

the **Whitworth**

Press release

21 May 2026

The Labour of Care

1 August 2026 – 29 August 2027

An exhibition dedicated to centring the voices and experiences of midwives and maternity healthcare professionals



The Whitworth presents *The Labour of Care*, co-created and shaped by the experiences of midwives and maternity healthcare professionals working across the UK.

Developed in partnership with Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust (MFT) the exhibition presents artworks to explore care, labour and emotional resilience at the frontline of maternal health, providing insights into the realities of working in maternity services at a time of growing pressure on the profession.

Developed from *Still Care*, a pioneering programme of artist-led workshops that began at the Whitworth in 2023, the exhibition creates space for maternity staff to pause, reflect and reconnect beyond the demands of the clinical environment.

Through creative practice and collective dialogue, midwives and maternity healthcare professionals have shaped an exhibition that speaks powerfully to the humanity, complexity and emotional intensity of caring for others. Their stories and perspectives form the heart of the exhibition.

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A Still Care workshop participant shared: *"Still Care has given me space to pause in a way I didn't realise I needed. Across the workshops I felt heard, held and able to restore parts of myself through creativity, reflection and connection with others who truly 'get it'. There have been moments of laughter, tears and honesty throughout, and being part of the programme has reminded me how important it is for those caring for others to also feel cared for themselves."*

The exhibition features new artworks created by healthcare professionals in their workshop sessions presented side-by-side with selected works from the Whitworth's internationally renowned collection, placing participants lived experiences in dialogue with artists including Marina Abramović and L.S. Lowry. Presented together, they create a rich visual and emotionally resonant landscape that considers care as both an intimate act and a wider social condition.

Paintings by Ghislaine Howard and Caroline Walker explore the experience of childbirth and everyday acts of care. Poet Courtney Conrad's new commission *On Shift* (2024), from the Birth Rites Collection, is developed from interviews with Black midwives reflecting on preterm birth, receives its Manchester premiere, amplifying voices too often marginalised within public discourse.

Lucy Turner, Project Producer, said: *"Over the past three years we have worked with more than a hundred midwives and maternity healthcare professionals, each sharing a similar story. A story of passion for their roles alongside feelings of emotional exhaustion, burnout and overwhelm. This exhibition creates space for those voices to be heard, not through statistics or headlines, but through real lived-experiences and human stories. We have not arrived at this conversation lightly; Still Care has grown directly from over seven years of listening, learning and working alongside families through the Still Parents project, and this exhibition is a reflection of the Whitworth's ongoing commitment to creating space for difficult but important conversations to be held with honesty, sensitivity and care."*

The exhibition arrives at a critical moment for maternity services in the UK. With nearly half of midwives reporting frequent burnout, and widespread concerns over staffing levels, *The Labour of Care* acknowledges the urgent realities shaping the profession today. Situated directly opposite St Mary's Hospital in Manchester, one of the UK's largest maternity centres, the Whitworth becomes both a site of reflection and a space of sanctuary.

Victoria Holmes, Bereavement Care Midwifery Matron, MFT said: *"Being part of Still Care has been incredibly meaningful, both professionally and personally. Working in partnership I've seen how important it is to create spaces where midwives and maternity healthcare professionals can pause, reflect and feel heard, but I was also surprised by how much I gained from the workshops myself during a period of transition in my own life and career." The Labour of Care captures the emotional realities of working within maternity services with such honesty and compassion. The provision of compassionate and effective care depends on the health and wellbeing of the professionals delivering it and I hope those who visit the exhibition come away with a deeper understanding of the people behind the profession."*

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This exhibition reflects the Whitworth's ambition to champion unheard voices, foster wellbeing through creativity and connection, and be a place where people can engage with programmes that reflect their experiences and communities.

The Labour of Care builds on the success of the Whitworth's award-winning *Still Parents: Life After Baby Loss*, continuing its commitment to connecting art with lived experience and pressing social issues. Through this exhibition, the gallery reaffirms its role as a civic space - one that not only presents art, but actively participates in conversations about care, community and collective wellbeing.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

For press information, images and interviews: Melissa McFarlane, Communications Manager, whitworthpress@manchester.ac.uk and Emily Gates, Rees & Co Emily.gates@reesandco.com

Image credit

Caroline Walker, Study for Ultrasound, 2021. Oil on paper © Caroline Walker. Courtesy the Artist; GRIMM, Amsterdam/New York/London; and Ingleby Gallery, Edinburgh. Photo: Peter Mallet.

Works included in exhibition

Ruth Horrell, Lizzie McLoughlin, Ghislaine Howard, Heather Spears and Caroline Walker.

Exhibition credit

This exhibition is created by the Whitworth and developed in partnership with Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust (MFT)

Supporters

Supported by Rayne Foundation, Friends of the Whitworth and Sands, in partnership with Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust (MFT)

Public Programme

A public programme will accompany this exhibition, further details about this will be shared on the Whitworth website soon. Discover more about the [Still Care project](#)

Listings information

The Labour of Care

1 August 2026 – 29 August 2027

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Free and open to all

About artist and works mentioned in release

This work is informed by information published on the Royal College of Midwives website: <https://rcm.org.uk/news/2025/12/rcm-highlights-midwives-are-exhausted-overstretched-and-burnt-out/>

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Courtney Conrad's series of works have been commissioned by Tommy's National Centre for Preterm Birth Research, Imperial College London and the Birth Rites Collection.

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. Founded in 1889 for "the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester" it continues this mission today in new contexts. The gallery, its park and gardens are home to the collection of over 60,000 works of art, textiles, sculptures and wallpapers and provides a platform for artists from around the world. The Whitworth is driven by a vision to actively seek and manifest connections between art, creativity, and their role in developing a more resilient and caring society through its exhibitions and award-winning civic engagement programme.
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