MANCHESTER 1824
The University of Manchester
The Whitworth

TRACES OF DISPLACEMENT

EXHIBITION GUIDE

the Whitworth

PREFACE

The *Traces of Displacement* exhibition stems from a three-year Arts and Humanities Research Council project, *Understanding Displacement Aesthetics and Making Change in the Art Gallery with Refugees, Migrants and Host Communities,* led by the Centre for the Cultural History of War, University of Manchester. This project has been developed in partnership with the University of Melbourne, Manchester Art Gallery and the Whitworth Art Gallery.

Since the second world war and the formalisation of the international refugee regime, forced displacement has been marked by a set of aesthetic, practical, and institutional concerns. *Understanding Displacement Aesthetics* investigates historical and contemporary cultural representations of displacement and refugeedom. It explores the impact that art and museum practices have had on displaced communities, as well as the reverse: the impact that displacement has had on artistic practice, the cultural industries, the United Nations, and humanitarian sectors.

Understanding Displacement Aesthetics reframes the way refugees and the conditions of displacement are seen. Through a blend of historical research, and long-term collaborative curatorship, it aims to challenge the limitations that contexts of displacement present for artists, art galleries and institutions addressing refugeedom and its legacies.

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UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Manchester Art Gallery

Forced displacement is one of the most urgent issues of our time, but it is not new. Conflict, persecution and environmental devastation have, throughout history, led people to flee their homes and seek safety elsewhere.

Traces of Displacement presents a partial and fragmentary, yet compelling, set of stories about displacement. It has been developed from deep research into how stories of forced migration can be told using the Whitworth's collection of art, textiles and wallpaper. The works on display reveal how artists experience and witness social, cultural and political upheaval. They are important historical documents that can challenge dominant narratives and familiar representations of refugees. These are not just images of conflict or trauma — they make space for critical dialogue, testimony, resilience and humour.

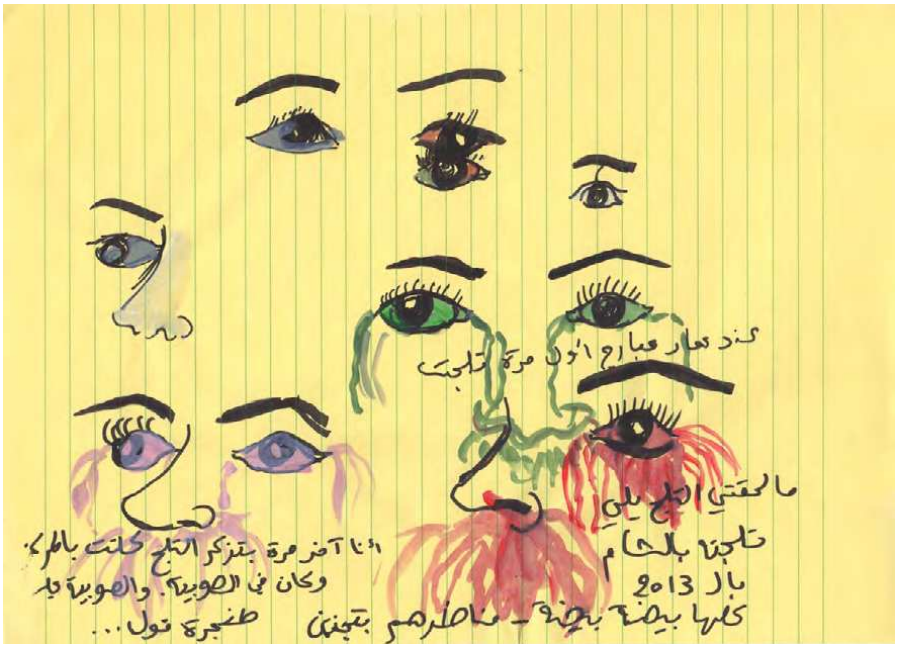
The exhibition moves across historical lines of inquiry — from colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, to the first and second world wars, partition in India, and the increasing impact of climate change. It is trans-national, engaging global perspectives and stories, and many of the artists included in the exhibition are reflecting on their own lived experience.

The task of finding stories of forced displacement in the Whitworth collection was a challenge. This important work required collaboration between curators, academics and a group of creative advisors with lived experience or a heritage of displacement. The group met to explore the collection and share their stories over many months. This provided invaluable expertise and insights that gave new meaning to works of art and shaped the content of the exhibition.

The *Traces of Displacement* advisors are Yuiwai Chung, Ani Daspanyan, Vian K. Hussein, Ambrose Musiyiwa, Mahboobeh Rajabi, Noor Seddiqi, and Helena Tomlin. Throughout the exhibition, visitors encounter art that has been selected and also created by the advisors, as well as additional wall texts and audio-visual content that they have produced.

The stories unearthed in the collection do not tell a complete story, and this reflects the inability of the Whitworth's collection to represent some histories, geographies and experiences. Loaned works of art enabled us to address some gaps, and more permanent changes can be made by adding work that speaks to the issue of displacement, enhancing the collection in the coming years. This work begins with the acquisition of Mounira al Solh's *I strongly believe in our right to be frivolous* (2012- ongoing).

TRACES OF DISPLACEMENT



Mounira al Solh (1978, Lebanon)
I Strongly Believe in the Right to be Frivolous 2012-ongoing
Mixed media on yellow legal pad paper

In this ongoing drawing series, Mounira al Solh collects and documents the stories of people who have been forcibly displaced because of humanitarian and political crises. These humanising works act as testimony to the unique lives and journeys of people who find themselves displaced from their homeland. Made in Lebanon, the Netherlands, Greece and Germany, the portraits are usually captured in a single session. Drawn on yellow legal pad, they reference the arduous bureaucracy that people fleeing conflict face when seeking asylum.

The title comes from a statement by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, known for writing about experiences of exile. This work has now been acquired for the Whitworth collection.

Purchased from Sfeir-Semler Gallery in 2023 with support
from Friends of the Whitworth

Caroline Walker (1982, UK)
Joy, 11:30am, Hackney 2018

Oil on linen

Caroline Walker's paintings document the lives of women. Depicting intimate scenes that show women in public and private settings, her works hint at possible narratives but stories are never fully revealed. In 2017, Walker collaborated with the charity Women for Refugee Women to make a series of paintings depicting female refugees and asylum seekers. Joy, who is shown here, was given refugee status in the UK. Walker paints her with warmth, reclining on her bed in her flat in Hackney, London.

Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery

DETENTION AND DETAINMENT

People forced to flee are frequently subject to processes of detention. While detainment is often associated with refugee camps, it comes in many forms: from off-shore detention centres to prisons, temporary holding facilities, internment camps, and immigration removal centres. Works of art and archival materials in this exhibition engage with forms of detention both historically and in the present.

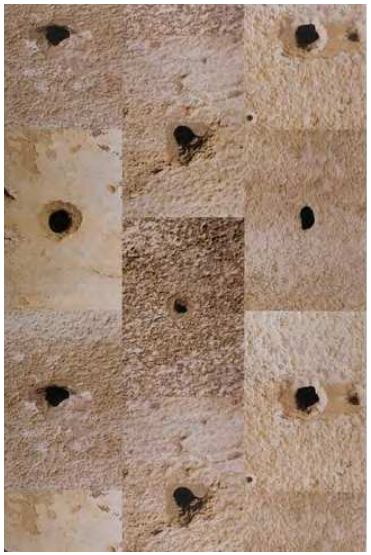
In the United Kingdom, 20,446 asylum seekers were placed in detention in 2022. Under British law, a person can be detained while their applications are being processed, while they wait to hear the outcome of an appeal process, or if their claim for asylum has been rejected. Under this law, people can be detained indefinitely.

Source: www.gov.uk, 2023

Bashir Makhoul (1963, Palestine)
Points of View 1998
Digital printed wallpaper

In 1998 Palestinian British artist Bashir Makhoul created a body of work related to his grandmother Najla - a woman who was born in Palestine, fled to Lebanon following the Nakba of 1948, and died as a refugee. Visiting his grandmother in Beirut, Makhoul created a series of photographs of bullet holes which he later transformed into vinyl wallpaper. Using repetition to transform a horrifying detail into a domestic object, the scarred walls Makhoul depicts here cannot be identified with a particular building, city, or place. Rather the work creates an uncanny sense of home as a space of constant threat and witness to repeated violence.

Purchased from Mid-Penning Arts in 1998



Hiwa K (1975, Iraq)
View from Above 2017
Single channel HD video, 12:27 min

View From Above narrates the story of a Kurdish Iraqi man facing interrogation in order to secure asylum. Attempting to prove he is escaping a so-called 'unsafe zone', the man memorises intricate details of a city he claims to have fled. His experience is narrated alongside an aerial view of a map of the German city of Kassel, which was destroyed in WWII. It is unclear if this is a true story or a composite of multiple experiences. What emerges from this haziness are the dangers of an asylum system which requires high-stakes performances and the reliving of traumatic memories to ensure one's safety.

Courtesy the artist, KOW Berlin, and Prometeogallery di Ida Pisani, Milan, Lucca

Safdar Ahmed (1975, Australia)
Border Farce 2022
2 channel video, 15:55 min

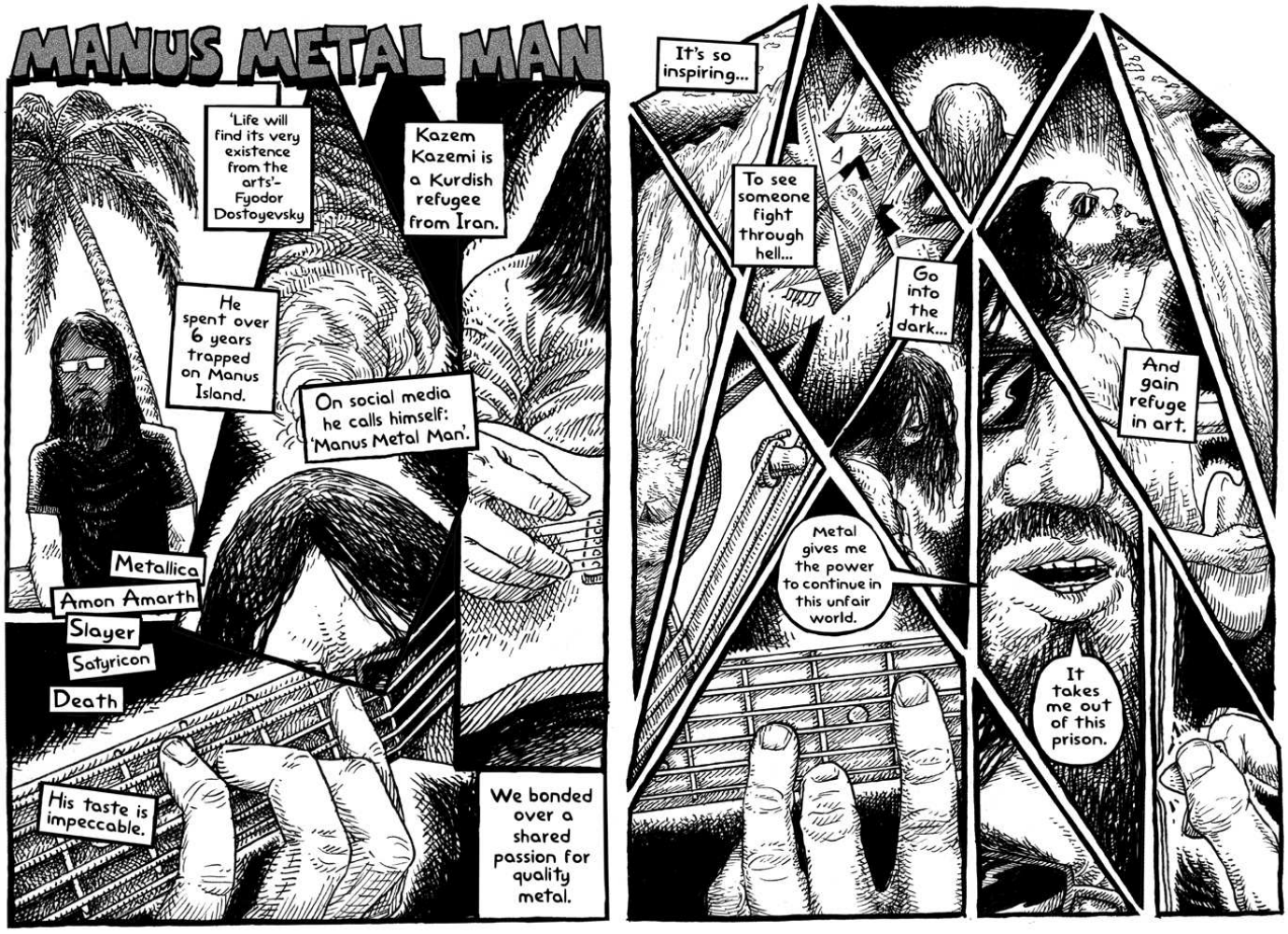
Border Farce is a collaboration between Sydney-based comic artist Safdar Ahmed, Kurdish-Iranian heavy metal guitarist Kazem Kazemi, and cinematographer Alia Ardon. Interrogating notions of citizenship and the weaponization of borders, the work focuses on documentary footage of Kazemi's traumatic experience at the Manus Island detention camp where he was held for six years, and his eventual evacuation to Brisbane, Australia, where he remains stateless. The footage is combined with the discordant visuals of Hazeen, the anti-racist Muslim death metal band that Ahmed and Kazemi were invited to play in with fellow artists Can Yalcinkaya and Kian Dayani.

Courtesy the artist

Safdar Ahmed (1975, Australia)
Double-page spread from Alien Citizen Zine 2022
Reproduction print

Alien Citizen was created by Safdar Ahmed in collaboration with Refugee Art Project, a community art organisation he helped to establish in 2011 following his first visit to Sydney's Villawood Immigration Detention Centre. This double-page details his collaboration with Kazem Kazemi aka Manus Metal Man.

Courtesy the artist



Ernst Eisenmayer (1920-2018, Austria)
Sketch of violinist made in internment camp, Isle of Man 1940
Ink on paper

Paul Humpoletz (1889-1972, Austria)
Jewish New Year card made in internment camp, Isle of Man 1940
Woodcut

Unknown
Poster for Art Behind the Wire exhibition held in Mooragh camp, Isle of Man 1940
Reproduction print

Museum case presenting selected objects from the Wolff family archive including archive letters, identity cards, drawing and other ephemera

Loaned by Janet Wolff

My father, Arthur Wolff, came to Manchester in 1938 to work at Lankro Chemicals in Eccles. The company had been founded the previous year by another refugee, Heinz Kroch. They were both interned as 'enemy aliens' in the Isle of Man from May 1940 for just under a year.

Arthur was born in 1903 in a village in south-west Germany. He was Jewish, so when the Nazi party came to power, he looked for ways to leave Germany. An introduction to Dr. Kroch gave him entry to Britain in 1938. He was able to get visas for his parents in 1939 and they joined him in Manchester. His father died six months later, having been badly beaten up in his home by supporters of the Nazi party on *Kristallnacht*. My father's attempt to get his uncle and aunt to Manchester was not successful. Deported in October 1940, he died in Gurs internment camp and she died in Auschwitz.

Janet Wolff, Professor Emerita, University of Manchester and Author of *Austerity Baby,* Family Memoir

Azza Abo Rebieh (1980, Syria)
Traces 2018
Digital images of lithographic prints

Traces is a series of etchings and drawings depicting the artist's time in a Syrian prison where she was detained for protesting against the government. The images and texts detail the harsh reality of imprisonment: brutality, police harassment, and the humiliation of strip-searching. They also reveal the tenderness and care shared by women detainees in the face of this treatment.

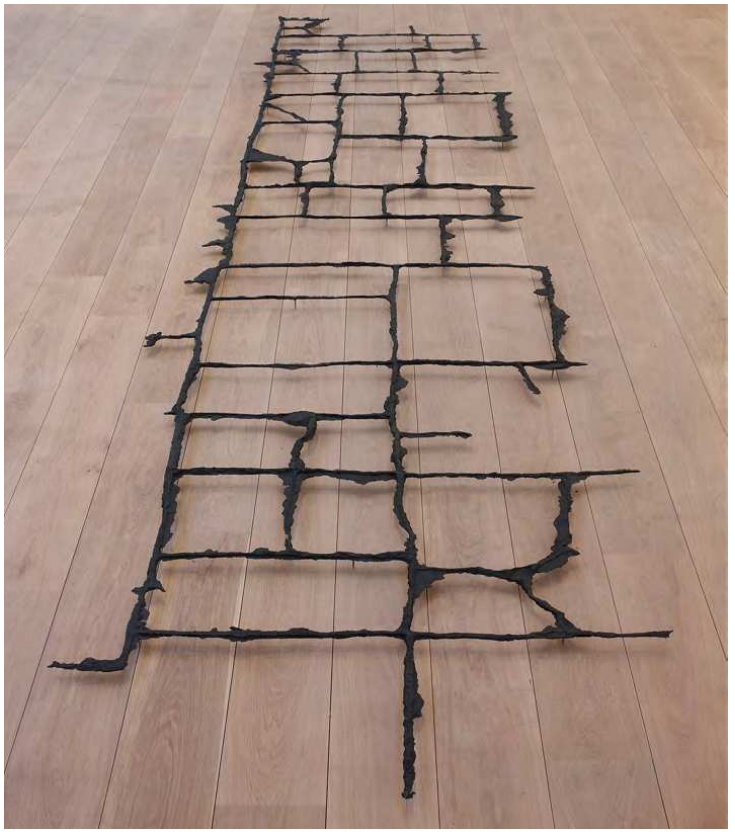
The works take inspiration from Francisco Goya's series *Los Caprichos*, which used the medium of print to circulate harrowing images of war. Gesturing to Goya's motifs, menacing depictions of bats appear to haunt the city, hovering like military helicopters and beckoning death to the civilians below. Symbols of escape such as a blue whale and a green bus accompany scenes of crowds fleeing the city. When eventually released from prison, Abo Rebieh sought refuge in Lebanon, where she lives and works today.

On loan from the artist

Nana Varveropoulou
No Man's Land 2012-14
Photographic prints

No Man's Land is a collaborative project that explores experiences of indefinite immigration detention at Colnbrook immigration removal centre, near Heathrow airport. Over two years, Varveropoulou had unprecedented access to Colnbrook, where she ran photography workshops with men detained at the centre, responding to themes such as time, powerlessness and patience. The photographs displayed are a mix of those taken by the artist and asylum seekers who took part in the project — representing parallel records of detention as seen from inside and outside. Some participant names have been changed to protect their identities.

Courtesy the artist



Cornelia Parker (1946, UK)
Jerusalem (Occupied Territory) 2015
Patinated black bronze

Jerusalem is one of a series of works in which Parker made casts of the cracks between city pavement slabs, a process she describes as an attempt to "record their contours, occupy their territory". For this piece, Parker poured latex into the cracks of a pavement in the contested area of East Jerusalem, an area from which Palestinians have been forcibly removed as a result of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Once the cast was set, Parker lifted it out and brought it back to the UK where it was cast in bronze. In making absences and voids visible, the work is a symbolic trace of displacement and contested territory.

Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund and the Arts Council England/Victoria and Albert Museum Purchase Grant Fund

THE BODY IS THE RECORD

People flee because their lives are at risk. The trauma that this generates does not stay in the past. It is imprinted on the body and the brain. This ripples across generations. Addressing trauma which is experienced or witnessed first hand, artworks in this exhibition draw on the body as both subject and material for art-making. Refusing straightforward narration, these works turn inwards to reflect on how the body is both a reminder and repository of the trauma of displacement.

Hayv Kahraman (1981, Iraq)
Hands on Flax 2021
Ink on flax

Lizard Brain 2022
Ink on flax

Beard-gut-brain axis 2021
Oil and ink on flax

Trauma Portfolio no.2 2021
Ink on flax

Kahraman's practice examines the gendered and racialised body politics of migrant consciousness. The drawings displayed here are part of a recent body of work that draws on scientific research into the gut, which has been termed the 'second brain' by scientists. Developed from the artist's ongoing exploration of embodied experiences of 'otherness', these works situate trauma in the body. Intestine-like cords allude to the complex web of interconnectivity that entangles our life experiences with our bodies.

Courtesy the artist and Pilar Corrias Gallery

Leilah Babirye (1985, Uganda)
Kuchu Ndagamuntu (Queer Identity Card) 2021
Acrylic on paper

The two works displayed here depict ambiguously gendered subjects from the artist's native Uganda. Inspired by passport photos or identity cards, Babiyre draws attention to how the LGBTQ+ community in her home country experience a lack of legal recognition or protection. Before Uganda was colonised by the British, who brought Victorian Christianity with them, LGBTQ+ people were widely accepted. In March 2023, MPs in Uganda passed a controversial anti-LGBTQ+ bill, which would make homosexual acts punishable by death. Through the application of bright, viscous paint, Babiyre imagines queer lineages amongst the ancestral clans of the Bugandan people. Together, these portraits envisage an international utopia of queer Ugandans liberated from homophobic oppression.

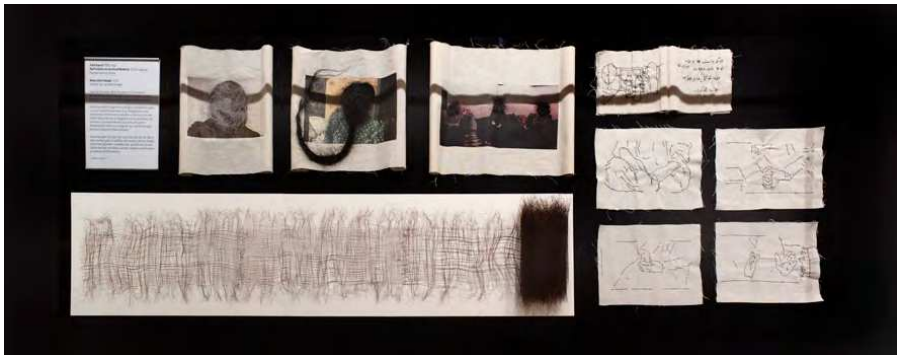
Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery

Leilah Babiyre (1985, Uganda)

Nakatulugu from the Kuchu Mpindi (Chickpea) Clan 2021
Glazed ceramic, wire, found objects

Babiyre fled her native Uganda due to homophobic persecution and familial rejection and was granted asylum in the US. This life experience informs her sculptural practice, which makes use of discarded materials. People born in Uganda are often named after clans. Babiyre carries this practice into the naming of her sculpture. In this way, she shows how queer communities continue to exist and hold their clan names, despite being disowned for who they are.

Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery



Kami Kamil (1981, Iraq)
Reflections on Archival Material. 2020 – ongoing
Human hair on canvas

Masculine Hanger 2012
Human hair, wooden hanger

Kani Kamil's work often focuses on the impact of displacement and upheaval in Iraqi Kurdistan. In these works, Kamil focuses on the sublimated stories of women, whose experiences of resilience against forms of patriarchal systemic violence remain sublimated within the historical archive.

Kamil recreates images from largely unpublished audio-visual archives from Northern Iraq from 1990 - 2000. Ranging from oral testimonies of domestic violence, to stories of village life and social events, these archives are a trove of women's history in the region, too sensitive to be published elsewhere. Using her hair, Kamil entangles her own body with these archival images, at once re-distributing these stories, whilst refusing their straightforward narration.

Courtesy of the artist

Kamil has said:

For you, hair is just hair. But for me, hair is also: women, pain, invisibility, destruction, silence, shatterings, beatings, demolition, voicelessness, fear, punishment, brutality, but also in the end, revolution, protest, solidarity and freedom.
In memory of Zhina Amini.

mandla (1993, Zimbabwe)
as british as a watermelon 2021Single channel video, 28 min

Set within a chaotically colourful, sensory performance space, *as british as a watermelon* shows mandla weaving fragmented personal memories of coming to the UK as an asylum seeker with fictional stories and poetry. Accompanied by Christian hymns and isiNdebele folk songs, you are invited to watch as mandla rises from the dead to reclaim a misplaced power, scrambling to piece together a life mostly forgotten in order to survive.

Courtesy of the artist

Dusan Kusmic (1920-90, Italy)
Untitled (bread shoes on base) c.1948-50
Bread, plaster, house paint

Kusmic was born in Italy to Croatian parents. In 1941, when Italy declared war on the Dalmation Coast, his family were forced to return to their homeland. Unable to live in a Communist state, Kusmic escaped and undertook a traumatic journey back to Italy – the only country he had known as home. He was subsequently placed in a prisoner-of-war camp in Sicily. Traumatised by the suicide of a fellow prisoner, he was unable to eat his bread ration and instead began moulding it into shapes with his hands, producing sculptures.

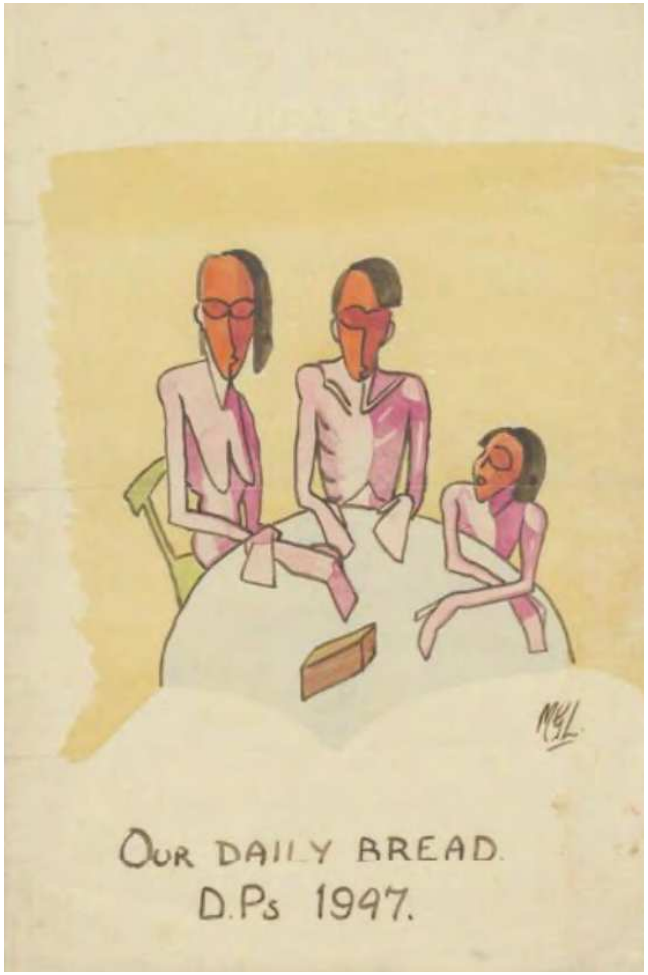
In 1950, the Red Cross found Kusmic refuge in Dublin, Ireland where he lived out his life in poverty. He continued to make art with unusual found materials, swapping his works for food. He said that making art helped him to "forget the distress of the past".

Presented by The Musgrave Kinley Outsider Art Trust in 2010. The Musgrave Kinley Outsider Art Collection was supported by the Eric and Salome Estorick Foundation

Mostyn G Langdon
Our Daily Bread, DPs 1947
Watercolour on paper

Langdon was a Medical Officer in Lubeck displaced persons camp, in the British zone of occupied Germany, after the Second World War (1939-45), when around 80 million people were displaced across Europe. In some camps, sourcing food and clothing were significant issues, and it is clear in this depiction of an emaciated family sharing a loaf of bread, that Langdon was concerned about the health of his patients.

On loan from Imperial War Museums



AFTER IMAGES

When looking at something bright (such as a camera flash), the human eye continues to see the outline image of an object even when it has looked away. This lingering visual impression is called an 'after image'. The artworks in this section can be understood as 'after images' of displacement and refugee experience. They are not produced from first-hand accounts, but rather from a distance via the media. The flash image creates a visual memory of familiar refugee tropes, such as boats, tents, crowds, and human flows. Yet it is often difficult to pinpoint specific geographies, time periods, conflicts, or communities. Artists make interventions into the mediatisation of refugees by rendering the image opaque, blurry and less visible.

Edward Bawden (1903-89, UK)
Penjwin, Iraq, from the Hills 1943
Watercolour and ink on paper

Edward Bawden travelled through the Kurdish area of Iraq as an official war artist, appointed by the British War Artists Advisory Committee in the second world war (1939-45). On Returning to England in 1942, a German U-boat torpedoed his ship and Bawden was interned in a camp in colonial Morocco.

Penjwin is in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), the area was subject to intense aerial bombardments and chemical attacks, displacing thousands of people. Subsequent conflicts, including the Syrian civil war (2011-ongoing) and the Islamic State's attempt to eradicate Kurdish cultural life in Iraq and Syria, resulted in Kurdistan taking in two million refugees and internally displaced people.

This artwork was selected by Vian K. Husseinn, a member of the *Traces of Displacement* focus group.

Presented by the War Artists' Advisory Committee in 1947

Vian K.Hussein (1999, Syria)
Women and Mountain 2023
Acrylic on Canvas

“

This mountain painting led me to think about the mountains in Syria and the Kurdish women fighters who were in the front line defending our land, identity and culture against ISIS. Identity has always been a crucial issue for me as, in my home country I was unable to exercise my identity freely without being subjected to violence.

The women in this painting evoke freedom, independence and liberation, while the olives are a Kurdish symbol meaning peace. The red dots on the mountain stand for the blood that was shed in defence of Kurdish land and identity, and the mountain is important, as it was a place of refuge for Kurds fleeing persecution.

Ian Rawlinson (1965, UK)
Refuge I-IV 2004
Graphite on film

Rawlinson made this series of drawings by tracing images of refugee camps directly from newspaper sources. Amidst the intense saturation of media images of these camps, Rawlinson uses drawing as a tool for slowing down and stretching out the act of looking. Desolate and ordered, human presence in these images is ghostly — at a point of near disappearance.

Purchased by The Whitworth in 2004 to Ian Rawlinson

Lyndell Brown and Charles Green
(1961, Australia; 1953, Australia)
Sinjar 2 2016-22
Digital print on Hahnemühle rag paper

Sinjar 2 is an image that reflects on the way that disastrous events are mediated through the news. In 2014, the artists saw a news story about the crash of a helicopter sent to rescue Yazidi families in Sinjar, Iraq from advancing Islamic State forces. They reacted to the photographs of chaotic scenes of rescue. Initially rendered in watercolour before being produced in print, the fading, intangible quality of the image speaks to how trauma is, or is not, translated through photojournalism.

Courtesy the artists

> The artists said: The faintness of [our] image goes with rendering invisible a media trope; making it difficult for the viewer to know what is going on. We will never know what it is like to have this specific experience...by watching the news, and we therefore cannot really see. We gradually made the image almost invisible in order to drain the depiction of rhetoric. We can never know, never empathise adequately or enough.

Cecily Brown (1969, UK)
Untitled (Shipwreck) 2016
3 watercolour and gouache on paper

Cecily Brown takes inspiration from images that already exist in the world. The drawings displayed here rework Eugene Delacroix's *The Shipwreck of Don Juan* (1840) and were made during the 2015-16 refugee crisis, when the media began bombarding viewers with imagery of refugees fleeing their homelands in small boats.

Densely layered with human forms, these drawings create a sense of claustrophobia and urgency. Through the act of looking now, we are drawn not only to their art-historical precedents but also to their contemporary relevance, as the image of the shipwreck is transposed onto the tragic journeys made by migrants crossing the world's seas.

Presented by the artist in 2019

Francesco Simeti (1968, USA)
Arabian Nights 2003
Digital wallpaper print

Here Simeti subverts a historic decorative wallpaper design by J.B. Reveillon by inserting images taken from newspapers showing scenes of conflict and its consequences. The original pattern, which depicts a manicured park landscape, is populated with Afghan refugees following the US military intervention in 2001. By seamlessly blending these juxtaposing scenes together, Simeti brings the consequences of global conflict into the domestic arena. Demonstrating how the proliferation of traumatic images in the media can cause us to become desensitised, allowing them to quite literally fade into the background.

Purchased from the artist in 2009

Lada Nakonechna (1981, Ukraine)
Historical pictures of the contemporary ruins 2019
Print

Nakonechna is an artist who lives and works in Kyiv. Her depiction of ruins draws on romanticist imagery that places ruins at the centre of the image. While in romanticism ruins evoke the forcefulness of nature over cultural artefacts, Nakonechna's ruins reflect the contemporary dominance of culture over nature. The site depicted here is unknown but speaks of the culture that constantly produces ruins in Ukraine today. This print is part of a series used for Artists for Ukraine.

Courtesy the artist and Artists for Ukraine

Poem for Rev. James Bourne, The Ruins of Coverham Abbey, Yorkshire

Standing in nowhere
the chaos all over me,
my holy church in ruins
is all that they see.
They believe that's the end,
there is no more escape
from all that happened
due to the present they shape.
But with belief inside,
getting closer one step,
caring tears I hide
and the self I kept,
I go down to my knees
attaching to the ground,
the strength my soul feels
is from the hope I found.
Holding the future in my arms
and God in my mind,
I mumble a prayer
enlightening my heart.
They tried to bury us
but as seeds of love
we will grow all over
and continue Your granted life.

Ani Daspanyan,
Traces of Displacement focus group member

Leon Kossoff (1926-2019, UK)
Going Home 1984
Etching and drypoint

Purchased from Ian Starr, 1987

The notion of 'going home' is such a critical idea for the diasporic population and always stays in my mind as a displaced person. The ideal home lies afar, and my previous home even farther. I am typing this in Hong Kong but my family are in Manchester. We sold our apartment where I was living for 25+ years and Hong Kong has gotten worse every day. 'Home' in every sense is lost.

I chose this piece as it shows an everyday space - a public transport concourse. A normal routine is hard for a displaced person to maintain. It is not always about the grand journey of flight or sailing but a fleeting gaze into another person's eyes in a subway station.

Yuiwai Chung, *Traces of Displacement* focus group member

Persian Sash
Silk, gold and silver thread

Mahboobeh Rajabi (1988, Iran)
Golden Persian Phoenix 2023
Video, 01:54 min

Image courtesy the artist

Golden Persian Phoenix

The golden threads of history
Waves by waves
Holding flowers of memories
Rooted in Persian soil
Where I'm from
Where I was born
Where I learned the most beautiful poetry
That is still where I grasp
For some air of my motherland
You standing in a glass shield
Hiding your long tails of secrets
Of where you travelled
Where you landed
And who you served
Your long threads
Like a Persian phoenix
Flying through my mind
Where your golden touches,
Flowers designs and patterns
Are no common textile
I thought of castles, royals, battles
And people that wowed your beauty
While their destiny's timeline
Brought them to you
What you heard
What you saw
With feelings lost in the history
Like your story of why are you here?
What would you tell us, if you could talk?
All the stories we miss through history
You kept it right in between
your golden threads,
Wings of the Persian Phoenix
Speaks the language of hearts
And travel through souls
My only worries are your glass box
And my glass box of indetnity
Has the same fate as the Persians
You at least have descriptions
Mine is 'Minority Ethnicity'

Mahboobeh Rajabi, Co-ordinator,
Traces of Displacement focus group

Russian table-top mat 1900-20
Hand embroidered and hand block printed cotton or linen

Helena Tomlin
Russian Mat 2023
Watercolour and stamped ink, coated paper, photocopy, canvas and thread

This woven mat conjured up dreams for me of mealtimes in Lodz apartments and noisy Odessa basements. Like the threads in our family worn and fragmented and now brought together by powerful (post)memory.

The mat marks a gathering space to reflect upon the generations weaving through the world, on paths newly connected. Like the sky blue and sunflower yellow threads they make joyful patterns as they go.

Just as the needle journeys between the cloth's front and back, past and present are brought together. The deep red coloured centre recalling a nesting space akin to the constant warmth of home. We project our emotions into the gaps left by collections and curators and shelved without a history. Here is a piece to inspire better design.

The images on the accompanying collage artworks are taken from treasured family collections (often without history) from all over Europe.

Helena Tomlin, *Traces of Displacement* focus group

TRANSATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

Between the 15th and 19th centuries approximately 12.5 million Africans were forcibly transported to the Americas. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was the largest and one of the most inhumane forced migrations in history. Many people were captured during warfare, or kidnapped far in-land, with their enslavement beginning hundreds of miles from the coastal slave forts where they were sold to Europeans. This trade consumed entire communities, destroyed families, and robbed the enslaved of a future in the homelands.

The trade and labour of enslaved people fuelled the economic growth that was key to the expansion and wealth of modern industrial cities, especially Manchester. This city's streets, buildings, institutions and prosperity are undeniable legacies of colonialism and slavery.

This text was contributed by Dr Laura Sandy, Co-Director of the Centre for the Study of International Slavery, University of Liverpool.

Theodor De Bry (1528-98, Belgium)
A Chieff Ladye of Pomeiooc 1590
A Chieff Lorde of of Roanoac 1590
Hand coloured engravings

Colonialism is not a thing of the past. It has shaped our world and its effects continue to be lived and experienced by us all. It might be said that British colonialism started here – in 1585 on Roanoke Island - where one of the first attempts was made to set up a British colony in America. The area was inhabited by first nation people of the Carolina Algonquians at the time.

John White, an artist who visited the colony, made several sketches of the native people he encountered. These images were copied by Theodor De Bry, an engraver who was illustrating a book about the 'new world' of America. Produced for a European audience, De Bry altered White's original images, changing the subjects' facial structure and changing their stance to reflect classical sculpture. They were then given pale skin and blonde hair, whereas White's subjects had brown skin and black hair.

Purchased from E.J. Beer in 1964

Thomas Hearne (1744-1817, UK)
The Island of Montserrat from the Road before the Town 1775-6
Pen and ink, watercolour, bodycolour

In the 18th century, Britain and France battled to rule the plantation colonies and slave economies of the Caribbean, where 5 million enslaved Africans were trafficked and detained. In 1775, while serving as official draughtsman to Governor-in-Chief Sir Ralph Payne, Thomas Hearne depicted the island of Montserrat from the distance of a Royal Navy ship, forces used to control the enslaved population. Visible around the island are windmills used to process sugar cane, where thousands of enslaved people were forced to work under conditions of racist brutality that rationalised inhumane cruelty. This innocent tropical scene belies the slave economy of sugar cultivation and erases the growing African and creole presence. Art served colonial power, but also reveals sites of violence and resistance, with the rebellion of enslaved people taking place in Monserrat a decade earlier in 1768.

In 1997, two thirds of the island were displaced by a volcano eruption, which destroyed the capital Plymouth and neighbouring villages.

Purchased from Christie's in 1994

Richard Cosway (1742-1821, UK)
Mr and Mrs Cosway with Ottobah Cugoano 1784
Etching

In this self-portrait, Richard Cosway presents himself with his wife, artist, Maria Cosway in the garden of their London home. Serving them a platter of grapes is Ottobah Cugoano (c.1757-after 1791), who worked for the Cosways from approximately 1784 to 1791 and was one of the most influential African opponents of slavery in Europe.

Born in present day Ghana, Cugoano was enslaved in 1770 and trafficked to Grenada in the Caribbean via the gruelling middle passage. Two years later, he was able to make his way to England where he gained freedom. In 1787, he published *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* - an important abolitionist text that called for an immediate end to slavery. This book was the earliest first-hand account of the horrific treatment that enslaved people were subject to within the plantation system. It was re-printed three times and translated into French.

Purchased from Abbott and Holder Ltd in 1960.

William Ward (1766-1826, UK)
Monsieur de St Georges 1788
Mezzotint

This portrait depicts Le Chevalier de St Georges (c.1740-99), a French-Creole composer and champion fencer.

Born in the then French colony, Guadeloupe, to wealthy plantation owner George de Bologne, his mother was an enslaved woman named Nanon. St Georges, whose real name was Joseph de Bologne, was educated in France, and became an influential composer, inspiring Mozart and teaching music to French Queen Marie Antoinette. In 1776, he was proposed as the Director of the Paris Opera, but was denied the role due to racial discrimination. Bologne was involved with the anti-slavery movement in Britain and established a French abolitionist group called the Société des Amis des Noirs (Society of the Friends of Black People).

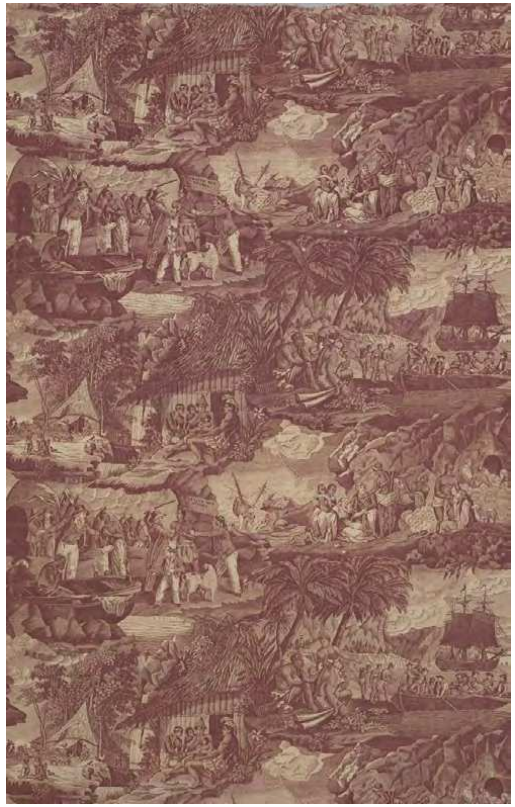
Purchased from Grosvenor Prints in 1993

Frédéric Etienne Joseph Feldtrappe (1786-1849, France)
Traite des Nègres (The Slave Trade) 1815-20
Roller-printed woven cotton, hand quilted onto woven cotton lining

This abolitionist textile was made in Rouen, France in the early 19th century. The images we see on this cotton (which would have been picked by enslaved hands) come from artworks created to highlight the inhuman brutality of slavery. Of the four scenes, two reference paintings by English artist George Moreland and contrast barbarous European slave traders with people from the African continent who offer aid to a shipwrecked family. The other two scenes are based on engravings by French artist Nicolas Colibert, showing African families being separated by slavers. Textiles like this were displayed in the homes of people who called for the abolition of the slave trade.

In the UK, we continue to benefit from slavery in visible and invisible ways. The Whitworth's collection includes works donated by philanthropists who made their wealth in cotton grown by enslaved people.

Purchased from Judy Wentworth in 2002



JMW Turner (1775-1851, UK)
Study of Boats 1828-30
Ink, watercolour, bodycolour

Supported by researchers at The University of Manchester, The Guardian newspaper recently published a report detailing research into their historic links with the trans-atlantic slave trade. They found that John Edward Taylor had various links to slavery through his partnerships in the cotton manufacturing industry, which enabled him to amass his wealth. Taylor was a significant donor to the Whitworth, donating 266 drawings between 1892 and 1912. We intend for this new information to act as a springboard for further research into links between the Whitworth's collections, colonialism and the slave trade.

This watercolour by Turner was gifted to the Whitworth by John Edward Taylor, founder of the Manchester Guardian, now The Guardian.

HUMANITARIANISM AND GENDER

During both world wars, artists worked with humanitarian agencies to support refugees fleeing violence and the destruction of their homes. This created familiar tropes of faceless crowds walking in formation with few belongings, shaping stereotypes of refugees. In addition, sympathetic portrayals of displaced people frequently focused on women and children because they aligned with ideals of innocence and vulnerability. Women and children are often shown to be passive and docile, and by extension 'worthy' of help. By contrast, in the media , male refugees are often racialised and presented as a threat to national security. Such portrayals play into gender stereotypes that equate masculine value with economic productivity. However, unlike humanitarian representations of women as dependent and helpless, works on display show how women adapted their handicraft skills to financially support their communities, build morale and sustain their threatened culture.

William Strang (1859-1921, UK)
A Belgian Peasant Girl 1914
Oil on canvas

In 1914, Germany invaded Belgium. This event triggered the first world war (1914-18) and caused a humanitarian crisis in Europe on a scale that had never been seen before. Millions of people were forced to flee their homes.

In this painting of a Belgian refugee, Strang draws attention to the pale innocence of the girl's face, her hair is demurely hidden beneath her head-covering. Her butter-coloured blouse implies rural wholesomeness, connecting to the idea of the 'deserving' refugee. The popularity of Belgian refugees as a subject helped to sell this painting to Manchester Art Gallery, making it the first work by Strang to enter a public collection.

Valorising refugees as dignified, and deserving was, however, a selective process. Though Britain had accepted 250,000 Belgian refugees, by the end of the war the climate of sympathy took a hostile turn, and they were largely forced to return by 1919.

On loan from Manchester Art Gallery

Sir Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956, UK)
Spain General Relief Fund for Women & Children in Spain c.1936
Lithographic poster

Similar to his work in support of Belgian refugees, Brangwyn joined other artists in producing art to raise funds for people fleeing the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). This work takes inspiration from the Catholic figure of the Madonna and child, with the mother figure protecting children from the burning buildings in the background.

Campaigns to support Spanish refugees were particularly popular in Manchester. The various fundraising initiatives included: medical aid and food ships, donations of produce from Lancashire farmers, film nights and, most notably, a special exhibition of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. The iconic mural, which depicts the bombing and massacre of the Basque town, was displayed in a car showroom on Victoria Street in the city centre.

On loan from Manchester Art Gallery

top to bottom

William B. King (1880-1927, US)
Lest They Perish 1915
Lithographic poster

Ethel Franklin Betts Bains (1877-1959, US)
Lest We Perish 1915
Lithographic poster

These posters were produced to raise funds for Armenian, Assyrian and Greek refugees. Images of lone children were used in charitable advertising from the early 20th century as a way to attract sympathy. While this kind of imagery was created with good intentions, it is also problematic, depriving refugees of agency.

In 1915 the Ottoman Empire (who controlled much of south-east Europe, West Asia and North Africa between the 14th and early 20th centuries) killed 1.5 million Armenian people in the Armenian genocide. The resulting displacement of refugees was unprecedented.

On loan from Imperial War Museums

Ethel Franklin Betts Bains (1877-1959, US)
Lest We Perish, Poster for the American Committee for Relief in the Near East
1914-18
Lithographic poster

The American Committee for Relief in the Near East was formed in 1915 to raise funds for refugee relief. In this poster, a young girl pleads with the viewer, her hands outstretched with fingers extending beyond the frame. Images of lone children were used in charitable advertising from the early 20th century to attract public sympathy for humanitarian causes. The lone child suggests the absence of familial and community care, so that donors might act as proxy parents.

In 2021, asylum-seeking children accounted for 8% of applications for refugee status in the UK, compared with 16% in 2008. Children who reach 18 while waiting for a decision on refugee status are more likely to have their claims rejected.

Source: Refugee Council, 'Children in the Asylum System', February 2022

On loan from Imperial War Museums

Frank Brangwyn (1867-1956, UK)
Proof for the poster 'Refugees Leave Antwerp' for Belgian and Allies' Aid League 1914
Etching

This drawing by Brangwyn was used to raise funds for Belgian refugees during the first world war (1914-18) and demonstrates the way that artists have contributed to the production of stereotypical images of refugees. We see a crowd of miserable people carrying personal belongings on their backs or in carts. For a British audience in 1914, the reference to stories of biblical exodus would have been clear. These kinds of images were circulated widely and were designed to garner public sympathy. In doing so, they homogenised individual experiences and cast refugees in the role of the victim.

On loan from Manchester Art Gallery

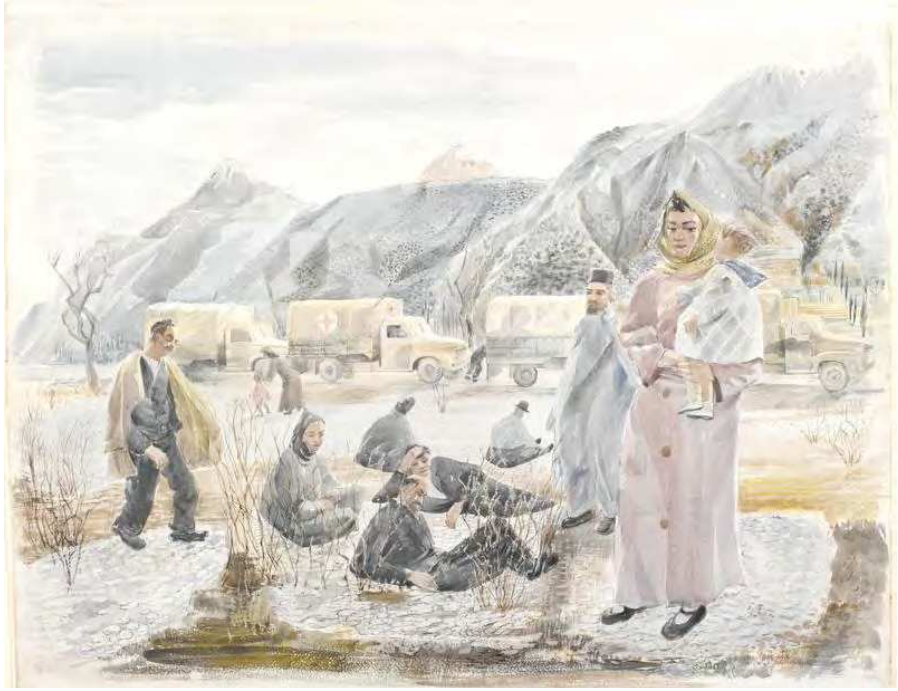
Leslie Cole (1910-76, UK)
Refugees from Janina, Greece 1945
Watercolour

Leslie Cole was an official war artist during the second world war (1939-45). He documented significant events including the invasion of Italy, the Normandy landings, and the liberation of Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

In this drawing he depicts a group of Greek refugees who have been returned home to Janina (known as Ioannina) by the Red Cross. Cole only described the subjects as refugees and hostages taken by the Germans, so it is unknown who exactly is depicted. We do know that Janina was the site of intense persecution of Greek Romaniote Jewish communities who were mostly deported to Auschwitz concentration camp. Groups of resistance fighters operated from the mountains shown in the background of this work.

Today, on the outskirts of Janina sits the Katsikas refugee camp, which shelters families from over 30 countries in very basic conditions.

On loan from Imperial War Museums



Top to bottom

Fragments of a border c.1900-24
Made in Armenia
Hand embroidered silk on cotton ground

Baby's needle lace cap c.1900-15
Made in Armenia
Needle silk lace with silk crepe lining

Today, the scale of loss and displacement caused by the Armenian genocide (1915-16) is amplified by its ongoing struggle for recognition as an official genocide. As such, and in the absence of destroyed archives (both official and personal), domestic objects take on renewed significance – where fragments of embroidery become unintended markers of cultural identity passed through generations.

The baby's cap below is indicative of the fine needlework and skilled artisanship of Armenian lacemakers, speaking to the cultural rebirth of Armenia in the aftermath of the genocide. For many refugee survivors, the sale of handicrafts provided income and a therapeutic escape into symmetry and beauty.

Presented by Mrs A Wilson in 1965; Presented by Mrs P.B. Tillyard in 1968

Poem for Armenian fragments

It's all about the colours,
the ornaments, the shapes,
all that life deprived us of,
the details defining our home.
Bear this with courage, my child,
keep your culture close enough.
Do not ever lose your inner light
although sometimes life is truly tough.
Bear this with love and faith,
may it give you power and strength.
may it remind you of your roots
and prevent you from any hurt.
No... it's not about the colours,
not the ornaments or shapes
that my hands gave life to,
it is just the heritage I owe you.

Ani Daspanyan,
Traces of Displacement focus group member

James McBey (1883-1959, UK)
Armenian Refugees making Fly-nets 1917
Watercolour and chalk on paper

Commissioned as an Official War Artist during World War One (1914-18), McBey was in Port Said, Egypt, when he encountered the Armenian refugee community in the wake of the genocide of 1.5 million people. This work depicts Armenian women making fly-nets for the British armed forces, a vital piece of military technology. We see the spindles being worked by the woman's skilled hands, celebrating the famed Armenian lacemakers who adapted to assist the war effort; their industriousness meriting Allied protection. In the 1920s, needlework made by orphaned Armenian girls became a main activity of generating humanitarian aid back to the community.

On loan from Imperial War Museums

Edward Lear (1812-88, UK)
Berat, Albania 1848
Watercolour and bodycolour on paper

Albania has been a repeated site of displacement events and has been host to many refugee communities. During the Second World War, Albania, a Muslim majority country, aided and hid Jewish refugees despite the Italian occupation and Nazi demands to hand them over for deportation. In 1999, 530,000 Kosovan Albanians sought refuge from ethnic cleansing. Today, Albania hosts over 1500 people at risk of statelessness, including Roma, Egyptian minorities, and children of Albanian diasporic returnees.

Source: Yad Vashem, 2023; The UN Refugee Agency, 2023

Gifted by Agnes Zimmerman in 1926

Mary Kessell (1914-77, UK)
Refugees: '...pray ye that your flight be not in the winter...'
Matt XXIV 20 1945
Oil on canvas

Kessell was one of only three female artists who worked as an official war artist outside of Britain during the Second World War (1939-45). Kessell was sent to Bergen-Belsen, where she made work after the Allies liberated the concentration camps, and the horror of the Holocaust was coming to light. She was also tasked with documenting the aftermath of defeat in Germany, focusing on displaced civilians. Her faceless and illusory figures are suggestive of the unfathomable nature of the scenes to which she bore witness.

In this work, a barefoot woman and her children struggle against the Winter cold, carrying a few possessions.

On loan from Imperial War Museums

Refugees at a Railway Station in Berlin: September 1945 1945
Drawing

A displaced mother embraces her children, waiting to leave Berlin. Kessell wrote in her diary:

'The afternoon at the railway station Berlin. Shall I ever forget them? The scenes were quite the worst I've witnessed. Like Goya come to life – people sitting – lolling & sleeping – waiting for trains that come today or perhaps come tomorrow. Filthy lousy – abject bundles of humanity. Utterly apathetic – just bundles. I had to tell myself that god loved them & cared where they got to – till the tears poured down my face.'

On loan from Imperial War Museums

Refugees: Mother and Child 1945
Drawing

In her travels to Berlin, Hanover, and Hamburg, Kessell's work often focused on displaced women and children. She wrote in her diary: 'I've never seen a more pitiable sight – such bits of humanity – with nothing to hope for – looking without seeing. God seemed so far away from them all'.

On loan from Imperial War Museums

Lucien Freud (1922-2011, Germany)
Man's Head (Self Portrait I) 1963
Oil on canvas

Lucian Freud is widely acknowledged as one of the foremost 20th century British artists. Born in Berlin, the artist's family moved from there to London to escape the rise of Nazism when he was 11. Whilst Freud insisted that they were emigres rather than refugees, he remained grateful to Britain for welcoming his family when they arrived in 1933 and for his citizenship. Upon his death in 2011, the artist gifted his treasured Jean-Baptiste Corot portrait to the National Gallery as a thank you 'to the country which welcomed his family so warmly.'

Purchased by the Whitworth in 1977

THE POLITICS OF RESCUE

During the Second World War, diverse international networks were established to rescue refugees from persecution, such as the kindertransport, the Emergency Rescue Commitee, and a range of humanitarian and community organisations. Today, many efforts to aid the mobility of refugees have become nationally and internationally criminalised, as borders harden and rights to asylum are under threat.

Frank Helmut Auerbach (1931, Germany)
Head of E.O.W 1960
Charcoal and chalk on paper

In 1938, when Auerbach was seven years old, his German-Jewish parents sent him by train to Britain on the renowned Kindertransport (German for "children's transport") an initiative that helped children to safety from Nazi-occupied territories. Unable to leave Germany, Auerbach's parents were murdered in Auschwitz concentration camp.

In Britain, Auerbach attended an independent boarding school in Kent for refugee children. The founder, Anna Essinger, was known as Tante Anna (Aunty Anna) and acted as a mother figure for many anxious and traumatised children. Auerbach was naturalised in 1947 and attended St Martin's School of Art (1948-52) and the Royal College of Art (1952-55). He went on to become one of Britain's most renowned painters, representing the nation at the Venice Biennale in 1986.

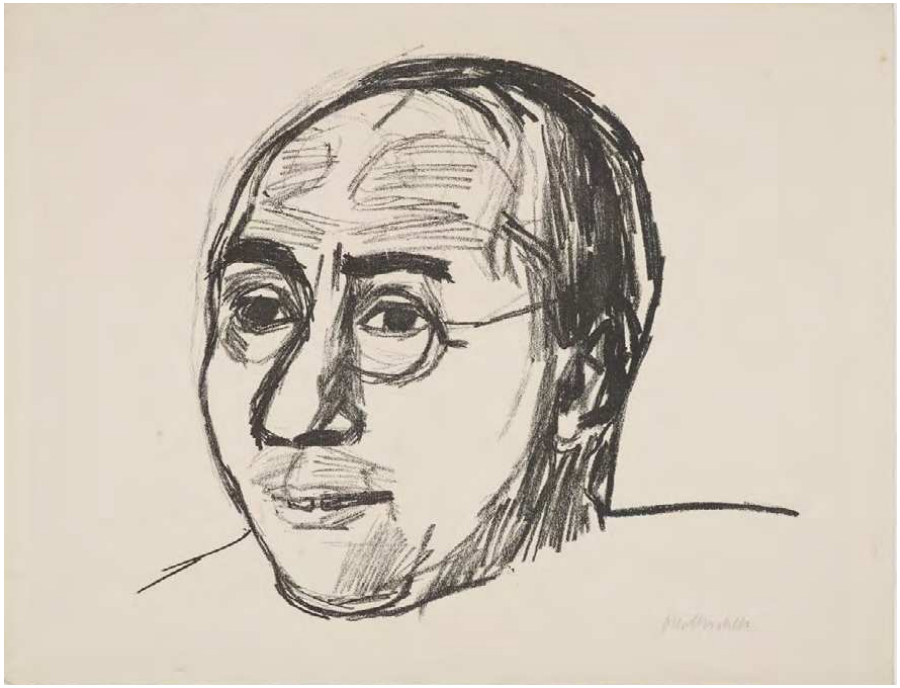
Presented by the Friends of the Whitworth in 1960

Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980, Austria)
Head of Paul Westheim 1923
Lithograph

Oskar Kokoschka fled his home country, Austria, in 1934 after being labelled a 'degenerate' by the Nazi party for his modern artistic and intellectual ideals. A key characteristic of fascist governments is the demonisation of experts and intellectuals - those who challenge prescribed ways of thinking and living.

Paul Westheim (1886-1963), who is depicted in this print, was a German-Jewish art historian. He was forced to flee Germany when the Nazi party seized power in 1933. During his exile in France, he wrote some of the most extensive criticism of Nazi ideals in the realm of art. Germany revoked his citizenship in 1935, and when the second world war broke out in 1939, he was interned in a French prisoner of war camp. Westheim was helped by Varian Fry who sourced travel papers that enabled Westheim to leave France via Marseille. He escaped to Mexico where he went on to make significant contributions to art historical writing on Mexican art until his death.

Purchased from Roy Sandbach in 1961



Fred Stein (1909-67, Germany)
Portrait of Varian Fry 1967
Reproduction of archival photographic print

Unknown
Refugees playing chess on the SS Sinaia 1939
Reproduction of archival photograph

Journalist Varian Fry led rescue efforts in wartime France (1939-45) that enabled around 2,000 anti-Nazi activists and Jewish refugees to flee Europe. Working for the Emergency Rescue Committee (alongside American heiress Mary Jayne Gold and artist Miriam Davenport), Fry facilitated the escape of artists including Marc Chagall and Max Ernst, whose paintings are displayed in this exhibition.

These efforts were condemned by French and American authorities. In December 1940, Fry was detained with 600 others onboard the SS Sinaia. The same ship that ushered refugees to safety in the second world war and ferried Spanish Republicans to asylum in Mexico.

This history, connecting art, friendship, and humanitarianism is currently dramatised in the TV series *Transatlantic* (Netflix, 2023).

Photos © Fred Stein / Bridgeman Images and Mary Evans / Robert Hunt

Max Ernst (1891-1976, Germany)
Danseuses (Dancers) 1950
Lithographic print

Max Ernst's work was included in the infamous Nazi propaganda event, the 1937 Degenerate Art Show. Although he was Catholic, Ernst was considered an enemy-alien by the Nazi party due to his affiliation with modern artists. He was imprisoned in Camp des Milles, a French internment camp in 1939. With the help of Varian Fry, Ernst was able to escape from Nazi-occupied territory, arriving in New York in 1941.

Transferred from the History of Art Department, University of Manchester in 1960

Marc Chagall (1887-1985, Belarus)
Le Cirque au Cheval Blanc 1967
Bodycolour on paper

A pioneering modernist, Marc Chagall's work spanned the Russian revolution and two world wars. Chagall was also a refugee. Living with his family in Paris, he was forced to leave France when the city fell to the Nazis in 1940. Chagall secured safe passage to the United States with the help of Varian Fry, where he lived out the war.

Chagall never happily resettled as a refugee. He resisted the demands of assimilation, refusing to learn English and finding solace in Yiddish literature. In 1962, the artist began a series of works on the theme of circus, a space he imagined as dreamlike, yet dangerous.

In 1966 Chagall wrote: 'Alas in my lifetime I have seen a grotesque circus: a man [Hitler] roared to terrify the world... I wish I could hide all these troubling thoughts and feelings in the opulent tail of a circus horse and run after it, like a clown... begging to chase the sadness from the world.'

On loan from Manchester Art Gallery

Lee Miller (1907-77, US)
Margaret Scolari Barr in Venice, Italy. 1948
Reproduction photograph

In the summer of 1940, after Paris had fallen to the Germans, Alfred Barr, founding Director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA) began receiving desperate letters from artists seeking assistance escaping Europe. His wife, Curator, Margaret Scolari Barr took lead in mobilising their network of artists, dealers and collectors. Collaborating with Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee, she turned the museum into a literal instrument of protection for persecuted artists.

Recent research within MoMA's archive indicates that the number of refugees sponsored through the Scolari Barr cooperative might be far greater than originally thought. In contrast to the story of Varian Fry, the significance of Scolari Barr's work has been overlooked.

Image courtesy MoMA, NY and the Lee Miller Archives

Pest Control Collective
MV Louise Michel 2022-23
3 reproductions of digital photographs

Europe's Mediterranean border has now become one of the world's deadliest. Since 2014, over 26,000 lives have been recorded as lost. European states have largely stopped reacting to distress calls, leaving asylum seekers to drift at sea. Now, search and rescue operations are mostly left to non-governmental organisations, known as the civil fleet.

The MV Louise Michel is named after the French anarchist Louise Michel, a hero of the Paris Commune (1871) and has a female crew. Combining lifeguarding with the principles of feminism, anti-racism, and anti-fascism, the Louise Michel was bought with proceeds from the sale of artwork by Banksy, who then decorated the ship with a fire extinguisher and continues to fund her operation.

The live feed of the ship's activity can be found at mvlouisemichel.org and on Twitter @ MVLouiseMichel.

Source: https://missingmigrants.iom.int/region/mediterranean

Courtesy MV Louise Michel crew and Nici Wegener

DISPLACING ENVIRONMENTS

There is no official definition of a 'climate refugee' and this means that it cannot be used as a reason for seeking sanctuary. Yet displacement caused by the climate emergency is increasing at an alarming rate, with the number of people displaced increasing by 41% compared to the previous decade. By 2050 it is estimated that 1.2 billion people will be forced to flee as a result of climate change.

Carpet or Tent Hanging c. 1945-55
Made in Iraq
Tambour work on hand woven wool ground

This textile was made by members of the Marsh Arab community. The contested ethnic description 'Marsh Arabs' refers to the inhabitants of the Mesopotamian Marshes, a vast wetland area located in southern Iraq and southwestern Iran. In the early 1990s, Saddam Hussein began systematically destroying the marshes — bombing and draining them to evict and punish Marsh Arabs for participating in uprisings against his regime. This reduced water levels by 90% and led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, whose economies and culture were decimated.

Throughout the 2000s, the Marsh Arabs were able to restore water and ecological diversity to the region, and some 250,000 people were able to return. Today, this important ecosystem is collapsing again due to political and environmental factors.

This carpet or tent hanging is made from two loom-lengths woven on a narrow, horizontal ground loom and densely embroidered Uniting two separate pieces represents unity in marriage.

Presented by Mr & Mrs Henry Rothschild in 1997

Eduardo Portillo and Maria Eugenia Davila
(1966, Venezuela; 1966 Venezuela)
Guardian 2006
Silk, moriche palm fibre, andean wool, indigo, eucalyptus, cochineal

In the past Venezuela hosted thousands of refugees from around the globe. Today it faces the second largest external displacement crisis in the world. Portillo and Davila are long-time collaborators based in Venezuela. They use their textile-making practice to interrogate the relationship between humans and earth. Each aspect of the making process is self-produced — from raising worms to making the silk and growing plants to make the indigo dye. Intended to represent each of us as guardians of the natural world, this textile is made with Venezuelan moriche palm plant fibres and hand-woven to create a colour combination that evokes shifting sunlight on a sunny and rainy afternoon.

Ecological damage and deforestation in the regions where moriche palms grow have displaced indigenous populations. Forced displacement due to environmental destruction is estimated to reach 1 billion people by 2050.

Source: The United Nations Refugee Agency, 2023

Purchased from Eduardo Portillo in 2009

THREADS OF DISPLACEMENT

Tibor Reich (designer) 1916-96
Tibor Ltd (manufacturer) e.1945
Raw Coral 1954-5
Screen printed machine woven cotton and rayon

The son of an affluent Jewish textile manufacturer, Tibor Reich fled Nazi-occupied Hungary in 1936 to study in Leeds. In 1946, he set up his own textile business, introducing new bright colours and textures to Britain's interiors. His firm gained an international reputation for design innovation and his textiles were used by some of the most well known furniture makers including Ercol and G Plan, as well as being used in the first Concorde plane and in the 1951 Festival of Britain.

Gifted by Tibor Ltd in 1962 (T.11191)

Spitalfields Workshop (manufacturer)
Panel of dress fabric c. 1749-52
Drawloom woven silk and metallic yarn brocade

The Spitalfields Workshop was set up by Huguenot refugees who had fled their native France in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries due to religious persecution. Some 50,000 Huguenots migrated to Britain, bringing with them new skills in silk weaving. Their services were in high demand amongst the British upper class, who coveted their exquisite silk designs. Much more labour intensive than embroidery, the fabric you see here would have taken exceptional weaving skills and many months to create. Huguenot weavers settled in Spitalfields, London, where housing was cheap and trade guilds held less power - enabling them to build a thriving textile trade in the area.

Presented by Miss May Gower in 1987

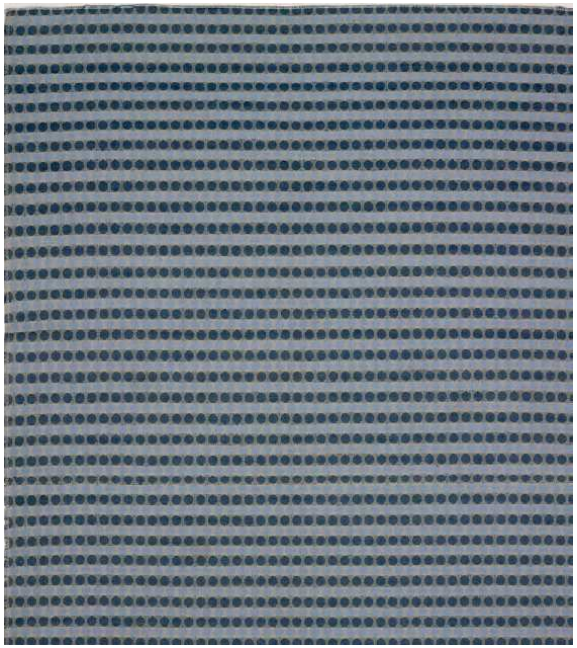
Judit Kárász (1912-77, Hungary)
Portrait of Otti Berger with Bauhaus facade 1931-2
Reproduction of archival photograph

Courtesy the Bauhaus Archive

Born in present-day Croatia, Otti Berger was a textile artist and designer at the Bauhaus School in Dessau, Germany. Berger challenged notions of textiles as a 'feminine' craft, writing a treatise on fabric methods for textile producers. In 1932, she left the Bauhaus to open an 'Atelier for Textile' in Berlin but was forced to close it in 1936 when she was banned by the Third Reich from working in Germany due to her Jewish origins. In 1937, she moved to Manchester to work for Helios, a fabric manufacturer in Bolton. As seen in these samples, she produced a distinctive style that amplified the tactility and optical illusions of textured fabrics for interior spaces. In 1938, she was invited to the New Bauhaus in Chicago where she hoped to join other Bauhaus refugees but was unable to secure a visa. Alone, with a limited professional and social network and held back by her lack of English and hearing impairment, Berger was unable to find further work in England. In 1938 she returned to Croatia to aid her mother who was in poor health. She was eventually deported to Auschwitz, where she died in 1944.

Otti Berger (1898-1944, Croatia)
Helios Ltd (Manufacturer)
Swatch for Ryegate 1938
Swatch for Burdale 1938

Presented by Helios Ltd in 1940



Raisa Kabir (1989, UK)
It must be nice to fall in love... 2017
Hand dyed and hand woven silk and cotton

Warping the borders, fringes; fractured.... 2016
Wooden stakes and mallet used in the performance *Warping the Borders, fringes; fractured* at the Whitworth

Raisa Kabir was commissioned to design and weave this piece in response to South Asian textiles in the Whitworth collection. Employing her own 'unweaving' technique, Kabir uses yarn to re-create a pre-partition map of India that has been distorted through weaving.

The Partition of India in 1947 resulted in the formation of Pakistan and East Pakistan. The latter subsequently became Bangladesh after the War of Liberation in 1971. India's partition is often presented as a story about borders, colonialism, and national identity, but it is less known that 15 million people were displaced because of it. *It must be nice to fall in love...* speaks to memory, trauma, and power as embedded in historically enforced border-making.

Commissioned by the Whitworth in 2017

Suman Gujral (1962, India)
All My Sorrows 2019
Monotype print on cotton handkerchief

All My Sorrows is made from the handkerchief of the artist's late father, who immigrated to England from India in 1965. The line that looks like barbed wire reflects the border between India and Pakistan, which is still visible from space today. The blue background references the colour of the sky at midnight on 15 August 1947 — the moment when British colonial leaders drew a line through a map of India — a literal and metaphorical fissure that caused extensive bloodshed and intercommunal violence.

Purchased in 2021 with support from the Art Fund New Collecting Award

Khatri Mohammad Siddik
Samples of 14 stages of Ajrakh handblock printing c.1990-99
Resist dyeing, mordant dyeing and block printing on woven cotton

'Ajrakh' is a distinctively patterned cloth printed and dyed with indigo and the madder plant. This series of samples corresponds to stages in the production process which includes block printing, mordants and resists. The cloth was traditionally worn by men as a turban, shawl or 'lunghi', which is wrapped round the hips.

Traditionally Ajrakh was made in the province of Sindh. With the partition of India in 1947, Sindh became part of Pakistan, and many Sindh-Hindus left the area. Ajrakh is now produced by makers in both Pakistan and India.

Presented by Professor Anne Morrell in 2004

Marriage kurta c.1950-1999
Made in Afghanistan
Embroidered silk and cotton on cotton ground with silk tassels

This tunic originated in a remote, mountainous region of Afghanistan. It is created from eight pieces of heavy cotton cloth. Most of the intricate stitching was worked before the garment was made up, and here the sleeves have contrasting patterns. Tunics like this were worn by shepherds, but the elaborate needlework and its excellent condition suggests that it was reserved for special occasions, probably marriage.

This piece was selected by Noor Seddiqi, a member of our focus group.

Purchased from John Gillow in 2003

This model of covering reminds me of a chapan, which is worn by many tribes in Afghanistan but mostly in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif. It is very valuable because it has historical spiritual value and is made of a precious fabric woven with pure silk threads.

This garment is famously worn in goat killing competitions in Afghanistan. The fabric protects the skin of the person wearing it from the blows of the whip and keeps them warm. It is worn in many special ceremonies like marriage and is even exchanged between people as a special gift.

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