the Whitworth

PRESS RELEASE

Bagri Commission

# Gulnur Mukazhanova
# The Manifold of Memory

**20 November 2026 – 16 May 2027**

Inspired by the Whitworth's textile collection, Gulnur Mukazhanova creates a monumental installation exploring memory, identity and the loss of meaning in the modern world



*Installation view Bagri Commission, Gulnur Mukazhanova, The Manifold of Memory (2026). The Whitworth, The University of Manchester. Photo by Michael Pollard.*

The Whitworth and the Bagri Foundation present *The Bagri Commission: Gulnur Mukazhanova, The Manifold of Memory*, a major new joint commission by internationally acclaimed Kazakh artist Gulnur Mukazhanova (b.1984).

Born in Kazakhstan and now based in Berlin, Mukazhanova is recognised for her use of felt, a material deeply rooted in the nomadic cultures of the Central Asian steppe. For centuries, felt has been used to create homes, clothing and everyday objects across this region. In Mukazhanova's hands, it becomes both material and language; a medium through which histories, identities and inherited knowledge can be explored.

Developed through extensive research into the Whitworth's textile collection, the exhibition explores what happens when symbols lose their meaning and traditions become detached from their origins.

Mukazhanova spent time examining objects in the Whitworth collection spanning centuries of textile history – from early Egyptian fabrics to nineteenth-century industrial textiles. Through this research, she became fascinated by a recurring phenomenon; how motifs that once carried spiritual, symbolic and communal meaning gradually became repetitive decoration.

For the artist, this shift reflects a broader human experience of modernity, where industrialisation, globalisation and migration can distance people from cultural origins, collective memory and a sense of belonging.

Commissioned in partnership with the Bagri Foundation as their 2026 Bagri Commission, *The Manifold of Memory* takes the form of a monumental textile installation made from felt, silk and vintage fabrics. Stretching approximately 16 metres across the gallery wall and rising five metres high, the work grows from a single textile fragment inspired by Mukazhanova's research into the Whitworth's collection.

Expanded into a vast landscape of colour, texture and pattern, it invites visitors to slow down and look closely. From a distance, the installation appears as one sweeping composition; up close, intricate details, layered forms and subtle traces of hand-making gradually reveal themselves, reflecting the artist's interest in loss, transformation and the shifting meanings carried by material culture.

Drawing on her experiences growing up in rural Kazakhstan following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mukazhanova's work considers how identities are shaped, fragmented and preserved through material culture. While rooted in Central Asian cultures and histories, the exhibition speaks to broader contemporary concerns about displacement, globalisation, cultural homogenisation and the search for meaning in an increasingly disconnected world.

The exhibition will also reflect on questions that resonate deeply with Manchester's own history as a global centre of textile production. Creating connections between handmade traditions and industrial manufacture across the globe, Mukazhanova asks what is gained — and what is lost — when materials, motifs and cultural knowledge are reproduced at scale.

Alongside the installation, a selection of historic textiles from the Whitworth's collection will reveal the sources that inspired the project, creating a dialogue between past and present, handmade and industrial, memory and modernity.

The exhibition marks the first Bagri Commission at the Whitworth, launching a new partnership with the Bagri Foundation. This initiative sees both organisations jointly select an ambitious contemporary artist to create a new installation informed by Asian cultural histories.

**Gulnur Mukazhanova, said:** “Memory does not disappear, it survives within materials. Textiles carry traces of human experience, they hold gestures, histories, movements, and fragments of identities that continue to transform over time. My work explores how memories are preserved, altered, and reimagined across generations and cultures. I do not

see tradition as something fixed or belonging only to the past, but as a living process, something that moves, transforms, and becoming a new meanings.

Through felt and textile forms, I explore the space between personal and collective memory, between what is remembered and what is forgotten. Felt, for me, is not only traditional material , but a way of thinking of a form of knowledge that exists before words, connecting us to ancestry, place, and embodied experience."

**Sook-Kyung Lee, Director of the Whitworth and Professor of Curatorial Practices at The University of Manchester, said:** "Gulnur Mukazhanova's commission brings the material traditions of Central Asia into dialogue with Manchester's textile heritage, revealing unexpected connections across cultures, histories and geographies. Her unique artistic vision shed new light on the Whitworth's historic collection, resulting in a thought-provoking exchange.

This is precisely the kind of transcultural practice that defines the Whitworth today; using contemporary art to deepen our understanding of the past while opening new perspectives on the present. We are delighted to launch the first Bagri Commission at the Whitworth through this exceptional project."

**Chelsea Pettitt, Director of Bagri Foundation, said:** "We're thrilled to see the 2026 Bagri Commission unfold through the lens of an artist like Gulnur Mukazhanova, whose work encapsulates a key element of what drove us to establish the commission; to create space for excellence in Asian art that bridges the traditional and the contemporary.

Partnering with the Whitworth for this commission has been fruitful in creating an opportunity for a trailblazing artist from Asia to present a thought-provoking new installation inspired by one of the UK's best textile collections.

We're excited for audiences to experience the stunning work and to see a new perspective on Central Asian cultural heritage, discovering its shared globalised connections to the UK."

**Valentin Diakonov, Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Whitworth, said:** "By transforming a traditional practice into a universal statement on the spiritual disarray of modernity, Gulnur Mukazhanova points to a desirable future where human making is attuned to intimate interactions with the environment."

For all press enquiries please contact Rees & Co:
Emily Gates | emily.gates@reesandco.com | +44 (0)20 3137 8776 | +44(0)7827 779170

**Notes to Editors**

**About the artist**

Gulnur Mukazhanova (b.1984, Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan) is a Berlin-based Kazakh artist whose work explores identity, memory and cultural transformation through the medium of felt. Born shortly before the collapse of the Soviet Union, she studied at the Kazakh National Academy of Arts in Almaty, before continuing her education at the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee.

Drawing on the textile traditions of the Central Asian steppe, Mukazhanova combines felt, silk and other natural materials to create immersive installations that examine cultural heritage, migration and the shifting meanings of tradition in an increasingly globalised world. Her practice connects the deep histories of textile-making with contemporary questions of belonging, identity and collective memory.

Mukazhanova has exhibited internationally, including at the Venice Biennale, and is recognised for expanding the possibilities of felt as both a sculptural material and a language for exploring the relationship between people, place and history.

**About the Bagri Foundation**

The Bagri Foundation, established in 1990, is a family foundation driven by curiosity. Through grants and strategic partnerships, the Foundation champions unique ideas that weave the traditional and the contemporary of Asian culture. Recent projects include *Myths, Dreams and New Realities* featuring 13 emerging Asian artists co-curated with the Saatchi Gallery; a co-production, *Thikra: Night of Remembering,* by Akram Khan Company; and the first retrospective outside of India of Arpita Singh's work at the Serpentine Gallery, London. Additionally, the family continue to support education, relief work, development and healthcare.

**About the Whitworth**

Established in 1889, the Whitworth is one of the largest and most significant public galleries in the UK. Its founding mission to serve 'the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester' remains at the heart of its ethos. The gallery has also developed a reputation for its national and transnational exhibitions programmes including touring projects. We work in partnership to initiate and deliver major exhibitions, underlining our commitment to present and create new knowledge around the work of international artists and makers. The Whitworth holds an outstanding and internationally renowned collection of over 62,000 works of art, textiles and wallpapers, which form the core of our changing displays. The gallery also presents a dynamic programme of displays and engagement projects that connect audiences with the most current social and political issues of today.

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