



50th Anniversary Conference

*Shaping Culture  
through Dress and Textiles*

at

University of Brighton

25-26 September 2025

# Schedule

## Thursday 25 September

University of Brighton, [Sallis Benney Theatre](#)

**10:00 Arrival**

**10:15-10:30 Welcome and introduction of poster presenters**

**10:30-11:30 Object histories**

- *Stories from the Stores: online research in practice*  
Shelley Tobin, National Trust
- *Dressed for the Field: uncovering the history of women's hockey clothing using The Hockey Museum collection*  
Emmy Sale, PhD student at De Montfort University / The Hockey Museum
- *Reading the Fragment: Chinese Silk Scraps and Their British Afterlives*  
Shilei Zeng, Victoria and Albert Museum

**11:30-11:45 Q&A discussion**

**11:45-12:15 Refreshment break**

**12:15-13:15 Community**

- *The Fanciest-Dressed Town in Britain: Costume Traditions in Lewes Bonfire*  
Janet Aspley, Independent
- *Woven Resistance: Archiving Labour, Memory, and Identity in The Balaramapuram Kasavu Project*  
Lakshmi Madhavan, Artist
- *Making Mischievous in Museums: working with communities*  
Amy de la Haye, London College of Fashion

**13:15-13:30 Q&A discussion**

**13:30-14:30 Lunch (+ time to view & discuss posters)**

**14:30-15:30 Keynote: Zenzie Tinker**

**15:30-17:00 Optional visits:** [Zenzie Tinker Studio](#); University of Brighton handling collection ([Moulsecoomb](#)); University of Brighton [Design Archive](#); self-led tour of The Lanes; self-led visit to [Brighton Museum & Art Gallery](#).

**17:00-18:00 DATS Annual General Meeting (online only)**

**18:30-20:30 Conference dinner** (pre-booked, at own expense) at [Permit Room](#), Brighton

# Schedule

## Friday 26 September

University of Brighton, [Sallis Benney Theatre](#)

**10:00-10:15 Arrivals**

**10:15-11:15 Keynote: Professor Emerita Lou Taylor**

**11:15-11:45 Refreshments**

**11:45-12:45 Cultural framing**

- *Some of the last Iraqi Jews: Capturing oral histories to diversify museum narratives*  
Jennifer Parker, Fashion Museum Bath
- *Does It Fit? Eastern Dress, Western Norms — Rethinking Cultural Framing in Conservation*  
Viviane Wei-An Chen, Textile Conservator
- *‘A Lack of Hard Evidence’: Queering the Lives and Work of the Modernist Textile Designers Hilary Bourne (1909-2004) and Barbara Allen (1903-1972)*  
Dr Jane Hattrick, Independent

**12:45-13:00 Q&A discussion**

**13:00-13:45 Lunch (+ time to view & discuss posters)**

**13:45-15:30 Archiving**

- *Against the Finished Product: On Archiving Process*  
Dr Lauren Downing Peters, Columbia College Chicago
- *Thickening the Archive: A critical analysis of fat representation within UK museum fashion collections and recommendations towards a fat liberatory collecting practice*  
Larissa Jennings, Independent
- *Not Just Bona Rags: Rethinking Menswear and Collecting through Vince Man’s Shop*  
Prof. Andrew Groves and Dr Danielle Sprecher, University of Westminster
- *Locating Men’s Underwear*  
Shaun Cole, University of Southampton

**15:10-15:25 Q&A Discussion**

**15:25-15:30 Closing remarks**

**15:30-16:00 Refreshments & depart**

# Abstracts & biographies in schedule order

## Panel 1: Object histories

### *Stories from the Stores-online research in practice*

#### Shelley Tobin, The National Trust

This paper considers the growing availability of online data and how we can apply it in research to help boost layers of interpretation and the understanding of the objects in our care.

Often large groups of family clothing have landed in collections, and some of these objects have been donated with very little information about their wearers or makers; research into businesses and makers can give us some insight into these objects but we are still left with little understanding of the social background of the people who originally wore the clothing. Can the use of tools like Ancestry and the British Newspaper Archive help to provide this? Should we be reconstructing donor family histories, and if so when? How valuable can these be for casting new light on objects that might otherwise sit neglected in the stores? How useful of these approaches compared with traditional research methods, and what are the pitfalls?

At a time when many of us are considering renewing our Museums Association accreditation and reviewing collecting policies, or working through the legal ownership and provenance of our collections, a little research can go a long way to validating an objects place in our collections.

The paper will be illustrated with case studies from work carried out with the collections at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter and Killerton (National Trust) focusing in particular on the Cotton family collection which covers the period 1800 to 1890.

**Biography:** Shelley Tobin has worked for the National Trust for over 30 years as Costume Curator at Killerton, which houses the largest dress collection cared for by the National Trust. She is also an Assistant Curator at RAMM, managing the dress and textile collection.

*Dressed for the Field:*  
*uncovering the history of women's hockey clothing using The Hockey Museum collection*

**Emmy Sale, PhD student at De Montfort University / The Hockey Museum**

'Now is the time when the hockey garments of last season – looking sadly forlorn with the creases of winter and the stains of last season's mud- are hastily searched for,' wrote The Ladies' Field in October 1902. This description resonates with the material lives of red skirts, tunics, and bifurcated garments preserved in the stores of The Hockey Museum. These under-researched garments provide a rare and tactile foundation for investigating the clothing worn by women hockey players from the 1880s to present.

Studying surviving uniforms reveals not only what women wore and when, but also the enduring pressures, resistance and negotiations around clothing in women's sporting lives. A material culture approach is used to examine how fabric, fastenings, wear, and mud stains speak to bodily movement, gendered expectations, and sporting identities.

This paper reflects on the practical and interpretive challenges of researching historical sportswear within a sport museum collection. It adopts an approach which bridges sport history and dress history to uncover the relationship between clothing, sporting bodies and society.

**Biography:** Emmy Sale is a first year Midlands4Cities (AHRC) funded Collaborative Doctoral Award student at De Montfort University and working in collaboration with The Hockey Museum. Her thesis is titled 'Dressed for the Field: Gender, Bodies, and Society through the Material Culture of Field Hockey, 1880 to the present.'

Image credit: The Hockey Museum | WKNHM.2022.1304.P.001



## *Reading the Fragment: Chinese Silk Scraps and Their British Afterlives*

**Shilei Zeng, Victoria and Albert Museum**

This paper explores how fragmented 18th-century Chinese export silks, once vibrant components of British interiors and dress, continue to shape cultural narratives through their survival in museum collections. Although incomplete and often overlooked, these scraps reveal complex histories of reuse, preservation, and cultural value. The focal point is a silk fragment (V&A T.322-1977) from Osterley Park House, which was originally part of an ornate painted taffeta bedchamber set and later transferred to the V&A. Through its layered biography, from manufacture in China to domestic use in Britain and eventual institutional acquisition, this fragment reflects the material legacy of global exchange and British fascination with Chinese design. The paper considers how institutional practices, inventories, and collecting habits have shaped the fragment's interpretation, and how small textile remnants can illuminate broader narratives of transcultural trade, domestic life, and museum memory. By reading this fragment both as a physical object and as cultural evidence, the study proposes new ways of working with overlooked materials and recovering the histories embedded within textile fragments.

**Biography:** Shilei Zeng is an Assistant Curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum where she looks after objects include Chinese textiles and dresses. And she is also completing her PhD at King's College London on Silk in Sino-British History (1700-1800). As a cultural historian interested in textiles and global exchange, her research is deeply informed by both hands-on engagement with historical objects and extensive archival research.

## Panel 2: Community

### *The Fanciest-Dressed Town in Britain: Costume Traditions in Lewes Bonfire*

**Dr Janet Aspley, Independent**

Each November 5<sup>th</sup>, members of the seven Bonfire Societies of Lewes, East Sussex take to the town's narrow streets for a torchlit procession that culminates in the lighting of seven Bonfires, accompanied by as many spectacular pyrotechnic displays. Each Society has its own traditions of fancy dress costume that include Vikings, Celts, Tudors and Buccaneers, amongst many others. In this paper, I discuss Lewes Bonfire as a survival of the many carnivalesque events that took place in pre-industrial Britain and argue that costume traditions have enabled it to thrive into the twenty-first century. I also look at common practices of making and remaking in the creation of Bonfire costumes, enable a peek inside the Societies' annual costume competition and offer insights from my own making to discuss issues of authenticity in Lewes Bonfire costuming.

**Biography:** Janet Aspley holds a BA Hons in History from University of Cambridge and graduated from University of Brighton in 2020 with a PhD in History of Design. Her research looked at the role of western wear, and particularly of Nudie suits, in country music. She lives in Lewes, East Sussex, where she is an active member of Waterloo Bonfire Society.

***Woven Resistance:  
Archiving Labour, Memory, and Identity in The Balaramapuram Kasavu Project***

**Lakshmi Madhavan, Artist**

This presentation explores The Balaramapuram Kasavu Project — a large-scale artistic and community-led initiative that brings together over 3,500 weavers to co-create a 6,000-foot-long kasavu textile in Kerala, South India. Conceived as both a social and artistic intervention, the project activates kasavu — Kerala's iconic gold-bordered cotton weave, shaped by caste-structured labour, colonial textile trade, and regional ritual — as a living archive of collective memory.

Emerging from my own artistic practice rooted in feminist methodologies and long-term engagement with the Balaramapuram weaving community, the project examines how cloth can become a site of resistance, remembrance, and repair. It foregrounds the labouring body — the hands and rhythms of the weavers — as both subject and co-author in a collaborative process that reimagines the loom as an instrument of storytelling, performance, and cultural reclamation.

Through embedded fieldwork, intergenerational dialogue, and decolonial inquiry, my role as artist extends beyond authorship to facilitation — mediating between inherited practices and contemporary meaning-making. This presentation will weave together documentation, archival fragments, and reflective narration to consider how community-led material culture can disrupt dominant narratives and propose alternative futures rooted in care, continuity, and the embodied politics of cloth.

**Biography:** Lakshmi Madhavan is a textile artist working between Mumbai and Kerala. Her practice explores the entanglements of cloth and body through material culture, memory, and identity. She has exhibited at Rajiv Menon Contemporary (LA), Melbourne Museum (Melbourne), Kochi Biennale (Kerala), National Museum & Craft Museum (Delhi) among other institutions.



## ***Making Mischief in Museums: working with communities***

### **Amy de la Haye, London College of Fashion**

Amy de la Haye will reflect upon the specificities of her curatorial practices that have involved community participation. These include *Streetstyle: From Sidewalk to Catwalk* (V&A, 1994); *Cinderellas of the Soil and Gluck: Art & Identity* (Brighton Museum, 2009 and 2017); *Making Mischief: Folk Costume in Britain* (Compton Verney 2023, London College of Fashion 2024) and her current role as resident curator at London's Fashion Textile Museum. She will also discuss the vital role of community in securing and delivering National Lottery Heritage Fund funding bids, site specificities, dissemination and legacy.

**Biography:** Amy de la Haye is Professor of Dress History & Curatorship at LCF, associate exhibitions editor at SHOWstudio, resident curator at FTM and consultant curator for the Museum of British Folklore. Her most recent co-curated exhibitions *Ravishing: The Rose in Fashion* at FIT, New York (2022), *Wild & Cultivated: Fashioning the Rose* at London's Garden Museum (2023) and *Un/Common People: Folk Culture in Wessex* (touring, 2024-2026).

# Keynote

## *Reading the Damage: biography as dress through the eyes of a conservator*

*Zenzie Tinker ACR*

In her book, *All that Remains: A Life in Death*, the forensic anthropologist Sue Black states, 'forensic anthropologists reconstruct the life led, the journey itself, across the full spectrum of its duration. Our job is to reunite the identity constructed during life with what remains of the corporeal form in death.' [1]

This description could equally apply to the work of textile conservators who also attempt to understand the life lived of a mute subject, revealing the course of its existence and the identity of its owner. We sensitively gather the material evidence held in the seams and folds of garments alongside indicators of their design, manufacture, and use. We lay out this evidence and examine it alongside that of past repair, reuse, past restorations, and present-day conservation to try to understand the life and history of the object. Then through research, conservation and mounting we attempt to bring the garment back to life.

Conservators are in the unique and privileged position of being intimately drawn into the life and history of garments as we work absorbing through an osmosis-like process the biography of dress. Handling and conserving clothing worn by previous generations can feel like stepping through a portal where past lives feel present. Gathering and analysing the evidence we find, using scientific processes in collaboration with other experts, the process of conservation can add to the biography of dress and further our collective understanding of past wearers and makers of costume. As with forensic anthropologists, conservators try to leave as little evidence of our interventions as possible but however carefully we carry out our work, we too become part of the cycle of life of an historic garment, in effect part of its biography.

This paper, based on a yet to be published contribution to Martin Pel's new book, *Dress as Biography* (Bloomsbury Press) will examine the work of textile and dress conservators, and more specifically my studio's work over almost forty years in the field. Perhaps more than any other professional working with historic dress, it is the conservator who spends the most time examining and working with specific garments, often for hundreds of hours. From the initial assessment to the final display or storage solution, it is through the duration of this time and the intimate nature of our work that clothing reveals its life – its biography.

[1] *All that Remains: A Life in Death*, Sue Black, p. 5.

**Biography:** Zenzie Tinker ACR's conservation journey began in the early 1980's with a degree in History of Design specializing in textiles and dress followed by a five-year apprenticeship training in textile and tapestry conservation in London under Ksynia Marko. After many years as a museum-based conservator, she left the V&A in 2003 to establish her freelance business from home in Brighton soon moving to a dedicated studio. Zenzie Tinker Conservation has since grown into the largest privately run textile conservation practice in the UK, offering a wide range of conservation and display services as well as work placement and training opportunities for students of conservation and curatorship.

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**Conservator Zenzie Tinker undressing one of the Westminster Abbey Royal Funeral effigies, copyright Zenzie Tinker Conservation.**



**ZTC conservator Jamie Robinson examining a 19<sup>th</sup> C man's coat from Manchester Museums, copyright Zenzie Tinker Conservation.**



**ZTC conservator Natalia Zagorska-Thomas treating a 19<sup>th</sup> century Peranakan garment from The Peranakan Museum, Singapore, copyright Zenzie Tinker Conservation.**



**ZTC conservator Natalia Zagorska-Thomas treating the Charles II funeral effigy garter robes doublet from Westminster Abbey, Queen's Diamond Jubilee Galleries, copyright Zenzie Tinker Conservation.**

# Keynote

## *Stories told by textiles and clothes*

*Lou Taylor Professor Emerita*

**Biography:** Lou Taylor is Professor Emerita in Dress History at the University of Brighton, author, amongst other books, the Study of Dress History and Establishing Dress History 2010-12. Lou has been on the Steering Committee of the EU museum/university Group Apparences, Corps et Sociétés for the past 12 years and has been Chair of the EU ACORSO research Group 'Tailoring for Women: 1750-1930' for the past 6 years. See also in Martin Pel's Dress and Biography, Bloomsbury, forthcoming, a chapter : ' Pearl Binder, 1904-1990 – a biography of an individualist dresser, through her clothes.



Lou Taylor 2024. Image credit: Jasmine Gillanders.





**Rag Dump Dress, No. 408.8.** Button through, below knee length, dark gray cotton with small white repeat print. Front entirely patched whilst back is not. Probably mid-1930s, Normandy, France. Lois Davidson collection.  
Bought LT £25 June 2015. Image credit: Jasmine Gillanders.



**Liberty Dress, no 284. : 1976.** wool, label: "Hildebrand Fabric by Liberty of London Prints" and "Cresta", printed in yellow, blue, pink, orange flowers and green leaves on beige background. Hemline, cuffs and collar in striped fabric of same colours. Hildebrand fabric designed by Susan Collier and Sarah Campbell, dated by Liberty Archivist, Anna Baruma, to 1976; bought in Mind charity shop, St. James's St. Brighton by Lou Taylor, 1995. Image credit: Jasmine Gillanders.



**Evening Dress, no 508.** Couture made, eau de nil silk, strapless, DIOR, Spring 1964; silk shattered, bought by MA student on e-bay USA for £5.  
Fabric is totally shattered. Image credit: Jasmine Gillanders.



**A Collection of 8 assorted, commercially made and marketed 'Collectors' dolls, nos 568.1-8.** in shades of flesh coloured porcelain bisque, jointed, hand painted, modelled with slightly different faces. These are from the mass marketed 'Dolls of the World' Collectibles range, -produced by the huge international EAGLEMOSS COMPANY, in 1999 - a range of 80 nationalities of dolls - each one dressed in machine made 'national' dress, originally numbered and sold in blister packs along with a copy of the 'The Complete Collector's Guide to Dolls of the World' magazine, and sold for £4.50. Found as a group by LT in the Dog's Trust Charity shop, St. James Street, Brighton, Jan 8th 2023. Image credit: Jasmine Gillanders.

## Panel 3: Cultural framing

### *Some of the last Iraqi Jews: Capturing oral histories to diversify museum narratives*

#### Jennifer Parker, Fashion Museum Bath

Fashion Museum Bath is undertaking a major capital project involving the complete re-opening of the museum at a new site in the city of Bath. Diversifying the narratives told in the Museum is a critical part of this project. Central to this is expanding the knowledge held about the collection and making strategic acquisitions to ensure it's more representative of the world around us.

This presentation unpacks one strand of this work, through a case-study of a new acquisition of early to mid-20th century garments donated by a British family of Iraqi-Jewish heritage. Through oral history and object-focused analysis, the acquisition enabled an insight into the experiences and fashion choices of one of the world's oldest and most historically significant Jewish communities during a period of growing antisemitism across the Middle East. This paper explores the process of acquisition at the Fashion Museum Bath, the importance of collaboration with donors and robust cataloguing to represent cross-cultural narratives through the object's story. It will contextualise this acquisition as a moment in time, reflecting on its impact on the collection and the role of each generation in shaping museum narratives.

**Biography:** Jennifer Parker is an Assistant Curator at the Fashion Museum Bath and holds a master's degree in art history and museum curating from the University of Sussex. She previously worked for the National Trust at Stourhead in Wiltshire having transitioned from a 12-year career in travel and tourism.

*Does It Fit? Eastern Dress, Western Norms*  
— *Rethinking Cultural Framing in Conservation*

**Viviane Wei-An Chen, Textile Conservator**

Trained in Europe, with experience in the US, I spent 13 years working within Western conservation frameworks. Yet when I returned to work on two major projects in Taiwan—one for a private historical fashion collection and another in collaboration with the M+ Museum in Hong Kong—I found that many of the professional norms I had internalised did not align with local working conditions, institutional structures, or cultural expectations.

As someone native to East Asia but trained in the West, the experience of returning “home” required me to unlearn certain assumptions and reframe my practice—reversing not only methods, but mindset. This paper reflects on how I navigated those misalignments by adapting conservation methodologies to context, while maintaining professional integrity and international standards. Faced with limited equipment, sourcing challenges, a shortage of trained textile conservators, and condensed timelines, I had to rethink not just techniques but roles—taking on curatorial, logistical, and contractual responsibilities. COVID-19 restrictions further complicated the process, requiring development of installation and packing protocols for teams unfamiliar with textile handling.

These experiences call for rethinking “best practice”—not as a fixed, western-defined standard, but as a flexible, context-responsive process where cultural difference became an opportunity for innovation.

**Biography:** Viviane Wei-An Chen is a textile conservator based in Portugal and Taiwan. Formerly a fellow at The Met, she specialized in European costume and conservation. Her Work spans M+ museum, the V&A, and Musée des Arts Décoratifs Paris. She currently researches mounting methods for Asia flat garments on three-dimensional forms.

## ***‘A Lack of Hard Evidence’: Queering the Lives and Work of the Modernist Textile Designers Hilary Bourne (1909-2004) and Barbara Allen (1903-1972)***

**Dr Jane Hattrick, Independent**

The exhibition *Double Weave: Bourne and Allen’s Modernist Textiles* (16 September 2023 – 14 April 2024), at Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft in East Sussex, brought the woven textiles created by Hilary Bourne and her partner in life and work Barbara Allen back into view, assessing their legacy as modernist designers and hand-weavers, with an emphasis on them as a creative couple. It also offered up an opportunity to articulate what had necessarily remained unsaid about their relationship throughout their life together, and to represent the LGBTQIA+ women we hoped would visit the exhibition.

The journey towards contextualising Bourne and Allen’s textile practice in terms of their lesbian relationship, however, was not straight forward. Mid-way through preparing for the exhibition, the decision was made by the museum not to refer to Bourne and Allan as a couple in text panels, citing a ‘lack of hard evidence’, a common argument for perpetuating the erasure and loss of queer histories in museums, as rationale. Couple is a small, every-day word, nevertheless, using it to describe Hilary and Barbara’s 40 year relationship felt like a very real risk for the museum at that time in terms of family and visitor ‘sensitivities’, and the safety of staff within the context of increasing hostility towards LGBT peoples.

Jose Esteban Munoz writes that: ‘Queerness has an especially vexed relationship to evidence...’ and to document a queer past we should look to ephemeral evidence such as gesture, considering ‘queerness as trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumour’. (Esteban Munoz, 2019). Through this lens Hattrick’s paper revisits the difficult journey taken by the museum towards queering Bourne and Allen’s archive and creative output, and raises questions in terms of prioritising visitor’s and families’ sensitivities over the representation of minority groups, perpetuating the erasure of queer histories of design and consumption of dress and textiles.

**Biography:** In the course of her career at the University of Brighton and beyond, Dr Jane Hattrick continues to queer the archives of fashion and textile designers such as the couturier Norman Hartnell and textile designers Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher. Hattrick co-curated the exhibition *Double Weave: Bourne and Allen’s Modernist Textiles* (16 September 2023 – 14 April 2024), at Ditchling Museum of Art + Craft in East Sussex. She is currently an independent researcher living in Norwich.



## Panel 4: Archiving

### *Against the Finished Product: On Archiving Process*

**Dr Lauren Downing Peters & Dr Colbey Emmerson Reid, Columbia College Chicago**

What does it mean to value what fashion leaves behind? To destabilize the finished product? In this presentation, we introduce The Process Archive, an ongoing curatorial and pedagogical project that seeks to recenter value in fashion around ephemeral, discarded, and affective remnants of the design process. By building an archive of student-generated design materials, from muslin toiles to mind maps, this project challenges dominant models of fashion preservation and collection that privilege finished, pristine, and durable objects.

Drawing from Michael Thompson's Rubbish Theory and Marco Pecorari's recent work on fashion ephemera, we interrogate how objects shift between categories of transient and resilient, valueless and valuable. Through The Process Archive, we propose a counter-archive that foregrounds the imaginative and affective labor of the designer and materializes the liminal space between idea and object. In doing so, we pose key questions: What cultural work is performed by what we throw away? How might attention to design process extend our understanding of dress, labor, and material culture? And what are the stakes of preserving fashion's "rubbish"?

In this presentation, we will share methodology for constructing The Process Archive and consider its applications for museum and teaching collections invested in shaping more inclusive, dynamic, and processual understandings of fashion.

**Biographies:** Dr Lauren Downing Peters is Associate Professor of Fashion Studies and Director of the Fashion Study Collection at Columbia College Chicago. Her research explores the history of plus size fashion, 20th century American fashion, and sustainable fashion pedagogies. She is the author of *Fashion Before Plus-Size: Bodies, Bias, and the Birth of an Industry* (Bloomsbury 2023).

Dr Colbey Emmerson Reid is Professor of Fashion Studies and Director of the School of Fashion at Columbia College Chicago. Reid specializes in the theory of style and its impact on consumption, technology, and the posthuman. She is the author of *Designing the Domestic Posthuman* (Bloomsbury 2024).

# *Thickening the Archive: A critical analysis of fat representation within UK museum fashion collections and recommendations towards a fat liberatory collecting practice*

**Larissa Jennings, Independent**

This paper explores how UK museum fashion collections have historically excluded garments worn by fat women and the ongoing impact of these collecting practices. Defined here as women's garments with a fitted waist of 80cm or larger (UK size 16+), fat garments are significantly underrepresented, making up just 3–7% of the holdings in six major UK fashion collections: National Museums Scotland, National Museums Liverpool, The Harris, the V&A, Manchester Art Gallery, and London Museum.

As sites of meaning-making and authority, museum collections shape how audiences understand fashion history and idealised body norms. The absence of fat bodies from collections contributes to the marginalisation of fat people in public narratives of fashion and desirability.

This paper reflects on the cultural relevance of these missing garments and examines how past curatorial priorities continue to shape our sector. While recent collecting has improved in scope, particularly through garments from Diaspora and LGBTQ+ communities, fat bodies remain overlooked.

The paper offers practical strategies for addressing this gap, including community callouts, advisory panels, and inclusive acquisition policies. These approaches aim to engage underrepresented audiences and ensure that museum collections better reflect the full spectrum of lived experience in dress history.

**Biography:** Larissa Jennings is a graduate of the University of Manchester, where she achieved a MA in Art Gallery and Museum Studies. She has an undergraduate degree in History from the University of Liverpool. Her research interests include innovating community curation practices in relation to fashion collections.

## *Not Just Bona Rags: Rethinking Menswear and Collecting through Vince Man's Shop*

**Prof. Andrew Groves and Dr Danielle Sprecher, University of Westminster**

Over the past eight years, the Westminster Menswear Archive (WMA) has collected garments from Vince Man's Shop, a Soho boutique founded in 1954 by physique photographer Bill Green, which specialised in casual and leisurewear for men. While menswear historians have long acknowledged Vince's influence on post-war British fashion, very little survives in institutional collections. To date, we have identified around 20 extant garments, ten of which are now held by the WMA.

This paper outlines the challenges of locating and interpreting these pieces and argues that the process of collecting and analysing material culture allows us to move beyond recycled anecdote. Vince is often described as a niche 'gay boutique' known for flamboyant design. However, our research suggests it employed a more complex strategy, what we term sartorial passing. While catalogues used homoerotic language and photography, the garments themselves remained plausible within conventional menswear. This dual coding allowed Vince to signal queerness to those attuned, while appearing fashionable to others. Like the use of the Polari, the coded form of slang used by gay men in 1950s Britain, Vince's garments functioned through plausible deniability: present, legible, yet deniable within mainstream society.

**Biography:** Andrew Groves is Professor of Fashion Design, and Danielle Sprecher is the Curator of the Westminster Menswear Archive at the University of Westminster. They have co-curated several notable exhibitions, including *Invisible Men: An Anthology* from the Westminster Menswear Archive (2019), *Undercover* (2021), and *Umbro 100: Sportswear x Fashion* (2024). They are co-authors of the book *Inside the Westminster Menswear Archive*, published by Bloomsbury in 2024.

## *Locating Men's Underwear*

**Shaun Cole, University of Southampton**

The importance of materiality of clothing and wardrobe studies has grown since 2000 offering insights into the construction of garment types and their relevance to their wearers/owners. There has also been an increasing academic interest in men's underwear over the past 15 years redressing a balance of interest in women's underwear – e.g. Cole *The Story of Men's Underwear* and themed issues of *Critical Studies in Men's Fashion* (2014 and 2022). There are some well-known and well-established museums and collections that include men's underwear, for example to V&A London – where items were featured in exhibitions such as *Undressed: a brief history of underwear* (2016-7) and *Fashioning Masculinities: the art of menswear* (2022) - and other less known or explored collections such as that held in Falmouth University's Textiles and Dress Collection. This paper explores a proposed AHRC funding bid to record extant men's underwear held in UK museum and private collections that aims to understand what is held, how it is defined, catalogued and accessed and how can a common terminology be created? The project also asks how can understanding extant historic men's underwear in collections lead to the creation of an historically informed capsule collection for screen and theatre performance.

**Biography:** Shaun Cole is a writer, lecturer, curator and Associate Professor in Fashion at University of Southampton. His publications and exhibitions include *Don We Now Our Gay* (2000), *Dandy Style: 250 Years of British Men's Fashion* (book 2021 & exhibition 2023), *Gay Men's Style* (2023) *Collecting Sue Clowes* (2024-5).

# Digital Posters

DATS 2025 will present a selection of digital posters at the conference and below.

## Poster Contributors

**Alex Clayden**, a postgraduate researcher at the University of Leeds School of Design, studies the private archive of his grandmother, artist-craftsman Marian Clayden. His research explores her diverse career—from surface design and fibre art to commercial runway fashion—through frameworks of postcolonialism, fashion, and design history.

**The Clothworkers' Textile Project** promotes collaborative approaches to museum interpretation and the cultural care of The Pitt Rivers Museum textile collections by engaging directly with originating and diasporic communities across the globe. The project is run by Ellie Welch (Textile Curator) and Shannon Cherry (Textile Conservator).

**Hannah Auerbach George** is an LAHP-funded CDA PhD student based in the Material Science Research Centre at the Royal College of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

**Laurence Wen-Yu Li & Viviane Wei-An Chen.** Laurence is an AHRC-funded PhD candidate at the Royal College of Art and the V&A. Her thesis investigates the production and consumption of ribbons on late Qing Dynasty Chinese women's clothing. She is also keenly interested in reconstruction as a methodological approach for studying historic Chinese dress. For Viviane's biography see Panel 3.

**Lucy Jenner-Brown** is a recent graduate of UAL's MA Fashion Curation & Cultural Programming. Lucy's practice is centred on research and exhibition making. With a focus on material culture analysis, biography and highlighting hidden stories, Lucy's compassionate curatorial practice aims to bring sensitivity and an emotional awareness to her work.

**Megha Chauhan & Pramila Choudhary.** Megha is a PhD researcher at Nottingham Trent University. Her work explores indigenous wool textiles, collaborative design, and knowledge exchange through ethnographic methods, with a focus on the Indian Himalayas. Pramila is a PhD researcher at Concordia University. She investigates sustainable textiles and land-based practices in Rajasthan's wool systems, drawing on material culture and craft knowledge.

**Muhammad Umer Rehman** considers himself a maker, dedicating his career to teaching while recognizing the need for discourse surrounding fashion in the Subcontinent. His research focuses on innovation in design through zero waste and sustainability, alongside a commitment to preserving traditional practices. His work intersects fashion history and materiality, aiming to connect historical crafts with contemporary needs.

**S.R.Karishima** holds a Master's degree in Conservation from the National Museum Institute (now Indian Institute of Heritage), New Delhi, India. Currently, working as a Project Associate in the Conservation Division at IGNCA, New Delhi, with core expertise in textile conservation and a special focus on traditional Indian textiles, including storage solutions, museum displays, and exhibition presentations.

**Terri Dewhurst**, Textile Conservator at the National Trust Textile Conservation Studio (2015-present). Terri was the lead textile conservator and conservation mounting specialist for the upcoming publication '100 Things to Wear: Fashion from the Collections of the National Trust'.



# DOCUMENTED DIALOGUE

Alex Clayden  
University of Leeds, School of Design

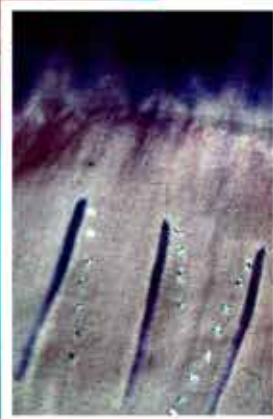
*"I combine classical elements from all over the world: the sculpture of the western silhouette, the drape of the oriental kimono, and the wrap of the tropical sarong."*

MARIAN CLAYDEN

In 2003, British American fashion designer Marian Clayden visited Ahmedabad and took part in a dyeing workshop. She used the techniques from that workshop to inspire garments in her 2004 and 2005 collections.



*Artisan Blouse, 2005.* This blouse uses the bandhani techniques visible in Clayden's images from Ahmedabad. The accompanying scarf also uses the colour/black/white strip technique seen in workshop images (inset).



*Float Dress, 2005.* Marian inserted this fashion photo into the slides immediately following the inset image of clamp and stitch-resist techniques from Gujarat.

Clayden combined images with photos of garments inspired by those techniques in her own archive. This rare attribution of ethnic source enriches debates on transnational cultural exchange and challenges concepts of authorship and appropriation, offering new curatorial possibilities for both Clayden's works held in museums and wider exhibitions.



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# Collaborative Care and Interpretation of Adire Textiles at the Pitt Rivers Museum

*The Clothworkers' Textile Project*

Ellie Welch, Textile Curator | Shannon Cherry, Textile Conservator



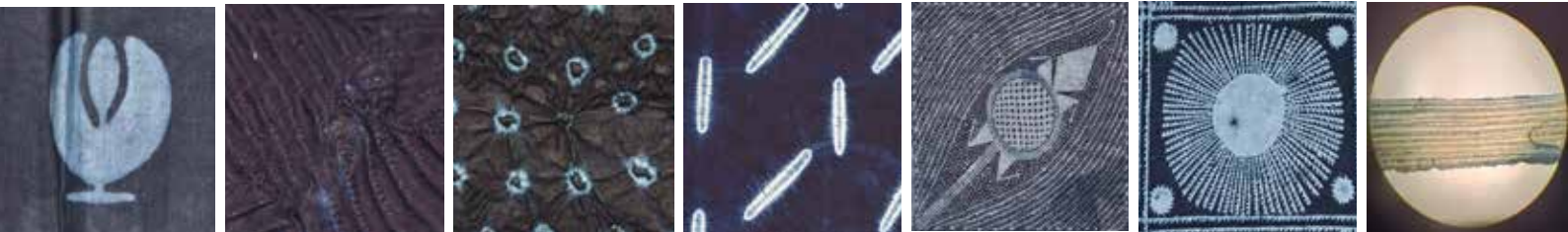
THE CLOTHWORKERS' COMPANY

**The Clothworkers' Textile Project** at the Pitt Rivers Museum supports collaborative and community-informed approaches to textile interpretation and conservation. Central to the project is working directly with originating and diasporic communities to reimagine the documentation, care, and presentation of textile collections. This poster focuses on our ongoing collaboration with Nigerian community members around the Museum's Adire collection—a group of richly patterned, indigo-dyed textiles with deep cultural, historical, and symbolic significance within Yoruba heritage.



Collector Edward Harland Duckworth's image: adire drying in the sun, 1939 - 1949

**Conservation as Cultural Care** This project advocates for conservation practices that reflect cultural values as well as material preservation. In the case of Adire, this has meant making space for physical interaction between community members and their textiles, and hosting open conversations about how garments should be interpreted, stored, and handled to reflect living knowledge systems. In this way, documentation becomes an ethical tool for care—guided by community priorities, not just institutional protocols.



**Adire at the Pitt Rivers Museum** The Pitt Rivers Museum holds 54 Adire textiles, acquired between the early 1900s and the 1970s. These pieces showcase diverse dyeing techniques, including adire oniko (tied resist), adire alabere (stitched resist), and adire eleko (hand-drawn or stencil resist). Each textile holds symbolic meaning and forms part of a broader tradition of storytelling, identity expression, and skilled craftsmanship—particularly led by Yoruba women. Despite the importance of these works, they have remained under-researched and minimally interpreted within the Museum. This project places Adire at the centre of a collaborative effort to consider how such garments are documented, cared for, displayed, and understood today.

**Community-Led Research and Engagement** Our team has revisited the Adire collection to expand object records, prioritising the inclusion of detailed descriptions, local terminology for patterns and techniques, and the broader social and economic contexts of the garments. Particular attention has been given to recognising the historical roles of women dyers and traders, and the economic agency these textiles provided. High-resolution flat photography has been carried out to improve online access. Additionally, in response to community feedback, selected textiles are being photographed on mannequins to show how they were worn—helping shift interpretation from flat decorative objects to lived, embodied garments. We have hosted Nigerian community members at the Museum to engage with the collection through handling sessions and in-depth discussions. Replica cloths were used alongside live demonstrations—on both mannequins and bodies—to explore how Adire is worn and styled. These sessions were recorded and transcribed, and this material will be publicly accessible via Collections Online, embedding community knowledge directly into the object records.



Dr. Louisa Onuoha, sharing information on Adire pattern and symbolism

**Improving Access and Interpretation** A key outcome of the project has been to address the historical lack of access and cultural context within existing records. Community collaborators highlighted the need to include not only technical detail, but also recognition of the makers—such as identifying marks found on hems—and celebrated cultural figures like Mama Nike who have championed Adire's legacy and revival. Discussions also explored the impact of colonial histories and global markets, situating Adire in both its local Yoruba context and within broader transnational conversations. The collection was recognised as both a traditional form and a contemporary practice—adapted and reimagined today in cultural revival movements, sustainable fashion, and creative industries. A contemporary piece, gifted by a community member, now sits alongside the historical collection, representing the living evolution of the craft. Community input also identified the limitations of flat photography, which fails to communicate the garments' scale, movement, or bodily significance. Mounted displays and mannequin photography have been introduced to help convey function and form—enhancing interpretation for the public and informing future conservation work. Research into acquisition histories has expanded knowledge of how these textiles entered the Museum. This includes examination of donor correspondence, field notes, and related photographic material, resulting in more complete object biographies and contextual links to other collections and publications.

## Resources

**All images copyright: Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford**

- <https://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/collections-online/#/search/simple-search/adire/>
- <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/mama-nike>
- <https://colorxstudios.com/editorials/mama-nike>
- Adire Cloth in Nigeria, 1971-2016. by Doig Simmonds & Pat Oyelola & Segun Oke, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, UK, 2016
- The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940 by Judith A. Byfield

## Acknowledgments

We thank The Clothworkers' Company for funding this project, Dr. Louisa Onuoha for her time, knowledge and input on Nigerian Adire and culture and The Pitt Rivers Museum Collection and Conservation teams.

Ellie.welch@prm.ox.ac.uk | Shannon.cherry@prm.ox.ac.uk



**Pitt Rivers Museum**  
Anthropology and World Archaeology

# Past Futures: Biobased Material Innovation and Absence in the Archive

Hannah Auerbach George, LAHP-funded CDA PhD student based in the Material Science Research Centre at the Royal College of Art and the Victoria and Albert Museum. Supervised by Prof Sharon Baurley, Dr Miriam Ribul, Dr Spike Sweeting and Connie Karol Burks

**Introduction:** Preoccupation with novelty in textile innovation has resulted in museum and archive resources being overlooked as sites of inspiration, despite the wealth of material knowledge they represent. This is further compounded by incomplete, miscatalogued, and inherently narrow museum collecting policies. There are also significant barriers to identifying and accessing the knowledge retained in collections, owing to the need for curatorial expertise, the complexities of physical access and the preservation of objects. My research asks the question: *How can historical resources inform and contextualise sustainable material futures?* The project focuses on the evolution of biobased polymer materials from early plastics through to semi-synthetic fibres, and reconsiders the value of past material innovations in the context of the bioeconomy, with the aim of developing a framework that facilitates material innovators to use historical resources to inform sustainable material futures.



Fig 1. Object W.6-1971: Circular plaque of compression moulded Bois Durci, showing the head of Queen Victoria in profile. Circa 1855-1875 ©. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

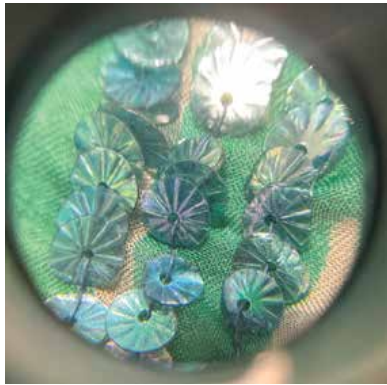


Fig 2. Object T.8&A-1973: Evening Cape. Close-up of damaged gelatine sequins ©. Hannah Auerbach George.

**Context:** The Bioeconomy, defined as the use of 'biotechnology and biomass in producing goods, services or energy' by the United Nations Environment Programme, has been widely recognised as an essential strategy in implementing sustainable development and moving away from reliance on fossil fuels (1). Although this definition of 'Bioeconomy' may be relatively recent (2), it is rooted in the recognition of planetary boundaries and the understanding that in nature, resources are utilised effectively with no waste. If we apply this lens to the museum collections we can see this material ecology permeates throughout. During the 19th and 20th century numerous examples of new materials were developed from all kinds of biobased sources, including blood, eggs and plants. However, the transient and often abject nature of many biobased materials has often excluded them from, or obscured them within historical collections. The project fosters an interdisciplinary approach between textile history and material futures and builds upon discourses on the relevance of historical paradigms to contemporary sustainability frameworks in the fashion and textiles sector. (3,4,5,6,7,8).

**Objects:** Biobased material design invites resourcefulness, reuse and re-evaluation of waste streams and many such objects can be found in the V&A collection including:

**Fig 1.** Bois Durci, a compression moulded and thermoset plastic made from blood and sawdust.

**Fig 2.** Gelatine sequins which adorned couture dresses in the late 19th and early 20th century.

**Fig 3.** Woven fabric made from Ardil, a regenerated protein fibre made from peanuts.

**Fig 4.** Silk flowers made from leftover raw silk which is beaten flat and treated with a natural sizing agent like agar-agar, gelatine or starch.



Fig 3. Object T.65-2010: Furnishing fabric, 'History of Shapes', of Ardil (groundnut fibre), designed by Tibor Reich, Stratford-upon-Avon ©. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Fig 4. Object FE.28-2021: Hairpin in the shape of a bunch of red flowers with green leaves, made of silk and iron ©. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

**I am seeking to connect with museum and archive practitioners to gather informal insights into themes, including but not limited to:**

- Biobased materials that are obscured by cataloguing or under-represented in collections.
- The use of archives in relation to sustainable material innovation.
- The relevance of collections to sustainable material innovation.
- Strategies to overcome barriers to collections access.

**Please contact**

**[h.auerbachgeorge@vam.ac.uk](mailto:h.auerbachgeorge@vam.ac.uk)**



Bibliography

**LAHP** The LONDON ARTS & HUMANITIES PARTNERSHIP

Your contributions may be used towards my PhD thesis and future work, so please specify whether you'd be happy for me to get in touch to follow up. Your details will be anonymised and treated with utmost care for confidentiality and protection of personal data as per the RCA Research Ethics and Data Protection policies.



# BEYOND THE FLAT CASE

## *Redisplaying Late Qing Chinese Clothing*

### *Through Interdisciplinary, Conservation-Informed Practice*

Laurence Wen-Yu Li | Royal College of Art • Victoria and Albert Museum

Viviane Wei-An Chen | Viviane Chen Studio

#### INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a new three-dimensional display model for historical Chinese dress, developed through object analysis, documentary research, and current conservation standards. Flat-cut Chinese and other non-Western garments are often shown two-dimensionally on T-bar mounts, reducing them from lived clothing to static ornaments. Here we propose a custom mount for an extant-garment-based reconstruction of a c.1860–80 Han Chinese woman's ensemble—dajinshan jacket 大襟衫 and mamian skirt 馬面裙—supported by reconstructed late Qing undergarments: dudou 肚兜, dadangku 大檔褲 trousers, and xiku 膝褲 leggings (Fig. 1–2). The methodology developed offers a replicable model for museum practitioners seeking to present Chinese dress with greater historical accuracy.

#### INTERPRETATION

Although Chinese garments before 1911 were cut flat and worn loosely, their silhouette were still shaped by undergarments. Extant garments alone cannot show this effect. Period erotic paintings indicate that dudou 肚兜 covered the bust and provided gentle compression, while dadangku 大檔褲 trousers, worn beneath skirts, used wide waistbands that reduced waist definition (Fig. 2–4). These insights into how late Qing women's figures were deliberately obscured offer a blueprint for more accurate and repeatable mounting methods.

#### METHODOLOGY

The mamian skirt 馬面裙 was cut with a waistband much wider than the waist. To avoid tying—which would create folds and strain—the torso form was extended to the full waistband size, allowing the skirt to hang smoothly (Fig. 5). Stabilisation was achieved with a magnet belt, with evenly spaced magnets applying uniform pressure around the waist (Fig. 8). While Spicer's (2019) disc-magnet method provided the foundation, this project introduced a new system using rubber-bonded neodymium magnets in place of discs. The format reduced risks of magnets snapping together during handling, offered safer application, and distributed weight more evenly across the textile (Fig. 6).

#### RESULTS

Combining primary sources and information gleaned from a person of plausible height wearing the reconstructed ensemble (Fig. 7), we were able to pad the mount to a form that accurately reflects what the late Qing dajinshan and mamian skirt look like when worn (Fig. 6). The width and length of the mamian skirt in particular provide information about the waist measurement and height of the original wearer, which aids in the construction of 3-D forms for flat-cut garments with copious ease. The length of the dajinshan, which should fall between mid-thigh and knee, also indicates the height of the original wearer.

#### DISCUSSION

This study offers an introductory look at the challenges and techniques required to mount flat-cut late Qing Chinese clothes. We are committed to further researching and developing this process to cover a wider range of Chinese dress, including that of men and children's clothing, clothing from different time periods and classes, as well as three-dimensional mounts with different postures and gestures that reflect their contemporary ideals and values.

#### SCAN THE QR CODE FOR MORE REFERENCES AND INFORMATION.

laurencewenyuli.com | laurence.li@rca.ac.uk | @laurencewenyuli  
vivianechen.co.uk | contact@vivianechen.co.uk | @vivianechen\_official



Fig. 1: Reconstruction dajinshan, mamian skirt, dudou, trousers, and leggings. (from left to right)



Fig. 2: Demo of dudou on form, pre-padding



Fig. 3: Bust form, after padding, and support skirt



Fig. 4: Bust form, after padding, with skirt installed



Fig. 5: Bust form, after padding, with skirt and support robe installed



Fig. 6: Reconstruction dajinshan, after mounting

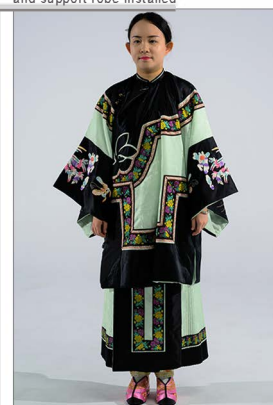


Fig. 7: Reconstruction dajinshan, worn on person

# INNER & OUTER FORM: THE WARDROBE OF BARBARA HEPWORTH

Exploring one of Britain's most iconic artists through the lens of her wardrobe

Leaving a legacy as one of the most important artists of the 20th Century, Dame Jocelyn Barbara Hepworth is celebrated for her modernist sculpture. As a previously overlooked biographic intervention, this work examines alternative aspects to Hepworth's life and experiences.

Grounded in practice-based research, through material cultural analysis and archival studies, her beliefs, sensitivities and struggles as a woman are considered through the reading of her clothing, with an aim to reframe her style as a meaningful part of her life story



Mandelmann, E. (1966). Portrait of Barbara Hepworth. Jenner-Brown, L. (2024). Examples of Hepworth's extant clothing. Private collection.

This body of research is centred around:

- An exploration of Hepworth's life in Cornwall (1939-1975) in terms of self-representation, constructing identities and developing a persona within changing socio-cultural landscapes
- My discovery of her remaining wardrobe within the Hepworth family and exploration of these personal items. The utilitarian look established her style narrative, however, the surviving clothing reveals another side to her wardrobe
- Challenging the traditional narratives around Hepworth, recontextualizing her as an activist, environmentalist and liberated woman
- Developing a fictitious relationship with the artist - investigating the relationship between non-living subject and curator
- In contextualising the study of artists and their style, primary and secondary research examines the interest of female-born artist's wardrobes through curatorial and textual exploration
- Considering Hepworth's cultural legacy and which narratives are legitimised
- This work is presented as a potential exhibition - Inner & Outer Form: The Wardrobe of Barbara Hepworth

Link to project showcase: <https://ualshowcase.arts.ac.uk/project/609598/cover>



# WOVEN WOOL LEGACIES:

## Cultural Rhythms of Regional Textiles in Northwest India

### REGIONAL LIVING TEXTILE: *PATTU*

- Handwoven wool cloth, worn unstitched by women in Rajasthan & Himachal Pradesh.
- Once everyday attire, now held in family archives and local tradition.
- Embodies care, memory, and ecological knowledge.
- Acts as an 'active participant' (Latour, 2005), shaping relationships and identity.

### CRAFT ECOLOGY 01 - KULLU, HIMACHAL PRADESH

#### Alpine Region



A 'Phool' pattu on the loom. Megha Chauhan, 2025



Pattu held in place by a Silver 'Bhumni' (pin). Megha Chauhan, 2025

### CRAFT ECOLOGY 02 - THAR DESERT, RAJASTHAN

#### Arid Region



Pattu weaver, weaving on the pitloom, Pramila Choudhary, 2015



Elderly weaver who stopped weaving due to decreased demand and the unavailability of the right type of wool. Pramila Choudhary, 2015

**Ecological Care:** Rooted in sheep, grazing lands, and seasonal cycles. In Himachal, indigenous wool comes from the local Gaddi sheep and is sustained through transhumance; in Rajasthan, from the Jat pastoral community, hand-spinners, and Meghwal weavers.

**Social Care:** Sustained through intergenerational weaving and gifting at life-cycle rituals. Women spin yarn for both everyday and ceremonial use, creating cloths for daughters, dowries, and the collective memory of families.



Pattu hung to dry in the sun. Megha Chauhan, 2025



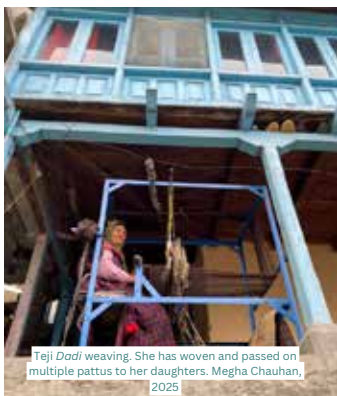
'Phool' pattus stored in a dedoar (Himalayan cedar) wood box. Megha Chauhan, 2025



Naani (maternal grandmother), Anchi Devi, stands before her 80-year-old handspun on Charkha (spinning wheel) and hand-embroidered Pattu, handwoven by a local weaver, shows her wearing a machine-made acrylic sweater, synthetic skirt, and chemically dyed cotton head scarf. Pramila Choudhary, 2015



Two generations of weavers stand with various styles (Sada Pattu (Solid Colour) & Bardi (Checkered) of handspun and handwoven Pattu. Pramila Choudhary, 2015



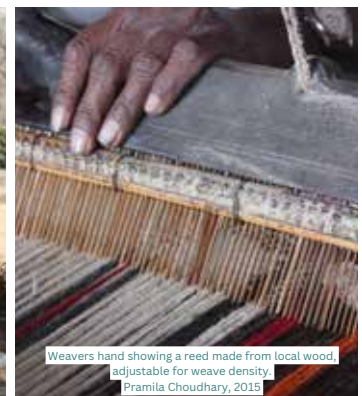
Teji Dadi weaving. She has woven and passed on multiple pattus to her daughters. Megha Chauhan, 2025



A simple pattu bought from Teji Dadi. Megha Chauhan, 2025



Naani handspinning on her 80-year-old Charkha in the afternoon, sitting outside the gadhal (an open living room in desert areas). Pramila Choudhary, 2015



Weavers hand showing a reed made from local wood, adjustable for weave density. Pramila Choudhary, 2015

Pattu crafting sustains biodiversity and traditional livelihoods. Integrating local wool and accompanying practices into 'F'ashion creates alternative ways of making and engaging with fashion.



# Embroidering Memory:

## Colonial Legacies, Cultural Relevance, and the curation of Textiles in Pakistan's Museum

What voices and meanings are omitted in the process?

How do museums in Pakistan and the subcontinent frame embroidered textiles as ritual, domestic, and every day, as cultural heritage?



### THESE ARE THE ISSUES

#### Colonial Display Logics Persist

Many museums in Pakistan continue to reflect curatorial structures inherited from colonial-era institutions. These were shaped by 19th-century European museum ideologies that emphasized classification, categorization, and objectification of non-Western material culture. Textiles were often grouped by region, motif, or type, stripped of their social or spiritual meanings. This reductive approach remains embedded in how embroidered textiles are displayed today, primarily as aesthetic or ethnographic "specimens" rather than dynamic cultural practices.

Reference: Hooper-Greenhill (1992); Thomas (2016)

#### Embroidery = "Craft", not Cultural Labor

In many exhibitions, embroidery is presented as decorative "craftwork" rather than serious cultural or economic labor, especially when practiced by women. This framing flattens the complexity of embroidery traditions, which often involve intergenerational knowledge, ritual significance, and socio-political expression. Women's work is thus visually celebrated but conceptually devalued, reducing embroidery to surface design instead of acknowledging it as a form of embodied heritage and feminist labor.

Reference: Mukherjee (2015); Ahmed-Ghosh (2003)

#### Missing Contexts: Ritual, Dowry, Oral Traditions

Museum displays often isolate textiles from their original cultural and ritual use. For instance, a bridal gharara or a dowry phulkari may be shown for its color or stitch, but without any

information about how it functioned within marriage customs, kinship economies, or religious ceremonies. Moreover, the oral transmission of stitching skills — from mothers to daughters or within women's collectives — is rarely documented or shown, leading to a disconnection from lived experience.

Reference: Appadurai (1986); Hafeez (2006)

#### Anonymous Makers: Gendered Erasure

Most embroidered textiles in museum collections are attributed to specific regions, rather than to individual artists. While collectors' or donors' names are preserved, the women who embroidered these textiles — often with incredible skill and symbolic knowledge — are left unnamed. This reflects a broader issue in museology: the erasure of women's contributions to cultural heritage. It also reinforces gendered hierarchies of authorship, where elite male or institutional names are remembered, while women's labor remains invisible.

Reference: Nochlin (1988); Said (1978); Hammad (2022)

### SUGGESTIONS

#### Include Oral Histories from Communities

Textiles carry memory — not just in their threads but in the stories of making, gifting, wearing, and preserving. Traditional knowledge in Pakistan, particularly around embroidery and stitchwork, is rarely written; it is oral, lived, and intergenerational.

#### Museum displays can include:

Audio clips or text excerpts from women narrating how a dowry piece was made  
Testimonies of artisans explaining motif meanings or stitch techniques  
Stories of resistance or identity embedded in regional embroidery practices.

#### Display Tools, Processes, and Ritual

Instead of presenting textiles as finished "artworks," museums

should foreground the making process

Include tools: needles, threads

Display in-process samples or time-lapse films of stitchwork

Provide context about when and why these were made.

#### Acknowledge Women Artisans as Cultural Agents

Too often, embroidered works are labeled "anonymous" or "unknown artisan" especially when made by rural or domestic women.

A decolonial approach calls for: Actively identifying and crediting women as makers.

Including names, community roles, and artistic choices.

Treating craft not as 'low art' but as intellectual and creative authorship.

#### Co-curate with Textile Makers and Scholars

True decolonization requires shifting power, from institutional curators to the communities whose heritage is being exhibited.

This can take the form of: Collaborative exhibitions where makers help design the narrative and layout.

Artist-in-residence programs within museums

On-site documentation with local experts, craftspeople, and historians

### CONCLUSION

A decolonial textile display is not only about what we show, but how we show it, with empathy, plurality, and justice.

In Pakistan and across the Subcontinent, this shift is essential for honoring the full richness of embroidered heritage.

#### Muhammad Umer Rehman

Adjunct Faculty Department of Textile Design  
Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture  
Karachi, Pakistan







# PREVENTIVE CONSERVATION OF DIVERSE TEXTILE OBJECTS IN INDIAN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

S.R. KARISMA, ART CONSERVATOR, INDIA. EMAIL ID: KARISHMA030593@GMAIL.COM

## INTRODUCTION

The Conservation Division of IGNCA undertook a RE-ORG project of the textile collection, which involved physically packing the textiles while keeping preventive measures in mind. This project was carried out at the National Crafts Museum & Hastakala Academy textile storage, where nearly 5,000 objects in 10 months.

## PROBLEMS DUE TO IMPROPER STORAGE

- Lack of space
- Accessibility
- Mishandling
- Inadequate ventilation
- Biological damage



Customized padding of accessories with archival material



Umbrella-Before packing



Umbrella- After packing



During process of packing with archival material



Turbans stored in Trunk



Turbans-Before packing



Turbans- After packing



During-packing



Labels outside the boxes for easy access



Before- textile in folded in plastic



After- textile rolled in archival material with labels

## METHODOLOGY

- Storage solutions were designed for each textile type, size, and condition.
- Materials used such as padded sausages, muslin wraps, acid-free boxes, rollers, tyvek, and archival tissue.
- Labelling of each object improved accessibility and accurate tracking
- Installation of mobile compactors and systematic sorting improved use of limited space.



The images shows the customized packing of hair pins



Rolling painted textile with interleaving of archival material



Drawer unit storage system

## RESULTS

- Objects were shifted from temporary storage to permanent compactors and systematically packed and labelled.
- Each compactor was marked with location details, and objects were arranged by size, type, condition, and group.
- This reorganization improved the visual appearance of storage and made object access much easier.



Before-after packing of canopy with archival material

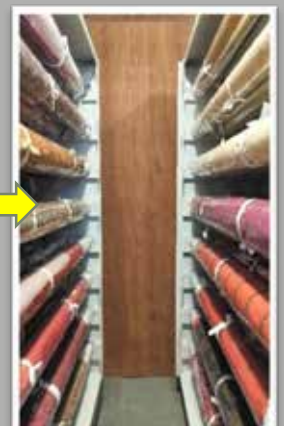


## CONCLUSION

The RE-ORG project at the National Crafts Museum & Hastakala Academy, New Delhi demonstrated that preventive conservation through systematic storage solutions can ensure long-term preservation of textiles. Simple, low cost and context specific methods such as labelling and organized placement significantly improved accessibility for research and enhanced the care of the collection



Previous Storage



New Storage

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank Dr. Achal Pandya, Head of the Conservation Division, IGNCA, New Delhi, for his guidance, and the storage staff of the National Crafts Museum & Hastakala Academy for their valuable support. I also acknowledge the project team members for completing the project with dedication without them, this would not have been possible.

## “Cultural Relevance of Fashion & Dress at the National Trust”

By Terri Dewhurst – Textile Conservator  
(National Trust Textile Conservation Studio)



National Trust Publication – *100 Things to Wear*,  
by E.Slocombe & H.Antrobus – Published 4<sup>th</sup>  
September 2025 (RRP £12)

New publication *100 Things to Wear: Fashion from the Collections of the National Trust* explores one of the National Trust’s greatest treasures: its collection of Fashion and Dress.

Made up of over 40,000 objects, the Trust's collection represents thousands of lives lived, from the couture of the social elite, to the livery of those in service. The book features 100 highlights from over 50 NT properties.

Over 12 months 100 items were mounted, conserved (where necessary), and photographed at the National Trust Textile Conservation Studio, and at properties.



This book is a moment of firsts and a catalyst for change. The book has invigorated internal interest, knowledge, and understanding of the collection, prompting new calls for conservation, treatment and exhibition. For some of these objects, it is the first time that a light has been shone on their story, and their significance understood.

Conservation prompted by the book is a critical part of the publication’s importance. Objects that might have been lost have been conserved at the NT’s Textile Conservation Studio, enabling access and display and for objects to live on & tell more stories to our visitors.



Throughout this process, we’ve demonstrated the importance and the impact that remedial and preventative conservation, proper mounting, and photography has on our fashion and dress collection, embodying garments and revealing untold stories for our audience. *100 Things to Wear* is an exciting call to action for all our places, an invitation to explore what's in our fashion and dress collections, what we can do to protect them and make them more accessible.

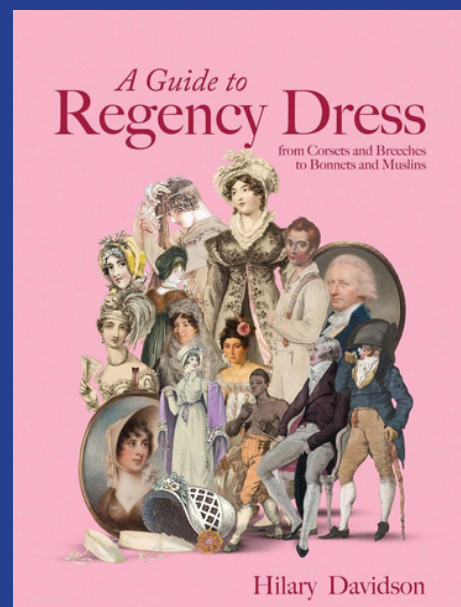
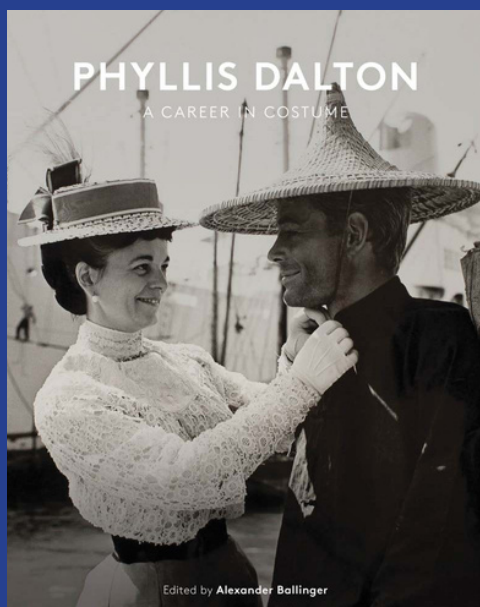
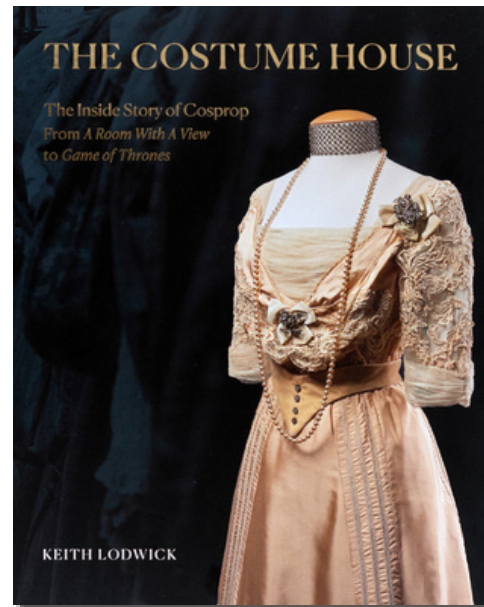
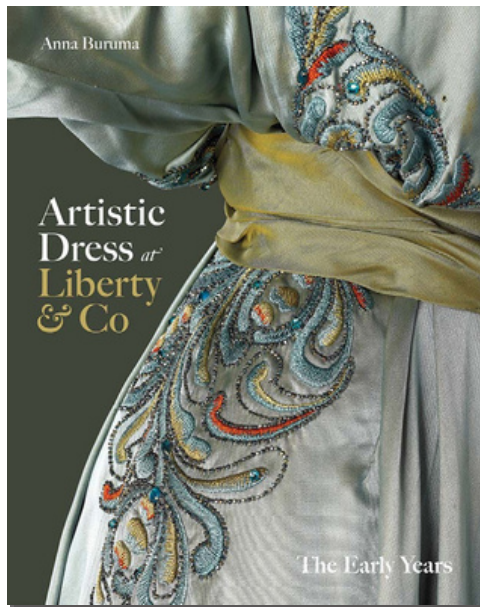
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Yale

## **Venues & travel:**

For more information on the conference venues, their accessibility and locations, please click the hyperlinks in the programme schedule (above).

Sallis Benney Theatre is part of University of Brighton City Campus, it is located at 58-67 Grand Parade. Please note there is no adjacent parking. On street paid parking and privately run car parks are available 5-10 minutes walk away.

Brighton city centre and city wide maps can be found here:  
<https://www.visitbrighton.com/plan-your-visit/visitor-information/maps>

Dishoom Permit Room, Brighton is a 7-10 minute walk from University of Brighton Grand Parade

## **Attendance bursaries:**

If you are a DATS member and require financial assistance to attend the conference for travel, accommodation or conference fees, please email DATS Chair Lisa Mason with a short note about yourself, why attendance is important and what help you may need: [L.Mason@nms.ac.uk](mailto:L.Mason@nms.ac.uk).