

Grounded – Touring Proposal

A partnership between Helen Barff (artist), Lucy Newman Cleeve (curator and priest), Close Ltd (gallery), YMCA LandAid House and Refugees at Home.



Overview

Grounded (previously *The Ground That Gathers Beneath My Feet*) was first shown at St Giles' Cripplegate in autumn 2025. Plaster casts of bare feet were placed throughout the church – resting on stone, laid upon blankets, tucked beneath pews, set before the altar – as if their owners might return at any moment.

They were made by young residents from YMCA LandAid House who have experienced homelessness and displacement, during workshops led by artist Helen Barff, accompanied by Lucy Newman Cleeve in her role as chaplain.

Each cast bore the marks of lived experience: pressure points, scars, the wear of journeys taken. Recorded interviews gave voice to stories of crossing borders and seas, of families scattered by war, of faith and endurance carried into new places. The installation invited visitors to pause and attend – to the objects, to the voices, and to their own relation to place and to others whose journeys intersect with their own.

Purpose and Approach

Questions of migration, belonging, and national identity continue to shape public life in Britain in complex and often charged ways. *Grounded* does not seek to resolve these tensions or to argue a position. It offers something more modest: a space in which difficult questions about home, fear, welcome, and responsibility can be held without being prematurely closed.

The work begins with the act of casting. The artist kneels before the participant, a change in posture that alters the dynamic of the exchange. It slows the moment and shifts the balance of

attention. What follows may be conversation, or quiet, but nothing is required beyond being present together while the plaster sets.

As the project moves to new places, further casts and recordings will be made in dialogue with each host context. What emerges will not be identical in every location. Some casts may remain where they are made, be returned to participants, or be held locally. The work unfolds through relationship rather than replication.



Partnership

Grounded will be co-curated in each host location by Helen Barff and Lucy Newman Cleeve, with the support of Close Ltd (gallery partner). The project grows out of sustained relationships with YMCA LandAid House and Refugees at Home. YMCA LandAid House provides supported accommodation for young people who have experienced homelessness, many of whom have also been displaced across borders. Refugees at Home has, over the past decade, facilitated over a million nights of hosting for people seeking sanctuary across the UK.

These partnerships ensure that the work remains rooted in lived experience and connected to wider networks of hosts, volunteers, and communities. They also provide pastoral, safeguarding, and practical frameworks to support participation as the project develops.

Each venue will shape its own iteration of the work, drawing on its local history, community context, and the relationships that develop there.

The Tour: Four Cathedrals, Eighty Casts (pairs of feet)

We are inviting four cathedrals to host *Grounded* between 2027 and 2028. In each location, new casts will be made with participants from local communities, alongside the installation of existing works and recorded voices.

Across the tour as a whole, eighty casts (pairs of feet) will be created, each taken from one participant, bringing the work into relationship with eighty individuals across the four locations.

The casts are currently proposed to be made in UHPC (ultra-high performance concrete), chosen for its ability to capture fine surface detail and for its durability. Unlike the plaster casts made for the original exhibition at St Giles', concrete allows the works to be sited outside as well as within cathedral interiors, opening up a wider range of possible placements. Their durability also raises the possibility of a longer life for the collection, which the project will continue to explore as it develops.

The number of casts resonates with the eightieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2028. That moment offers a wider context for reflection on dignity, belonging, and responsibility, without determining how the work is encountered in each place.

Two production approaches are possible, and we are open to discussing which best suits the project and its funding:

- Cast and exhibited in stages: twenty new casts made in each host city, with participants from local communities. The exhibition grows as it travels.
- Cast in full: all eighty casts made in advance (during 2026), with the complete set touring from 2027. This allows for consistency in production and simplifies logistics for venues.

In either case, each venue's iteration will respond to its particular spatial character, community relationships, and local history.

What We Are Asking of Each Cathedral

We ask each cathedral to host the work in a way that is both practical and relational: providing space for casting and installation, working with local partners to identify participants, and supporting the project during its time on site.

This includes:

- A suitable space for casting sessions (a well-ventilated room or outdoor area with access to water and electricity)
- Space within the cathedral, or in external cathedral grounds where appropriate, for the installation of the casts. The works can be placed directly on existing surfaces with no permanent fixings or structural alterations required. Their durability allows for both indoor and outdoor placement. Recorded interviews are accessed via QR codes, so no audio equipment is required from the cathedral.
- Working with local organisations to identify participants with relevant lived experience of displacement, migration, homelessness, marginalisation or forced movement
- A locally recruited assistant to support the work on site
- Overnight accommodation for Helen Barff and Lucy Newman Cleeve during working days

Further detail is outlined below.

Summary of Requirements From Host Cathedrals

Requirement	Detail
Casting space	Wet-work-suitable room or outside space; water, electricity and ventilation; capacity for groups of up to 10
Installation space	Within the cathedral; no permanent fixings needed
Participants	Recruited via local community partners; guidance provided
Local assistant	Someone from a local community partner; relational not technical role
Accommodation	For Helen Barff and Lucy Newman Cleeve on working days
Community partnerships	Local coordination – liaison with project team and local partners
Local programme (optional)	Cathedral shapes its own accompanying events with our support
Commitment in principle (now)	A letter of support or expression of interest to accompany funding applications; no financial commitment required at this stage

Working Days at Each Venue

Each cathedral visit follows this structure:

Day	Activity
Day 1 (advance)	Admin day: planning meetings with cathedral staff and community partners, finalising participants and logistics. This day does not require Helen and Lucy to be on site.
Days 2–4 (on site)	Three working days: travel, casting sessions with participants, and audio recording of conversations and interviews.
Day 5	Finishing day: casts to cure and be completed off-site.
Day 6	Installation day: return to cathedral to place casts and set up QR codes linking to edited audio.
Day 7	De-installation day: works removed at close of exhibition.
Post-visit	1 day of interview editing (remote): interviews made accessible via QR codes placed alongside the casts.

Recorded Voices

Recorded interviews with participants will be edited and made accessible to visitors via QR codes placed alongside the casts. No specialist equipment is required from venues. Visitors can listen on their own phones. The recordings form part of the installation: the voices of those whose feet are cast, present alongside their physical traces.

Theological Dimensions

Set among pews and stone the casts call to mind the ways bare feet are given significance in various scriptural and faith traditions. When Moses approaches the burning bush, God commands him to remove his sandals, for the ground itself is holy (Exodus 3:5; Qur'an 20:12). In Jewish law, the exchange of a sandal sealed covenant and kinship (Ruth 4:7), a binding gesture of recognition and belonging. In the Christian story, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples (John 13), overturning expectation by taking the place of a servant and embodying love in service.

These resonances are not imposed as an interpretative framework, but remain available within the space in which the work is encountered.

Lucy Newman Cleeve will be available to work with cathedral staff and local clergy to develop theological framing appropriate to each context, including:

- Sermons or reflections drawing on the themes of the work
- Liturgical events or services held in relation to the installation
- Integration with the cathedral's existing rhythms of worship and prayer
- Interfaith conversations appropriate to the context

Resource Toolkit

Working with YMCA LandAid House and Refugees at Home, we will develop a resource toolkit for cathedrals and their partners to use before, during, and after the exhibition. Their experience and networks will shape the content, ensuring that materials are grounded in lived experience and framed with care.

The toolkit is designed to support what the work opens, rather than to direct it. It provides structures through which conversations can be held attentively, without seeking to resolve them too quickly or to prescribe conclusions.

It will include:

- Discussion prompts and question cards for use with community groups, schools, and congregations
- Contextual information on displacement, asylum, and homelessness in the UK, presented clearly and without polemic
- Case studies and testimonies, developed with partner organisations and used with appropriate permissions
- Guidance for facilitating group conversation, including approaches that support respectful listening and participation
- Project branding and media assets (images, copy, and digital materials) for cathedrals to adapt within their own communications
- A short guide for cathedral staff on relating the exhibition to existing worship, chaplaincy, and community work in each location

The toolkit will be developed collaboratively, with input from partner organisations at draft and review stages. A contribution is included within the project budget to support this work.

Local Programming

Each cathedral is encouraged to develop its own accompanying programme. We are happy to support this and to make introductions where useful. Possibilities include:

- Talks or panel discussions with local refugee organisations, housing charities, or policy voices
- Podiatry partnerships: specialist podiatry services working with refugees and asylum seekers often encounter the physical consequences of long journeys and inadequate footwear. A link between this clinical reality and the artistic one – both attending to feet, both concerned with the body's record of displacement – could be a rich point of connection. Organisations such as Forgotten Feet and university podiatry departments have worked in this area.
- Participatory events in dialogue with the installation, such as storytelling, communal making, or shared readings of texts connected to the themes of the work
- School and university visits with appropriate educational framing

The Final Exhibition, Publication, and Web Page

The tour will conclude with a final exhibition bringing together all eighty casts and the full archive of recordings, alongside Helen Barff's responsive work. A publication and dedicated web page will document the project's development across locations: the different iterations, the voices gathered, the communities and places that held the work. The publication provides a lasting record; the web page keeps the documentation live and accessible beyond the life of the printed edition, allowing stories and reflections gathered across all four cities to remain in circulation.

2028 is not a deadline we are working towards so much as a moment that gives the project's unfolding a natural shape.

Funding

The project will be funded through a range of arts, charitable, and civic sources. We are currently in conversation with and preparing applications to national arts funders, charitable foundations with interests in human rights, migration, housing, and community cohesion, livery companies and City of London trusts, and local and regional funders connected to each host city. The scale and material form of the project will be shaped responsibly by the resources secured.

At this stage, we are not asking cathedrals for a financial contribution. We are asking for a commitment in principle to host the exhibition: a letter of support or expression of interest indicating that your cathedral is willing to participate. This is what funding bodies need to see – that the project has confirmed partners across the UK – and it is what will enable us to submit applications with confidence. The detail of what hosting involves, and any in-kind contribution, will be worked through in conversation once partners are in place.

Grounded is not a campaign but an ongoing artistic and curatorial practice. It does not promise agreement, but makes space for difficult questions about migration, homelessness, and belonging to be held in view rather than pushed aside. We invite cathedrals to join in extending this work across the UK – not to deliver a message, but to help sustain a space where attention, dignity, and shared ground can be held open for those who arrive.

Biogs and contact

Lucy Newman Cleeve is a curator and ordained priest whose practice spans contemporary art, ministry, and public theology. She is Assistant Curate at St Giles' Cripplegate, where *Grounded* was first shown, and Chaplain to YMCA LandAid House, the partnership from which this project grew. She is a doctoral candidate at King's College London, researching contemporary art as public theology, and serves as Visual Arts Advisor to the Southwark Diocesan Advisory Committee. She teaches modules on Visual Arts and Society and Theology and Art at Samford American University in London. Her writing on art and theology has appeared in *Art+Christianity* and the Visual Commentary on Scripture, and she has contributed chapters to publications by Routledge and Open Editions. Her curatorial work includes *Stations of the Resurrection* at St Paul's Cathedral, *Brittle Crazie Glasse* at Islington Mill in Salford, and several years as Curatorial Consultant to The Faith Museum at The Auckland Project. She was Founding Director of Man&Eve gallery (2006–2014). She holds an MA from the Royal College of Art and an MA in Theology and Religious Studies from Cambridge.

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Helen Barff is a sculptor living and working in London. She graduated from Goldsmiths College with a BA (Hons) in Fine Art and Art History in 1999 and completed an MA in Drawing (Distinction) at Camberwell College of Arts in 2004. She has exhibited widely in the UK and internationally, including a solo show *I Wrap My Fear Around Me Like A Blanket* at Close Ltd and Taunton Brewhouse (2022), group shows at the Foundling Museum and White Cube, London, and the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition. She has been shortlisted for the Jerwood Drawing Prize and was a finalist in the Royal Society of Sculptors First Plinth: Public Art Award in 2023. Helen teaches and runs workshops, including with residents at YMCA LandAid House and with Market Hall Museum, Warwick, working with female immigrants exploring memory and migration. Her work is held in collections in the UK, Canada, Mexico, and the USA.

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