



## This is a Leeds Arts University Repository copy of: Working Girls

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**Author:** Paula Chambers

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### Abstract

Working Girls is a solo exhibition of sculptural works by Paula Chambers. This exhibition comprises sculptural works, installation, and film -- and includes works created specifically for the Whitaker made in response to the history of women mill workers in the region.

**Collaboration Contribution:** The film work '*Shame*', included an original soundtrack by Erica Dawn Park created in collaboration with Paula Chambers. The sound edit was undertaken by Pete Cunliffe.

**Research Process:** The artworks in this exhibition are material-led investigations of women's histories of ambivalence. In the months prior to the exhibition, Chambers worked with the Whitaker Museum's object archive researching the material culture of working-class women from the region. Many of these objects were exhibited as part of Working Girls alongside the sculptural works in the galleries. Several of the pieces exhibited had been conceived and created as site specific works: '*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 9*', '*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 13*', and the two iterations of '*Her Magic Slippers*'. In addition, a new film work was created specifically for the exhibition, was devised in response to the history of working-class women in the region, and shot on location in Rawtenstall.

**Research Insights:** The primary concern that became apparent through the process of reading first-hand accounts of working-class women's lives, was the idea of shame. Women consistently spoke of the shame they felt in relation to their bodily functions, their sexual drives, their hidden wants and needs, and about their poverty and lack of material wealth. It was this that inspired the creation of the film work '*Shame*'.

**Dissemination:** The exhibition was shown at the Whitaker Museum and Art Gallery, Rawtenstall, from 14th April until 12th June 2022, along with an artist's talk held during the exhibition. The film '*Shame*' is available on Vimeo and shared via social media.

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*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 12 (2022)* copper leafed horns, work helmet, leather, plaster dental cast, nylon duvet cover, acrylic blanket. 210 x 75 x 75 cm





*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 12 (2022)* copper leafed horns, work helmet, leather, plaster dental cast, nylon duvet cover, acrylic blanket. 210 x 75 x 75 cm



*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 8 (2022)* Horse's leather bridle and steel bit with copper covered browband, 40m braided nylon reins, copper stands.  
165 x 70 x 190 cm



*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 10 (2022)* Iron gate, 50m applique satin ribbon 5  
200 x 350 x 65 cm





*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 5* (2021) plastic shovel, copper, suede, satin joggers, satin covered coat hanger, copper leafed plant hanger. dimensions variable



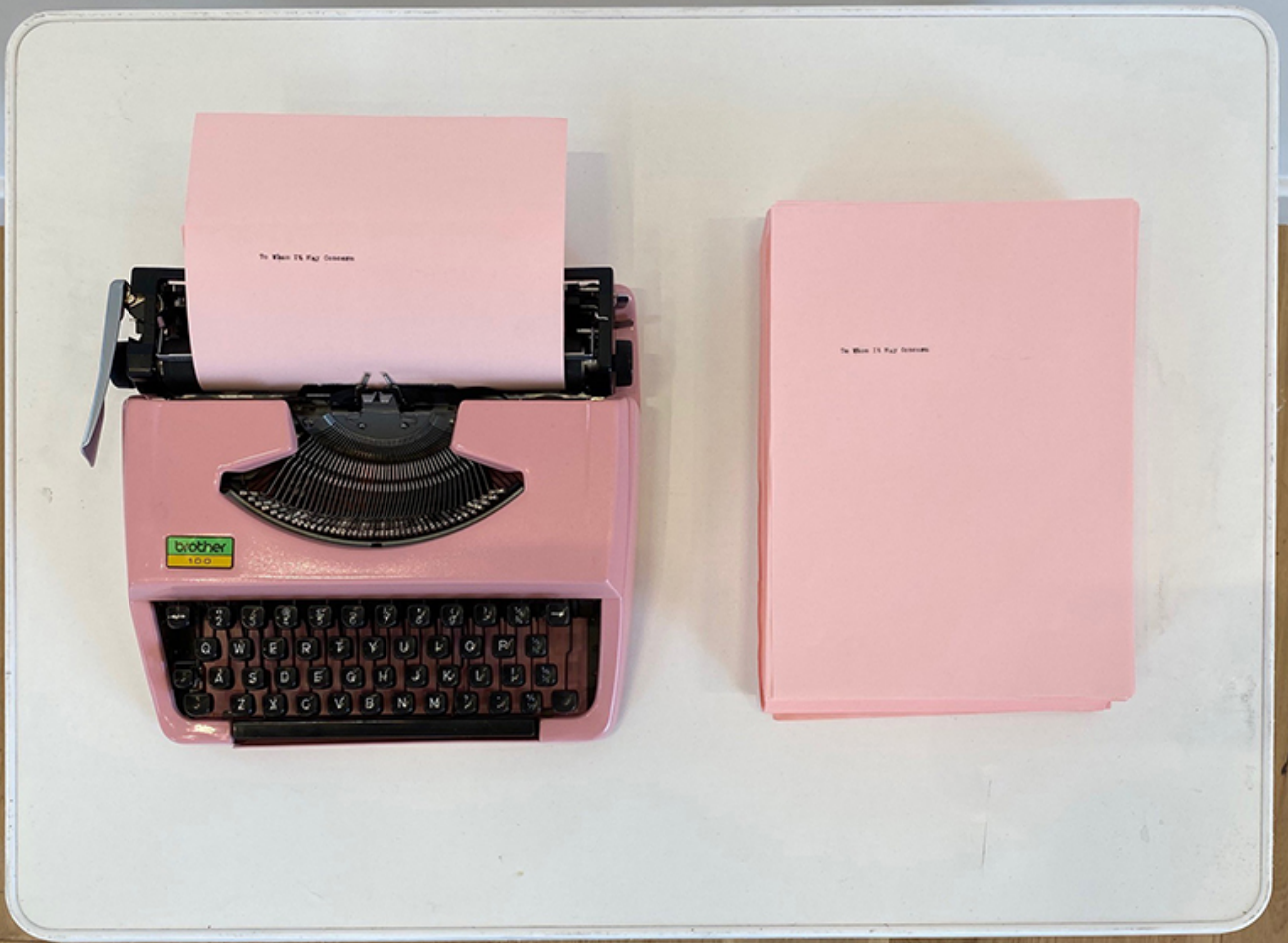
*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 11* (2022) Copper wire, millinery head stand, ceramic tiles, copper stand 185 x 65 x 75 cm





*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 6* (2021) Powder coated typewriter, ream pink paper, Formica folding table. 95 x 75 x 50 cm





*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 6* (2021) typewriter, ream pink paper, Formica folding table. 95 x 75 x 50 cm. and *Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 7* (2021) Pebbledash rendered suitcase, suede. 80 x 40 x 105 cm



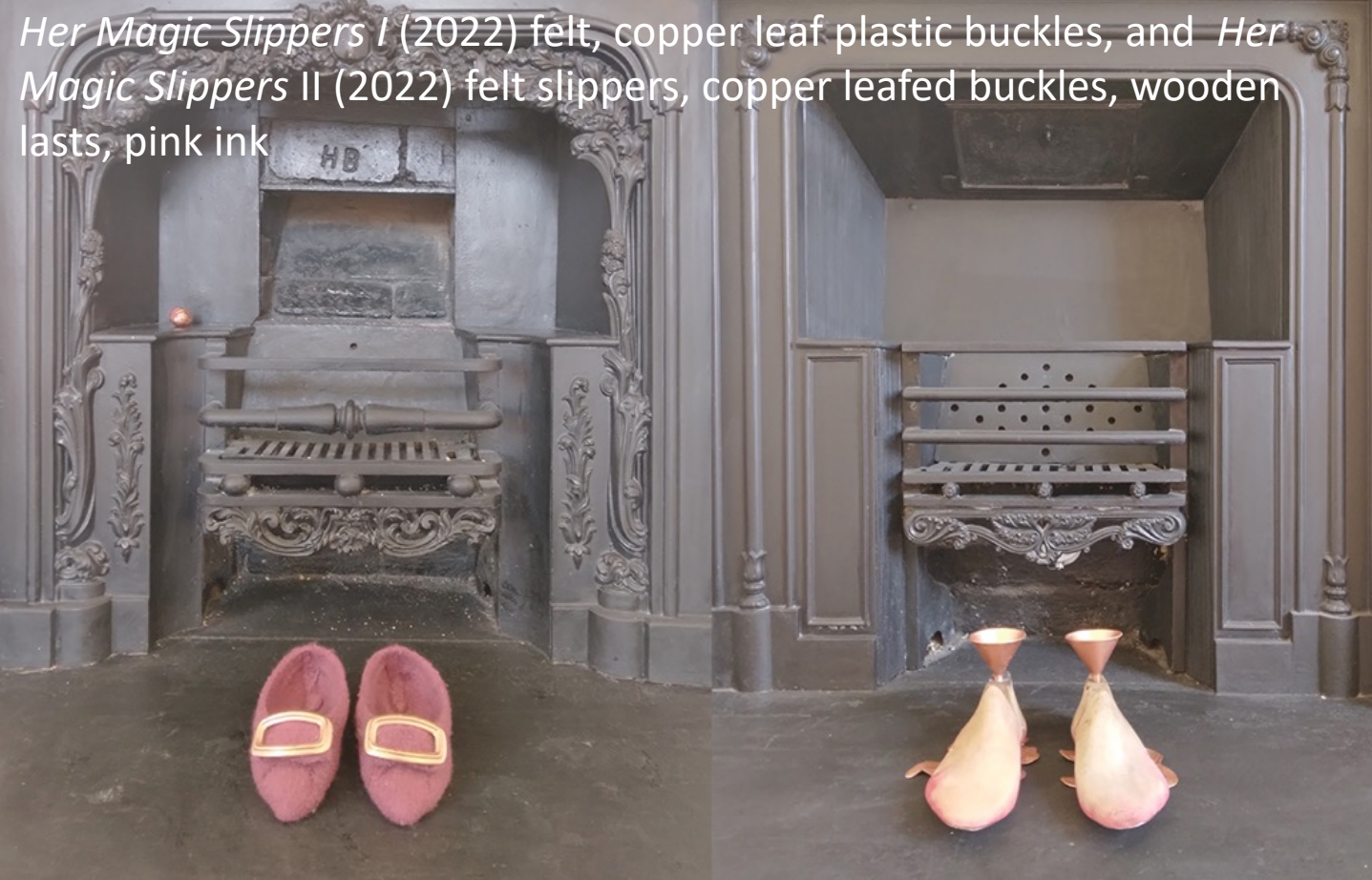
*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 14 (2022)*  
 Sunrise glass panelled door, sunrise wall mural,  
 masking tape, invisible thread, flip flop.  
 195 x 85 x 25 cm

*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 13 (2022)*  
 Artificial hair, satin ribbon, copper covered twigs and leaves.  
 260 x 25 x 12 cm









*Feminist Escape Route: Attempt No. 9* – cooper leafed brick, satin pillow case (women's patent leather shoes and their box from the Whitaker archive collection)

## **Paula Chambers**

### **Working Girls**

This exhibition, titled *Working Girls*, comprises sculptural works, installation and film, and includes works created specifically for the Whitaker made in response to the history of women mill workers in the region, exhibited here for the first time.

I make sculpture and installation as a material-led investigation of women's histories of ambivalence. My sculptural practice is led by a disruptive engagement with found domestic objects materialised as a feminist strategy of resistance. My sculptures and installation works perform narratives of disobedience; in each, items of furniture and other domestic materials, come together with hand crafted sculptural objects constructed from the stuff of home, the overlooked and undervalued objects of the material culture of feminine domesticity. Yet these objects that reference ornamentation or domestic furnishings are misleading, for their feminine materiality has been put to use in a manner that suggests feminist rebellion.

The exhibition title *Working Girls* has multiple interpretations, including its discrete reference to sex workers. This is intentional, for the history of working-class women's employment has been peppered with misunderstanding and the language of misogyny. In this context, the titles of my sculptural works, *Fire Starters*, and *Ball (for Girls)* for example, become more complex and nuanced, allowing for multiple layers of meaning.