

THE NEW CHANGE MAKERS

Introducing the trailblazing women who are transforming the way we live now

Portraits by EMMA HARDY

*Emtithal Mahmoud
photographed at
Wilton Park, the West
Sussex agency of
the Foreign &
Commonwealth Office*





EMMA HARDY

OPPOSITE AND PREVIOUS PAGE: HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY AMY BRANDON

EMTITHAL MAHMOUD

The activist poet

Emtithal Mahmoud, resplendent in a check dress and an intricately woven aquamarine headscarf, spontaneously breaks into a performance mid-conversation. The UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador has written 'The Schoolhouse' – a poem drawing on her month-long walk across her home country of Sudan to promote peace – exclusively for *Bazaar*, and she wants me to experience the words as they are meant to be heard. Her voice dances with the rapid cadence of her words – I am rapt.

'I've never written a poem without crying from sadness, or anguish, or even laughter,' says Mahmoud, who won the 2015 Individual World Poetry Slam Championship in Washington DC and went on to become a powerful advocate for refugees around the world. 'I write to process what happened, so I relive and suffer through it. But when I perform, and share, it's to reach people.'

Silence is a recurring motif in Mahmoud's work because, she tells me, she 'comes from a place where they would literally kill to silence us'. Born in Khartoum in 1993, she was taken to the US five years later when her parents emigrated there. She briefly went back to Sudan while her parents were protesting against the government; aged 10, she asked her mother why there were so many burials in her community and learnt the meaning of 'genocide', writing her first full poem immediately afterwards. 'I remember thinking that all I could contribute was words,' she says. 'Poetry destroys the boundaries of language – it cuts down the barriers words box us into.'

Since graduating from Yale, where she studied molecular biology and anthropology, she has frequently returned to Sudan, raising awareness of the continuing violence in the country, volunteering and setting up programmes such as 'Poetry Town Halls' to provide safe spaces for local people. When she was 22, she was asked by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to speak at a nuclear-ethics conference, and has gone on to share platforms with Ban Ki-moon and the Dalai Lama.

In 2016, she was invited by Barack Obama to join a discussion when he visited the Islamic Society of Baltimore. 'That meeting was an answer to all those years [as a Muslim] of being ignored, oppressed, being told that we're not American enough, that we don't belong here, that we aren't human,' she says.

Not one to rest on her laurels, Mahmoud is making a recording of her first published collection of poems, working on a memoir and developing the Women's Table initiative, which helps empower communities in Sudan to advocate for peace. She is also applying to medical school because, she says, 'doctors are record-keepers too. Even after you die, your bones don't lie.' At 26, she is still often the youngest person in the room and the only woman of colour, but has no qualms in speaking out. 'If you're invited to the table, you have a right to be there,' she argues. 'Because if you don't contribute, who else is going to?' HELENA LEE

The Schoolhouse

Our journey of a thousand miles began with a single desk
me standing at the front tongue-tied
core shaken by the magnitude of what we were doing
the words wouldn't leave my mouth.

I've stood on both sides of the classroom before
but this time, unsure of what to say
I closed my eyes.

Old memories of studying under the burning sun
staved off only by the cool shade of the tabaldi trees
outside our homes competed in my mind with recent days spent climbing
the white stone steps of my university.

Such a stranger I felt to my own life
visitor of both worlds, settler of none.

In that moment, I pushed back against the decades
that pressed down on my shoulders and the shoulders of those before me,
I peeled away the weight of oppression,
unwrapped entire layers of grief,

I unpacked and unlearned until I could see the girl I once was
staring straight up at me from another life,
And I looked past her to see the little girls who were looking up at me there,
from that roofless classroom in the middle of that town beyond the hills of Al Fashir

Is this what it means to be human? To have a second chance at life in the ones that follow?
to make mistakes so that the younger ones don't have to?
To feel that hope is lost only to discover that it lies dormant, resting,
waiting for the moment we dare to acknowledge her?

*This is an excerpt of the original poem written for Bazaar. To read the full version,
visit www.harpersbazaar.com/uk.*



*Kudzanai-Violet
Hwami's 'Dance of
Many Hands' (2017)*

KUDZANAI-VIOLET HWAMI The genre-defying artist

Although Kudzanai-Violet Hwami will not graduate from the Ruskin School of Art in Oxford until 2021, she is already exhibiting her paintings internationally. Last year, the artist returned from representing Zimbabwe at the Venice Biennale, and she used a recent residency in her native country to challenge traditional African hostility to LGBT art. It has been a whirlwind few years, but Hwami is taking it all in her stride. 'Sometimes my partner accuses me of not celebrating anything because I just say, "Well, that's great" and move on,' she tells me, smiling.

Hwami, who has been based in the UK since she was 17, creates large-scale collages on paper or canvas made from photographs of herself and her family, compiling them digitally and then overpainting them with vivid streaks of colour. As a young artist finding her own voice, she is determined to resist being tied to any particular school. 'It's not just part of a feminist or a black-art movement – it's

more than that,' she says of her work, which touches on diverse themes including sexuality, gender and spirituality. 'How can anyone create something new if there's a preconceived notion that because you're this or that, you're more likely to make art about identity? I'm a black lesbian woman and with those three things, there's already pressure from all sides.'

Not that this will prevent her from thriving creatively; Hwami is brimming with ideas for how she can make a difference back in Zimbabwe, where she dreams of creating spaces to bring communities together, whether running workshops, opening an art school or even building a skate park for young people in urban neighbourhoods. For now, however, she is concentrating on making her bold, deeply personal paintings here in the UK. 'I think it's wonderful when artists create work that truly reflects them,' she says. 'That way, it will always survive.' MEG HONIGMANN

LUCY SHEA The sustainability strategist

'The biggest challenge we have to face as a species is the climate crisis, and we're at a crossroads: either we deny what's happening or we make radical change,' says Lucy Shea. As the group CEO of Futerra, an international creative agency that collaborates with businesses on sustainability programmes, Shea is working to ensure that we have both the ambition and the tools in place to preserve our planet. 'There's this whole doom narrative springing up, but we should see 2020 as the start of a decade of hope,' she says. 'We have all the solutions within our grasp – we just need to really sell them in.'

Shea has an impressive track record when it comes to selling in big ideas. Since joining Futerra in 2003, she has helped launch the world's first awards ceremony for ethical fashion, spearheaded the move towards clothes swapping by coining the concept of 'swishing', and been a founder member of the UN's Sustainable Lifestyles Taskforce. Most recently, she chaired a discussion at the Climate Change Conference in Madrid about progress on the UN's



Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action, which aims to reduce the sector's carbon emissions by 30 per cent before 2030.

Having supported clients from the global luxury conglomerate Kering to Tommy Hilfinger and L'Oréal, Shea understands the need to combine research with what she calls 'the magic of creative.' For Formula One, she oversaw an investigation that showed car engines accounted for just 0.7 per cent of its emissions, with the majority coming from the logistics around its events. This helped trigger a radical overhaul of its activity at race tracks, including waste reduction, the elimination of single-use plastics and carbon off-setting, as well as partnerships with road-vehicle manufacturers to develop zero-carbon engines that run on synthetic fuels. 'We realised that F1's cars represent very little of its carbon footprint, but 100 per cent of its "brainprint" – the huge impact it has on the driving habits of its fans,' she explains.

The F1 project is just one way in which Shea is rewriting the narrative around environmental progress. 'It takes courage to change your business model – you need a clear plan and a guarantee your consumers will buy into it,' she says. 'My job is to help brands be braver.' FRANCES HEDGES



*Maria Raga
photographed at
Depop's Shoreditch
headquarters*

MARIA RAGA The digital disruptor

More than 15 million people in 147 countries buy and sell their second-hand clothes through the London-based app Depop – and 90 per cent of them are under 25. 'Generation Z represents the world's largest consumer group,' says the company's CEO Maria Raga, who is now overseeing growth into the US and Asia. 'They are optimistic, entrepreneurial and the future of fashion.' The app has generated £380 million in sales since its launch in 2011 – success that Raga attributes to her customers' environmentally conscious, inherently sociable outlook. 'What sets us apart from other e-commerce platforms is that we're a real community, with users who inspire one another,' she says. 'Our mission is to empower creative minds to change the industry for ever.' KIM PARKER

EMMA HARDY

*Emily Eavis at
the Glastonbury
Stone Circle on
Worthy Farm,
Somerset*

EMILY EAVIS

The music mastermind

When Glastonbury Festival launched in 1970 at Worthy Farm, there was an ox roast, a performance by Marc Bolan's T Rex and free milk included in the £1 ticket price. Almost 50 years on, the event is nothing short of a cultural phenomenon, attracting the world's best bands, hip-hop and pop stars, and more than 200,000 revellers annually. This modern incarnation is spearheaded by Emily Eavis, the youngest daughter of Michael, Glastonbury's founder. 'There's an element of care and love that only exists here,' says Eavis, who sees herself as a custodian of the festival's original ethos. 'I think it's because the farm has been in our family for generations, and is our home.' She is a vocal advocate of equal representation across the stages, and consistently champions an environmental and charitable agenda. Last year, David Attenborough took to the Pyramid Stage to praise the decision to ban plastic bottles from the site. 'That

was my main personal mission,' says Eavis. 'The task seemed insurmountable. But when people say something's impossible, that's my biggest motivator. This year, we're going to take it a step further.'

Eavis is no stranger to challenges. After Jay-Z was announced as a headliner in 2008, she was heavily criticised for inviting a hip-hop act, and in 2015, she even received death threats for booking Kanye West. 'Being at the centre of a media storm was a massive learning curve,' she says. 'It toughened me up. I was prepared for failure. I had wanted to do something radical, and in the end, Jay-Z's set was so inspiring and breathed new life into the festival. That was a real turning point.' She experienced another backlash when Stormzy was announced last year, but was again vindicated after his groundbreaking performance.

Paul McCartney and Diana Ross are headlining for Glastonbury's 50th anniversary, and Taylor Swift will be the closing act. 'Funnily enough, my dad has always been a massive fan of hers,' says Eavis, who tells me that Swift was the first performer to confirm. 'She's the biggest pop star on the planet. It's important to push the event forward. To open our doors to a different audience.' HL

Eva Franch i
Gilbert at the
Architectural
Association
in Bloomsbury



EVA FRANCH I GILBERT
The political architect

'I am very keen on expanding the definition of architecture,' says Eva Franch i Gilbert, the first female director of the Architectural Association, a school that counts Zaha Hadid and Richard Rogers among its alumni. The Catalanian force of energy has been at the helm for just over 18 months, and is already revolutionising the way we teach and use architecture. Her innovations have included funding a full scholarship and introducing seminars on 'forensic architecture', a new discipline that explores how our built environment influences human activity. She is redefining the architectural canon, calling into question the emphasis on a few landmark designs, and instead focusing on what she calls 'the 99 per cent' – those buildings that the majority of the world's population live in and around. 'Architecture is not just about nice façades – it's political,' she says. 'It solidifies structures of power, and is one of the greatest influences on the way humans interact. Once you understand that, it's a tool for change.' CHARLOTTE BROOK

EMMA HARDY

TABITHA GOLDSTAUB
The AI advocate

Tabitha Goldstaub wants everyone to talk to robots. 'Seriously,' she says, laughing. 'Most of us carry a virtual assistant with us already, but we're not making use of its artificial intelligence. Start seeing what it's like to ask it to turn on the music instead of doing it yourself. Get used to how the technology works, because that way it won't just "happen" to you one day.'

A tech evangelist, Goldstaub studied graphic design and advertising before working for a digital video-distribution company. While there, the CEO tasked her with automating some of the business' processes using AI, and she realised it was set to change not just this particular microcosm, but all of our worlds. She then launched the online AI-based platform CognitionX, which uses knowledge-sharing tools to guide decision-making; it was so successful that it also spawned an annual festival of ideas, CogX, which brings together government delegates, industry leaders and academics to discuss how we can harness the power of technology in sectors from healthcare to the environment. 'We're looking at using AI in medicine to help diagnose patients and monitor their symptoms,' explains Goldstaub. 'And it's crucial to tackling climate change – it can do everything from separating rubbish to predicting forest fires.'

As the chair of the government's AI Council, Goldstaub is determined to help the UK stay ahead of the game. 'China and the US are putting a lot of funding into this area, but we are very well-positioned here because of the geographical proximity of talent and clients,' she says. 'Look at the British fintech sector: we've got all our start-ups on the doorsteps of our big banks and universities – that's a magic potion for innovation. But we have to be aware of the ethical considerations too, because the last generation of technology went unvetted. We should be developing the next set of structures for robust, responsible technology right now.'

Goldstaub believes in addressing fears head-on, whether by being alert to the motivations of the companies using our data or tackling in-built prejudices in AI applications. 'The good news is that the dark underbelly of this world is being exposed more quickly every day,' she says. 'For instance, when Amazon created a recruitment tool that was biased against women, it got caught before it could even be released.'

Retraining and upskilling this generation is vital to ensure no one is left behind; fortunately, many traditionally female skills – teamwork, empathy, creative thinking – are integral to the development of AI. 'The voice of the user is so important – that's why we want women who are writers, historians or designers to get involved, not just tech people,' says Goldstaub. 'We need to decide what kind of society we want *before* we design the technology to build it – and that's a role for everyone.' FH



THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHS: STELLA PICTURES; OPPOSITE: HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY AMY BRANDON



NOËLLA COURSARIS MUSUNKA
The entrepreneurial educator

'It's not about helping or aiding; it's about encouraging independence,' says the model and philanthropist Noëlla Coursaris Musunka, who founded the non-profit organisation Malaika in 2007 to progress the development of her home country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.



Malaika was inspired by Noëlla's mother, who was forced to send her five-year-old daughter away after the sudden death of her husband left her without the financial resources to raise a child alone. Noëlla went to live with one of her aunts in Belgium, and later with another in Switzerland; when she returned to the Congo at the age of 18, she was shocked by the poor conditions her mother was living in. 'All of her hopes were laid on me,' she says.

Noëlla studied for a degree in business management, and soon afterwards, a friend entered her into a modelling competition where she was chosen as the face of Agent Provocateur, going on to front campaigns for Max Factor and La Mer. Determined to make her mother proud and to give back to her country, she used this international platform to help launch Malaika; her first mission was to build a well to enable the construction of a school in the Congolese village of Kalebuka, which at the time had no water or electricity. Since then, the charity has overseen the creation of 19 wells, serving 35,000 people, as well as opening a community centre in Kalebuka, where adults can gain literacy, farming and sewing skills.

The Malaika school now educates 346 girls between the ages of five and 18, providing a free curriculum that includes music, sport, art, computing and leadership lessons, as well as supplying food and uniforms. Such opportunity for education is scarce in the Congo, especially for girls. 'They are very shy and unconfident, entering an amazing environment where they are nurtured. Their lives change,' says Noëlla. By raising their aspirations, she aims to empower the girls and safeguard them from the risk of early pregnancy, instead offering them the chance to pursue careers and, in turn, give back to their own communities. 'They're going to dream of being a scientist, a pilot, an engineer, a designer – of everything they want in life.' BROOKE THEIS

SUPRIYA LELE
The fashion iconoclast

Since graduating from the Royal College of Art in 2016 and founding her eponymous label, the designer Supriya Lele – the daughter of Indian doctors who emigrated to the West Midlands – has been making waves in the fashion industry with her dynamic designs. Working with a predominantly female team, Lele blends her Asian heritage and British identity in a sensitive, and sometimes provocative, way. ‘I’m unpacking certain codes that I’m familiar with, reworking them and playing with that tension,’ she says. ‘I want to create a modern, feminine dialogue between the two.’ Her innovative take on traditional styles – whether the draping of a sari reimagined as a sheer chiffon slip or a traditional Madras check interpreted in neon – has helped to make her womenswear brand a bestseller at Dover Street Market, flying the flag for a generation of designers whose work explores culture, individuality and what it means to belong.

‘The process can be challenging, as it comes from such a personal point of view and things have to feel right,’ she says. ‘At the end of the day, it’s part of me.’ LUCY HALFHEAD



Supriya Lele and three looks for her S/S 20 show

GALA GORDON & ISABELLA MACPHERSON
The pioneering producers

‘To change people’s minds, to inspire and communicate.’ This is the philosophy behind Platform Presents, a not-for-profit production company established by the actress Gala Gordon and the producer Isabella Macpherson, after they met at a film screening in 2016.

With a passion for producing superbly written, meaningful scripts, the pair aim to recognise and nurture emerging writers, actors and directors, particularly championing female-led stories. This has involved building projects from the ground up, starting with material that is ‘slightly raw and unpolished’, says Gordon. ‘We’re part of every single moment in the journey, from it just being a kernel of an idea to seeing it on-screen or performed in front of an audience of 800,’ she explains.

For those whose talent is spotted by Platform Presents, the possibilities multiply, as the success of the company’s 2018 project *Blueberry Toast* attests. The play was performed at the Soho Theatre, and its creator Mary Laws is now a writer for the gripping HBO comedy-drama series *Succession*. Gordon and Macpherson also work to expand the output of professionals with manifold talents, such as the actress Tuppence Middleton, whose script for the short film *Four* they recently turned into a production starring Juliet Stevenson (it has since been screened at festivals). ‘We have a chance to create spaces for women writers where they haven’t existed before,’ says Macpherson. ‘That’s important, because men have had those opportunities for a really long time.’

The duo host an annual poetry gala to raise funds for their Playwright’s Prize, taking place this year on 9 February. Held at the Savoy Theatre and directed by Gemma Arterton, it is a far cry from the first gala in 2017, hosted in a church seating 250 people. The 2020 event will see stars of the stage and screen, including Chiwetel Ejiofor, Dianna Agron and Joely Richardson, read an array of classic and contemporary poetry, with profits going to support the discovery of diverse and dynamic talent. ‘It’s such a massive thing as a woman, particularly at a young age, to suddenly feel like somebody believes in you,’ says Gordon. ‘Your life can really change.’ Thanks to Platform Presents, the future of the arts is changing, too. BT □

THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPH: WILL GRUNDY; OPPOSITE: HAIR BY JOSH KNIGHT AT CAREN, USING BUMBLE AND BUMBLE; MAKE-UP BY AMY BRANDON; MACPHERSON WEARS EDELINE LEE; GORDON WEARS BELLA FREUD

Gala Gordon (left) and Isabella Macpherson at the Savoy Theatre

