

stop her. Naomi is pleased she did not listen to other people's opinions. She confesses that this was the best decision she could have taken. 'I felt like I found my people,' she says.

But the decision of moving was influenced not only by her interest in British history. Her family heritage also played an essential role in this. Naomi's paternal grandparents were originally from the UK. So, she made it her mission to find some of the places where they grew up. Though this, she wanted to learn more about her roots.

About her grandfather, she knew only a few things. But this did not stop her from going in search of his childhood home. Only knowing the name of the house and the village, she hit a few bumps in the road. When she went to the location of what she supposed was the house, she learnt that it was no longer there.

Disappointed, Naomi went to the village's church. To her surprise, she discovered a map of the old village where she found the name of the house and its location. 'We walked out into the village, and we went, and we found the house that my grandfather had grown up in,' she recalls.

About the place where her grandmother lived, she knew more. Naomi's aunt had interviewed her grandmother in the '80s about her life in

England. She gave detailed accounts of places where she lived within Sheffield. 'I listened to my grandma via the internet talk about these places as I visited them,' she says. Naomi went to one of the addresses that her grandmother listed to find everything was as she described. 'With the exact same pub next to it, and with the church across the road from them,' she says.

'I realised that my grandpa came from a middle-class family,' she says. 'I assumed both my grandparents had come from middle-class families.' But while visiting Sheffield, Naomi discovered that her grandmother lived as a small child in a back-to-back house – which revealed her humble beginning. 'Going to the different places where my grandpa had grown up, where my grandma had grown up helped put the pieces together of who they were,' Naomi says.

Her time in the UK was devoted, she says, to 'exploration and discovery'. Not only did she have the chance to discover the country and its rich history, but she also discovered and explored what is of interest to her. 'There were other things apart from the history that I wanted to do,' she says. But it became like an obsession once she got here. 'I count last year as one of the best years of my life.'





# Culture central

Coventry's Herbert Art Gallery will be key to the success of the city's tenure as UK City of Culture in 2021, says Kritika Randev.

**C**oventry hit the jackpot when it was announced as the UK's City of Culture 2021. More visitors than ever will come to the city, and one of the venues to benefit will be the city's Herbert Art Gallery.

Construction of the museum and gallery, named after industrialist and philanthropist Sir Alfred Herbert, began in 1939, but it did not open until 1960. The latest major work was a refurbishment in 2008. It is run by Culture Coventry and entry is free, supported by revenue from the museum shop and from venue hire. The Herbert Art Gallery has plenty to offer to visitors interested in the history of Coventry, as well as showcasing exclusive artwork.

The main gallery, on the ground floor, is about history and is full of memorabilia linking to the social and industrial history of Coventry. There are displays detailing Coventry archaeology and the gallery also houses the Coventry archives. The displays in the gallery often leave visitors amazed by the ways Coventry has contributed to culture and the country's history.

One visitor to the gallery, Jane Pattison, says she is fascinated by Coventry's history. 'I'm glad that this is the City of Culture 2021, as I feel that

it has so much to offer, especially as there seems to be a lot of talented artists within this city.' Local resident Paul Bird says the City of Culture announcement has already made a difference: 'I can really see the change in how this city has evolved to be more cultural, allowing more younger creative artist to showcase their skills.'

Bird praised the events the gallery offers, such as Coventry Open 2020, which was planned to run between February and April but temporarily closed due to the coronavirus outbreak.

This exhibition is the 11th Coventry Open, and it showcases artwork from three local artists from Coventry, Warwickshire and neighbouring cities. The exhibits were chosen from more than 340 pieces of work submitted for the competition. The three artists were selected through a vote made by visitors to the gallery, with a winner being announced on the last day of the exhibition.

Some of the activities planned for the summer include an exhibition charting 100 years of the council house, and undercroft tours. While plans are still being made for next year, and there's inevitably some uncertainty due to coronavirus, the Herbert is sure to be at the centre of Coventry as UK City of Culture 2021.



Entrance to the main exhibition introduces Coventry's history



Coventry Open 2020 exhibition was planned to run until April, but closed early due to coronavirus. Below: A piece of art made entirely out of recycled materials, part of the Coventry Open 2020 competition.

**‘I can really see the change in how this city has evolved to be more cultural allowing more younger creative artist to showcase their skills.’**



Left: Katy Perry's 'Geisha' performance at the 2013 American Music Awards (Walt Disney Television CC BY-ND 2.0)  
Below: Angela Shev in traditional Albanian costume.



# Cultural controversy

Is it right that fashion brands mine cultures all over the world for inspiration? Agata Slowinska investigates.

**F**ashion houses have faced accusations of cultural appropriation many times. Brands and designers get inspired by the culture of different countries, but too often they have used famous models to present instead of a model from the culture the clothes are inspired from. Many people have found this disrespectful.

One instance of cultural appropriation was Kendall Jenner's afro in *Vogue* in 2018, which critics felt ignored African-American culture. Condé Nast, the publisher of *Vogue* explained: 'The photos, which had been taken to promote the *Vogue*/CFDA Fashion Fund, were meant to evoke a nostalgic aesthetic reminiscent of the early 20th century.' The brand was accused of 'exploiting their culture for the brand's profits' and questions were raised as to why the fashion house did not use 'someone from the culture you are inspired by to represent them.'

But this is a daily occurrence in the fashion industry, which might never stop because as some say, fashion would not exist otherwise. Different cultures have inspired fashion designers all the time.

Angela Shev is an Albanian fashion follower since her early years and she also feels very strongly about the topic of cultural appropriation. 'Fashion industries should be able to find someone within the needed culture to represent that culture. Involving an individual who does not believe or know much about the culture itself may come across quite disrespectful to the people of that culture. When I see someone famous being used to represent a culture just because they are known in the public eye, I find this very wrong. Cultural

**'Cultural appropriation may never end but that doesn't mean we should agree with it'**



appropriation may never come to an end but that doesn't mean we should agree with it.'

The fight to stop this has come far, but there are still things that need to be addressed. Fashion industries will always feel the need to look into other cultures for ideas for fashion shows, new clothing ideas, or new patterns for their products. But a question arises regarding how wrong it is for a famous person to express themselves through fashion.

On the other hand, there are people defending the fashion industry, who claim that 'this is not offensive, it is celebrating culture' and that 'other people can also share your culture if they do it with respect.' But it can be argued that there is a fine line between cultural representation and cultural appropriation.

Dr Serkan Delice, a lecturer in cultural and historical studies at the London College of Fashion told BBC News that he was researching the debate around fashion and cultural appropriation. The key point about cultural appropriation according to Dr Delice was that it 'happens when there are power inequalities between different cultures.'

# Stay on, go further

Go further with a master's  
at Coventry University.

[www.coventry.ac.uk/gofurther](http://www.coventry.ac.uk/gofurther)

**Adolphus Duru (Jnr)**  
2017-18 (Jan entry)



# Sexism in the

© Hannah Woolgar

# Cosplaying Community

Angela Crocker talks to two cosplayers who have experienced harassment while in costumes.

**A**tending a convention and cosplaying as Rogue, a character from X-Men was going to be a fun event for Chloe Povey, a 19-year-old from Manchester. The friend she was with needed medical attention, but when help arrived she felt the helper laid all of his attention onto her. 'I figured he was trying to lighten the mood,' she says. 'As we left, he asked for my Instagram. Not thinking anything sinister from it, until he messaged me asking if I was in character.'

Chloe's story is not a singular incident. You hear these types of accounts from many female cosplayers about fans who begin stalking and harassing them to dress up as their fetishized fantasies and will not accept no for an answer. Cosplaying is a community that continues to grow in popularity. More and more people are choosing to dress up in a wide range of TV and movie characters - ranging from *Game of Thrones'* Jon Snow to cult anime protagonist

Naruto. The rise in cosplaying has had a dramatic effect on multi-genre entertainment conventions, such as San Diego Comic-Con which will gather over 150,000 attendees.

However, when it comes to any large-scale event, there are often underlying issues. In this case, it is the sexism that follows the female cosplayers, which can be made to feel uncomfortable from the attention laid on their outfits. It is a taboo in the world of cosplaying. But more started to be done about it, such as the 2014 Geeks for CONsent initiative that gathered more than 2,600 signatures calling for comic cons to create and enforce more effective anti-harassment policies.

Chloe was introduced to the world of cosplay by one of her friends. 'That was six years ago, and I've been a cosplayer ever since,' she says. This is a way for her to feel closer to her favourite characters. 'It also allows me to meet other people who are interested in the