# Keywords (S and T) by Elinor Morgan

**Tending** To care for, give attention to, or manage. This word is often associated with gardening or agriculture: 'He tends to the sheep in the morning and fruit trees in the afternoon.' It can also be applied to an art practice: 'Jasleen's work centres on tending her relationships with people and her understanding of materials.' If the processes one employs are as important as the outcomes, then this word becomes paramount.

Jasleen has been working in Stoke-on-Trent with people from a refugee background for the past three years. She has returned over and over again, building relationships through talking, making, and eating. She has always worked as an educator and facilitator but during this time she has developed a new understanding of how different parts of her practice interconnect. She and I share a feeling that work is often most exciting when it springs from relationships and encompasses more distributed ownership: the artist as initiator rather than sole author. We also share a disdain for the tokenistic involvement of people in culture as a condescending salve: the Arts Council England's slogan, 'Great Art for Everyone', which flattens and assumes so much.

**Tinfoil Decorations** For me these go wonderfully with spicy dried peas. A perfect Sunday afternoon of barely understood Bollywood, curried snacks and hilarity. Sometimes Mehndi (continually disappointing on white skin, no matter how long you leave it to dry and scab). And always dancing. The carpet and three-piece suite green and velureish and the room adorned with strings of silver snowflakes which in this context were simply abstract patterns. The dark of the afternoon outside the semi-detached house enjoyed through the PVC window.

For Jasleen tinfoil decorations are reminiscent of the Gurdwara where she spent so much of her childhood listening to her father and uncle singing, chiming bells in time to the musical recital, playing games in the long corridors, and even sleeping upstairs during Akhand Paths, when the Guru Granth Sahib scripture is recited without break, for three days. The gaudy, reflective strings of colours floated above big halls full of turbaned heads and bright Salvar Kamees. They came here from wholesale distributors via corner shops and hardware stores where they lost their Christmas connotations and became useful for

different festivals, different congregations, than the one intended.

**Tools** The hardware shop, filled with materials, full of possibilities, and the knowledge of what people really buy, and what they do not. What is useful? And can an artwork be a useful tool? **6** *Curry Measure*, designed for Tala (2013) is a redesigned measure from the 1920s that is simultaneously a recipe book and scales; an all in one hand tool. It is both art and design; sculpture and kitchen utensil. *Curry Measure* is handmade in the UK by a historic British company, Tala, whose wares sell through the very shops that Jasleen grew up in, as well as high-end department stores.

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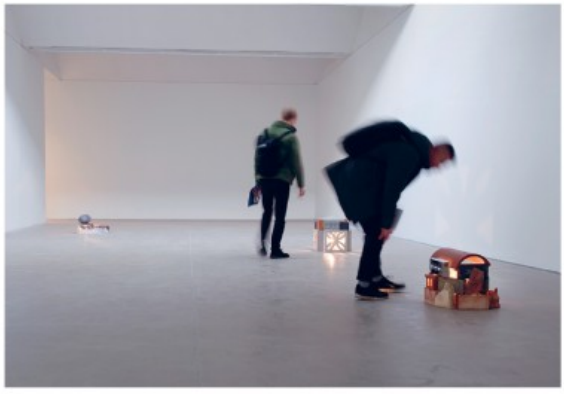
The reach of this piece reminds me of Jenny Holzer's condoms printed with slogans during the AIDS crisis in the West (*Expiring for Love is Beautiful but Stupid, 1983–85*) or Cildo Meireles' *Interções em Circuitos Ideolõgicos* (*Insertions into Ideological Circuits)*, 1970 – Coke bottles and bank notes printed with political statements and returned to circulation. *Curry Measure* uses the form of an existing product to distribute an important assertion of Indian heritage. It is a vessel containing memories of learning to cook in an Anglo-Indian household, a handing down of recipes and measuring by eye. It is perhaps softer, more familial than Holzer or Meireles' works, but political in its own way.

**Skeuomorph** Mimicry and material subterfuge. A masquerade, a dressing up. Each house on my walk to school was in competition with its neighbours. A suburban grandeur that I associate with South Asian families who are settled and established in the UK. My favourite place had a floor-to-roof stained glass window of a peacock, its tail cascading down a central staircase. PVC of course. And don't forget the plastic Grecian columns. I was jealous of this beauty and decadence.

The pillars in the ancient church on top of the cliff in Whitby. So many of its graves have already fallen into the sea – a late adventure for those inside – that the church must follow at some point. Each one of the wooden columns inside is painted with a skin of marble. It is beautiful. But it looks very little like stone. These not-quites are very much within Jasleen's work. She mimics one material, getting inside its properties through a side door of another matter. She studies marble and plastic through working in Polyurethane Plastic and Pigment (**3** *Marbled Busts*, Jerwood

**7** Mum's hand **Curry Measure** booklet detail 2013

Makers Open, 2015). Sometimes these material schisms are humorously apparent (**1** fake rocks in *Cairns*, 2016), and sometimes slippery and unsettling.



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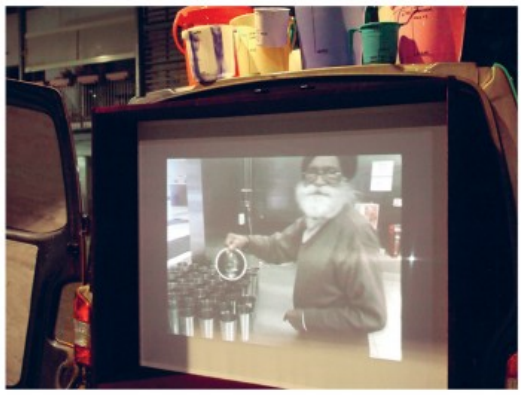
**Sustenance** For Jasleen this word is deeply connected with Langar, the daily preparation of free food by volunteers in Sikh temples. Part of growing up within a Sikh community was the responsibility of cooking for and serving the whole congregation and anyone who was hungry: peeling and chopping sacks of onions and potatoes, preparing salad, buttering endless stacks of chapattis and stacking them buttered sides together.

In 2014 she made **4–5** *BALTI Unmeasured Measurements*, a film that documents the process of cooking Langar, showing the scale of preparations and documenting the ingredients used. It was shown around London on a purpose-built screen in the back of a van. The principle of Langar threads through all of her works. In the Gurdwaras there are no recipes; knowledge is intuitive and practiced. It is only now that Jasleen is able to roll and turn a pat of dough simultaneously to make roti in the way that she admired as a child.

**A Skvader** A hare and wood grouse sewn together to realise a mythical image and given a name that mimics and joins both of their cries. (As though taxidermy wasn't strange enough already.) Something fantastical. Two parts that make a wrong whole. And in Jasleen's work: a flip-flop and a smart leather shoe: two dress codes appropriate in entirely different moments and contexts brought together for one man and presented with a small ode: 'My father – a proper business man improperly dressed' (**2** *Father's Shoes*, 2009).

Jasleen employs the cobbled together as an artistic approach, another way to understand the already-made. This reminds me that the fissures or joins between cultures – whether glued or dovetailed – inform identity. The size and shape of the linked elements might change, but the seams are the productive centre.



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**8 Cairns** BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art 2016
**9 BALTI Unmeasured Measurements** 2014