Soft Monument
A visual guide

Ellie Shipman



Soft Monument, Ellie Shipman
2024 - 2026
British wool and mild steel

This guide explains some of the stories and meaning behind the motifs and patterns in the artwork Soft Monument.

***Soft Monument* is an ode to the invisible labour of women - the work which rarely receives its own monument but is monumental in effort, sacrifice and repetition as well as joy.**

The artwork traces the role of women in shaping industrial history, from Barton Hill to the wider world. Four large-scale yet familiar objects represent weavers, welders, seamstresses, and the domestic labour of unnamed women. Geometric repeat patterns evoke the rhythms and cycles of industry, reminding us of the threads across generations which connect us to place.

The monument becomes the negative space within the circle of soft, wool panels which hold invisible conversations, ideas and reflections, honouring those whose unseen contributions have supported people in this space to gather, connect and innovate.

Soft Monument is made of British wool and mild steel. It was fabricated by local women-led businesses: woven by Dash & Miller and the Bristol Weaving Mill; metalwork by Dizzi Lombardo and Lottie Smith and pieced together by Jokoto Tailoring.

The artwork was informed by Charting Change, a two-year programme of public events, exhibitions and temporary artworks led by Ellie Shipman with artists Jack Stiling and Dhaqan Collective, and facilitated with community partners Ayeeyo and Awoowo and Barton Hill History Group.

The public art programme for the Temple Quarter Enterprise Campus was developed to embed creativity into the new campus, using artist-led commissions to encourage creative exchange and connection between the University and the wider city. The artworks are designed to spark curiosity, inspire imagination and create a welcoming place for all. The programme was delivered in partnership with the Contemporary Art Society *Consultancy.



Ellie Shipman (b. 1989) is an artist based in Bristol. Ellie studied BA Fine Art at Chelsea College of Art, UAL, and MSc Sustainable Development at UWE. Ellie is interested in womanhood; community; sustainability; industry and history - exploring what it means to be human through multimedia artworks using textiles, collage and installation. Pieces are often site specific, participatory or interactive - including people in research, process and product. Ellie works with researchers to translate academic ideas into public art and graphic design; hospitals to design spaces and objects for better care; and museums to create interactive artworks which tell a story.

Scan the QR code to listen to an interview with Public Art Producer Martha Crean and artist Ellie Shipman:

Find out more: public-art.bristol.ac.uk / @bris_uni_publicart
@ellieshipman / @stilings_workshop

Cover photo: Lisa Whiting, 2026; Ellie Shipman portrait: Martha Crean, 2026

Entrance Panels

Panel 1: Ironwork Tongs

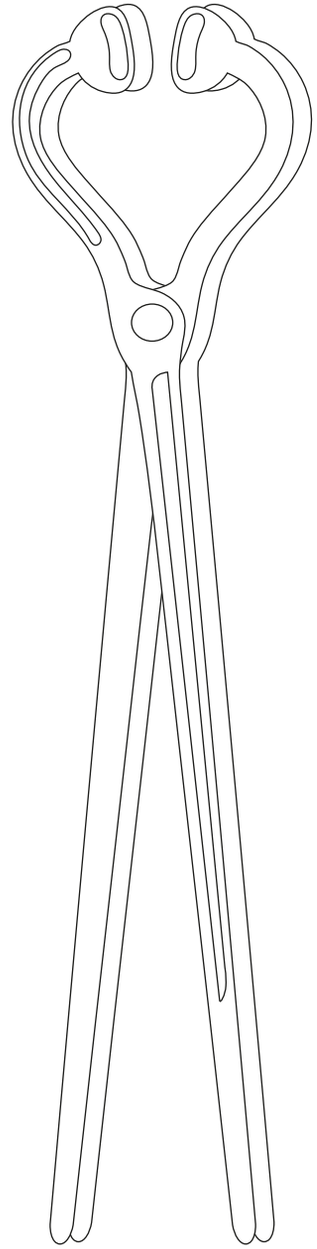
The design of tongs has remained largely unchanged since ancient times and across cultures, a sign of practicality and resilience.

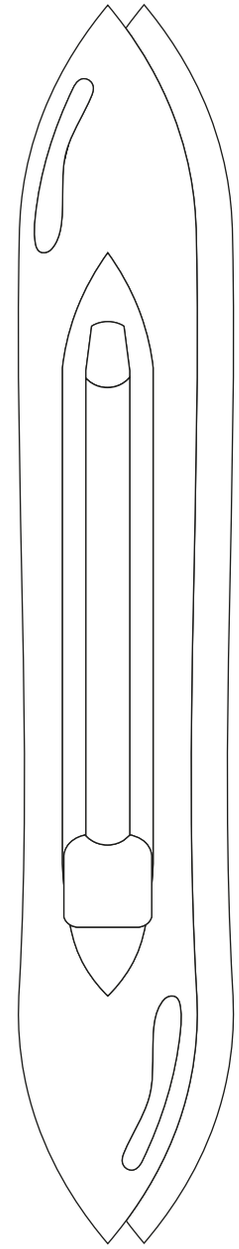
John Lysaght's Netham Ironworks produced iron and steel exported around the world. Follow the Feeder Canal from here and you can still see the company's office building on Silverthorne Lane.

During World War Two women were employed at the ironworks, welding and riveting bridges, pre-fabricated ships, tanks and machinery. Resident Nic Colton's mother was a welder at Lysaghts - he remembers her work in his poem *War Time Welder* (extract):

Me and the girls of Lysaghts,
Would sweat and toil each day,
Building tank parts and Bailey bridges,
For our boys so far away.

This panel asks:
How does society shape industry and vice versa?





Panel 2: Flying Shuttle

This 'boat' shuttle holds a bobbin and passes the weft (horizontal) thread through the warp (vertical) threads on an industrial loom.

These flying shuttles would have been seen in The Great Western Cotton Factory in Barton Hill and many other industrial weaving factories around the world. They were often operated by low paid 13 - 14 year old girls and were dangerous - if they came off course they could take out eyes.

This object is a reminder of the complexities of innovation: it's patent in 1733 led to a reduction of the workforce, from five jobs per loom to just two, whilst enabling fabric to be made at greater speed.

This panel asks:
What are the impacts and benefits of innovation?

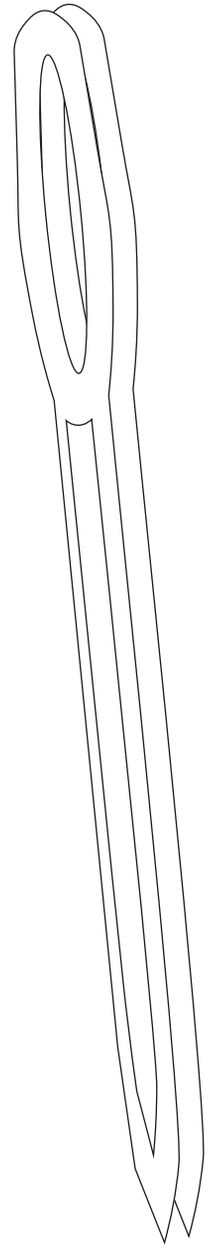
Panel 3: Needle

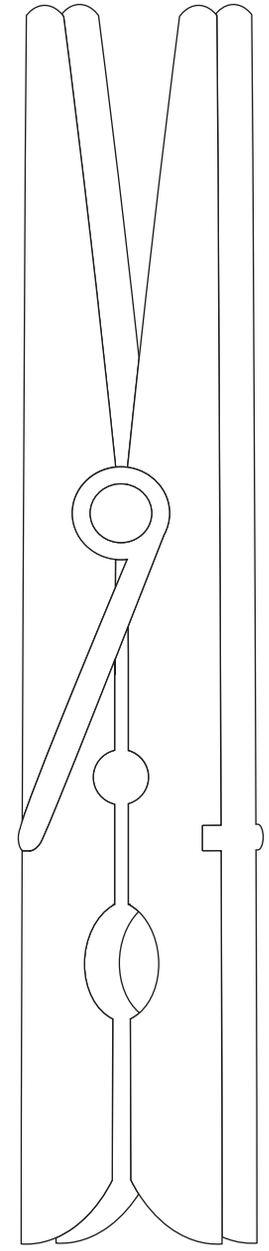
Needles were first made from bone by early humans around 40,000 years ago - with varying sizes suggesting clothes were not only made but also decorated - evidence of intelligence, practicality and creativity.

The needle saw mass production in England in the 16th Century, and by 1847 was industrialised. The life expectancy of needle makers was only 35 years due to the dangers of metal shards and rolling needles in asbestos to prevent rust.

In Barton Hill needles were used by women workers in Chappel Allen's Corset Factory (the Stay Factory), who - if lucky - had the option of doing piece work at home, enabling a more flexible work life. The needle also symbolises domestic creativity - such as the pleasure and self-expression seen in quilt making and embroidery.

This panel asks:
What tools do we use to enable creativity?





Panel 4: Peg

Before the invention of the modern peg in the early 1800s clothes were simply laid out to dry on the ground or on hedges, but with increasingly urban living conditions the clothes lines we know today became the most space-efficient way to dry laundry. Pegs made from willow and hazel held clothes in place.

Pegs are a ubiquitous symbol of domestic labour - the end requirement to process endless piles of washing. Work which is unseen, unheard and uncelebrated - and yet work, often by mothers, which has supported and enabled many of us to be here today.

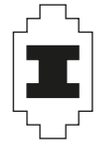
The peg is an ode to my own mother, Amanda - and all the work she has done for me.

Ellie Shipman, 2026

This panel asks:
How do we value different forms of labour?

Circle Panels

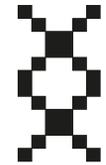
Pattern 1: Bobbin



The bobbin references the women workers of the Great Western Cotton Factory, founded in 1838 in Barton Hill. Women workers as young as 13 wove and spun cotton imported from America via Liverpool. 1889 strikes across the city were led by the ‘cotton girls’ of Barton Hill. Their actions were pivotal in improving working conditions across the country.

This factory was one of many across Bristol built from compensation paid to owners of enslaved people following the Slavery Abolition Act 1833, which enabled wealthy slave traders to continue to profit from the lives and labour of others.

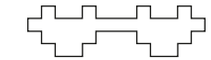
Pattern 2: Cranes



Cranes are a sign of change in a city skyline. Strengthened towers with cross-like grids, these machines essential to moving materials for construction. With their long necks and reaching arms they are almost animalistic, bringing life and movement to a site long before people move in.

Charting Change Programme Artist Jack Stiling documented the cranes and construction of the site across this project, creating kinetic sculptures used in community workshops and analogue photography to chart the change happening right before our eyes.

Pattern 3: Underwires



The bra underwires represents the women workers of Chappel Allen’s Corset Factory, known locally as the Stay Factory. The women made corsets and bras in the factory in Barton Hill / Redfield area from 1898 into the 1970s, serving brands such as Marks & Spencers and Fortnum & Mason.

One worker, Olive Howard, was crowned the ‘Bread Pudding Queen’ with a crown made from bra pieces for making the best bread pudding for her friends and colleagues, inspiring an edible sculpture and welded corset crown by Ellie Shipman. With thanks to one of Olive’s daughters Liz Howard for sharing this story.



Historical bobbins of the same era, etching plate and photograph from the Great Western Cotton Factory, on loan from the Barton Hill History Group



Wreck it, *mild steel series of 2, 2025, by Jack Stiling at a construction play workshop for local families at Barton Hill Microcampus*



Women working at the Chappel Allen Corset Factory sourced from Barton Hill History Group archives. Unknown date.

Photo 1 and 2: Ellie Shipman, 2024

Ear to the Ground, Jack Stiling
2024 - 2026
Audio piece

The sounds of construction can be heard for miles; deafeningly loud, lingeringly long, gratingly harsh yet also intricate and gentle. Close your eyes and pick apart the processes. Old bricks tumble down with supporting steels screeching into obsolescence and the new is swung in with a whirr and a hum, poured into existence.

Hear the voices in, among, and behind the machines: those entrusted with changing the landscape, those who know its old face and those who will see it anew. Hear from the temporary community of workers leaving the legacy of this new structure, a small record of the labour in a long-standing building. When all is said and done, the wheel rolled and the dust settled, may the stories be held in these walls too, as they were in buildings past, in an ongoing evolution of change.

Jack Stiling (b. 1991) is a visual artist and fabricator based in Bristol. His background as a self-taught inventor and mechanic led him to a BA in Contemporary Crafts in Falmouth where he made automata and tactile art, learning further through apprenticeships.

Jack seeks the voiceless stories of used objects in order to tell their actual or fictional truths. As an observer of the ever changing cityscape, he has been looking at the processes of construction, demolition and the forces that put them in motion. By making art that invites imagination, participation and play, Jack's work handed the controls of his sculptures to the residents near and developers that work on site to gain insights into local history and the opinions of its regeneration.



Jack Stiling (right) with sound designer Rowan Bishop (left) and members of the Barton Hill History Group activating sculpture ***Groundwork*** at exhibition Work in Progress, 2024

Photo: Ellie Shipman, 2024

Scan the QR code to listen to Jack Stiling's sound piece *Ear to the Ground,* edited with Rowan Bishop: