

SEE  
ME



# fifth word.

Fifth Word Theatre Company is an award-winning theatre company based in the East Midlands, founded in 2007. We develop and produce vital new plays that change how people see the world. We make work with and for younger audiences (age 14-25) and under-served communities.



Engagement Producer: Zahra Butt  
Artist: Sayra Begum  
Writer: afshan d'souza-lodhi



SEE ME is a Heritage Lottery-funded project, run by Fifth Word in partnership with Nottingham Libraries and supported by Nottingham Playhouse. We recruited Muslim girls aged 12-22 in Nottingham and trained them in oral history skills, photography, filming and audio recording. Equipped with these skills they have met and interviewed inspirational women of Muslim heritage in Nottingham. They filmed and recorded interviews, and took portrait photographs of the interview subjects.

The resulting interviews are part of a new touring exhibition and a podcast series hosted by the young participants, which can be found on Fifth Word's website and all major listening platforms. You can scan the QR codes in this booklet to hear snippets from the podcast.

The touring pop-up exhibition, featuring portrait photos of the interviewees, is accompanied by an Islamic miniature-inspired illustration for each interviewee, depicting a moment or a message from their story. The exhibition launched at Nottingham Central Library, and then toured to Nottingham libraries as well as the theatres across the UK hosting the touring production of Fifth Word's new show 'Liberation Squares', in Spring 2024.

Please visit our website for more information:  
[fifthword.co.uk](http://fifthword.co.uk)

**NOTTINGHAM  
PLAYHOUSE**

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Made possible with  
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ENGLAND**

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# Saimah Zaharah

Business Woman turned Influencer


Once upon a time, in the land of Nottingham, there was a young girl called Saimah. Saimah always loved to travel. She spent many years managing international cricketers all around the world. But she wanted more. Saimah wanted to see more of the world, she had caught the travel bug. But she realised that travelling alone as a woman was very difficult. So she started up a company to help other women who had also caught the travel bug. The first trip she organised, to the Emirate land of Dubai, had 55 other women on it! It was hard work, managing so many women, but Saimah loved it. Inspired by her own mother's hard work, Saimah works hard to help other women realise their dream of wanting to travel.

The strength in Saimah's voice, her determination and unconditional love for her family shone through. I had to illustrate that connection, I felt this is what empowers and drives her.


- Sayra







Two things that inspire me,  
my mother and my children.



She didn't think about barriers,  
she thought about the solutions.

If she could be so strong...  
I am from her.

# Zarina Teli

Artist and Dentist

In a land not far away, hung up on large white walls, are Zarina Teli's artwork. Zarina, who as a young girl was always passionate about art, ended up becoming a dentist in the land of Nottingham. She loved her job fixing people's teeth, but the calling of the art world was too strong. So one day, Zarina decided to go back to college and study art. She studied hard day and night while still working as a dentist. A lot of her artwork features her family, her relationship to Islam and the environment around us. Zarina loves the earth and nature and uses her artwork to investigate our connection to the world around us. One day, Zarina hopes to create children's books with her artwork, so she can help shape the children of our land into beautiful human beings.




I decided to illustrate Zarina's awe and our inescapable connection to the environment because of the strong resonance it held with me. There is a clarity of faith when surrounded by creation.

- Sayra





A stylized illustration with a limited color palette. A large, gnarled tree with green foliage stands on the left. The background consists of jagged, purple mountains under a solid orange sky. In the center, a large, yellow rock face is being painted with green floral and vine patterns. A small, dark green silhouette of a person stands at the base of the rock, holding a paintbrush. The entire scene is framed by a thin black border.

I am always in awe and inspired  
by the beauty of the natural world.

We are more connected than we sometimes like to think...

# Nergis Ahmed

Speech and Language Therapist & Health  
and Fitness Coach

Once upon a time lived a woman called Nergis who loved helping people improve their lives. Nergis was the first person in her family to do a degree and focussed on her education. She became a speech and language therapist for the National Health Service. Nergis was the only Muslim speech therapist in the team and had to challenge people's expectations. One day, after working in the National Health Service for 16 long years, Nergis decided that she would set up her own business because she wanted to spend more time with families in the land. In her spare time, Nergis also helps people with their health and fitness. Rather than forcing people to go to the gym, Nergis helps people to increase their fitness levels from their own homes and castles.

I had to illustrate Nergis's joy in helping people to transform their lives for the better, drawing lovingly on her lived experience of the many times she pushed herself to capture the life she envisioned.

- Sayra





I love transformation, I love change and I like to see people improving their lives from one bit to another.



# Razia Maqbool

First Pakistani Teacher in Nottingham

Once upon a time there was a young woman called Razia Maqbool. She immigrated from India to Pakistan during the partition and then moved to the land of Nottingham with her husband. She wanted to become a teacher. It was 1976, a time where racism was rife and people didn't understand much about other cultures. But Razia fought the systems and paved her own way as a teacher in Nottingham. She started working part time in adult learning colleges, supplementary schools, and Nurseries before she became a teacher in a school. Little did Razia know, that she would become the first Pakistani teacher in Nottingham. While fighting racism, she introduced new ways of working and made young children feel safe and supported within the schooling structure. Children she has taught still come up to her today to tell her how much her teaching methods have changed their lives.



I couldn't shake the memory of Imran and how Razia pulled him out of the darkness, combined with her faith that Allah has given us all brain power.

- Sayra







Beta, just try to improve yourself, particularly in education, there is no limit, you are so lucky, all facilities are there, it's up to you.

# Maliha Asi

## Business Woman

In the middle of Nottingham with beautiful long hair, lives Maliha aka The Queen of Malayage. Maliha, a mixed-race Muslim woman, has always had to fight cultural pressure. But like diamonds, she thrived under that pressure and created her own hair salon Malayage. She was persistent and pushed back on stereotypes to create her own castle. Known in the province of Nottingham for creating a new hair colouring technique called the Mayalage, Maliha also creates a space for Muslim women in her salon. She gives them privacy and the care that they don't get from other salons and stylists. She doesn't charge extra for people with longer or thicker hair. She is a fair and just queen and wants everyone to be treated equally.


She may have started off as a travelling hair stylist, but Maliha now works in her own castle in the land of Nottingham – Malayage.

For Maliha the Hijab is more than a piece of fabric, it is your whole persona. She emphasised the importance of loving what you see when you take off the physical Hijab and look in the mirror.

- Sayra





A person with long, wavy brown hair is shown from the back, looking into a large, ornate diamond-shaped frame. The frame is filled with a vast field of purple, crystalline structures of various sizes. In the center of the frame, a small, stylized purple figure stands amidst the crystals. Above the figure, a large, faceted purple diamond floats in the air. The background within the frame is a light purple, textured surface. The frame itself has a decorative, swirling border. The entire scene is set against a dark green background.

When you have  
pressure, pressure  
makes diamonds.

If everything's the same,  
you're not going to have any  
advances, you're just in that  
same circle for however long  
until someone breaks out of  
that cycle and introduces  
something new and only then  
will you see new perspectives.

# Marwa Sofiman

Women's Group Founder

Listen to the story of this rebel, all the way from Egypt, called Marwa. Now residing in the Kingdom of Nottingham, Marwa found that due to stereotyping of Muslims there was a lack of support and spaces for Muslim women. One day, Marwa set up Heya, a support group for Arab women by Arab women. Heya builds community for all the Arab women in Nottingham. Marwa's work is recognised all over the country and Heya has been nominated several times and even won a BBC award last year. By standing up and being loud and clear about her views, Marwa has become an icon for other women in the community. If she sees something she doesn't like, she will change it. Marwa is the rebel of the Kingdom of Nottingham, creating safe and supportive spaces for Arab women.

Through Marwa's hard work, the Heya community has grown and strengthened, bringing together Arab women who support and empower each other in Nottingham, sometimes even before they arrive at their new home.

- Sayra





It showed other women who are moving to Nottingham how their new life would be, and there's a community that is there to welcome them, encourage them and empower them and they won't be alone.



# Fatou Keita

Business woman

Once upon a time, 16 years ago, Fatou moved from the Ivory Coast to the UK. When she arrived, she had multiple different jobs and even ran a cleaning company before she found her calling – health foods and drinks. She wanted to raise awareness of West African culture and food within Nottingham and bring people together in community. One day, Fatou decided to start her own company and named it after her mother Nafanta. Fatou wants to help people to make healthier decisions about what they eat and drink and so she runs cooking classes and makes natural juices. Her mission is to get Fonio on everyone's plate. The supergrain which is naturally gluten free and diabetic friendly was first cultivated in Africa over 5000 years ago. And yet most of the world don't know about it. Slowly but surely Fatou will change the world's perception of West African food.

Fatou's determination had to be captured. When faced with negativity, she remains strong and focused on her goal of bringing people together and challenging stereotypes using food and culture.

- Sayra





West African food, it stay  
in shadow and sometimes  
there's misconception.



I will bring people together in  
the community. I will cook for  
them, they will try my food  
and judge it for themselves.

# Uroosa Arshid

First Hijabi Firefighter

Once upon a time in a city called Nottingham lived a Muslim woman called Uroosa. When Uroosa was a little girl, some firefighters came to visit her primary school and Uroosa was enamoured. 'These guys are real superheroes' she thought. And so, Uroosa wanted to become a firefighter. Unfortunately, it wasn't common to have Asian firefighters let alone female Muslim firefighters. People didn't think Uroosa could be strong enough to lift people on ladders. Oh, how wrong they were. Uroosa trained tirelessly and passed all the tests. She fought stereotypes and society's expectations of women to become the first Hijabi firefighter in the United Kingdom. And now Uroosa rides a big red truck throughout the realm of Nottingham keeping its residents safe from fires and rescuing people and animals from dangerous situations.

Uroosa wanted to be a firefighter since she was a child, admiring firefighters as superheroes. Now, I see Uroosa as a superhero, and I wanted to capture her strength with that childlike wonder.

- Sayra

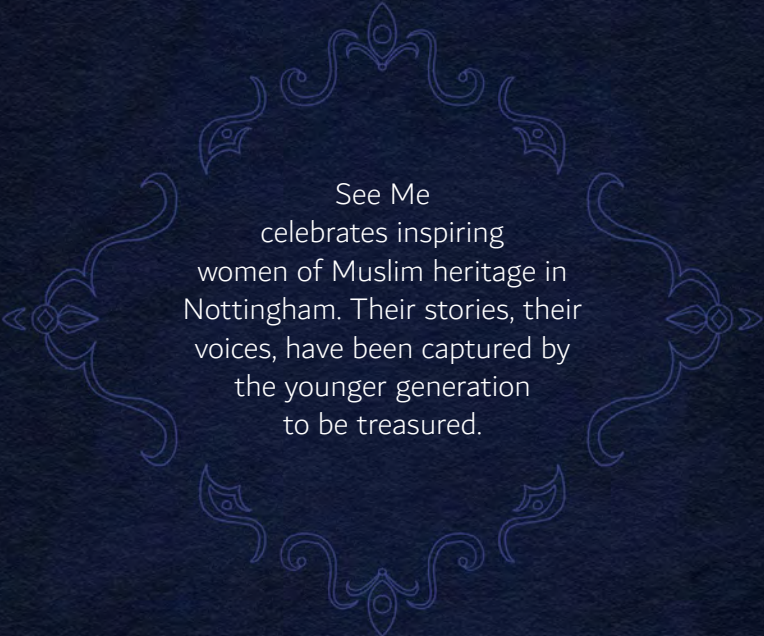




I've always wanted to  
be a firefighter from  
when I was really little.



I was still in primary school,  
firefighters came to my school  
and did a safety talk and I just  
thought it was so cool, these  
guys are real superheroes.



See Me  
celebrates inspiring  
women of Muslim heritage in  
Nottingham. Their stories, their  
voices, have been captured by  
the younger generation  
to be treasured.

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