

Press Release: April 2023

Threads

'Breathing stories into materials'

8 July to 1 October 2023



Viento 2, 2014 by Olga de Amaral.

© Olga de Amaral; Courtesy Lisson Gallery. Photography by Theo Christelis.

Additional images at <https://bit.ly/ArnolfiniThreads>

A thread is a line that links the past with the present, knotting personal and shared experiences together...

Arnolfini launches its summer 2023 programme with *Threads*, a major exhibition featuring twenty-one contemporary international artists and makers, for whom textiles is their chosen medium.

Celebrating material and making, these artists use the storytelling power of textiles to connect with past traditions, find commonalities between cultures, time and place, and to 'breathe stories into materials'¹.

Recognising the increasing attention drawn to textiles as an artistic medium, *Threads* encompasses weaving and spinning, rug-making, stitching and embroidery, print, knit, threading, mending and found materials, with materials and techniques handed down, reused and reinvented.

Co-curated by leading textile artist [Alice Kettle](#), *Threads* weaves throughout Arnolfini's three floors, to reveal how textiles 'remember'², how memory is 'embedded within the process of making'³, and how new narratives are created.

Just as single threads are twisted into a yarn or woven together to make a cloth, many strands and connections are found between these works. Opportunities for audiences to 'make' new stories are also interwoven throughout the exhibition and the engagement programme which includes collaborations with [Bristol Weaving Mill](#).

Reflecting a range of experiences, materials, processes and artistic impulse, exhibiting artists are: Caroline Achaintre, Mounira Al Solh, Ifeoma U. Anyaeji, Olga de Amaral, Will Cruikshank, Monika Grašienė, Lubaina Himid, Young In Hong, Raisa Kabir, Alice Kettle, Anya Paintsil, Anousha Payne, David Penny, Anna Perach, Celia Pym, Richard McVetis, Ibrahim Mahama, Farwa Moledina, Lucy Orta, Yinka Shonibare and Esna Su.

¹ From Esna Su's artist statement for *Threads* in which she describes her works as 'breathing stories into materials'.

² From Jessica Hemmings *The Textile Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, first edition 2012, 2023) page 57 in which she states "Textiles remember. This is not something that we necessarily ask of them, nor is it something we can divert them from doing. They do it regardless... moments of joy and tragedy are recorded on the surface and embedded into the structure of the cloth, without permission and often without intention. Textiles remember, in part, because they are hostage to their own fragility."

³ Pamela Johnson discusses the relationship between the process of making textile works and how memory can be embedded in their making in 'Acts of Memory' in *Textures of Memory: The Poetics of Cloth* (Nottingham: Angel Row gallery, 1999), page 7

Within the works artists explore narratives of movement and exchange, environmental concerns, sustainability, labour, trade, migration, post-colonial narratives, identity, gender, politics, community building and place making, reflecting our histories in a current context.

Materials such as Dutch Wax print cloth (Ankara), jute sack and indigo fabric are used for their symbolic associations. Artists harness and exploit texture, pliability, patterns, and colour, to spin and twist and to wind and weave.

Quiet contemplative works evoke the rhythm and intimacy of making, sitting side-by-side with works which use material to break away from accepted forms, challenging established ways of making and embracing new technologies to tell different stories.

Through these acts of making, each artist pushes the mediums' narrative potential to 'remember', asking us to question where, and how, and with what the work has been created. *Threads* are unravelled as new stories become intertwined, and audiences are invited to engage with their own memories through material and making.

***Threads* also includes:**

- New artist commissions by Birmingham-based Farwa Moledina and Bristol-based South Korean artist Young In Hong.
- A reimagining of the work *Ezuhu ezu* by Nigerian artist Ifeoma U. Anyaeji during her residency in Bristol as the first recipient of the Arnolfini ACBMT International Artist Residency Award.
- An accompanying exhibition of work showcasing the talents of refugee women who attend Arnolfini's regular Women's Craft Club and members of Bristol-based charity Bridges for Communities' Stitching Together, refugee sewing

group, embodying both Arnolfini's and co-curator Kettle's own ethos of collaborative practice.

- An opportunity for audiences to engage with Bristol's own complex textile history through a digital memory map and audio stories focusing upon the sites of the Great Western Cotton Factory and Bristol's new 'textile quarter' – home to Bristol Weaving Mill, *Threads* collaborative partner and pioneers of a thriving new textile industry in Bristol – creating an additional historical context for the narratives explored in *Threads*.
- A supporting programme of engagement activities including family workshops from Let's Make Art, participatory artworks, Celia Pym's *Mending Project*, interactive activities from Bristol Weaving Mill, and talks, music, dance, and film, will further bring the building to life with opportunities to 'make, unmake, and remake connections', creating a new community of makers and memories. See Arnolfini's website for further details.
- Take a look at our exciting **Art Fund Art Happens Crowd Funder appeal** for an exciting peek at how Arnolfini could be transformed into a giant textile studio as part of *Threads* this summer **here**.

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For further information please contact Sara Blair sara.blair@arnolfini.org.uk

Additional images are available at <https://bit.ly/ArnolfiniThreads>

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LISTING

Threads: 'Breathing stories into materials' | 8 July to 1 October 2023

Arnolfini invites you to *Threads*, a major exhibition of textiles featuring a wide variety of materials and approaches from twenty-one contemporary international artists and makers. Celebrating material and making, and the idea that textiles remember, these artists use the storytelling power of textiles to connect with past traditions, exploring a multitude of visible and invisible memories, to 'breathe stories into materials'. With work from Caroline Achaintre, Mounira Al Sohl, Ifeoma U. Anyaeji, Olga de Amaral, Will Cruikshank, Monika Grašienė, Lubaina Himid, Young In Hong, Raisa Kabir, Alice Kettle, Anya Paintsil, Anousha Payne, David Penny, Anna Perach, Celia Pym, Richard McVetis, Ibrahim Mahama, Farwa Moledina, Lucy Orta, Yinka Shonibare and Esna Su. The exhibition has been co-curated by Arnolfini with leading textile artist-Alice Kettle.

Arnolfini, 16 Narrow Quay, Bristol BS1 4QA, arnolfini.org.uk @ArnolfiniArts

Tuesday to Sunday, 11am to 6pm, free entry.

arnolfini.org.uk/whatson/threads #Threads #Arnolfini

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Exhibited Artworks

(Artist bios available at <https://bit.ly/ArnolfiniThreads>)

Caroline Achaintre's hand-tufted abstract work *Croaker* with its densely textured surface creates junctures between the ancient and the modern. Achaintre brings together multiple 'beings', drawing upon traditions of masquerade from Central European carnival to Mardi Gras, to create her hybrid human and animal forms.

Gathering together women's stories of oppression **Mounira Al Sohl's** intimate tented installation *Mina El Shourouk ila Al Fahmah* creates a space for reflection. Alongside Arabic calligraphy (the names for each hour in the day), embroidered drawings bring the stories to life, magnified by audio recordings of the Lebanese singer Rima Khcheich.

Olga de Amaral's works *Cesta Lunar 50B* and *Viento 2* are representative of her 60-year career in which the artist has explored the flat surfaces of tapestry through to three-dimensional sculptural forms. In her gold-leaf works de Amaral creates spaces of meditation that reach back to pre-Columbian worship, reclaiming a material that has been plundered from her country over centuries.

Ifeoma U. Anyaeji continues her exploration into 'plasto-art' with the work *Ezuhu ezu*, using discarded non-biodegradable plastic bags and bottles, which are transformed through threading (Ikpa Owu in Igbo), a traditional Nigerian hair-plaiting technique. Through repurposing these environmental pollutants Anyaeji examines the value we place upon materials in today's consumer culture.

Will Cruikshank's work emerges from a studio-based experimental practice grounded in his use of machinery, materials and improvisation. His life-sized *Spindles* (made using a potter's wheel) are built up through layer upon layer of yarn before being sliced open to reveal their interior, demonstrating a decorative element – colour, pattern and symmetry – which emerges through the act of making, referencing spinning and weaving traditions.

Monika Grašienė's work *Sacrament* uses digital jacquard weaving and optical polypropylene thread to recreate folds in space, revealing interiors and exteriors as part of her series *Packing Life*. Inspired by architectural façades and scaffolding cloths, Grasiene embraces secrets and rituals, engaging with a host of cultural memories including the history of Sacrament church in Kaunas, Lithuania.

Bristol-based **Young In Hong** has been commissioned to create a new work which will draw upon the untold stories of female former textile factory workers in South Korea in the 1960s and 1970s. Weaving their words into the textile surface, stories of oppression and marginalised labour are told through the use of traditional craft methods and redundant technology within her multi-layered work.

Lubaina Himid has reconfigured *The Grab Test* (a site-specific installation originally commissioned by the Frans Hals Museum, Netherlands, in 2019), a monumental work connecting together Dutch Wax fabrics. These traditional cloths have been overlaid with paintings by Himid of birds, flowers and hands, reflecting upon notions of migration, circulation and appropriation, integral to the textile's history.

Raisa Kabir's installation *Nil. Nargis. Blue. Bring in the tide with your moon* incorporates the complex history of Bengali indigo dye with environmental and political concerns. Composing of film (made in Couplport, Scotland), tapestries and remnants of performances. and working with jute, indigo and linen, the work makes material and historical connections between Scotland, Bengal and the Caribbean to examine the cultural politics of cloth.

Artist and co-curator **Alice Kettle's** expansive embroidered canvas *Ground* is part of a triptych of works, *Thread Bearing Witness*, representing the displacement of people through the migration of stitches. Drawing upon textiles' innate ability to connect people, and existence in our everyday lives, Kettle employs images contributed by refugees (as part of a wider project) and 'bears witness' to multiple stories of migration.

Ibrahim Mahama's vast work *Searo* is made from the charcoal jute sacks now synonymous with Ghana's trade markets. Originating from Southeast Asia, the imported sacks transported cocoa beans, before being repurposed to carry food, charcoal and other goods. Mahama transforms the material, engaging with issues of economic exchange, globalisation and migration.

The meticulous detail of **Richard McVetis's** hand-embroidered work, such as *Variations of a Stitched Grid*, reference traditional English black and white embroidery, encompassing the artist's preoccupation with the repetitive nature of process and the rituals of habitual making. His careful monochromatic stitches record human presence, time and decay, with each stitch acting as a marker for lived time.

Farwa Moledina has been commissioned to create a new work, building upon her existing practice exploring faith, family and the portrayal of Muslim women within western art historical narratives. Inspired by the interiors of 19th century Orientalist paintings, Moledina's new participatory installation deconstructs these Orientalist tropes, creating a welcoming space of rest and reflection within Arnolfini's second floor reading room.

Lucy Orta's *Body Architecture - Study* is a 'prototype' façade (moved from floor to wall) for one of her dome tents from the ephemeral installation *Antartic Village* created with Jorge Orta in 2007. Embracing Orta's ethos of community, the gloves and clothes are symbolic of individual people and the myriad of emotional, intellectual and spiritual ties that exist between them, whilst the work serves as a reminder of our human impact on the environment.

Anya Paintsil's work draws upon her joint heritage exploring Ghanaian folk tales and Welsh pre-Christian mythology, using traditional Welsh rug-hooking and embroidery techniques. *God Will Punish Him* (based on her step-mother) offers an autobiographical interpretation of memory, love, trauma and loss, whilst *Rhita Gawr* is inspired by the legend of how Mount Snowdon (Yr Wyddfa - The Grave) became the final resting place of a fearsome giant, with Paintsil reimagining the tale with people of colour at the centre.

With the figurative, collaborative installation *As She Laughs Anna Perach* and **Anousha Payne** bring together their textile and ceramic practices through a shared interest in myth and folklore. Their tufted (using Axminster wool) and ceramic body parts (inspired by the surrealist concept of the exquisite corpse) draw upon multiple sources from Greek mythology to Southern Indian and Iranian stories, creating new myths led by female protagonists.

David Penny's *Screen for Another Focus*, created during a residency at Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh, interprets tapestry-making through the use of moving-image and photography. The work explores the intimacy of human touch, where every inch of wool passes through the weaver's hands, suggesting that the body is an extension of the tools used throughout weaving's history. Connections with Bristol's own weaving history will be highlighted in the show.

Celia Pym's deliberately slow work uses mending to explore what is left behind, anchoring threads and yarn into robust healthy fabric and filling areas of thinning cloth, building upon what already exists. Her work often encompasses personal stories, with *Hope's Sweater* belonging to the artist's mother (and later her brother) and repaired with Jamieson's Shetland Sprindrift wool. Her *Mended Paper Bags* embrace a similar ethos of care and repair.

Yinka Shonibare's interdisciplinary practice uses textiles to explore cultural identity and the tangled relationship between Africa and Europe. *The British Library Collection (Artists AP)* comprises of 237 hardback books wrapped in Dutch Wax printed cotton fabric, bearing the names (in gold) of amongst others, artists who have contributed to the field of British art (the majority who have immigrated to the UK or are the descendants of immigrants).

Esna Su's *The Burden II - My Trousseau* explores the idea of displacement. Using traditional Turkish techniques of weaving, twining (interlacing strands), needle work and crochet, the 'burdens' are knitted with leather cord and moulded to Su's own treasured possessions. She mutates these materials into wearable sculptures that she describes as being enveloped with heritage, exploring issues of identity and memory and how these are shaken by political instability and migration.

About the Curators

Threads has been co-curated by Arnolfini and **Alice Kettle** an artist who has established a unique area of practice. Her large figurative stitched works, exploit the textures and effects made possible through the harnessing of a mechanical process to intuitive, conceptual and creative ends, in which stories collide with autobiographical and contemporary events, folklore and mythology. Her work is represented in various international public collections including the Crafts Council, the Whitworth Manchester, Liverpool International Slavery Museum, Museum of Decorative Art and Design, Riga, Latvia, Ararat Art Gallery Australia, the Belger Collection, Kansas City USA. She is professor of Textile Arts at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University and has co-authored and edited various publications including *Machine Stitch Perspectives*, *Hand Stitch Perspectives*, *Collaboration through Craft*, and *The Erotic Cloth* with Bloomsbury. She is represented in the UK by Candida Stevens Gallery.

Kettle's contribution to *Threads* acknowledges the influence of research carried out as part of a wider project with Professor Lesley Millar, University for the Creative Arts.



About our Supporters

Threads will be supported by Arnolfini's first ever crowdfunding campaign in collaboration with Art Happens, a platform run by **Art Fund**. The target is to raise £20,000 to transform Arnolfini into a living, breathing textile studio – building a giant interactive weaving machine, bringing artist Celia Pym's *Mending Project* to Bristol, and free weekly family activities throughout the summer holidays, bringing *Threads* to life for as many members of the community as possible.

Among the rewards supporters may receive for their donation are limited edition rewards, such as a new artwork by Alice Kettle, curator-led tours, hand-embroidered cushions created by a refugee craft group with Alice Kettle and commissioned by Christopher Farr. More details and how to make a contribution to the campaign, which runs from until Sunday 30 April, are [here](#).

About Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. It provides millions of pounds every year to help museums to acquire and share works of art across the UK, further the professional development of their curators, and inspire more people to visit and enjoy their public programmes. Art Fund is independently funded, supported by Art Partners, donors, trusts and foundations and the 135,000 members who buy the National Art Pass, who enjoy free or discounted entry to over 850 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and receive Art Quarterly magazine. Art Fund also supports museums through its annual prize, Art Fund Museum of the Year. The winner of Art Fund Museum of the Year 2022 is Horniman Museums & Gardens. www.artfund.org

Art Fund_

About Arnolfini

Woven into the fabric of Bristol since 1961, Arnolfini is an international centre of interdisciplinary contemporary arts, presenting an ambitious and wide-ranging programme of visual art, performance, dance, film, and music.

Housed in a prominent Grade II listed accessible building (Bush House) on the city's harbourside, Arnolfini is a pioneering, inspiring public space for arts and learning, offering an innovative, inclusive and engaging experience for all. Bush House is also part of the University of the West of England, Bristol's City Campus with over 300 students and tutors onsite.

Arnolfini has welcomed artists from around world throughout its history – sharing works by Paula Rego, Jannis Kounellis, John Akomfrah, Grayson Perry, Rachel Whiteread, Peter Doig, Richard Long, Veronica Ryan, Chantal Joffe, Sonia Boyce and Frank Bowling, to name just a few - as well as supporting talent from in and around Bristol.

Alongside its exhibition programme, Arnolfini is a centre of everyday creativity and learning, working with a wide range of community and artistic partners, while continuing to explore and develop new opportunities across the city and beyond. Spaces are used regularly by families, schools and colleges, health and wellbeing groups.

Through sharing a 60+ year archive of exhibition slides, publications and an extensive artist book collection, Arnolfini celebrates its heritage and the wide-reaching impact the organisation has had since its foundation.

From 2019, Director Gary Topp and team have sought to honour Arnolfini's founder Jeremy Rees' principle to 'Enjoy Yourself', welcoming everyone into the space, and inviting engagement, in any number of ways.

Arnolfini is an independent charity (CIO) and part of the University of the West of England, Bristol, supported by Arts Council England and the Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust.

About UWE Bristol

The University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) has a global and inclusive outlook, with approximately 36,000 students and strong industry networks and connections with over 1,000 employers. Research at UWE Bristol focuses on real world problems and the University plays a pivotal role in the regional economy. With over £300 million invested in infrastructure, buildings and facilities across all Campuses, UWE Bristol is creating a place for learning that is innovative, ambitious, connected, enabling and inclusive. UWE Bristol is ranked 24th in the Guardian university league table, as well as 4th in the South West of England for student satisfaction. www.uwe.ac.uk

About Arts Council England

Arts Council England is the national development agency for creativity and culture. By 2030 we want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. Between 2018 and 2022, we will invest £1.45 billion of public money from government and an estimated £860 million from the National Lottery to help deliver this vision. www.artscouncil.org.uk

About Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust

Arnolfini has been supported by a linked charity, the Ashley Clinton Barker Mills Trust (ACBMT) for more than 60 years.

Arnolfini founders Jeremy and Annabel Rees were first introduced to the artists and benefactors Peter and Caroline Barker-Mill in 1963, by the London gallerist Lesley Waddington. It was a fortuitous meeting that was the catalyst in allowing Arnolfini to develop from a small volunteer-run private gallery into a major international arts centre.

The Ashley Clinton Barker-Mills Trust (ACBMT) principle is to work with Arnolfini, primarily by making annual grants from the income earned on its investments, as well as funding modest, one-off capital grants to help the Arnolfini transition to its current

financial model. In more recent years members of the ACMBT have become more involved working with Arnolfini to help plan its future.

www.arnolfini.org.uk/about/ashley-clinton-barker-mills-trust