

Welcome to this audio description of A Walk of Peace and New Life, by Lucy Isaiah, with the Woolwich-based African Women Weavers, set up by Black Female Entrepreneur Greenwich.

Lucy describes herself as an Accessories Designer, and has worked with 3 other artists on this project: an “up-cycling guru”; a fashion designer, and a wool-knitter, each adapting their skills to this particular project.

A Walk of Peace and New Life takes the form of a raffia-woven arch that spans the entrance to MUGA, the multi-use games area. It symbolises the values of togetherness and invites you to walk through and feel the strength of community spirit.

Created by Lucy and her team of artists, with input from up to 200 participants who contributed ideas both online and in person during lockdown, the project has been conceived to recreate a traditional African community setting, in which women would gather to knit, weave, sew and, whilst doing so, chat about the issues affecting them, their families and community. Such groups have a particular focus on supporting the younger members of the community, teaching them valuable life skills, as well as with more significant challenges, such as childbirth, parenting, or supporting mental health and wellbeing more generally. Whilst creating the arch, the African Women Weavers were particularly mindful of the impact of Covid-19 on the BAME community within Greenwich. With this in mind, the arch has come to represent a shrine, which honours both the dead, as well as the Earth and Nature, in which we find life.

The arch is made mostly from raffia, the fibre from the leaves of the raffia, or palm tree, which is traditionally used for making baskets, or hats. As it spans the entrance to MUGA, it covers a distance of approximately 2 metres, and is itself about 20 centimetres wide.

The arch is woven from pink, green and yellow coloured raffia, as well as its natural straw colour – rainbow colours that symbolise inclusivity and equality. The arch is brightly and colourfully decorated with rosettes and balls that have been handcrafted by the participating artists and are attached to the arch.

There are 9 rosettes and 9 balls, each representing the number of planets in our solar system. The balls are about the size of a plum, each made from multi-coloured knitted wool. The rosettes vary from apple to grapefruit size. Each is made from raffia which is then decorated with strings of tiny, multi-coloured beads. The detailed patterning of each rosette and ball, as well as the raffia arch itself, is reflective of African fashion.

In one African tradition, a strand of raffia is placed in the mouth to encourage silence and reflection. With a Walk of Peace and New Life, you too are encouraged to enter a place of stillness and quiet, in which to remember those we have lost to Covid-19, and to honour the Earth, Nature and new life.