

Press release
Monday 13 November

Material Power: Palestinian Embroidery

24 November 2023 – 7 April 2024

An exhibition exploring the historical life and contemporary significance of Palestinian embroidered craft.



The Whitworth presents *Material Power: Palestinian Embroidery*, an exhibition exploring the historical life and contemporary significance of Palestinian embroidered craft. This ancient practice is characterised by exceptional beauty and intricacy – some of the finest dresses, known as *thobes*, carry over 200,000 stitches. It remains an important living tradition and the most prominent cultural material of Palestine today. More than 40 dresses and other embroidered objects, from the Whitworth's collection and loaned from important collections in Jordan, Jerusalem and the West Bank, will be on display for the first time in the UK.

The exhibition will map Palestinian embroidery's evolution over the past century: from rich village tradition, transformed by the advent of modernity, to its politicisation and critical re-interpretation by contemporary artists. Based on research by the exhibition's curator Rachel Dedman, *Material Power* will explore the ways in which embroidery embodies female labour and resilience and reflects pivotal moments in Palestine's history.

Material Power will offer audiences in Britain, for the first time in more than 30 years, an opportunity to engage with Palestinian cultural heritage through the intimate lens of clothing. The exhibition will further be enriched by rarely seen archival material and works by contemporary artists including Mona Hatoum, Khalil Rabah, Mounira Al Solh, Aya Haidar, Majd Abdel-Hamid and Maeve Brennan.

the Whitworth

Textiles have been a major part of the Whitworth's collection since the gallery first opened. The Whitworth is home to an internationally significant collection of around 25,000 dress and textile objects from across the world that range in date from the third century AD to the present, including embroidery from Palestine and the surrounding region. The gallery has a long history of exploring lived experience through our exhibitions which draw from international textile collections. *Material Power* offers a unique opportunity to focus on the lives and experiences of women in Palestine through these intimate embroideries.

Notes to Editors

For all PRESS information, images and interview requests please contact, the press team at: whitworthpress@manchester.ac.uk

Image credit: *Detail of dress from Beit Dajan*, 1930s from the collection of George M. Al-Ama © the Whitworth, The University of Manchester. Photography by Ruth Wedgbury.

Material Power: Palestinian Embroidery has been organised by The Whitworth, The University of Manchester in collaboration with Kettle's Yard, The University of Cambridge, where it was on display from 8 July – 29 October 2023.

The Whitworth continues its programme and activities to promote understanding and provide a space for reflection and community during this difficult time. The University of Manchester and University of Manchester Students' Union is providing support and assistance to anyone in our university community affected by the ongoing situation in Israel and Gaza region. [More information can be found here.](#)

Material Power: Palestinian Embroidery has been generously supported by The Orange Tree Trust.

The exhibition at the Whitworth will be accompanied by Dedman's 2016 book, *At the Seams: A Political History of Palestinian Embroidery*, published by the Palestinian Museum.

About the curator Rachel Dedman

Rachel Dedman is the Curator of Contemporary Art from the Middle East at the V&A, London, where she curates the triennial Jameel Prize exhibition and runs residency and commissioning programmes for artists. From 2013-19, Rachel was an independent curator based in Beirut, Lebanon, where she curated exhibitions for institutions across the Middle East and Europe. 'Material Power' reworks the content, structure and curatorial methodology of 'Labour of Love: New Approaches to Palestinian Embroidery' and 'At the Seams: A Political History of Palestinian Embroidery', curated by Dedman for the Palestinian Museum in 2016 and 2018. These projects and their publications involved years of research and fieldwork in Palestine, Lebanon and Jordan, and close collaboration with collectors and embroiderers.

the Whitworth

About the Whitworth

The Whitworth is proudly part of The University of Manchester, operating as a convening space between the University and the people of the city. It was founded in 1889 as The Whitworth Institute and Park in memory of the industrialist Sir Joseph Whitworth for "the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester" and continues this mission today in new contexts. The gallery is home to the collection of over 60,000 works of art, textiles, and wallpaper and is driven by a mission to work with communities to use art for positive social change, and actively address what matters most in people's lives. This vision has been developed as part of an international dialogue about how to evolve and adapt museums to a constantly changing world.

www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth

Gallery opening times:

Tuesday to Sunday 10am-5pm, Thursday late opening until 9pm

With thanks to our official paint sponsor [Little Greene](#)

About Kettle's Yard

Kettle's Yard, part of the University of Cambridge, is a leading gallery and unique house with a remarkable collection of 20th-century art. Its founders Jim and Helen Ede believed in art's ability to transform lives, a vision upheld today through critically acclaimed exhibitions, pioneering community and learning programmes, and research of the highest quality. Our aim is to offer an inspiring and enriching experience for everyone who visits. Find out more and get involved at www.kettlesyard.co.uk.

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