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The Old Ways

Sun 22 Mar – Sat 16 May, 2026
Barbican Cinema
https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2026/series/the-old-ways

Images available to download here

This Spring, Barbican Cinema weaves its curatorial magic in **The Old Ways**, an abundant three-month season of films celebrating artisans and artists, worldwide craftsmanship and all-things handmade, plus opportunities to make and repair, stitch and knit.

Opening in March with the London Premiere of ***A Century of Sound,*** which reveals the meticulously crafted interiors of Tokyo's legendary 'listening cafés', the season continues through to May with a tapestry of rarely seen documentaries and shorts, including programmes for Families and Seniors.

Gloria Costa Rica 2024, Dir Cloe Velarde Raffo

Highlights include a celebration of renowned Sami textile artist and activist **Britta Marakatt-Labba**, who will attend the UK premiere of the award-winning documentary film ***Historjá – Stitches for Sapmí*** narrated by the artist, and directed by Thomas Jackson. In the London premiere of ***Shades of Indigo***, introduced by **Dr Linda Brassington**, **Chair of the Textile Society**, the farmers, artisans and scientists tell of keeping the craft of indigo dyeing alive in contemporary Japan. Audiences are invited to bring along their yarn and

needles to the bespoke-curated shorts programme **Pattern Testing** featuring textile-based animated films (this programme is repeated at a special edition of the weekly **Senior Community Screenings** which take place every Monday morning). And finally, the screening of ***The Colour of Ink*** a captivating portrait of artisanal ink-maker **Jason Logan**, will be introduced by **Soraya Syed**, British Islamic calligrapher who also appears in the film**.**

The season includes two programmes of documentary shorts: **In the Making** invites audiences to look at the importance of craft to the lives of artisans from around the world, while **Yarn Stories** explores the many crafts connected to yarn. Ahead of Yarn Stories audiences can also learn the art of how to repair damaged but much-loved textiles in a special **Textile Repair Café** run by Islington Fixers and TRAID.

Families can busy their fingers at two **Family Film Club** screenings celebrating hand-made animation - **Woolly Animations**, a wool-tastic programme of short animations for fledgling cinemagoers and crafters, and ***The Songbird's Secret*** an enchanting feature-length animation made entirely from cut paper**.** Both these FFC screenings will be preceded by crafty workshops and followed by the Barbican Library's Saturday afternoon Monster Art Club.

Barbican Library also hosts a regular Craft and Conversation group on Monday mornings, welcoming knitters to learn and share tips. The Library holds an extensive collection of art catalogues and resources on all kinds of crafts.

Tamara Anderson, Barbican Cinema Curator, says: "*I'm immensely proud of this season which takes us to meet the people worldwide upholding cultural legacies, and inside their practice. In this era of disconnect – of digital experiences and mass production – many of us are thinking again about what we value. This might mean a renewed appreciation of craftsmanship, of things with a tangible connection to a person and place, embodying skill, dedication and deep understanding. I hope The Old Ways will create a space for audiences to find renewed appreciation of the practises and the people*".

The Old Ways is part of London Craft Week (11-17 May 2026), a city-wide festival celebrating exceptional craftsmanship, across multiple sectors and disciplines, from around the world.

PROGRAMME:

A Century in Sound **PG* + ScreenTalk with director Nick Dwyer in conversation with Becca Voelcker**
Japan/Sweden 2024, Dirs Nick Dwyer, Tuataroa Rapana Neill, 106 min
Sun 22 Mar, 3.30pm, Cinema 1
Thu 2 Apr, 6.10pm (film only, no ScreenTalk), Cinema 2

Japan has a tradition of Onagku Kissa: specialised cafes where people can come and listen reverently to the music they love. Directors Nick Dwyer and Tu Neill take us to three, specialising in classical music, jazz, and rock, to meet the music devotees who run and frequent them. The history of these spaces, spanning the post-war period to the late 1980s, is also the story of Japan itself in these decades. In their meticulous focus on sound quality, they are also testament to immense dedication and very specific, well-

executed craftmanship: one of the café owners has even hand-carved elements of his café's sound system.

London Premiere in partnership with Doc'n Roll Film Festival

Becca Voelcker is a writer and historian of art, film, and visual culture. Much of her work considers senses of place. After living in Tokyo as a young adult, she moved to the USA to complete a PhD at Harvard University. She is currently a Lecturer at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Shades of Indigo [U*] **+ Introduction** with **Dr Linda Brassington**, **Chair of the Textile Society**
Japan 2024, Dir Shigeru Yoshida, 117 min
Sat 28 Mar, 3.30pm
Cinema 1

Indigo is a natural dye derived from the leaves of certain plants. In Japan, indigo production dates back to the sixth century; in recent times, however, the natural product has been superseded by a cheap-to-produce synthetic option.

Shigeru Yoshida's documentary ***Shades of Indigo*** honours the people, and their passion, that are preserving this disappearing craft. Among the participants is young artist and dyer Ryuta Sasaki who makes indigo from scratch, according to a strict regime. As a fermented product, indigo is alive and can change and mutate; Ryuta ministers to his vats with the same loving devotion as do many their sourdough starters.

Introducing the film and discussing the significance of indigo in Japanese culture, is **Dr Linda Brassington**, Chair of the Textile Society, who features in the film and is author of *Indigo and Resist Dyeing*

Pattern Testing [12A*] **+ Knit-along**
Total programme running-time: 62 mins (approx.)
Sat 11 Apr, 2.30pm
Cinema 2

This programme of bespoke-curated shorts will be screened with lights dimmed to allow knitters, crocheters and needleworkers of all skill levels to both enjoy the films and carry on crafting without difficulty.

The programme celebrates the use of textile in film including felted wool in animation which has enjoyed a resurgence in recent years (including in work for adult audiences that is anything but cutesy), an embroidered music video; a cross-stitched fable; a woven tale of a woman who went into the forest (and perhaps never came back); and a colourful experimental work that 'plays' with threads.

Film programme:
Soft Plants
Belgium 2008, Dir Emma de Swaef, 11 min

The daydreams of a live-action office worker, rendered in felted wool. The worker's woolly avatar awakens deep in the forest, and has a sequence of encounters, good and bad –

adventures that touch on yearnings for softness and companionship, and feelings of desolation and alienation.

Whose Woods Are These
US 2024, Dir Kate Nartker, 6 min

An ominous, fairy-tale feeling pervades this animation, created entirely from textiles and inspired by the story of the director's great-grandmother. A woman goes into the forest, and perhaps never comes back.

The Island of Us
Taiwan 2022, Dir Yu Yu, 19 min

If David Lynch had ever got into felting, perhaps he'd have come up with something like this, a nightmarish, near-unintelligible story set on a woolly island made from and inhabited by all kinds of strange, toothy, one-eyed felt creatures.

Criss Cross
Slovakia/Czech Republic 2023, Dirs Nina Rybárová, Tomáš Rybár, 8 min

An animated fable combining a video games aesthetic with cross stitch embroidery.

Fadenspiele I (Toying with String I)
Germany 1999, Dirs Ute Aurand, Detel Aurand, 8 min

This gorgeous stop-motion animation 'plays' with a variety of natural artefacts – pebbles, seedheads, rosehips, sticks – and lengths of yarn, sometimes animated against sold-colour backgrounds, sometimes outdoors. Like an abstract painting come to life.

Dialtone
US 2023, Dir Cole Montminy, 5 min

Two fuzzy needle-felt characters – neighbours, in fact – run around embracing, fighting and answering telephones. This is the realm of the soft and the woolly, but in a wholly unexpected register, both unsettling and grotesque.

Lake Monsters
Canada 2018, Dir Hiné Mizushima, 3 min

An embroidered music video featuring a form of Japanese embroidery called Kogin, a folk craft originating in the north of Japan. The director used special Japanese Kogin fabrics and threads which she hand-dyed to the desired colours.

Enough
UK 2018, Dir Anna Mantzaris, 2 min

This funny, relatable, animation features felted-wool characters who in various ways have had 'enough' and begin acting on their impulses. A glorious ode to moments of lost self-control.

Historjá – Stitches for Sapmi [PG*] **+ ScreenTalk with Britta Marakatt-Labba, director Thomas Jackson and Barbican Curator Lotte Johnson**

Sweden 2022, Dir Thomas Jackson, 88 min
UK premiere
Fri 17 Apr, 6.30pm
Cinema 1

World renowned artist **Britta Marakatt-Labba** was born to a Sámi family of reindeer herders in Northern Sweden. For decades, her needle and thread have represented the vast, calm snowscapes of her northern homeland and carried stories of Sámi mythology, childhood memories and history – political, and domestic.

Taking as its starting-point the huge 24-metre-long embroidery *Historjá* (2003–2007), the piece that first introduced her to international audiences, this film brings us into Britta's world, and allows us to hear directly from the artist as she battles for her culture against the threats of climate change.

This event is made possible thanks to the Swedish Embassy.

Thomas Jackson has directed several of the most acclaimed documentary films coming out of Sweden in the last few years, including *Foodies – The Culinary Jetset* (2014); *Kartellen - Lys Upp Skuggorna* (2016; and *Sök Och Du Skall Finna* (2017). His films have screened at festivals such as Berlin International Film Festival, Toronto Hot Docs, CPH:DOX and Tokyo Film Festival.

The Colour of Ink [U*] **+ Introduction with Soraya Syed, British Islamic calligrapher**
Canada 2022, Dir Brian D Johnson, 105 min
Wed 22 Apr, 8.30pm
Cinema 1

Based in Toronto, Canada, **Jason Logan** makes ink with ingredients foraged from the wild: weeds, berries, bark, flowers, rocks, rust. A former illustrator himself, he supplies his custom-made inks to cartoonists, calligraphers and tattoo artists across the world.
As well as showing the artists receiving and using these precious vials, the film follows Jason on selected field trips, sourcing materials from landscapes ranging from the wildfire-charred hills of Malibu to a white-marble quarry in Tuscany. Like a good wine, his ink has a "terroir": it tells the story of the place it comes from.

A wonderfully tactile film *The Colour of Ink* also confronts us with the effort behind craftmanship and the making of art.

British Islamic calligrapher **Soraya Syed** who features in the film, will introduce the UK premiere of the film.

Soraya Syed is a classically trained calligrapher and artist dedicated to bringing the ancient art of Arabic calligraphy into the 21st century through film, dance, VR, and three-dimensional sculptures.

Family Film Club
Woolly Animations [U*] **+ Pre-screening Activity + Post-screening Barbican Library Monster Art Club**
Film programme running-time: 42 mins approx
Sat 9 May, 11am
Cinema 2

A Family Film Club special for the young crafters among us! Featuring a cast of needle-felt characters (including the *cutest* poisonous mushroom), dancing balls of wool and knitting sheep, wool is the star of the morning's animation programme.

Before the screening, families can drop into the Beech Street Cinema Café from 10am – when **Clara Peterson** will be hosting a creative activity, using wool and assorted textiles.

And for crafters looking to update their materials, a 'craft swap' table will be hosted in the cinema foyer between 11.45 - 2pm. Fabric scraps, unused balls of wool, thread or spare haberdashery can be swapped for something else on the table. Full details on the website. And later the same day families can join Barbican Library's Monster Art Club from 2-3.30pm where the session will be themed around the morning's film programme. All materials provided.

Film programme:
Two Balls of Wool
Czechoslovakia 1962, Dir Hermína Týrlová, 8 min

On the table in front of the director's own cottage, the top of a sewing basket pops open and two balls of wool jump out, followed by a pincushion, snapping scissors and more.

Battery Daddy
South Korea 2021, Dir Seung-bae Jeo, 6 min

When a trip to the countryside goes awry, it's up to Battery Daddy to save the day.

Hush Hush Little Bear
Latvia 2022, Dir Māra Liniņa, 3 min, Latvian with English subtitles

This delightful musical animation features knitting sheep, mummy and daddy bears foraging for honey and berries, and two naughty baby bears who get tangled up in a ball of yarn.

Battery Mummy
South Korea 2023, Dir Seung-bae Jeon, 8 min

Battery Mummy is always busy at the nursery where she works. But one day she's needed like never before: while everyone's napping, the Christmas tree has caught fire.

Bobel's Kitchen
Belgium 2024, Dir Fiona Rolland, 10 min

Poisonous mushroom Bobel dreams of having a food stall at his local farmer's market but has not counted on the prejudices of the villagers.

Desi Oon
India 2025, Dir Suresh Eriyat, 7 min, Hindi with English subtitles

For little ones, a toe-tapping treat featuring a singing ball of wool; for their grown-ups, this musical animation tells the story of Indian Deccani sheep, local shepherding traditions, and the sacred role of wool in daily life – all threatened by imports and the arrival of nasty acrylic.

Age suggestion: 5+

This screening is for families to attend as a group. Adults (over 18s) can only enter auditorium if they are bringing a child. Children (under 18s) can only attend if accompanied by an adult. Babies 18 months and under can be brought in on adults' laps, but children over 18 months need a seat purchased for them.

10am – Drop-in activity, Cinema Café
11am – Screening, Cinema 2
2-3.30pm – Monster Art Club, Barbican Library, Level 2

Senior Community Screening
Pattern Testing [12A*] **+ Knit-along**
Mon 11 May 11am
Cinema 2

Repeat Senior Community Screening of the shorts programme **Pattern Testing and Knit-along**, detailed above. Senior Community Screenings take place every Monday at 11am for 60+ cinema goers.

In the Making [U*]
Film programme running-time 107 mins approx.
Wed 13 May, 6.20pm
Cinema 1

This hand-picked selection of rare documentary shorts goes beyond the "how to" to say something about what the craft means to the practitioner, and also to the community. From glassblowing and candle-making factories, huge outdoor indigo dyeing vats and small home workshops these films tell of love, identity and resilience.

A New Use
Japan/US 2018, Dir Monika Uchiyama, 24 min

This observational documentary takes us into the Tokyo wax factory belonging to the director's family. The least 'romantic' workshop imaginable, the space is cramped and dusty, but at the workbench and outside, where grandma is wrapping the finished product, there is an incredible sense of camaraderie and shared purpose.

Fuego en el Cielo
Mexico 2022, Dir Mariano Rentería Garnica, 13 min

In the Purépecha community of Paracho, Mexico, the Torres family meet to build hot air balloons. Hand-made from paper, these balloons can take weeks to make, and are up, up and gone in minutes. The family speak movingly of the craft as cultural expression, and something that holds them together as a unit.

Primitive
Mexico/Argentina 2023, Dir Azucena Losana, 5 min

The most experimental film in the line-up, this is a portrait of Doña Vivi in her home and

ceremonial beeswax candle factory, in Teotitlán, Oaxaca, Mexico.

The Hatmaker
Finland 2023, Dirs Mari Koppanen, Katri Ilona Koppanen, Kari Ahotupa, 11 min

In the small mountain village of Corund in Transylvania, a rare mushroom craft has been passed down through generations. There, handmade objects (including hats) are made from a leather-like material processed from tinder fungus. But now, as ageing artisans pass away, this precious 'amadou' tradition is at risk of disappearing.

The New Indigo Wave
Puerto Rico 2025 Dir Karla Claudio 12 min

In the Oaxacan town Niltepec indigo has been processed from the jiquilite plant for more than a century. Now a new, young generation of dyers is recovering this knowledge and trying to make a living, while young local makers are using the dye, in preference to the synthetic alternative, as an endorsement of local heritage.

Gods of Clay
US 2024, Dir Amit Bhattacharya, 15 min

A documentary short looking at the art and artists of Kumortuli, a community in Kolkata, India who use traditional methods to craft large, near life-size clay statues for religious ceremonies.

Ikebana
Canada 2019, Dir Alejandro Yoshizawa, 5 min

A Japanese-Canadian pensioner talks about her past, her Japanese identity, and how practising Ikebana (Japanese flower arranging) has helped her reconnect with a heritage she had wanted, or was encouraged, to leave behind.

You May Laugh at Me a Little
Canada 2024, Dir Yuula Benivolski, 22 min

In Hebron, glassblower Abu Waheed has worked in the family shop since childhood. His family's glassmaking history dates back to the thirteenth century, when glass factories dominated Hebron's old city. Now his is the last such shop.

Family Film Club
The Songbird's Secret **U* + Pre-screening Activity + Post-screening Barbican Library Monster Club**
France 2025, Dir Antoine Lanciaux, 77 min, in French with English subtitles (read aloud for children via headset)
Age suggestion: 5+
Sat 16 May 11am
Cinema 2

The first feature-length film using cut paper animation in more than 30 years, *The Songbird's Secret* tells the story of Lucie who lives most of the year with her dad but moves for the summer to be with her archaeologist mum. While her mum works on a dig, she leaves

Lucie to her own devices, to explore the countryside, make new friends – including a pair of songbirds – and, perhaps, uncover some hidden family secrets.

The screening will be followed by a short film about how the film was made, the techniques involved and interviews with the filmmakers who worked on the film.

Before the screening, families can drop into the Beech Street Cinema Café from 9.45am – when **Yuriko Nakano** from the Barbican Library will help families create origami inspired by today's film. And later the same day families can join Barbican Library's Monster Art Club from 2-3.30pm where the session will be themed around the morning's film programme. All materials provided.

This screening is for families to attend as a group. Adults (over 18s) can only enter auditorium if they are bringing a child. Children (under 18s) can only attend if accompanied by an adult. Babies 18 months and under can be brought in on adults' laps, but children over 18 months need a seat purchased for them.

9:45am – Drop-in activity, Cinema Café
11am – Screening, Cinema 2
2-3.30pm – Monster Art Club, Barbican Library

The Old Ways: Yarn Stories PG* **+ Repair Café**
Programme running-time: 95 mins approx.
Sat 16 May, 4pm & 6.10pm
Cinema 3

This collection of short documentaries focusses on the practitioners – from fabric dyers, weavers, quilters, lacemakers to embroiderers - and what their craft means to them. Ahead of the screening, from 1pm the Cinema Café will be transformed into a Textile Repair Café hosted by the Islington Fixers and TRAID, who will have expert visible menders and fixing equipment on hand to help with mending damaged but much-loved textiles.

Programme:
A Colour I Named Blue
Japan 2025, Dir Sybilla Patrizia, 16 min

This beautiful documentary takes us into a Japanese indigo dyeing studio to interview dyer Watanabe, and his colour-blind assistant Kato. Both offer wonderfully personal accounts of their decision to work in the profession, and about the revelations it has brought them about the nature of colour itself.

Gloria
Costa Rica 2024, Dir Cloe Velarde Raffo, 12 min

Hear from Gloria, an indigenous woman from the Q'ero community in Peru, widely known as the last living direct descendants of the Incas. Gloria unfolds her family circumstances, her thoughts on her cultural heritage, and her goals for the future, which include opening a store selling hand-woven alpaca wool garments of her own design.

To Your Hands
Cyprus/US 2025, Dir Ana Mouyis, 11 min

This experimental animated documentary weaves together the stories of Cypriots who continue the local traditions of hand-made lace and hand-made halloumi. Both traditions have been passed down for generations on either side of the border, making the film a reflection on how shared culture endures beyond political divides.

Prairie Flowers
Mexico 2021, Dir Mariana X Rivera, 19 min

In the Amuzgo town of Suljaa', Mexico, traditional textile knowledge is handed down and possessed by women. Also passed on, generation to generation, is male violence against women. After one recent femicide, a group of women weavers from the Prairie Flowers co-operative create a ritual to honour the victim's life, and the textile legacy they have received from their female ancestors.

The Embroiderers
Palestine 2016, Dir Maeve Brennan, 23 min

Embroidered crafts in Palestine have a long-established history and are a crucial part of Palestine's cultural heritage. This film interviews five women embroiderers, to understand the meaning the craft has for them, its political significance, and how it endures as a living legacy – something passed down the generations, but that also changes in response to the contemporary political and social landscape.

While I Yet Live
US 2018, Dir Maris Curran, 14 min

Gee's Bend is an isolated hamlet encircled by the Alabama River, with a population of around 200 people, most of them African American. For decades, as glimpsed in this documentary, the tight-knit community has been known for its quilting culture. The film follows five quilters as they sew, sing and reflect on the ongoing struggle for civil rights and their love of community and craft.

ENDS

For further information contact:

Sarah Harvey, **Barbican Cinema Press Consultant**
sarah@sarahharveypublicity.co.uk / 07958 597 426

Images available to download here

Box office: www.barbican.org.uk

Standard: £14
Members: £11.20
Concessions: £11
Under 18s: £6
Young Barbican: £6
Senior Community Screening: £6
Family Film Club: £2.50 under 18s / £5 over 18s.

Barbican press room
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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're proud to be the home of the London Symphony Orchestra, our Resident Orchestra, and a London base for the Royal Shakespeare Company. We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our Artistic Associates the Academy of Ancient Music, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Boy Blue, Darbar Arts, Cultural and Heritage Trust, and Serious, who produce the EFG London Jazz Festival, alongside other associates and partners including Doc'n Roll Film Festival, London Palestine Film Festival, and Trafalgar Theatre Productions.

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