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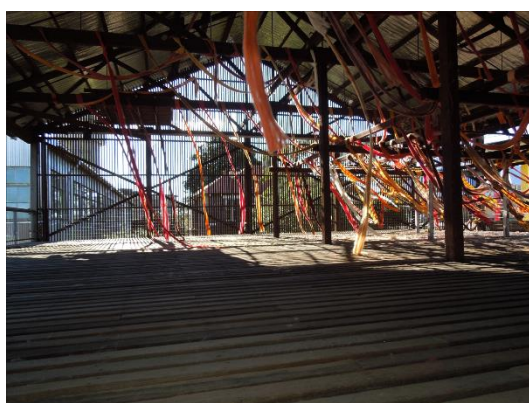
barbican

Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art

Barbican Art Gallery

13 February – 26 May 2024

#Unravel @barbicancentre



L: Teresa Margolles, *american Juju for the Tapestry of Truth*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich / Paris. **R:** Cecilia Vicuña, *Quipu Austral*, 2012. © Cecilia Vicuña, courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul, and London, photo: Cecilia Vicuña.

Textiles weave through our everyday lives yet remain one of the most underexamined mediums in art history and contemporary practice. The universality of fabric has made it a potent messenger across global contexts – whether communicating personal stories or conveying hidden messages. Embedded in a single thread is the material history of the medium, revealing ideas relating to gender, labour, value, ecology, ancestral knowledge, and histories of oppression, extraction and trade.

From 13 February 2024, ***Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art*** shines a light on artists from the 1960s to today who have explored the transformative and subversive potential of textiles, harnessing the medium to ask charged questions about power: who holds it, and how can it be challenged and reclaimed? Spanning intimate hand-crafted pieces to large-scale sculptural installations, this major exhibition brings together over 100 artworks by 50 international practitioners. Drawn to the tactile processes of stitching, weaving, braiding, beading and knotting, these artists have embraced fibre and thread to tell stories that challenge power structures, transgress boundaries and reimagine the world around them.

Organised thematically, with artists placed in intergenerational and transcultural dialogues, *Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art* considers the various ways in which artists have used textiles to speak to stories of marginalisation and exclusion, as well as emancipatory joy and transcendence. The show's earliest works were created in the 1960s, when many artists were pushing the sculptural boundaries of the medium and challenging the limiting parameters of 'fine art' and 'craft'. Expanding across both time and geography, the exhibition presents six themes – **'Subversive Stitch'**, **'Fabric of Everyday Life'**, **'Borderlands'**, **'Bearing Witness'**, **'Wound and Repair'** and **'Ancestral Threads'** – which together explore the role of textiles in artistic practices that challenge dominant narratives,

push up against regimes of power, and manifest an enduring spirit of hope.

Shanay Jhaveri, Head of Visual Arts, Barbican, said: *“We are delighted to be opening our 2024 season with Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art. This truly expansive show weaves together an international, intergenerational array of artists and artworks, bound by their engagement with the practice of textiles – at once intimate and capacious in its reach across cultures, geographies, and ages. From the minutiae of daily life to the global movement of peoples, the vast scope of this exhibition speaks to the international ambitions of the Barbican Visual Arts programme, as well as to our work closer to home, where the threads of our arts offering unspool beyond the confines of the gallery walls and into our public spaces.”*

Guided by artworks that are radical in their form and their politics, the exhibition sets out to ask why textiles are a particularly resonant medium to address ideas of gender and sexuality, the movement and displacement of people, and histories of extraction and violence, as well as understanding the world through connecting with ancestral practices and communing with nature. The exhibited artworks encompass a wide range of forms, scales and techniques, drawing on historic forms of making as well as new and experimental processes.

Works on display include:

- Embroidered blankets by **Feliciano Centurión** who – harnessing the association of textile as a gendered, feminine craft – embroidered poetic reflections onto found fabrics to process his HIV diagnosis in 1993.
- An intimate installation of 64 items of clothing wrapped in unspooled yarn by **Sheila Hicks**, a leader of the fibre art movement in the 1960s whose work challenged the prevailing hierarchy between art and craft at the time.
- **T. Vinoja**'s delicately handstitched aerial landscapes inspired by testimonies from the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009) that use the language of maps and borders to explore ideas such as loss, mourning and forced displacement.
- Two tapestries and films by **Teresa Margolles** whose collaboratively-made, handstitched works commemorate the lives of individuals – Eric Garner in Staten Island and Jadeth Rosano López in Panama City – who were brutally killed. Each work was placed in contact with the body of the deceased, harnessing the ability of textiles to carry memory.
- **Harmony Hammond**'s large-scale work *Bandaged Grid #9* in which cloths and rags are applied to the surface of reclaimed canvas to suggest bandages over seeping wounds, reflecting on the way artists have used textiles to express healing and reparation.
- **Yinka Shonibare CBE RA**'s figurative sculpture *Boy On A Globe* which, using his signature Dutch Wax fabrics, addresses race, class and the legacy of imperialism by reflecting on colonial trade and the entangled economic histories embedded within fabrics.
- Larger-than-life, deity-like macramé sculptures by **Mrinalini Mukherjee**, which surge up from the ground as though organic beings. Drawing on nature and myriad artistic

references, their knotted, rippling forms confound expectations of textiles as two-dimensional.

- **Cecilia Vicuña's** spatial installation *Quipu Austral* which, drawing on the history of textiles as ancient systems of communication, links the oppression of pre-colonial cultures to the devastation of the earth's natural resources.

Participating artists:

Pacita Abad (The Philippines / USA), **Magdalena Abakanowicz** (Poland), **Igshaan Adams** (South Africa), **Ghada Amer** (Egypt/France), **Arpilleristas** (Chile), **Mercedes Azpilicueta** (Argentina), **Yto Barrada** (Morocco), **Kevin Beasley** (USA), **Sanford Biggers** (USA), **Louise Bourgeois** (France / USA), **Diedrick Brackens** (USA), **Jagoda Buić** (Croatia), **Margarita Cabrera** (Mexico / USA), **Feliciano Centurión** (Paraguay), **Judy Chicago** (USA), **Myrlande Constant** (Haiti), **Cian Dayrit** (The Philippines), **Tracey Emin** (UK), **Jeffrey Gibson** (USA), **Antonio Jose Guzman** and **Iva Jankovic** (The Netherlands / Panama and The Netherlands / Yugoslavia), **Harmony Hammond** (USA), **Sheila Hicks** (USA), **Nicholas Hlobo** (South Africa), **Yee I-Lann** (Malaysia), **Kimsooja** (South Korea), **Acaye Kerunen** (Uganda), **José Leonilson** (Brazil), **Tau Lewis** (Canada), **Ibrahim Mahama** (Ghana), **Teresa Margolles** (Mexico), **Georgina Maxim** (Zimbabwe), **Małgorzata Mirga-Tas** (Poland), **Mrinalini Mukherjee** (India), **Violeta Parra** (Chile), **Solange Pessoa** (Brazil), **Loretta Pettway** (Gee's Bend) (USA), **Antonio Pichillá Quiacaín** (Guatemala), **Faith Ringgold** (USA), **LJ Roberts** (USA), **Zamthingla Ruivah** (India), **Hannah Ryggen** (Norway), **Tschabalala Self** (USA), **Yinka Shonibare CBE RA** (UK), **Mounira Al Solh** (Lebanon), **Angela Su** (Hong Kong), **Lenore Tawney** (USA), **T. Vinoja** (Sri Lanka), **Cecilia Vicuña** (Chile), **Billie Zangewa** (Malawi / South Africa), and **Sarah Zapata** (Peru / USA).

Some works have been withdrawn from *Unravel* as an act of solidarity with Palestine in response to the Barbican's decision not to host the London Review of Books (LRB) Winter Lecture Series. The list of artists can be found on the [Unravel webpage](#). Our statement about the LRB Winter Lecture Series can be found [here](#).

This exhibition is co-curated by the Barbican, London and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, where it will be on show from 14 September 2024 to 5 January 2025.

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Notes to Editors

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Press images available online

The image sheet is available on the [press room](#). Please contact the press team for high-res images.

Barbican Press Room

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communication team's contact details are listed on our website at <https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room/>

Press Tickets

All press tickets will need to be booked 48 hours in advance by contacting a member of the Barbican's Visual Arts Press team. Our inbox is monitored Monday to Friday, 10am-6pm. Please let us know if you have any access requirements.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Barbican Art Gallery, Silk Street, London, EC2Y 8DS

www.barbican.org.uk

Tickets

Tickets on sale [here](#).

Pay What You Can

Our Pay What You Can visits take place every Thursday from 5 – 8pm.

Select the price you can pay and enjoy the exhibition. If you're able to pay the standard ticket price, you'll be helping to support our Visual Arts programme.

Opening Hours

Saturday – Wednesday 10am - 6pm (last entry 5pm)

Thursday – Friday 10am - 8pm (last entry 7pm)

Bank holidays: Please check the website as opening times vary.

Exhibition

Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art is at Barbican Art Gallery from 13 February to 29 May 2024. The exhibition then tours to Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam from 14 September 2024 to 5 January 2025. The exhibition is curated by Wells Fray-Smith (Barbican), Lotte Johnson (Barbican) and Amanda Pinatih (Stedelijk), with Diego Chocano (Barbican). The advisor for the exhibition is Julia Bryan-Wilson. Architectural design is by Studio Donna van Milligen van Bielke & Ars de Vries Architecten and graphic design by Atelier Dyakova.

Book

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue co-published with Prestel, featuring original essays by Julia Bryan-Wilson, Miguel A. López and Denise Ferriera da Silva, and texts by Michelle Adler, Diego Chocano, Wells Fray-Smith, Simone de Haan, Lotte Johnson and Amanda Pinatih. Designed by Atelier Dyakova. Price: £39.99

Events

A rich events programme of talks, tours and workshops accompanies *Unravel*. To coincide with the exhibition, British lifestyle brand [TOAST](#) will take over the Barbican Foyer (25 March – 3 April 2024) with a pop-up presenting a 7-piece repurposed collection by award-winning

British circular fashion designer, Phoebe English, alongside a series of interdisciplinary workshops led by textile artists such as Bridget Harvey and Ekta Kaul. Check the website for more information: www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery

Barbican Art Gallery

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

About the Barbican

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We are the home of the London Symphony Orchestra, and a London base of the Royal Shakespeare Company. We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other partners and associates: the Academy of Ancient Music, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Boy Blue, Britten Sinfonia, Cheek by Jowl, Drum Works, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and We Are Parable.

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