee-background, as well as roundtable meeting with support organizations on collaboration.

In 2021 we published a report on refugee-entrepreneurship in the Netherlands. We met with the other European partners to develop the training prototype which was tested by the French organisation. It was evaluated in autumn 2021. The World Makers and Newest Art Organization organised a workshop in December with other refugee support organisation on collaboration.

The project is developed with the generous support from Interreg North-Western Europe.