

StoryLands

Objects, Voices
and Global Journeys



Exploring identity
through objects in
a world shaped by
migration



Explore the StoryLands Digital Archive

www.storylands.alwaleedculturalnetwork.org

StoryLands: Objects, Voices and Global Journeys is an Alwaleed Cultural Network initiative and collaborative project by MultakaOxford and Turquoise Mountain Trust, powered by Alwaleed Philanthropies.



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Welcome to

StoryLands

This digital archive brings together people from around the world, each reflecting on personal identity through cultural objects, in a world shaped by movement and migration.

This first collection includes 13 stories and objects, shared by people from different places, cultural and personal contexts. Each contributor offers their unique insight into how objects take on deeply personal significance and resonate with a sense of self and belonging as we move from one place to another — revealing the richness of cultural heritage, diversity, and migration in our interconnected world.

These stories ask us to reflect: What do objects mean to us beyond their material form?

How does the significance of cultural objects change across time and distance, between makers and holders, past and future?

Are connections to objects intellectual, emotional, spiritual, or social?

Whether ordinary or extraordinary, objects embody meaning through symbol and form, giving shape to narratives that define our lives.

Through sound stories and photography, we invite you to explore the StoryLands digital archive.

Take a moment to listen, to reflect, and to join in a shared conversation about heritage and the human experience.

Identity

Moves

Culture

Speaks

Objects

Remember





LISTEN
to Krysten's
STORY

1 Lei Po'o

Krysten



The lei po'o, a head garland worn in Hawaiian Hula, Tahitian 'Ori, and across Oceania, symbolises connection to nature, humanity, and ancestral wisdom. Krysten, an American artist of Filipino, Jewish, and Polynesian heritage, is now based in the UK.



Krysten teaches Hula and 'Ori Tahiti which allows her to share rich knowledge. Embracing her multicultural identity has been a journey, but she now sees it as her superpower. Krysten has woven this lei po'o to honour her past, present, and future, and captured it's beauty and significance through her photography series.

Listen to Krysten's story accompanied by a soundscape from Hayley Ku'unani, which blends tradition and modernity through the sounds of Hula instruments and foraged dried foliage, interwoven with contemporary instruments.



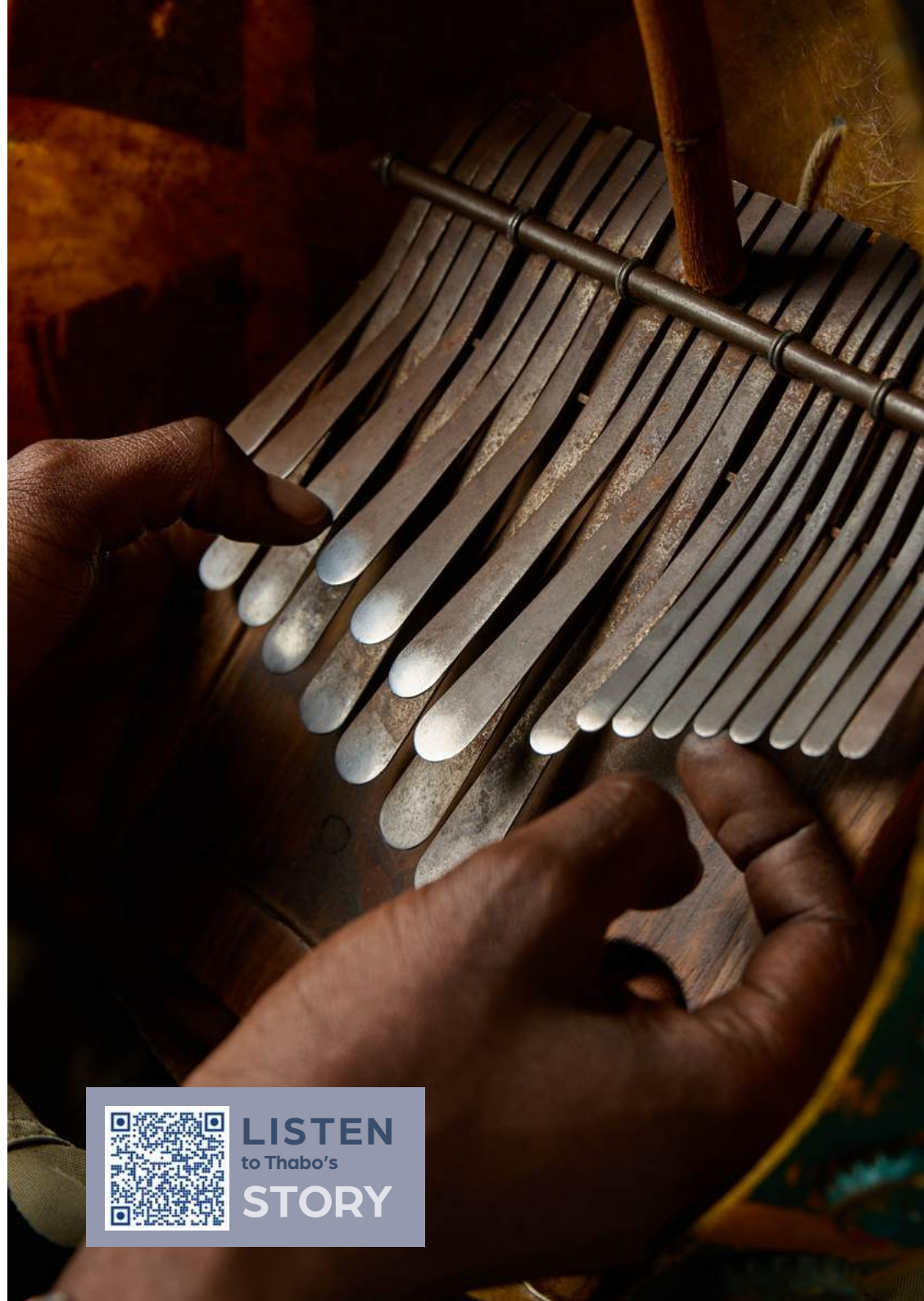
2 Mbira

Thabo



“The sound is very ancient. It’s very soothing. It’s very profound for one to hear it, you know?”

Thabo grew up in Zimbabwe caught between two worlds—his Shona heritage and the Christian faith imposed through colonial rule. Emerging from this tension is the mbira, a sacred instrument once silenced, now reclaimed. For the Shona people, the mbira is more than music; it is a spiritual bridge to ancestors, a tool for healing and guidance, and an integral part of life’s most significant moments. Thabo reflects on how this once-forbidden instrument, now recognised as the national instrument of Zimbabwe, remains a powerful connection to his roots. Since settling in the UK, he finds that its distinct, mystic sound carries new weight. Listen to Thabo’s story, featuring the mbira played by Miles Ncube, a gwenyambira (a spiritual mbira player)...



LISTEN
to Thabo's
STORY

3 Tatreez Thobe

Dina



Tatreez, the traditional Palestinian art of cross-stitch embroidery, has long preserved identity, memory, and connection to the land. Motifs of plants, animals and landscapes are stitched into dresses by communities of women and passed down through generations.

Dina is Spanish with Palestinian roots and now lives in the UK. During the Covid pandemic, she rediscovered tatreez and began a deeply personal journey. Migration had left her feeling lost, but through tatreez, she began to reconnect with herself and co-founded the Tatreez Collective – a space for cultural revival. A chance conversation with her mum led her to this dress, which embodies her family heritage in every stitch.

Listen to Dina's story, featuring music and poem 'Lullaby of Hope' by Shahd Karaeen...



LISTEN
to Dina's
STORY

4 Backgammon Board

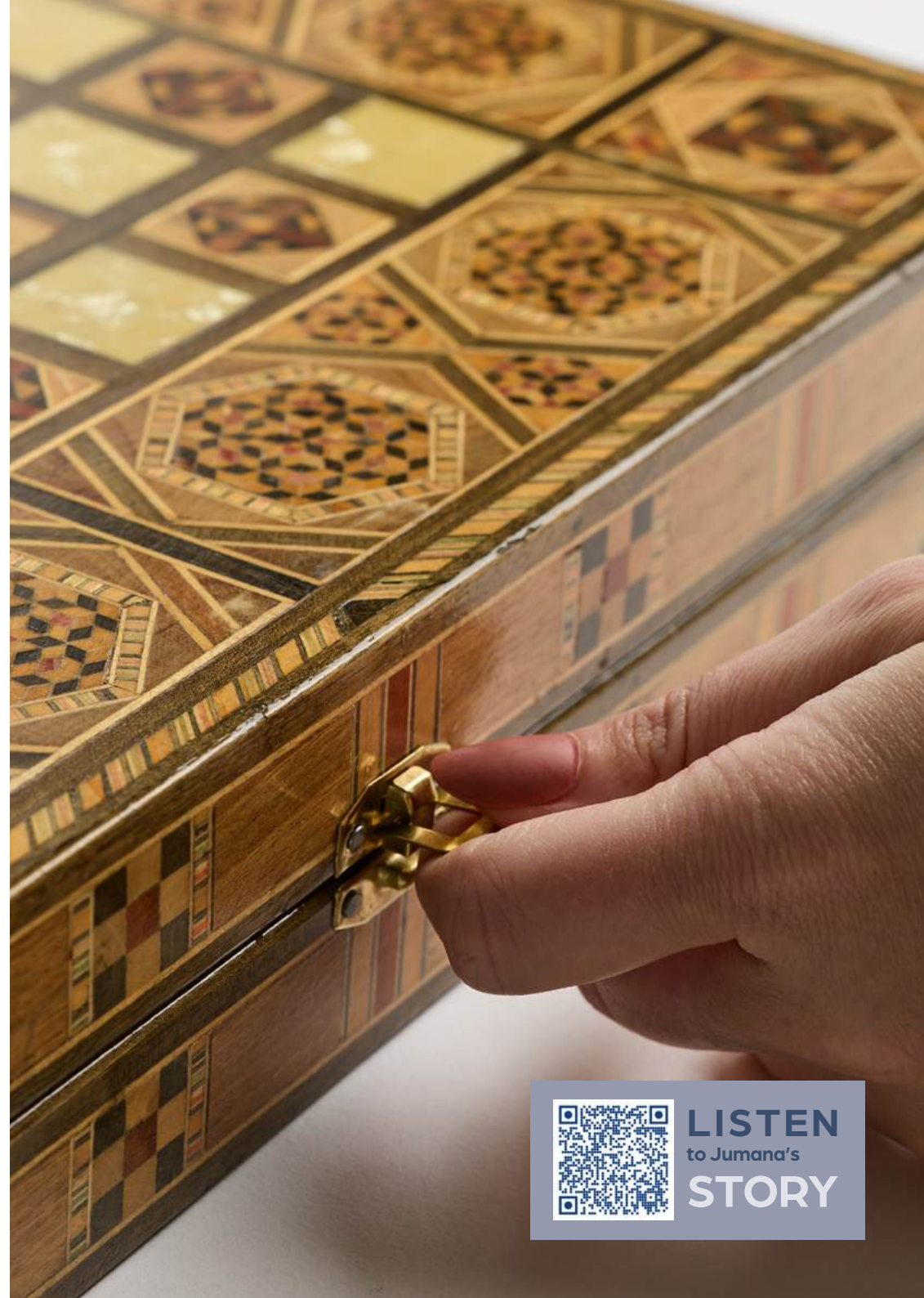
Jumana



Jumana, a Syrian-British artist, spent most of her life in Syria before moving to the UK to study, never imagining that she wouldn't be able to return due to war in her country. Over time, she came to realise that the intricate mother-of-pearl inlaid woodwork once so familiar to her, was more than decoration in homes and everyday objects. It was part of her cultural identity, now missing in her life in the UK.

Recently, she asked her father to bring her a backgammon board from Aleppo, crafted in this traditional style. It has become a bridge to the past and an act of preservation. Listen to Jumana's story...

“Even though it's stunningly beautiful, you know, you saw them all around you, every time you go to the old city, people would be selling them. So I never saw them in the way that I'm seeing them now.”



LISTEN
to Jumana's
STORY

5 Carnival Mask

Luena



Luena is Brazilian and carries the spirit of celebration wherever she goes, infused with the rhythm of Samba music and dance. She created this Carnival mask as a reflection of her identity, shaped by waves of ancestries and migration.

What makes Samba so powerful for Luena, is its origin – a joyful, infectious expression born from the deep struggle and resistance of Black Afro-Brazilian communities. Now living in the UK, Luena finds that Samba carries even greater meaning in the diaspora, where connection and community are essential to her Brazilian identity. Her mask is a symbol of the resilience of the Brazilian spirit, inviting everyone to join the party! Listen to Luena's story....



LISTEN
to Luena's
STORY

6 Vyshyvanka Embroidered Shirts

Liudmyla and Valerii



Embroidery is a vibrant part of Ukrainian culture, with ancient symbols stitched into garments like shirts and dresses. Each motif tells a story of daily life, folklore and heritage, traditionally stitched by hand.

Mila and her husband Valerii moved to the UK in 2022 after war forced them to leave Ukraine. They have always worn vyshyvankas as part of their cultural tradition, but now they wear them with renewed pride – as powerful symbols of identity, solidarity, and quiet defiance in the face of conflict.

The musical score featured in this story is by Dvi Doli – a fusion of traditional Ukrainian melodies with a contemporary arrangement, incorporating different regional elements of deep cultural significance. Listen to the story...

“Our ancestors believed that every stitch and pattern embroidered on our clothes would protect the wearer, and we believe it! The vyshyvanka protects.”



LISTEN
to Mila & Valerii's
STORY

7 Minbar

Abdelrahman



A master artisan of Syrian wood mosaic, Abdelrahman left Syria due to the war and resettled in Jordan, where he built a business around the traditional Syrian craft he's perfected since the age of 13.

A minbar is a sacred raised platform in a mosque where the imam delivers sermons, often adorned with intricate carvings and a staircase. This spectacular mosaic minbar is the first of its kind, crafted by Abdelrahman for the 2022 *Ithra* exhibition in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Creating this minbar was both a personal and spiritual journey for him. The piece also represents one of his most complex works to date, a testament to the patience and dedication required for this craft. Listen to his story....



LISTEN
to Abdelrahman's
STORY

8 Mshatta Facade

Mansoor



LISTEN
to Mansoor's
STORY

The Mshatta Facade is a richly decorated stone wall from an 8th-century Desert Castle of Jordan. It is now housed at the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin. The limestone relief carvings depict a fantastical scene of animals and mythical creatures harmoniously sharing water from a fountain.

Mansoor, originally from Afghanistan and now living in Germany, unexpectedly found that these images took him back to memories of times in his life in Kabul, where diversity flourished around him. For Mansoor, this piece of early Islamic art symbolises the potential for unity across cultures and societies, reinforcing the importance of cultural exchange. Listen to his story...

“These scenes of creatures drinking water from one fountain together; for me, it shows peace. Reminds me, of course, everything is possible if people want.”





9 Wooden Chest

Maher



For generations, a wooden chest has been a common feature in nearly every old Damascene household. Maher moved from Syria to Jordan due to the war in his homeland. He crafted this piece alongside his sons, a process which has become a way to pass down Syrian identity and heritage to his children.

Traditionally crafted from locally sourced wood, Maher now incorporates aesthetically refined materials more fitting to the environment he is in, like walnut in this piece, blended with contemporary touches such as hand-beaten brass. For Maher, wood has a soul; it speaks to him, guiding his hands and allowing him to keep the legacy of Syria alive through his craft. Listen to his story...



LISTEN
to Maher's
STORY

10 Bamboo Calligraphy Pen

Rasooli



LISTEN
to Rasooli's
STORY

Ustad Rasooli believes that everyone is born with a life purpose, and moving to Kabul, Afghanistan, enabled him to realise his.

As a shepherd, Rasooli would trace letters in the earth, captivated by their form. It wasn't until he left his rural life for Kabul that he discovered how calligraphy was created with pens cut from bamboo reeds. This revelation sparked his journey into the art of calligraphy, and he soon began crafting his own pens.

Over time, he became a master calligrapher and has discovered that each pen has its own unique character, much like people. His favourite pen is this 'happy' red bamboo pen, as it only flows with an upbeat spirit when he writes with it. Listen to his story....

Some pens had soft skins, and some had hard bamboo skins. I gave the soft ones to gentle people and the hard-skinned ones to those who seemed tough to me.



11 Beaded Gown

Um Ahmad



Um Ahmad spent her childhood on the Farasan Islands in the Red Sea, where she learned the art of beaded embroidery from her mother, aunts, and grandmother. Now in her nineties, she was raised in a time and place where everything was handmade out of necessity. This skill has not only preserved her heritage but also allowed her to earn a living well into her later years.

This hooded gown, a garment for special occasions, is intricately hand-beaded by Um Ahmad. She now lives in the modern city of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, but her designs still reflect a deep connection to her nomadic roots. She has taught these traditions to her grandchildren, making sure they live on in today's world. Listen to her story...



LISTEN
to Um Ahmad's
STORY

12 Jamdani

Tasleema



LISTEN
to Tasleema's
STORY

There's a quiet magic in Jamdani:

a fabric once woven from the now-extinct phuti karpas plant that grew only on the river deltas of Dhaka. Picked with the dew at dawn and crafted in silence by a Hindu Brahmin and a Mughal court Muslim weaver sitting side by side, together they spun patterns into the finest, gossamer like muslin cotton.

Tasleema is a British Bangladeshi artist specialising in sacred Islamic art and ornamental design. Jamdani saris have always been part of her wardrobe, but only recently did she uncover its deeper story of colonial disruption and cultural survival, echoing her own journey of identity and belonging in Britain.

Working with master weavers in Bangladesh, Tasleema has reimagined traditional Jamdani motifs into contemporary symbols of power, to carry forward its legacy and her heritage. Listen to her story...

“I think working with Jamdani roots me. It gives me a foundation. It's about celebrating that resilience, and I think this sense of belonging.”





13 Luntaya Acheik

Win



Luntaya Acheik, meaning “100 shuttles,” is a centuries-old silk weaving tradition from Myanmar,

once reserved for royalty and deeply rooted in Bamar heritage.

Today, it continues to hold meaning in Win’s family, where it’s worn for special occasions and passed down through generations.

This intricate Acheik Pan Nwe design, created for the Turquoise Mountain collection, draws inspiration from lungis worn by the women in her family.

When Win was living abroad in the U.S. and Sri Lanka, wearing Acheik remained a powerful connection to home. Now back in Myanmar, she’s committed to preserving and internationally showcasing this female-powered tradition, taking pride in its beauty and resilience amid the country’s challenges.

Listen to her story...



LISTEN
to Win's
STORY

The Future

StoryLands is just the beginning of an ever-widening collection of community memory and insight from around the world – continuing to voice the meaning and role of cultural objects in personal stories of place-making and belonging.

StoryLands is intended to provide a valuable community-led resource for building understanding and opportunities for learning, dialogue, and research. We'd love to hear from anyone who might want to be involved in the future – do you have a story to share, or simply curious about the project?

Your interest will help shape the direction of StoryLands as it evolves.

Further Information

For more information about the StoryLands project, please contact acn@alwaleedculturalnetwork.org

To learn more about the Alwaleed Cultural Network visit:
www.alwaleedculturalnetwork.org

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