

# Unbound

## *Visionary Women Collecting Textiles*

*Exhibition Dates:* Saturday 25th January - Sunday 19th April 2020

*Press Preview:* Thursday 23rd January 2020 10am - 12pm

*Two Temple Place, London WC2R 3BD* [www.twotempleplace.org](http://www.twotempleplace.org) #Unbound

Two Temple Place is delighted to announce its 2020 exhibition *Unbound: Visionary Women Collecting Textiles*.

*Unbound: Visionary Women Collecting Textiles* tells the story of seven pioneering women who went against all established norms to create some of the richest, most diverse and global public collections in the UK today.

Textiles and costume give us a beautiful and intensely human insight into our history. *Unbound: Visionary Women Collecting Textiles* celebrates seven women who saw beyond the purely functional, to reveal the extraordinary artistic, social and cultural importance of textiles. From the exquisite anthropological collections of traditional Balkan costume by Edith Durham, to the ground-breaking contemporary South Asian collection of Nima Poovaya-Smith, these women defied the 'traditional' concept of collecting – an activity still more often associated with men – and forged the way for textiles as crucial documents of social history as well as works of art in their own right.

This major collaborative project explores the innovative approaches of Edith Durham (1863 - 1944), Louisa Pesel (1870 - 1947), Olive Matthews (1887 - 1979), Enid Marx (1902 - 1998), Muriel Rose (1897 - 1986), Jennifer Harris (working 1982 - 2016 at the Whitworth, University of Manchester) and Nima Poovaya-Smith (Senior Keeper International Arts 1985 - 1998, Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Bradford), and presents the objects from a previously unexplored perspective, that of the female collector.

*Unbound: Visionary Women Collecting Textiles* includes sculptural 18th-century costume, intricately embroidered Balkan towels, headdresses and waistcoats, the 1920s and 1930s block printed fabrics of Barron and Larcher, as well as contemporary works: Alice Kettle's huge machine embroidered panels *Three Caryatids* (1989 - 91), Yinka Shonibare's 2007 copy of the last slave ship *The Wanderer* reimagined with 'African' batik fabric sails and Sarbjit Natt's 1996 geometric patterned silk sari. These sit alongside archival photographs, sketchbooks and letters, many of which have never been shown in public. The exhibition looks at how these collections continue to influence us today and asks why textiles still have to fight for their place amongst the more established visual arts.

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*Unbound: Visionary Women Collecting Textiles* is created in partnership with seven museums and galleries: Bankfield Museum, Halifax; Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Bradford; Chertsey Museum; Compton Verney; Crafts Study Centre, Farnham; the Special Collections at the University of Leeds and the Whitworth, University of Manchester.

The exhibition is curated by leading textiles expert June Hill and emerging curator Lotte Crawford, with support from modern craft curator and writer Amanda Game and Jennifer Hallam, an arts policy specialist.

The 12-week, free exhibition is devised for and with Two Temple Place in London as part of its successful Winter Exhibition Programme.

## EDITORS' NOTES:

*“Textiles sit within so many disciplines that it’s difficult to get a grasp of the diversity of human experience they encompass. That’s the challenge Unbound has set itself: to bring together material from across a wide spectrum and uncover different ways of seeing.”*

June Hill, Curator

*“Many of these women collectors were described as having an ‘eccentric’ or ‘selective’ eye. To me this is a gendered issue that points to the hierarchy of their collections and status of women in a wider cultural sense as they were not perceived as professional collectors or curators. This exhibition challenges that perception and shines a light on their informed insight into the importance of textiles.”*

Lotte Crawford, Assistant Curator

### **Edith Durham (1863 - 1944), Bankfield Museum, Halifax.**

An artist and anthropologist, Durham became a national hero in Albania, lauded by the Albanian people after only a few years’ travelling there. “It is”, she said, “an awful responsibility to be fallen in love with by a whole nation.” Durham travelled to the Balkans, first in 1900, where she was quickly enthralled by the people, their cultures and costume which she recorded in writings, photographs, sketches and by collecting traditional textiles.

The material Durham acquired during her travels in the Balkans between 1900 and 1914 has assumed even greater significance since the ethnic cleansing of Balkan museums during the conflict in the 1980s and 1990s. Durham donated her collection of textiles to Bankfield Museum in 1935.

### **Louisa Pesel (1870 - 1947), International Textiles Collection, University of Leeds**

An outstanding needlewoman and advocate of the art of embroidery, Pesel focused her life on teaching and encouraging others to stitch for employment, therapy and recreation. In 1918

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Pesel was instrumental in starting the Khaki Handicrafts Club, which taught men in Bradford suffering from shellshock to sew and embroider as a form of therapy. A century on, the wellbeing aspect of craft (and stitch) is equally pertinent. An encourager of small groups, Pesel helped lay the foundations of the Embroiderers' Guild and was its first President (1920 - 1922).

Louisa Pesel features as a character in Tracy Chevalier's new novel, *A Single Thread*, which focuses on the Winchester Cathedral embroideries.

### **Olive Matthews (1887 - 1979), Chertsey Museum**

Encouraged by her father, Olive Matthews began to collect at the age of 12 using her pocket money to buy examples of historic fashion and textiles. The 18th century was of particular interest, influenced by her being given a small group of items from the 1770s that belonged to her great-great-grandmother Susanna Pearce.

Her collecting was always personal – reflecting her love of technical accomplishment and surface decoration – diligently researched and within a budget (she never spent more than £5 on an item).

Olive Matthews was instrumental in placing her collection at Chertsey, having set up a Trust in the 1960s to create a Museum space for the collection.

### **Muriel Rose (1897 - 1986), Craft Study Centre, Farnham**

Pivotal in the development of modern crafts in the 20th century and key in highlighting craft's role in the formation of national identity, Muriel Rose was the Director of The Little Gallery, London (1928 - 1939), a venue for showing and selling the best of contemporary craft. In the process, she encouraged and supported the work of numerous artists, printmakers and ceramicists at key periods in their careers including Barron and Larcher, Ethel Mairet, Elizabeth Peacock, Bernard Leach, Lucie Rie and Hans Coper. "You've no competition, either re your little shop or into your insight re English Crafts and Craftsmen" commented Bernard Leach.

That influence extended beyond the gallery into her work for the British Council for whom she curated international exhibitions, including a major show that toured nine venues in the US and Canada during the Second World War.

Muriel Rose was a founding Trustee of the Craft Study Centre where her archive now resides.

### **Enid Marx (1902 - 1998), Compton Verney**

Marx was part of the outstanding 1920s cohort of students at the Royal College of Art that Paul Nash described as 'an outbreak of talent'. With Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden as close friends, her modernist approach to print and patternmaking in textiles was ground-breaking and produced several iconic designs. The first Royal Designer for Industry (1944)

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to be awarded the role as ‘Pattern Maker’, Marx designed the patterns of furnishing fabrics for the London Underground as well as postage stamps to coincide with the accession of Her Majesty the Queen in 1952.

In 1932 Marx and her life-long friend and colleague Margaret Lambert started to collect English popular art. An interest in pattern, identity and the integration of past and present design informed her collecting of material that was undervalued, if not on the brink of being lost. The Marx-Lambert collection also shows what attracts a maker’s eye, demonstrating how the objects collected inspired Marx and Lambert as designers.

**Jennifer Harris, Curator of Textiles and Deputy Director at the Whitworth, University of Manchester (1982 - 2016)**

Responsible for building a collection of art textiles of global significance, Harris’ work towards this coincided with the growth of textiles as a contemporary art form. She not only collected seminal artworks that chart this period but also was herself an integral part of its development. Harris was influential in shaping thinking around textiles and, as a curator, she worked with artists in exhibiting, commissioning and purchasing work that explored the contested territories of textiles and art, exploring issues of textiles and gender (see Lyn Malcom’s *The Subversive Stitch Sampler* which was commissioned for the related seminal exhibition in 1988) and engaging artists with historic collections (Michael Brennand-Wood for *Material Evidence*, 1996). The respect with which she is held is reflected in the number of works donated to the Whitworth by leading artists, including Tadek Beutlich, and the continuing demand for her publications.

**Nima Poovaya-Smith, Senior Keeper International Arts, Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Bradford (1985 - 1998)**

Throughout her time at Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Nima Poovaya-Smith created an outstanding collection of international art that reflected the changing diversity of the city’s population. Drawing on links with Bradford’s textile heritage and the inspiration it took from world textiles (especially the Indian subcontinent), she collected examples of historic traditional textiles (many now rare) and the work of contemporary artisans and artists in the Indian subcontinent and the UK.

The collection grew from a dozen objects to nearly 2,000 throughout Poovaya-Smith’s tenure. It now contains the largest collection of contemporary art by artists of South Asian descent, including Sarbjit Natt, Fahmida Shah and Sehyr Saigol, whose works will be on display at Two Temple Place. This ground-breaking international collection explores questions of cultural identity and cultural appropriation inspired by – and acquired in full consultation with – the diverse communities of its home in Bradford.

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## About *Unbound: Visionary Women Collecting Textiles*

### Events

The exhibition will be accompanied by a varied programme of cultural events for children and adults including talks, lectures, workshops and our usual Wednesday Late openings until 9pm.

Two Temple Place will also continue to offer its popular free literacy workshops for KS2 pupils from state London Primary Schools. More information and Teacher Resources can be found on our website: <https://twotempleplace.org/learning/>

### Opening Times

Monday, Thursday - Saturday: 10am - 4:30pm

Wednesday Late: 10am - 9pm, Sunday: 11am - 4:30pm

Closed on Tuesday, Closed Easter Sunday

**ADMISSION FREE**

### About Two Temple Place

Two Temple Place, a magnificent neo-Gothic mansion on London's Victoria Embankment, is owned and run by the charity the Bulldog Trust. This will be the ninth show in its Winter Exhibition Programme, supporting regional museums across the UK, highlighting great collections through annual free exhibitions and supporting emerging curators.

A summary of the programme's impact and success can be seen here: <https://twotempleplace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2TP-Exhibition-Report.pdf>

The Bulldog Trust is grateful to Arts Council England, John Ellerman Foundation and the Mullion Charitable Trust for their generous support of this exhibition.

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