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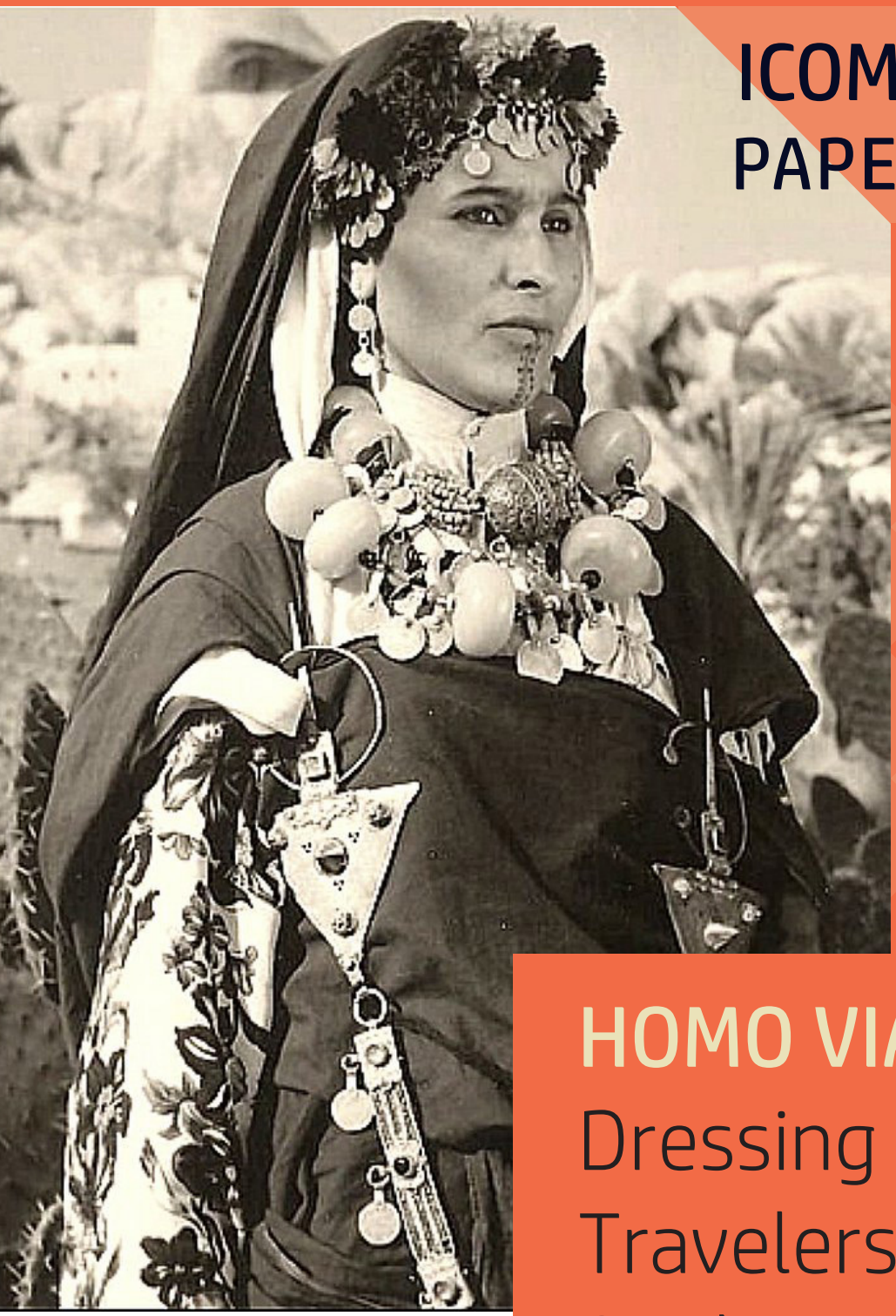

ICOM COSTUME PAPER SESSION

DUBAI, 12-13 NOV. 2025

HOMO VIATOR

Dressing Nomads, Travelers, Migrants & Pilgrims

ICOM international council of museums

COSTUME ICOM international committee for the museums and collections of costume, fashion and textiles

آيكوم دبي ICOM Dubai 2025

Homo Viator. Dressing Nomads, Travelers, Migrants and Pilgrims. ICOM Costume Paper Sessions at ICOM General Assembly 2025 in Dubai.

The nomadic lifestyle is connected with the beginnings of many civilisations, but it is also an important feature of the culture of numerous contemporary societies. The need to travel is an indispensable part of human life. During the ICOM General Assembly 2025 in Dubai, the ICOM Costume international committee wanted to address—in its paper sessions—the issue of clothing for different kinds of journeys, considering all aspects of this phenomenon and across communities, regions, and periods. This overarching theme also seeks to explore tangible and intangible heritage in rapidly changing communities. I wish to acknowledge my good friends and colleagues, Lina Gebrail Tahan, Chair of IC Ethics, Melissa Rinne, Chair of DESIGN.

The ICOM Costume paper sessions, jointly with IC Ethics, invited contributions to explore the multifaceted relationship between dress and nomadic cultures, both ancient and modern, with a particular focus on the ethical challenges and implications that arise from these interactions. Throughout history, nomadic groups have developed unique and highly functional forms of dress adapted to their specific environments, social structures, and cultural practices. These clothing traditions often hold deep symbolic meaning, reflecting identity, status, and worldview. However, the study, preservation, and representation of these traditions, particularly in an increasingly globalised world, raise complex ethical questions.

The joint ICOM Costume paper session with the Design Committee explored adornment as an expression of personal, social, and cultural identity across diverse societies through textiles, jewellery, fashion, and other mediums. How does bodily adornment not only beautify but also communicate belonging, status, beliefs, or heritage? How do practices of adornment define individual and collective identities? In what ways do these practices adapt or persist amid the shifting dynamics of globalisation and cultural exchange? How are traditional artistic techniques of adornment preserved as intangible heritage that connects communities to their past? How do the creativity and energy of younger generations reinterpret and reinvigorate historic traditions to reflect evolving identities? What innovative roles do emerging technologies play in documenting, preserving, and reimagining adornment to engage diverse audiences in museums today?

The proceedings bring together interdisciplinary perspectives from archaeology, anthropology, fashion studies, cultural studies, history, and ethics by examining archaeological and historical analyses of ancient nomadic dress, including methods of preservation, interpretation, and the challenges of representing ephemeral materials; the use of nomadic dress elements in contemporary fashion, film, and other media, as well as the ethical dilemmas surrounding cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, and the erasure of cultural heritage; the role of dress in constructing and expressing individual and collective identities within nomadic communities, and how external forces impact these identities; the production and sale of ‘traditional’ nomadic clothing and textiles, and the economic, social, and cultural consequences for nomadic communities; the display and preservation of nomadic dress in museums, and the ethical considerations related to ownership, repatriation, and community engagement; how dress reflects and reinforces gender roles and identities in nomadic societies, and the challenges to these roles in a changing world; and how dress expresses resistance, asserts cultural sovereignty, or negotiates power relations between nomadic groups and dominant societies.

In addition to the paper sessions, the Costume Committee organised the IC Day at the Al Shindagha Museum in Dubai, a museum complex comprising a series of specialised collections housed in different buildings. ICOM Costume invited the GLASS Committee to join the museum tours. This venue was followed by a visit to Couture designer Kristina Fidelskaya, a former ESMOD alumni in Dubai, at her new premises in Downtown Dubai. We were able to experience her work and her world through the presentation of her collections displayed on mannequins in the showroom, and we met with the embroiderers (see figs. below). The viewing of the exhibition 'Poetry of Birds' at the School of Jewelry Arts Van Cleef & Arpels, in Dubai Design District, closed the ICOM Costume IC Day. I wish to acknowledge and thank all the partners and contributors to the Costume scientific programme and special visits organised on the occasion of the ICOM General Assembly 2025 in Dubai.

Corinne THEPAUT-CABASSET,
Chair of ICOM Costume Committee, Château de Versailles, France (2019-2025).

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Weaving Memories: Adornment and Identity in Atayal Clothing

Chen, Hsiang-Yin
Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung, Taiwan

Abstract

The Museum of Fiber Arts (MOFiA), Taichung, explores how adornment in Atayal clothing serves as a medium for cultural memory and identity. Through artefact reproduction, exhibitions, and technology, MOFiA collaborates with Indigenous communities to revive lost weaving traditions and reinterpret ancestral symbols. Exhibitions such as Rebuild and Bloom and Tradition Meets Innovation showcase recreated bridal attire and contemporary wedding garments that integrate clan emblems. Youth curator Lona Funay presents weaving as a 'cultural USB', linking body, loom, and ancestral memory. Technological tools like AI and 3D holography immerse visitors in rituals related to lukus-qaxa' (shell bead garment), highlighting the role of adornment in social hierarchy and belief. MOFiA positions itself as a platform where traditional art meets contemporary practice, enabling Indigenous voices to be heard and identities to be continually woven in today's cultural landscape.

Content

Introduction: clothing as a vessel of cultural memory

Clothing is more than a physical necessity or aesthetic expression—it is a cultural archive. For Taiwan's Indigenous peoples, garments are imbued with ancestral wisdom, spiritual beliefs, and social meaning. They serve as visual narratives of identity, lineage, and ritual.

The Museum of Fiber Arts (MOFiA), which opened on 17 October 2018, is the first city-level museum in Taichung as well as the only fiber-themed museum in Taiwan. MOFiA hopes to integrate Taiwan's cultural and natural resources and performs as a craft platform that bridges fiber creators and cultural relics based on the four major cultural relics of the existing collections, including Han, Taiwanese aborigines, Southwestern China's ethnic minorities, and contemporary creation. MOFiA inherits fiber craft culture, with a vision of becoming a venue for craft textile craft indexing in Taiwan.

The aim of the museum is 'fiber·fashion·green craft' while upholding the four major functions of the museum: Collection, research, display, and education. MOFiA collects fibre relics with historical, cultural, and artistic value and registers them as cultural assets. For example, the antiquities such as the Atayal traditional costume Lukus-qaxa' (shell bead garment), and traditional crafts including the works of preserver Kesi Huang Lan Ye and rush-weaving preserver Zhu Zhouguichun. In addition, there are more than 1,200 important cultural relics in the collection. The museum's mission is to promote fibre culture globally, and hope to share these craft relics, rich in cultural heritage and beauty, with all audiences. Moreover, through innovative experiments, the museum enables people to enjoy the dialogue between crafts and art, and to further reimagine the traditional skills within contemporary society.

The Museum of Fiber Arts (MOFiA) in Taichung has become a key institution for preserving and revitalising Indigenous textile traditions. Through collaborative exhibitions, artefact reproduction, workshops, and digital innovation, MOFiA explores how adornment operates as both a vessel for cultural memory and a medium for weaving identity. This article focuses on the Atayal people, illustrating how the museum weaves together a narrative connecting traditional craftsmanship, embodied practice, and contemporary reinterpretation (**Fig. 1**).

Atayal weaving culture and the symbolism of adornment

The Atayal people have long inhabited the northern reaches of Taiwan's Central Mountain Range. Their weaving tradition, passed down through generations of women, centres on the kongu—a horizontal backstrap loom tied around the waist. This portable loom reflects the mobility of mountain life and the adaptability of Atayal communities. Weaving is intimately woven into the Atayal life cycle. Textiles accompany every stage of existence—from baby swaddling clothes to ceremonial shawls worn after facial tattooing, wedding garments, and burial shrouds. These fabrics are far more than functional; they are sacred artefacts

encoding social status, clan affiliation, and ancestral blessings. The motifs woven into Atayal fabrics are rich in symbolism. Geometric patterns and decorative elements serve as visual markers of identity and protection. The very act of weaving is both meditative and spiritual, connecting the weaver to ancestral knowledge (**Fig. 2**).

Weaving serves as a coming-of-age rite of passage for Atayal women, charting their journey from girlhood to maturity. This path begins with the foundational technique of the *Snuyu* two-colour diamond weave (*twill*), which every novice must master, and progresses to the intricate multi-color diamond weave—the technical standard a young woman must achieve before her coming-of-age ceremony. Meanwhile, the ubiquitous *Cinun Pala* (plain weave) cloth accompanies the Atayal people throughout their entire lives. It bears witness to the beginning and the end of life: serving as the swaddling cloth for newborns to the wrapping cloth for the deceased elders. Furthermore, advanced techniques—such as the *Sebuxan* (brocade weave) for formal wear, the chromatically rich *St'lian* (small patterned weave), and the *L'Mamu* (inlay/supplementary weft weave), often combined with brocade for ceremonial attire—demonstrate the Atayal people's dedication to textile aesthetics and social honour (**Fig. 3**).

The five weaving techniques

1. *Snuyu* (twill/diamond weave): the standard of maturity and social skill

The *Snuyu* weave embodies the social norms and technical standards defining an Atayal woman's transition from apprenticeship to maturity. Ranging from the basic mountain-form twill to the sophisticated multi-colour diamond weave, its diagonal structure and complex chromatic patterns transcend mere decoration, serving as essential signifiers of the weaver's technical proficiency and social responsibility. The intricate multi-colour diamond pattern, in particular, represents a milestone achievement required of women before their coming-of-age rites.

2. *Sebuxan* (supplementary weft/brocade): honour and identity marker

The *Sebuxan* technique is primarily used for ceremonial attire or specialised garments, assigning the textiles distinct ritual and status attributes. The decorative floating patterns, created by coloured wefts on the surface, lend the clothing a sense of solemnity and splendour. Despite visual similarities, regional variations in the execution of these floating threads enable *Sebuxan* textiles to serve as vital cultural indicators for identifying the textile's place of origin and the wearer's community identity.

3. *Cinun Pala* (plain weave): the cultural carrier of the life course

Cinun Pala is the most fundamental and prevalent textile in daily Atayal life. Its cultural significance is grounded in the continuity of the human life cycle. Woven predominantly from hand-spun ramie and madder-dyed yarn, the fabric displays simple, natural hues. This basic plain weave structure requires no complex patterns yet accompanies the Atayal people through major life junctures, from the swaddling of newborns to the burial shroud of elders, serving as a modest yet sacred cultural vessel of the life course.

4. *St'lian* (small patterned weave/small brocade): aesthetic innovation and regional iconography

The St'lian technique, characterizsed by the intricate small motifs produced using a pattern heddle rod, embodies the Atayal commitment to aesthetic refinement and textile innovation. This process yields fabrics abundant in colour and pattern variation, primarily used for decorative garments such as shawls and women's wraparound skirts. In the Daan River basin, the distinctive aesthetics of *St'lian* weaving has evolved into a regional hallmark, highlighting the unique textile artistry of local communities.

5. *L'Mamu* (inlay/supplementary weft): layering of motifs and compound symbolism

The *L'Mamu* technique emphasises the layering and compound expression of decorative motifs, often combined with the *Sebuxan* brocade method to enhance the visual complexity and cultural value of the garment. Through a precise needle-picking process (inlay), *L'Mamu* creates distinct pattern structures on the base fabric—such as the monochromatic inlay of the Kinhagun system and the multicolour inlay of the L'lung Penux (Northern Group) system. These systematic pattern variations transcend mere ornamentation; revealing diverse regional interpretations of the motif vocabulary, thereby enriching the cultural semiotics of Atayal clothing.

Artifact reproduction and the revival of collective memory

Taiwan's Indigenous textiles are rich in cultural symbolism and artisanal knowledge. Each intricate woven pattern is like a lyrical verse recounting Indigenous peoples' histories. In recent years, the Taichung City Government's Bureau of Cultural Affairs has collaborated with community weavers through the Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung (MOFiA), undertaking research based on the museum's collections. The goal has been to rediscover the diverse and vibrant identities of Taiwan's Indigenous cultures through the study of their textile motifs. Over time, both the museum and Indigenous weavers have worked to reconstruct long-lost weaving techniques and cultural histories through textile analysis and reproduction.

In the exhibition *Rebuild and Bloom: Reviving Traditional Weaving Crafts of Taiwan's Indigenous Peoples*, MOFiA collaborated with tribal elders and master weavers to reconstruct a long-lost Atayal bridal garment. This garment, adorned with symbols of wealth, clan emblems, and spiritual protection, had not been seen in its entirety for decades. The act of reproduction was more than a technical exercise—it was a ceremonial process (**Fig. 4**). When tribal members encountered the reconstructed piece in MOFiA's collection vault, it awakened a profound sense of reunion with ancestral craftsmanship. The garment became a bridge between generations, reviving not only techniques but also a shared cultural pride. This initiative inspired a wave of contemporary reinterpretations. In *Tradition Meets Innovation: Research and Creativity in Atayal Textiles*, young Atayal women designed wedding attire incorporating the symbols of their maternal clans. These garments transformed traditional motifs into modern visual languages, allowing ancestral adornment to speak anew in contemporary rituals.

These ceremonial ensembles—including those worn by the groom, bride, guests, and flower children—recreate the authentic appearance of a traditional tribal wedding while blending elements of contemporary Taiwanese wedding customs and folk aesthetics, producing an experience that is both intimate and visually captivating.

Youth curation and the embodied transmission of craft

Between 2023 and 2025, the Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung (MOFiA), organised a trilogy of exhibitions centered on weaving looms—the Jacquard loom, the vertical loom, and the horizontal backstrap loom—presented in reverse chronological order to trace Taiwan's textile history, weaving techniques, and cultural evolution. The 2023 exhibition, *Weaving Loom Trilogy (I): Jacquard Textiles Exploration*, examined the integration of digital technology and textile craft, showcasing how computerised systems expand the creative possibilities of weaving. The 2024 exhibition, *Weaving Loom Trilogy (II): Vertical Loom Exploration,* returned to the dialogue between fibre, loom, and human hands, exploring both floor and tabletop vertical looms in relation to daily life, education, and industrial development. The trilogy culminated in 2025 with the *Weaving Loom Trilogy (III): Memory Above the Clouds – Exploring the Atayal Horizontal Loom* exhibition, a cultural and spiritual reflection on weaving traditions and embodied practice (**Fig. 5**).

The exhibition *Memory Above the Clouds* was curated by Atayal curator Lona Funay, from Xiangbi Village in Tai'an Township, Miaoli County. Her mother, Yuma Taru, is a renowned master weaver officially recognised as a National Living Treasure of Taiwan. Growing up amid the sounds of the loom and the mountains, Lona learned every step of the process from her mother—planting and peeling ramie, spinning fibres, warping, and weaving—while discovering the deep cultural meanings embedded in patterns and motifs. From an early age,

she accompanied her parents on field expeditions to visit elders and weavers in remote villages, documenting their oral histories and techniques. Her pursuit of cultural knowledge eventually took her to museums in Japan and the United Kingdom, where she studied Atayal textiles preserved abroad. For Lona, weaving is not merely a craft but a process of emotional healing and cultural restoration—a tactile act that reweaves memory and identity through the interlacing of warp and weft.

At the heart of *Memory Above the Clouds* is the Atayal horizontal backstrap loom (*kongu*), a tool embodying the intertwined relationship between body and craft. The warp remains parallel to the ground, and the loom connects to the weaver's body by means of a belt, allowing fabric tension to be regulated through physical movement. The exhibition was organised around four dimensions—loom structure, bodily engagement, technical language, and cyclical philosophy of life. As Atayal elder *Yaki* (grandmother) once said, 'Life is like a woven circle; each stage has its own cloth.' This worldview weaves together ritual, clothing, and ancestral belief into a continuous cycle of existence. The exhibition also presented the five major Atayal weaving techniques which—preserved and adapted over centuries—demonstrated Atayal women's mastery of pattern and meaning.

During guided tours, curator Lona wove on-site with the traditional loom, demonstrating her skills and embodying the transmission of heritage through the hands of the younger generation. Her weaving during the exhibition became a living dialogue between tradition and the present—a symbolic act of cultural continuity.

Extending this philosophy of 'Weaving Futures Together', MOFiA also hosts annual Weaving Skills Workshops that bring together Indigenous and Austronesian weavers from across the region, including the Atayal, Puyuma, Seediq, Bunun, Paiwan, and Kahabu (*Pingpu*) peoples of Taiwan, as well as Ifugao weavers from the Philippines. These workshops create a platform for intergenerational and intercultural exchange, enabling participants to engage in hands-on learning and dialogue. Through these sessions, weaving becomes not only a means of technical practice but also an act of reclaiming collective memory and sustaining identity. In the rhythm of weaving, the threads of tradition and modernity interlace—ensuring that the past continues to resonate within the living fabric of the future (**Fig. 6**).

Technology as a bridge for cultural interpretation

The Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung (MOFiA), counts among its most prized collections the shell-bead garment (*lukus-qaxa'*), a ceremonial costume of the Atayal people symbolising wealth and prestige. Traditionally serving as both currency and betrothal gifts, such garments were once owned exclusively by warriors, chiefs, and skilled weavers—treasured heirlooms that embodied lineage and honour. Among MOFiA's collections, one remarkable example—crafted from ramie fibre and adorned with 83,874 white Tridacna shells—has been registered

as a national cultural asset, representing one of the most iconic symbols of Taiwan's Indigenous textile heritage.

In the exhibition *Remote Memories: The Past and Present of Shell-Bead Craftsmanship*, MOFiA employed AI and 3D holographic projection to create an immersive storytelling environment. When visitors stepped onto the interactive platform, an AI motion sensor activated a holographic image of an Atayal youth demonstrating the ritual process of dressing in the complete shell-beaded ensemble—comprising the shell crown, earrings, necklace, short tunic, long coat, belt, front apron, armlets, and leg ornaments. As the light reflected off the shells and the rhythmic sound of weaving fills the space, visitors were transported into a ceremonial atmosphere once reserved for traditional weddings and ritual gatherings (**Fig. 7**).

The exhibition also explored the challenges and innovations in reviving traditional shell-bead craftsmanship. Since the natural Tridacna shells used in ceremonial garments are now protected under international conservation agreements, MOFiA employed cultured shells in its artefact reproduction efforts—balancing authenticity with ecological sustainability. Meanwhile, the museum's educational workshops introduced environmentally friendly materials such as porcelain clay and jade, enabling participants to learn about the structure, aesthetics, and symbolism of shell beads through hands-on creation. These workshops emphasised not only technical learning but also ecological awareness and cultural respect.

Through this combination of traditional craftsmanship and digital technology, MOFiA redefines how heritage is experienced and understood. The integration of AI and 3D projection transforms the static museum display into a multisensory encounter in which touch, sound, and sight collectively evoke the living presence of culture. Rather than merely observing the artefact behind glass, visitors participate in its narrative—experiencing how adornment, as both material and memory, continues to weave connections among identity, spirituality, and cultural continuity in the contemporary world.

Contemporary practice: rebirth of adornment vocabulary

MOFiA's exhibitions and programmes demonstrate how traditional adornment can be reactivated in contemporary contexts. Adornment is not merely decorative—it is relational, linking individuals to their families, communities, and spiritual beliefs. Through artefact reproduction, creative reinterpretation, and embodied practice, MOFiA empowers Indigenous communities to reclaim and redefine their visual languages. Each garment worn and each motif revived stands as a statement of identity and continuity. Adornment art thus moves from static preservation to dynamic regeneration, becoming a living practice that continually generates cultural voice and ethnic identity. In this way, MOFiA fosters not only the conservation of heritage but also its creative evolution (**Fig. 8**).

Conclusion: museums as platforms for cultural continuity

MOFiA reimagines the museum as a cultural platform—not merely a repository of artefacts but a space for dialogue, innovation, and community empowerment. It functions as a meeting point between Indigenous traditions and contemporary society. By centring adornment and weaving as mediums of cultural expression, MOFiA fosters understanding and connection, enabling Indigenous voices to be heard and identities to be rewoven. Looking ahead, MOFiA will continue to deepen Indigenous participation, ensuring that communities retain agency in both preserving and evolving their cultural heritage. Weaving is not merely a craft—it is a living practice of cultural sustainability. In every thread and every motif, the legacy of the ancestors endures.

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Fig. 1

The Museum of Fiber Arts, Taichung (MOFiA).

Fig. 2

Atayal horizontal back-strap loom (*kongu*).

Fig. 3

The Five Major Weaving Techniques of the Atayal Tribe

Fig. 4

Atayal bridal garment.

Fig. 5

Exhibition ‘Memory Above the Clouds’.

Fig. 6

Weaving skill workshop.

Fig. 7

AI integration and immersive visitor experience.

Fig. 8

Weaving memories:
adornment and identity in Atayal clothing.

Threading the Journey: Palestinian Embroidery and Displacement

Haddad, Ghia

Artist and Researcher, Dubai, UAE

Abstract

This paper responds to the *Homo Viator* theme by examining Palestinian embroidery as both an art of displacement and a vehicle of movement. While Palestinians experience restricted mobility under occupation, exile, and the denial of the right of return, their embroidered dresses have become nomadic travellers, carrying identity and memory, moving in their place. Through combined frameworks of material culture, postcolonial theory, and feminist thought, the paper explores how *tatreez* occupies a symbolic and ethical space between freedom and confinement, between nomadism and refugehood. It also contrasts this movement with that of the historic Bedouin nomads of the Naqab, whose mobility has been curtailed by dispossession and state control. By tracing how these garments circulate through global collections and exhibitions, the paper considers the ethics of representing a living heritage that speaks to experiences of displacement, transforming the idea of *Homo Viator* into a postcolonial condition in which the object—rather than the body—travels freely.

Content

Introduction: nomads, refugees, and threaded journeys

Movement lies at the heart of this study. Inspired by the *Homo Viator* theme, this essay traces an arc from freedom to constraint, from home to exile. In Palestine, mobility has carried dual meanings: the nomadic passage of the Naqab Bedouin across open landscapes, and the forced displacement of refugees dictated by occupation and exile. *Tatreez*, the embroidery tradition of Palestine, embodies another form of nomadism, traced not through desert routes but along threads crossing borders and generations. Here, nomadism refers not to a way of life but to a metaphor of freedom within confinement, a paradox through which Palestinian identity, like *tatreez*, continues to travel despite the restrictions imposed on Palestinians since 1948.

Tatreez, once a form of rural dress, has become an enduring emissary of a displaced people. When the 1948 *Nakba* (Arabic for 'catastrophe') fractured the landscape of Palestine, *tatreez* preserved it symbolically. As Sandra Dudley observes, the separation of things from places creates both rupture and the possibility of new bonds (2018, 116). Through displacement, embroidered *thobs* (Palestinian dresses) transformed immobility into a form of travelling witness.

To understand this transformation, the following discussion examines *tatreez* through three frameworks that together form the study's method: heritage and material culture, feminism, and postcolonial theory. They are applied concurrently to reveal how *tatreez* operates as both object and discourse, bridging tangible artefacts with symbolic narratives of power, gender and representation. Through this reading, *tatreez* is revealed as a living heritage that links past and present, challenging dominant Western authorship and feminist binaries of domesticity and liberation. As it enters global museum and heritage systems, *tatreez* invites ethical questions about representation, appropriation, and the stewardship of living culture. It emerges as an ethical art of movement: a travelling archive, created by women, mapping the geography of Palestinian exile and resilience; transforming fabric into material resistance (**Fig. 1**).

Nomadic past, colonial rupture: the Bedouins of the Negev

Prior to the 1948 Nakba, the Naqab desert in southern Palestine was home to a semi-nomadic population of over 100,000 Bedouins whose lives revolved around seasonal herding and movement (UNDP/PAPP 2017, 8). Their relationship to land and migration was guided by ethics: freedom tied to responsibility, and mobility to stewardship. Contrary to perceptions that nomadic people lack attachment to place, the Naqab Bedouins' connection to the land was existential, rooted in livelihood, lineage, and a reciprocal relationship between people and terrain (Jamjoum 2008/2009, 27).

By the late nineteenth century, Palestinian Bedouins began adopting more sedentary patterns of agriculture while still guided by customary law. From Ottoman "civilising" projects to British "modernization" successive authorities imposed controls that steadily eroded Bedouin autonomy and curtailed mobility (Abu-Saad 2012, 21-22; Amara 2013, 31-33). Conditions deteriorated sharply after 1948, when Israeli settler colonialism implemented systematic displacement and dispossession of Bedouin tribes (Amara 2013, 34-36; Abu-Saad 2012, 27-31). By the early 1950s, only about 10,000 Bedouins remained in the Naqab following expulsions and forced transfers (Jamjoum 2008/2009, 27). Those who stayed were confined to restricted zones and forbidden to return to ancestral lands. Once symbols of free mobility, the Naqab Bedouins were forcibly settled in so-called "concentration townships" (Jamjoum 2008/2009, 28-29).

Like the Naqab Bedouin, all Palestinians after the Nakba were rendered immobile. Those who were forced out are still prohibited from returning, and those who remain are either contained in refugee camps or inside occupied Palestine, severely restricted. The romantic tableau of the archetypal Arab—the unbound Bedouin conquering the desert—contrasts sharply with the checkpoints and barbed wire of Palestinian reality. The Bedouins' shift from a self-determined rhythm to enforced stasis marks a rupture in the moral geography of the Naqab and reveals how the ethics of mobility and belonging were rewritten after 1948. This moral geography, rooted in movement and attachment, later finds material expression in *tatreez*, where stitched surfaces similarly negotiate between freedom and confinement.

Village life and the first disruption: *tatreez* until 1948

Before 1948, Palestinian village life was defined by an intimate rhythm of land, labour, and craft. Within this social fabric, *tatreez* functioned as both ornament and record. Each region developed its own visual dialect, where motifs, colours, and the cut of a thob acted as geographic markers and social codes (Kawar 1980, 125-126). While Bedouin routes charted movement across seasons, village embroidery stitched belonging into place.

In the Naqab and its surrounding villages, women's dresses embodied the region's desert ecology and Bedouin aesthetics. Garments were often cut from indigo or dark-dyed cotton and embroidered with geometric motifs (Gilbert 2013, 132) evoking ancient southern Palestinian designs. The Naqab *thob* thus carried a dual symbolism: its hues and motifs signified tribal affiliation, while its expansive structure and traded materials reflected a life shaped by mobility, exchange, and adaptation (Qleibo 2022, 55–57).

The dress also mapped life's transitions. In the Naqab, unmarried women and widows embroidered in different colours than married ones, and mourning was expressed with specific dyes. As Rachel Dedman observes, such visual codes transformed dress into a language of social belonging and emotion, embedding biography into material form. Beyond aesthetics, these choices signified wealth, mobility, and disposable time. Heavier stitchwork or imported fabrics often reflected prosperity and thriving economies (Dedman 2016, 18-20). While sedentary village embroidery thrived on rootedness, Bedouin dress in Palestine expressed active adaptation. Bedouin garments tended to favour practical cuts and restrained embellishment suited to desert life, yet still conveying tribal identity (Dedman 2016, 22; Kawar 1980, 122).

This embroidery ecology began to unravel with the 1948 *Nakba*. As hundreds of villages were depopulated and more than half the rural population displaced, the embroidered dress ceased to belong solely to a fixed geography. It became a portable archive of belonging and continuity. Thobs once tied to local terrain were carried into camps and exile, acquiring new meanings as mobile archives of memory and loss (Dedman 2016, 35, 44). Through its passage from village to camp and into exile, *tatreez* redefined a moral geography: one that maps the ethical transport of testimony through displacement (**Fig. 2**).

Embroidery in exile: movement, resistance, and survival through *tatreez*

Tatreez *as survival in camps*

After 1948, the rhythm of embroidery travelled with the people who carried it. What had once been anchored to the soil of village life was now practised within the makeshift geography of camps. Women who had lost fields and homes began to stitch memory into cloth. NGOs and women's associations such as Inaash in Lebanon (Dedman 2016, 85) or Sulafa in Gaza (Allenby 2002, 107) began marketing these embroideries beyond refugee camps, transforming everyday clothing into coveted cultural objects and sustaining women's economic agency within the camps. As Shelagh Weir noted, Palestinian dress had always embodied distinctions between village, town, and Bedouin mobility (1969, 45). After the *Nakba*, these distinctions blurred, producing hybrid vocabularies of stitch that reflected the mingling of communities in exile. In this meeting of threads, regional identities were re-stitched into a collective visual lexicon of loss and endurance (El Khalidi 1999, 54-55). *Tatreez* in exile became both income and inheritance, an act of quiet continuity amid

collapse. Within the camps, embroidery workshops emerged as vital spaces of social cohesion and survival, carrying the spirit of lost orchards and village squares (Dedman 2016, 44-45).

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, *tatreez* had acquired a new level of meaning. Once adorning the dresses of rural villagers, it began to migrate into new social and material registers. Twenty years after the *Nakba*, it was graphically mobilised by the Palestine Liberation Organisation as a language of resistance. It also became a desirable artefact to affluent Palestinians in the diaspora seeking a tangible link to a homeland they could no longer reach. Buying and collecting *tatreez* both preserved and reframed its significance at a time when Palestinians were negotiating their national identity outside Palestine. Growing awareness of Israeli attempts to erase or appropriate Palestinian heritage gave embroidery new symbolic urgency. Yet as Khurana notes, this circulation through NGOs and global markets often reproduced neoliberal hierarchies, where refugee women were underpaid for labour (2023, 21). Metaphorically, the *Nakba* gave *tatreez* new legs, moving it from Palestine to the world, and from village women to wealthy collectors. As it entered the realm of collection, *tatreez* was simultaneously commodified and canonised, emerging as a countermap of loss and dispossession (Dedman 2016, 49, 61, 86--87; Abushama 2025, 2).

Tatreez *as political resistance*

For the Bedouin communities of the Naqab, the story of embroidery intersects with that of land loss and restriction. As Ahmad Amara and Mansour Nasasra show, the Bedouins under Israeli rule endured demolition of villages and confinement to designated areas (2013, 4-6). Bedouin women, once itinerant weavers of tents and garments, transformed their textile skills into new forms of protest and livelihood, asserting indigenous presence through the endurance of pattern and colour. Their stitches, like their oral histories, resisted the erasure of their territorial rights (Abu-Rabia-Queder 2007, 69-70, 74; Gilbert 2013, 133-137).

Dedman describes how these practices reshaped tatreez into an economy of endurance that was at once intimate and political (Dedman 2016, 44–46). Cooperative sewing circles trained new generations, their stitches passing on not only technique but also a sense of belonging. *Tatreez* became a shared language through which Palestinian women could articulate identity while negotiating aid economies that often sought to undermine them (Peteet 1991, 33-34). Each garment sold beyond the camp boundary carried traces of women's resilience and a subtle assertion of authorship.

The popular uprising—or *Intifada*—in the Occupied Territories during the late eighties repurposed *tatreez*. Women stitched forbidden Palestinian symbols and colours into what Widad Kawar named the "*Intifada* Dress" (Kawar and Nasir 2021, 17). When the flag and map were banned, the body itself became the banner. Resistance was worn, not proclaimed. This signalled a shift from folk expression to resistance art within feminist and postcolonial visual culture. Embroidery reclaimed agency within systems of constraint, redefining domestic labour as political authorship and extending feminist expression to the frontlines of resistance.

Tatreez *as movement and collection*

The instinct of Palestinians to salvage and collect thobs also proved instrumental in preserving historical evidence and creating collections of material culture that would later

inform exhibitions globally. Dresses once worn in the fields of Bir al-Sabe' or Alkhalil now hang in homes the world over; cherished as heirlooms by families denied the right of return. Collecting vintage dresses became an act of conservation and pride, adorning "home museums" and later international museums, safeguarding identity and history in exile (Haddad 2024, 17). In this circulation, embroidery became a choreography of imagined mobility. It allowed Palestinian women to travel imaginatively across boundaries that the state and the camp sought to fix, carried by journalists, aid workers, and collectors.

Yet this circulation raised ethical tensions. International aid organisations marketed embroidered goods as symbols of suffering, transforming heritage into commodity (Gilbert 2013, 133, 135). Dedman and others warn that such commodification borders on exploitation or humanitarian tokenism, setting limits on embroiderers' economic growth or separating the aesthetic from the political struggle it embodies (Dedman 2016, 78-82). This uneasy balance between empowerment and commodification continues to define the legacy of *tatreez* in exile.

Home and museum archives of *tatreez*

As *tatreez* travelled, its display within diaspora homes became a form of curatorship. Embroidered dresses, once worn daily, were reframed behind glass or repurposed for home décor as cushions, upholstery materials or to cover everyday objects. Such domestic curatorship also marks a feminist act of reclamation, transforming spaces traditionally dismissed as private into sites of cultural authorship and resistance. In many Palestinian households, the act of collecting, conserving, and sharing *tatreez* became both memorial and manifesto.

Through these gestures, the significance of *tatreez* transformed beyond ornament into what Arjun Appadurai describes as a "social life", carrying layered narratives across generations and geographies (Appadurai 1986, 5). The embroidered dress thus continues its march against ongoing settler-colonial erasure. As it moved beyond homes and refugee camps, its transition into museum spaces reflected a new chapter in its "social life". Igor Kopytoff reminds us that objects possess "biographies" that trace how their meanings shift across contexts and regimes of value (1986, 66–67). The *thob*'s journey from domestic heirloom to curated object follows such a trajectory, moving from household memory to institutional display.

Collectors such as Kawar, whose private holdings in Amman constitute the largest known Palestinian dress collection, were instrumental in this movement. By mediating between personal heritage and institutional preservation, Kawar acts as custodian of national memory, ensuring that *tatreez* survives as a living record rather than a relic (Kawar and Nasir 1980, 128-129). In her seminal book *Threads of Identity*, she highlights the women as prominently as the embroidery itself. These acts of collection transformed private dedication into public heritage and legitimacy, linking the domestic archive to the museum display.

Recent exhibitions, such as Dedman's 2023 Material Power, reframe Palestinian embroidery through a decolonial lens, placing it in dialogue with contemporary art and feminist narratives of resistance. This shift echoes Beverley Butler's argument that museums can provide access to "heritage resources" capable of reconfiguring the politics of vision (Butler 2009, 58-59). Yet, as Laurajane Smith notes, heritage remains a "political resource" through which recognition and misrecognition are continuously negotiated (Smith 2022, 623-624). The

museum's power to legitimise is inseparable from its potential to silence; a tension that continues to shape *tatreez* exhibitions today (Haddad 2024, 23).

The UNESCO listing of *tatreez* as Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2021 (UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage n.d.) encouraged major institutions such as the V&A and the Metropolitan Museum of Art to re-examine their Middle Eastern textile holdings, often in collaboration with Palestinian artists and scholars. However, this visibility raises complex ethical questions. As Edward Said cautions, no cultural interpretation of Palestine is neutral; each is shaped by colonial histories and power (Said 1986, 33-35). Exhibiting Palestinian heritage within imperial institutions inevitably mirrors the power hierarchies it critiques. Like the twin museological spaces analysed by Yonatan Mendel and Alexa Rose Steinberg, where Israeli and Palestinian exhibitions mirror each other's political constructions, exhibited *tatreez* too becomes a site of contested authorship. Embroidered objects circulate through museums that often operate as vantage points into entrenched political ideologies (Mendel and Steinberg 2011, 192–193). Within these exhibitionary systems, the *thob* may be displayed as ethnographic specimen, nationalist emblem, or humanitarian artefact; framing that echoes the politics of those who hold the power to display.

Seen through Dudley's notion of "powerful encounters", *tatreez* retains agency within curated spaces, inviting empathy and reflection through its materialisation of displacement (Dudley 2018, 111). Once confined to the village, *tatreez* now circulates globally, speaking for the absent maker while bearing the weight of her violent fate. It continues the counter-narrative, exposing the tension between the sterility of the gallery and the chaos of Palestinian reality.

Stilled bodies, travelling threads

The story of movement in Palestine starts with the Naqab Bedouin tribes traversing a landscape of seasonal rhythms and oral boundaries. Their mobility, once central to their identity, was gradually restricted by regimes that recast free movement as disorder, mirroring the broader immobilisation of Palestinians whose displacement continues (Amara 2013, 34-35; Nasasra et al. 2015, 10).

If Bedouin mobility was once ecological and self-determined, the contemporary movement of *tatreez* is symbolic and institutionally mediated. *Tatreez* now travels across borders and exhibitions, asserting Palestinian presence. As Said reminds us, the struggle over geography is also a struggle over representation, where settler colonial narratives recast the landscape as empty (2000, 188). Within this contest, *tatreez* enacts what Butler calls "the capacity of archival memory" to reinscribe Palestinian experience (Butler 2009, 59). It thus occupies what Bhabha defines as the "Third Space"—a zone of postcolonial negotiation where meaning is produced between power and resistance (Du and Cui 2021, 81). While its mobility is curated, authorised, and often commodified, *tatreez* retains the spark of unregulated movement; the potential energy Dudley attributes to displaced objects within museums (2018, 116).

Through this lens, *tatreez* becomes both artefact and advocate. Like the Bedouin woman, it resists containment by adapting. Its routes are no longer drawn through land topography but through markets, homes, and museums. Embroidery's journey reflects what Sarab Abu-Rabia-Queder describes as the Naqab women's "reflexive invention of activism", a feminist resistance within imposed limits (Abu-Rabia-Queder 2007, 83). For Arab women, feminism occupies a liminal space between Western binaries and local patriarchal constraints,

negotiating global discourses of emancipation alongside indigenous moral frameworks (Tadros and Khan 2018, 3-4). In this space, *tatreez* enacts a feminist politics of movement, articulating agency and voice for women who remain confined. The *thob* stands in for its makers, embodying an ethical nomadism that mirrors postcolonial subjectivity: a condition of movement within constraint and agency within domination. In this transformation, mobility becomes testimony; and a quiet form of feminist resistance.

Conclusion: threads beyond borders

In Palestine, under settler colonialism, both land and body became immobilised. The Bedouins were made sedentary while the rest of Palestine became stateless. In this stillness, *tatreez* began to move, carrying the memory of a geography now fenced and fragmented.

From destroyed villages to camp workshops, to diaspora homes, and museum displays, *tatreez* has crossed boundaries as witness, survivor, and archive of women's resistance. Its path traces shifting meanings that reveal how displacement reconfigures heritage and authorship. Yet this movement is never neutral. *Tatreez* circulates within regimes of display and exchange that could liberate, but could also orientalise, appropriate and commodify; a paradox at the heart of what this essay has sought to illuminate.

Still, within these circuits, *tatreez*, as a displaced object, provokes ethical encounters and injects moral testimony (Dudley 2018, 116). The embroidered dress functions as *Homo Viator*: a travelling body of conscience that carries Palestinian memory across borders, speaking in place of those who are silenced by displacement and power.

As long as there are women stitching, remembering, and teaching, the map of return remains unfinished. The thread is not cut. It is being passed on.

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Fig. 1

'The Hopemaker', Original Painting by the author, Ghia Haddad. Acrylic Paint, Fabric, and Thread on Canvas, 38x38cm. Created December 2020.

Fig. 2

Bir al-Sabe' and Sinai Wedding Dress and Belt circa 1920-1940, Photographed by the author from a display at Tiraz Center in Amman, Jordan – May 2024. Background removed through Photoshop editing.

Textiles in Armenian Ooks as Witnesses of Cultural Migration

Jędrusik, Aldona & Engel, Patricia

University for Continuing Education Krems, Austria

Abstract

Armenian manuscripts and early printed books bear silent witness to centuries of migration and resilience. Carried across regions by pilgrims, refugees, and communities of various diasporas, these volumes were often the most portable form of Armenian spiritual and cultural heritage. Embedded within their bindings, textiles tell their own stories of repurposed garments, domestic fabrics, or regionally traded materials used as pastedowns, covers, veils, structural reinforcements or repairs. These textiles serve as physical evidence of Armenian routes of transition. Identifiable patterns of use and reuse reveal networks of trade, regional aesthetics, and local histories. The symbolically rich Armenian block-printing technique emerges in book bindings as a distinct expression of cultural identity. Continuities with these printed patterns can later be found in European textiles. Each textile fragment, often hidden or replaced, preserves traces of craftsmanship and belief, embodying the intertwined histories of mobility, devotion, and material memory.

Content

Introduction

Located at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, Armenia occupies a singular place in Christian history as the earliest kingdom to officially adopt Christianity and as the eastern frontier of the medieval Christian world. Among its most distinctive creations were the illuminated manuscripts, which embodied the union of religion, art, history, and knowledge that defined Armenian culture. Although political autonomy was repeatedly lost through invasion and deportation, their collective identity was sustained. These artefacts thus functioned as an instrument of cultural preservation and self-definition, uniting beliefs, craftsmanship, and national consciousness.

From the fifth century onward, when Mesrop Maštocʿ invented the Armenian alphabet and when the first translation of Holy Scripture appeared, the written word became both a medium of religious expression and a symbol of national identity. Manuscripts continued to

be produced even after the appearance of the first Armenian printed book in 1511 or 1512 in Venice. It was only in the 19th century that printed books completely replaced manuscripts. Books offered a strong sense of belonging to people whose geographic stability was repeatedly shaken. They travelled wherever Armenians migrated, carried by merchants, pilgrims, and scholars. In their pages and bindings, Armenians condensed their memories of faith and exile. However, the codices can also be seen as material objects, providing valuable insights into the culture that created them through materials, construction techniques, and the ways they resemble or differ from those of other cultures, revealing a nation's trade connections, its interactions with other societies, and the technological resources it had within reach.

Routes of transition

Armenia's geographic position made its merchants key mediators in trade between the East and the West. This constant movement of people and goods also carried with it the circulation of books, ideas, and artistic practices. By the eleventh century, Armenian trading houses exchanged Persian silks for Mediterranean goods. After Shah ʿAbbas I relocated Julfa's merchants to Isfahan in 1604, granting them autonomy and suburban land along the river, New Julfa emerged as the centre of Iran's silk exports, and Safavid Iran became a centre of artistic fusion. The Julfan merchants' success depended on flexibility. They adapted goods for local markets, commissioned book bindings and printed volumes for distant colonies, and intermarried with trading families from Smyrna to Amsterdam.

With Armenia divided between two constantly fighting empires, the Ottoman and Safavid, its principal cultural centres naturally emerged beyond its borders. Political instability, foreign invasions, and periods of persecution also compelled many Armenians to seek security and better living conditions abroad. Their written heritage travelled with Armenians wherever they settled, ensuring cultural continuity across continents.

Although literacy among Armenians did not become common until the nineteenth century, many families owned copies of the Gospels and other books. They were treasured and believed to safeguard the household and protect its owner through divine grace. Sometimes, manuscripts kept in a monastery or church were regarded as a powerful safeguard. Pilgrims from surrounding regions would visit such sites, and upon request from locals, the holy book was occasionally carried from one place to another to protect communities from disease or misfortunes.

Armenian art itself embodies a unique dialogue between Christian iconography and the enduring symbols of Zoroastrian belief—one of the world's oldest monotheistic traditions. Even after centuries under Christianity, Armenians retained a persistent fear of dark forces, a belief deeply rooted in their Zoroastrian past. Demons were thought to bring disease and misfortune, sometimes taking the form of robbers or wild animals to threaten travellers, or haunting their sleep. It is telling that the first Armenian printed volume, *The Book of Friday* (1511), included prayers intended to ward off these creatures. Even as printing spread, these manuscripts remained at the heart of Armenian devotional and domestic life. The traditional craft of manuscript production survived longest in monasteries, where voluntary labour of monastic scribes was less costly than investing in mass-produced printed volumes. Concerns that printing would threaten the livelihood of scribes, widely voiced in the West, were echoed among Armenians as well. Yet Armenian printing soon flourished, beginning in Venice and spreading to Rome, Amsterdam, and other European centres, before reaching

eastward to Constantinople, Iran, and India. This dispersal of creative life reflects the enduring importance of the Armenian diasporas.

This long-standing tradition of movement—through trade, exile, and artistic exchange—shaped the character of Armenian culture and ensured its lasting global presence.

Textiles in Armenian bookbinding

Armenian manuscripts are far more than repositories of words. With richly decorated bindings and colourful illuminations, they can be regarded as works of applied art with many features guided less by function than by a distinct aesthetic shaped by local and regional influences. Each codex, whether handwritten or printed, still needed a durable cover, independent of its origin or language. Armenian printed works until the seventeenth century, and sometimes even later, retained the manuscript tradition being bound by the same time-honoured methods.

Textiles appear throughout Armenian manuscripts in many forms: they could act as fine veils protecting painted illuminations, as decorative coverings for sacred writings, or as structural materials supporting the construction of bindings, including covers, pastedowns, and spine linings. The selection of cloths reveals both availability and intention. The splendour of the fabrics incorporated into these bindings reflects their cosmopolitan origins. Iranian brocades, Indian chintzes, and Italian damasks most often appeared as pastedowns, while luxurious Ottoman velvets and silks adorned the covers, often characteristic of the New Julfa style. The diversity of fabrics in Armenian bindings, with no strict separation between sacred and utilitarian textiles reflects the same combination of devotion and pragmatism that animated their trade.

Alongside these luxurious fabrics were simpler cottons decorated with printed designs. Textiles featuring repeating floral patterns were produced in Armenian centres and exported through Julfan trade networks to Eastern Europe. In bookbinding, these printed cottons served as pastedowns lining the boards inside with fabric that hides the wood and fittings. In daily life, printed fabrics were used as bedspreads, shawls, tablecloths, or garments, whether bleached or dyed in various colours and further ornamented with printed or painted designs.

Traditional Armenian textiles are distinguished by their vivid ornamentation and exceptional craftsmanship. This craftsmanship is expressed through colour, composition, and a range of techniques including block-printing, stencilling, resist-dyeing, and contouring. The evolution of Armenian block-printing reveals a gradual transition from geometric abstraction to ornamental naturalism. The earliest examples, dominated by red pigment, feature broad stripes filled with rosettes, rhombi, and other geometric motifs characteristic of early Armenian design. Trade exchanges shaped not only markets but also visual culture. Floral forms developed gradually. By the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, block prints became more vivid and compositionally complex, adopting checkerboard layouts with large decorative or even figural motifs (**Fig. 1**). The floral arabesques of Persian textiles entered European decorative repertoires, while European botanical realism filtered back into Armenian embroidery and illumination. Within this artistic dialogue, the fabrics used in Armenian bookbindings began to embody these aesthetic exchanges, merging Eastern ornament with Western naturalism.

From the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, floral elements gained prominence, arranged either as scattered motifs or as garlands set against light backgrounds (**Fig. 2**). Later,

between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, striped patterns reappeared in more standardised and repetitive forms (**Fig. 3**). In the final phase, dating from the eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, prints display refined floral designs executed with remarkable technical precision and chintz-like intricacy. These richly detailed works, often featuring dark backgrounds and restrained colour palettes, attest to the sophistication of regional workshops and the enduring adaptability of Armenian textile artistry (**Fig. 4**).

The printing process demanded great precision and care, as the finished fabric had to appear seamless—without any smudges or visible transitions between impressions. The entire image was meant to look like a single harmonious design.

The custom of donating liturgical vestments

The reuse of textiles within Armenian bindings was not accidental but an integral expression of religious culture. Deprived of their own statehood and political elites, Armenians gathered around their Church, which was not only a form of defense against fear, but also provided them with a sense of identity and distinguished them ethnically and culturally from other nations living within the Ottoman Empire. The special role of the Church in Armenian social life translated into careful attention to its needs. Laypeople felt responsible not only for maintaining the clergy and church institutions such as schools or hospitals but also for the Church itself—its interior decoration and the setting of the Divine Liturgy celebrated within it.

The legal restrictions imposed on Armenians under Ottoman rules (such as the requirement of government approval for constructing or repairing churches and the obligation to minimise exterior and interior ornamentation) redirected artistic expression toward smaller liturgical objects: book illuminations, metalwork, and, above all, textiles. Therefore, it is not surprising that some of the earliest surviving examples of cotton textiles are fragments used as linings in the silver covers of Armenian manuscripts dating from the 10th to the 13th centuries. The result of these restrictions was an extraordinary richness of liturgical vestments, which stood out for their colourfulness and splendour.

Their creation was not a mere craft activity but an act of devotion. Armenians would donate the objects as a personal confession of faith. The gift honoured God and expressed belonging to the Church. In return, the benefactor hoped for divine grace in life and salvation after death. In the Armenian worldview, matter itself could participate in sanctity—objects became holy through their use in sacred contexts. This principle of matter absorbing holiness through use extended beyond Church textiles. Domestic fabrics, merchants' wares, and even remnants of foreign trade goods or block-printed cottons made for export were also repurposed into bookbinding. While a manuscript is produced only once, its binding may be replaced multiple times in various locations.

Armenian bindings, therefore, condense within a single object the entire social spectrum of fabric use—from royal silks to domestic linens. Their combination of new and old materials reflects a broader ethic of continuity. In a culture repeatedly uprooted by war and exile, the capacity to reuse and adapt became a moral virtue.

Conclusion

The intertwined history of textiles and scripture reveals how a dispersed nation sustained its cultural cohesion through objects. The story of textiles in Armenian books is one of perpetual movement—of materials, people, and ideas. From the secluded monasteries of medieval Armenia to the Safavid ateliers of Isfahan and the merchant courts of Europe, these fabrics trace a history of motion more eloquent than words. Each book embodies the Armenian worldview shaped in diaspora. Manuscripts carried by merchants served as tangible reminders of their homeland and linguistic relics. The materials embedded within them chart not only geographical journeys but also conceptual ones.

Although Armenia was influenced by both the Roman–Byzantine and Persian worlds, it nevertheless remained distinct from both. This is reflected in the structure of Armenian bindings—Eastern in their aesthetical elaboration yet Western in their codicological form. The pattern of exchange was never one-directional but dialogic: Persian weavers inspired Armenian binders, who in turn influenced European artisans. Textiles embedded in migrating books testify to a journey across political, linguistic, and spiritual frontiers, mapping the global circulation of fabrics, ideas, and faith.

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Fig. 1

1588-1602. MS. Arm. d. 22. https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/6c9253f3-4db2-48b6-9404-418ba9e24b5d/ (CC BY-NC 4.0)

Fig. 2

17th century. MS. Arm. f. 16. https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/67a9ed64-9989-473b-a6b8-5ddbc4bed30f/ (CC BY-NC 4.0)

Fig. 3

Preußischer Kulturbesitz. 1678. [Minutoli 274]. Berlin: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Public Domain Mark 1.0. https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN683928635&PHYSID=PHYS_0002

Fig. 4

Preußischer Kulturbesitz. 1692. [Minutoli 277]. Berlin: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Public Domain Mark 1.0. https://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN1838919767&PHYSID=PHYS_0002

Poles Travelling (1825). Notes on Outerwear

Kowalska, Joanna Regina

National Museum in Krakow, Poland

Abstract

During the Romantic Period (1790s-1850s), Poles travelled widely across Europe for business, study, leisure, and health, as well as for pilgrimage. Travelling required appropriate clothing, especially outerwear, since roads were dusty and journeys long. The National Museum in Kraków holds two exemplary garments: a woman's *salopa* from the 1830s and a man's surdut dating to the late 1840s. This article focuses primarily on these two types of outerwear to demonstrate the importance of bringing together physical garments, iconography, and written sources within costume studies. The study also highlights how careful source analysis is essential for the accurate interpretation of garments preserved in museum collections, and how challenging contemporary terminology can be to understand.

Content

Introduction

During the Romantic Period, the roads of Europe saw an increasing number of inhabitants of the Polish territories, which at the time were under Prussian, Austrian, and Russian rule. People travelled for business, study, holidays, family visits, to explore the wonders of European nature and culture, to receive treatment in numerous European spas, and to undertake pilgrimage to famous centres of worship. This period in Polish history was marked by attempts to break free from foreign domination, the largest of which—the November Uprising (1830-1831), which ended in defeat—triggered a wave of emigration among Polish patriots persecuted by the partitioning powers.

Every journey required careful preparation, including the choice of appropriate clothing for the road. The rapid development of the railway network occurred only toward the end of the period in question, so travellers largely relied on carriages, stagecoaches, and sometimes riverboats. One of the most important garments during travel was suitable outerwear, which protected not only against the cold but also against the dust stirred up by horse-drawn vehicles moving along Europe's roads.

The collection of the National Museum in Krakow includes two particularly interesting garments from the Romantic period—a woman's coat from the 1830s and a man's frock coat from the late 1840s. They will form the core of our reflections on the outer garments worn by travelling Poles, based on Polish source materials: diaries, manuals, and fashion journals.

In this article, I use Polish names for the garments, and my translations into English are necessarily approximate. As we will see, clothing terminology in the sources is often unclear, which often makes accurate translation very difficult.

Surdut

The most popular and universal of men's garments was definitely the *surdut,* a term meaning 'frock coat', 'surtout' or 'redingote'. It could be used as outerwear, worn above a tailcoat or above another slightly shorter *surdut*, or as daily wear, worn directly over the vest (*Dziennik Domowy* 1840). It not only protected the wearer against bad weather, but also effectively concealed any shortcomings of the underlying clothing, whether due to limited financial means or simple untidiness. It was an ideal choice for travel during the warmer months, providing both comfort and adequate protection from both cold and dust.

The brown woollen *surdut*, dating to the late 1840s, entered our collection in 1909 as a keepsake of Andrzej Towiański (1799-1878) (Gutkowska-Rychlewska 1968, 758 -759; Możdżyńska-Nawotka 2002; Biedrońska-Słotowa & Kowalska 2003, 62; Jarosińska I. 2017). It was given by Józefat Andrzejowski (1849-1939), a Polish industrialist and social activist who met Towiański in Zurich in the 1870s, so we can probably trust his statement regarding the garment's provenance (**Figs. 1 & 2**).

Andrzej Towiański was a Polish philosopher and mystic, the founder of the ideology of Towianism, whose core belief was that an oppressed Poland was the messiah of nations and would bring about a moral and spiritual revival across Europe through the renunciation of violence and the cultivation of spiritual virtues. He had a profound influence on the beliefs and works of Adam Mickiewicz, one of the greatest Polish poets of the Romantic Era. As his poetry stirred the Polish nation to fight for independence, he had to spend most of his life in exile. Andrzej Towiański himself also travelled a lot throughout Europe.

Apparently, the brown *surdut* was among Andrzej Towiański's favourite garments, as he appears in it in portraits and photograhs. It is made of brown woollen cloth and features a high black velvet collar. Collars reaching up to the chin were referred to as *col russe*— 'Russian collars'. The garment is fitted at the waist, flaring out below the waistline, although not as dramatically as had been common in the previous decade. It is voluminous and gives the impression of being comfortable, and was certainly quite warm. It is lined with alpaca(?) fabric, dyed black and green, with the exception of the sleeves, which are lined with cotton fabric, white with narrow black stripes. The buttons are engraved with 'Patented June 1844', which allows us to date the garment to the late 1840s or early 1850s. One of the most practical features of this *surdut*, especially during travel, was the multitude of pockets—this one has two in the front, another inside the chest area, and two very deep pockets hidden in the back skirts of the coat.

The term *surdut* is probably correctly used in reference to Andrzej Towianski's garment, but when turning to source materials one can never be entirely sure of this. It is a reasonable principle that garments from a given era should be referred to using the terminology actually employed at the time. The situation is clearest when we are dealing with a depiction of

clothing in a journal illustration, painting, or photograph, accompanied by a caption with the name that appears to be the correct contemporary term. However, even in their own time, people sometimes had difficulties with terminology, especially when it came to translating from foreign languages, particularly French. Regarding men's garments, an outstanding example can be found in the Polish women's magazine *Motyl* in 1829. There were three fashion plates, reproduced from French originals and published in consecutive issues of the journal, which retained the original French captions with a Polish translation beneath. All three men's garments were labelled as '*redingote'* in the French captions, which we would probably simply translate into Polish today as '*redingot'*. The 1820s Polish fashion expert apparently noticed differences that were insignificant to the French author, as he translated the word '*redingote'* once as '*surdut*'' (frock coat/*redingote*), once as '*tużurek'* (cutaway coat/*jaquette*), and once as '*węgierka*' (Hungarian coat/*veste hongroise*) (*Motyl* 1829, n° 19, 21, 24) (**Figs. 3, 4 & 5**).

It is also worth mentioning the number of colour terms used for men's garments in the written sources. We associate such richness primarily with women's costumes, but the ingenuity in developing new colour names for men's clothes was equally remarkable. Even a seemingly dull colour like gray could prove remarkably diverse in its many shades. Let's look at one of the 1828 issues of *Motyl*, where we can find a long list of gray shades, with names derived from everyday life and nature, making them easy to imagine: *steel, poppy-seed, goose, sparrow, starling, mouse, hare, dormouse, cloud-like, dust, and smoke* (*Motyl* 1828, n° 20). We would call Towiański *surdut* 'brown', but in the 1840s its colour might have been described with greater precision or given a more romantic name—for example *consience* (Fr.), meaning 'conscience'—mentioned in one of the issues of another Polish journal from 1830. Even the columnist writing about it was somewhat perplexed, resignedly concluding: 'Since the colour of conscience is unknown to us, we must therefore trust the illustration, which shows that conscience is dark brown in colour' (Wanda 1830, n° 13).

Particularly useful during holiday journeys were multifunctional garments, such as the invention of the Poznań tailor Jasiński: 'A *surdut* (frock coat) that has a double function, so that, according to preference, it can be transformed into a tailcoat. The entire mechanism is hidden under the lining, and nothing more is needed than to thread a cord with a needle through a dozen loops to transform the wide skirts into cut and narrow ones'. The *Dziennik Mód Paryskich* (*Paris Fashion Journal*) did not fail to note that the inventor 'as done a great service for travellers, who are spared heavy bundles, as they can fit both their everyday and formal attire into a small package…' (Dziennik Mód Paryskich 1844).

Salopa

Turning to women's historical outerwear, we encounter numerous terms in the written sources. With careful analysis—usually within a period no longer than a dozen or so years—it is possible to attempt to match these terms to types of garments preserved in museum collections, although one must approach this with great caution. In Polish diaries, one of the most popular travelling garments for women was the *salopa*, usually described as heavy, stiff, and very warm, sometimes—pejoratively—as shapeless. Perhaps this is how contemporaries would have described the women's coat from the collection of the National Museum in Kraków (Gutkowska-Rychlewska 1968, 749-751; Biedrońska-Słotowa & Kowalska 2003, 60). It possesses all of the above-mentioned characteristics: it is thick and

heavy, padded with wadding, and quilted on the inner side. When worn, it stood away from the figure, forming a bell shape, with its entire weight resting on the shoulders (**Fig. 6**).

The garment has a beautiful sea-green colour. The outer fabric combines the advantages of silk—its sheen and smoothness—with the hygroscopic and thermal properties of wool, as it is woven from both materials. Its pattern refers to ornaments found in 17th-century Italian silk fabrics. It fastens at the neck with three hooks and is tied with a ribbon. The front is equipped with arm openings into which narrow sleeves were inserted for additional warmth, covering the arm only from the elbow to the wrist—a design intended to accommodate, under the *salop*a, the fashionable 1830s dress sleeves shaped like a lamb's leg, particularly wide in the upper part. The long cape-style collar is lined with pink taffeta, which could be revealed by a gust of wind.

The *salopa* has not a single pocket, not even the smallest. Evidently, women made do with detachable pockets worn under the dress, as well as the increasingly fashionable handbags. All tears and damage were carefully mended by the owner so that the garment could be worn for many years. Patches and darning visible on the surface of the fabric are executed with great care. The *salopa* is equipped with a sturdy hanger capable of supporting its considerable weight.

The *salopa* in the collection of the National Museum in Kraków was donated in 1924 by Helena Dąbczańska (1863-1956), an outstanding collector who was among the first to appreciate the beauty of historical garments. She was primarily interested in fashion from the first half of the 19th century. Thanks to her generosity, the museum's collection in Kraków was enriched with valuable examples of clothing from that period (Kowalska 2024).

To choose the correct term for the outer garment in the collection of the National Museum in Kraków, we can analyse illustrations in Polish journals, provided that the original Polish captions are preserved. In the 1830s, we find several examples of overgarments described as *salopas*. They are very similar to the *salopa* from our collection. One of their most visible features, besides the bell-shaped cut, is a double collar: a very large, *pèlerine*-style collar, sometimes reaching as far as mid-thigh, and a smaller collar at the neck that rests on top of the *pèlerine*. The *pèlerine* collar could also provide some additional warmth to the wearer. These garments usually also lacked proper sleeves, featuring only slits. All these characteristics can be found in our garment. Some *salopas* were also equipped with a hood, although ours does not have one (**Figs. 7 & 8**).

Thus, although we may be inclined to call it a '*salopa'*, we should first consult a very important source for Polish costume studies—namely Łukasz Gołębiowski's *Clothing in Poland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day, Described in the Manner of a Dictionary*, published in 1830—to verify this assumption. There we read that fashionable *salopas* of 1830 were made with many variations in linings, collars, trimmings, ribbons or cords attached to them, as well as in their cut and length. The only clear hint provided by the author is that *salopas* for summer were constructed from fine, lightweight woollens and silk fabrics, whereas winter ones were made from heavier wool materials (Gołębiowski 1830).

Mainly because of its heavy padding, we can classify the described garment as a winter one; however, we can no longer be entirely certain that the term '*salopa'* is the most accurate name for it.

Over time, women's fashion evolved, and the voluminous *salopa* ceased to be a necessity. By the 1840s, sleeves were already narrow enough to fit comfortably under coats that emphasised the female silhouette. Yet in Poland's cold climate, warm *salopas* continued to be worn for quite some time, which occasionally met with resistance from young girls who wanted to look attractive even while travelling. Their attitude is well illustrated by a quote from the diary of Zofia Szeptycka, daughter of the Polish playwright Aleksander Fredro, who, in her early teens, around 1850, set out for Paris with her governess. With some displeasure, Zofia described them as follows: 'Both were ash-coloured, dress-style, in large sapphire checks. Mazdunia's example had a long *pèlerine* with a silk fringe, mine a sapphire velvet hood; they were carefully and stiffly felted, though made by the leading dressmaker of the time, Mrs. Adamska. Nevertheless, mine at least gave me perfectly rounded, spherical shapes.' (Szeptycka 1974)

Other outergarments

Men's outerwear appeared in so many varieties and under so many different names that even contemporaries could get confused by the diversity. A vivid illustration of this can be found in the issue n°25 of Lviv's *Dziennik Mód Paryskich* from 1846, which explains:

The 'surdut' is always the garment most closely resembling a tailcoat, remaining moderate in the length and width of the waist. 'Paletots,' on the other hand, are subject to great variations; the length and width of the waist sometimes reach such proportions that it is astonishing that there are people willing to appear almost ridiculous. In 'twins' the only difference is that they do not have such a pronounced waist indentation and that they have two pleats on each side.

The higher the waist and the closer the cut to the body, the more elegant the outfit was considered. At the top of this hierarchy was the *redingot* (riding coat), followed by the *surdut*, and finally the *paletot* and the coat (*Dziennik Mód Paryskich* 1846, n° 21). Even the slightest modification in cut or decoration provided grounds for creating new names whose meanings were gradually forgotten, such as *kabana*, *opończa*, *pleed*, *bunda*, *algierka*, or *kasawajka* (*Dziennik Mód Paryskich* 1842, n° 11; 1846, n° 21; 1847, n° 14; *Magazyn Mód* 1836, n° 2; Gołębiowski 1830).

There were also many other types of women's overgarments mentioned in Polish sources, such as *burnus*, *paletot*, *mantyla*, and *opończa*. One cannot overestimate the role of shawls, the most versatile of garments for any occasion (**Fig. 9**).

Conclusion

In this article, I chose two types of garments for analysis, the *salopa* and the *surdut*, to demonstrate how important it is in costume studies to make use of multiple sources: extant garments, iconography, and written texts. I also wanted to share my observations and doubts regarding the difficulties associated with the historical garment terminology.

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Fig. 1

Surdut of Andrzej Towianski.
France (?), circa 1850.
Given by Józafat Andrzejowski, 1909.
© National Museum in Krakow.
Nr inw. MNK XIX-2792

Fig. 2

Portrait of Andrzej Towianski.
Walenty Wankowicz (1799–1842).
© National Museum in Krakow
Nr inw. MNK III-r.a-17489

Fig. 3

'Redingote', translated as *Surdut*.
From *Motyl*, 1827, n° 19.

Fig. 4

'Redingote', translated as *tuzurek*.
From *Motyl*, 1827, n° 21.

Fig. 5

'Redingote', transalated as *Wegierka* (Hungarian style).
From *Motyl*, 1827, n° 24.

Fig. 6

Salopa
Poland, 1830s.
Given by Helena Dabczanska, 1924.
© National Museum in Krakow.
Nr inw. MNK XIX-5528

Fig. 7

Salopa
From *Magazyn mód. Dziennik Przyjemnych Wiadomosci*, 1835, il. 45B.

Fig. 8

Salopa
From *Magazyn mód. Dziennik Przyjemnych Wiadomosci*, 1835, il. 43B.

Fig. 9

Burnus

From *Dziennik domowy*, 1840, n° 32.

From Trade Fabric to Intangible Heritage: The Enduring Legacy of English Callimanco in Estonian Visual and Material Culture

Kull, Tiina

Junior researcher, Estonian National Museum, Estonia

Abstract

This paper traces the cultural history of callimanco, a striped worsted fabric imported from England in the 18th century, and explores how it evolved from a trade item into a symbol of regional and national identity in Estonia. Drawing on textile trade records and surviving garments in museum collections, the study shows how callimanco-like fabrics became common in 19th-century rural dress and how their vivid stripes were later canonised during the Soviet occupation as markers of folk authenticity.

Rather than disappearing, these patterns persisted and migrated from garments to broader visual culture. Today, similar stripes appear in local fashion, municipal symbols, and rural architecture, revealing mechanisms of cultural transmission that bridge centuries. The endurance of this motif illustrates how practices of adornment are continually reinterpreted, transforming a once-imported fabric into an element of Estonia's intangible heritage that connects material culture with collective memory.

Content

Introduction

As humans, we study history to understand how things begin—how ideas, traditions, and customs emerge, take shape, and weave themselves into our present. This search for origins is what grounds us and helps us navigate the modern world, where much of what once was distinct is becoming increasingly uniform. In such a landscape, paying attention to the small regional differences—the subtle shifts of form, colour, or habit—becomes a way of preserving diversity and meaning. Every cultural expression carries traces of the environment and era that shaped it.

This paper begins with one such trace: a fabric that once crossed seas and social boundaries, leaving patterns that still speak in colour and form. What follows is the story of how a material object can carry both continuity and change, and how textile, trade, and tradition converge to shape a living heritage that remains visible and meaningful in contemporary space.

Making the connection

Aino Voolmaa was the first to propose that the use of purchased striped fabrics for skirts in the 18th century laid the foundation for the 19th-century tradition of locally woven striped skirts in Estonia. However, no link to international textile trade could be confirmed at the time. (Voolmaa 1971) Today, four such skirts, made from thin satin-weave wool fabrics with a glazed finish, are preserved in two Estonian museums (**Fig. 1**). These rare garments provided the initial material basis for this study.

Knowing that the fabric in question was a purchased material, the search turned to centres known for the production of woollen textiles in 18th-century Europe. This inquiry led to Michael Nix's (2023) excellent study of the Norwich textile industry and, most importantly, to several pattern books preserved in the Norfolk Museums Service and the Winterthur Library. These constitute the principal surviving sources for Norwich's production. In addition, pattern books and sample sheets originating from Norwich are held in a few other collections—notably several fabric samples in Anders Berch's collection in Nordiska Museet in Sweden (NM.0017648B_12 q,r,s,t,u,v) and a complete pattern book preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum (VA 67-1885).

To verify or refute the hypothesis that the striped skirts preserved in Estonia originated in England, the stripe patterns of the Estonian garments were compared with those found in pattern books displaying Norwich callimancoes. The study examined striped callimanco fabrics represented in eleven pattern books comprising a total of 184 pages, each page containing on average around twenty samples of striped cloth (**Fig. 2**). In addition, the technical characteristics of the Estonian textiles, including weave type and density, fibre composition, and traces of glazing visible on the fibre surface when analysed under a microscope, were compared with the data published by Michael Nix. The results of this combined visual and structural analysis made it possible to conclude that the four surviving skirts preserved in Estonian collections were made from fabric produced in Norwich, England (Kull 2024).

This identification not only confirms the origin of the material but also provides a clearer basis for tracing the broader history and circulation of striped worsted fabrics in Estonia.

Historical trade fabric—callimanco

In the 18th century, England's worsted industry produced a wide variety of colourful woven fabrics that were exported throughout Europe and beyond. Among these was callimanco—a glazed, striped woollen worsted fabric woven mainly in Norwich and the surrounding areas. Its distinctive sheen came from calendaring and hot-pressing, using wax- and resin-treated sheets, and its stripes from the warp, which allowed subtle shade crossings from lighter to darker in two adjacent colour stripes (Nix 2023; Proano Gaibor et al. 2021).

By bringing together evidence from a variety of sources that document textile trade in the northern and eastern Baltic Sea region, it becomes possible to assemble a reasonably

comprehensive picture of how the commerce in worsted fabrics operated in this area. In the late eighteenth century, the territories of present-day Estonia and northern Latvia were part of the Russian Empire, with both Tallinn and Riga serving as important ports for sea trade. The Danish Sound Toll Registers provided the principal dataset and formed the basis for quantitative analysis. These were supplemented by English records that identified the ports of departure and the merchants involved. Further information from the receiving end, including the names of local consignees and the subsequent routes of ships, was derived from late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century newspapers published in Baltic towns. These were general information periodicals containing a wide range of notices such as advertisements, economic reports, and announcements as well as regular lists of vessels arriving in, and departing from, port (Kull and Nix 2025).

The most substantial volumes of worsted fabric reached the eastern Baltic only after Norwich manufacturers began to organise their own shipping consignments through Great Yarmouth. This structural change, initiated in 1765, effectively bypassed London commission merchants and created a direct export network that connected the Norfolk manufacturing centre with the market in the Russian Empire. The principal trade route ran from Norwich via Great Yarmouth to St Petersburg, with Tallinn functioning as a strategically important intermediate port that received roughly 13 per cent of the total cargo. While a respectable quantity of goods also reached Riga—arguably the larger regional *entrepôt*—the trade pattern there differed markedly. Shipments to Riga tended to be small, and the city's role in the exchange was primarily that of a supplier rather than a recipient: vessels that arrived light with textiles or in ballast typically departed heavily laden with timber, hemp, and hemp-tow destined for English markets (Kull and Nix 2025).

Based on the trade figures, it is possible to make a cautious estimate of the number of skirts that could theoretically have been produced from the worsted fabric imported into Tallinn. Archival data show that between 1789 and 1807, merchants in the Estonian Governorate received more than 66,000 pieces of stuffs from Great Yarmouth and London. If we follow the proportions recorded in the dispatch books of Ives & Co., roughly half of these may have been callimancoes—around 33,000 pieces in total. With the average piece length calculated at thirty yards (27.4 metres), this represents approximately 900,000 metres of fabric. Considering that a single striped skirt required between six and seven metres of material, the imported quantity would have been sufficient to produce between 130,000 to 150,000 skirts. Of course, this remains a theoretical figure: not all imported callimanco was destined for rural dressmaking. Yet even as a thought experiment, the calculation underscores the extraordinary scale of the trade—and the improbability that the four surviving callimanco skirts in Estonian collections could ever convey the full extent of the fabric's once-vivid presence (Kull and Nix 2025).

Forming into widespread fashion trend

The point at which imported English fabrics began to inspire the skirts worn and cherished by Estonian peasant women remains unclear. In the same article where she proposes that bought skirts were already in use in the 18th century, Aino Voolmaa also cites records of striped cloth given as part of servants' wages at Põltsamaa Castle and notes that, twenty years later in 1765, two women escaped from a spinning house wearing striped skirts. (Voolmaa 1971) However, it remains uncertain whether these fabrics were woollen, as striped cottons or linens may have been equally common at the time. Additional evidence

suggests that callimanco was already reaching Estonia earlier than the 1790s. Hannes Vinnal has identified references in archival documents showing that between 1717 and 1720, Tallinn merchant Thomas Clayhill sold 1,500 ells of full callimanco at 15 öre per ell and 1,140 ells of half callimanco at 8 öre per ell (H. Vinnal, e-mail, 11 November 2024). A 1772 newspaper from Tallinn also reported the import of 139 pieces of ‘callmank’ (Image 3). However, trade records show that substantial shipments of striped woollen fabrics began arriving only after 1789, when direct consignments from Great Yarmouth were initiated. The very first of these documented shipments included 2,430 pieces of worsted stuffs on a single ship (Kull and Nix 2025) (**Fig. 3**).

Although early documentary evidence does not establish a direct connection between imported callimanco and local peasant dress, the scale of documented shipments combined with the striking visual similarities between English callimanco and Estonian striped skirts make it reasonable to consider callimanco as a likely predecessor for the latter. When these two fabrics are viewed side by side, the resemblance is too significant to be coincidental. Both callimanco and the Estonian striped skirt share a similar pattern design: a dominant ground colour, mirrored stripe sequences arranged symmetrically from the centre, and tonal transitions of the same colour from lighter to darker shades. Among Estonian examples, there are also skirts in which the outer stripes of a single group are repeated, creating a visually uplifting effect similar to that seen in some callimanco fabrics (**Fig. 4**).

Despite these parallels, there is also a fundamental difference between the two. Estonian skirts were woven as semi-woollen fabrics with a linen warp and woollen weft, whereas callimanco is a warp-faced satin-weave textile made entirely of wool. These structural and material differences demonstrate how strong the desire to imitate callimanco must have been, since reproducing the same tonal transitions from light to dark was technically far more demanding in peasant weaving, where the stripes were formed with the weft. The Estonian weaver had to change the colour of the weft yarn repeatedly, whereas the professional Norwich weaver could achieve the effect using a single continuous woollen weft thread, as the stripes were already on the loom.

Although the precise moment when the striped skirt became popular among Estonian peasant women cannot be firmly dated, the collections of the Estonian National Museum already attest to its wide distribution. The museum holds more than 800 skirts dating from the 19th century, in addition to numerous fragments of fabric that once formed part of similar garments. While not all historical Estonian skirts are striped—especially in the second half of the century, when checked patterns and horizontal stripes also became more common—the majority of preserved examples do feature vertical striping. Together, these materials provide substantial evidence of the extent to which the striped skirt had become an established and characteristic element of women’s dress in rural Estonia by the 1820s.

Forming into the symbol of Estonian nationality

Interest in the clothing of the Estonian peasantry can be traced back to the late 18th century, particularly among members of the local upper classes, who regarded rural traditions with both ethnographic curiosity and aesthetic appreciation. However, it was the national awakening movement in the latter half of the 19th century that provided the ideological impetus for reinterpreting these garments as emblems of collective identity. Cultural leaders and writers began to encourage the use of 'authentic' and distinctively local attire as a visible marker of national belonging. In his introduction to the first Estonian folk costume book, Ilmari

Manninen catalogued at least twelve newspaper articles published between 1882 and 1925 that advocated wearing of folk costume or ‘national dress’ on festive occasions. (Manninen 1927) This period marks the emergence of the term ‘*rahvarõivas’* (folk costume) in its modern meaning, even though in many households these garments were still kept in chests and remembered as former everyday wear (**Fig. 5**).

After the Second World War, during the Soviet occupation, when overt expressions of national identity were politically dangerous, folk costume took on a dual role. On the one hand, it became a culturally sanctioned symbol of heritage and was visible at state-approved festivals and in folkloric performances. On the other hand, it remained a discreet medium for preserving and affirming Estonian identity. (Värv 2008) Ethnographic fieldwork and costume research were considered apolitical and thus allowed to flourish, leading to the creation of typologies, reconstructions, and instructional materials based on museum collections. Although this process inevitably standardised and simplified the regional diversity of traditional dress, it also safeguarded techniques and designs that might otherwise have been lost. Folk costume thus persisted as both a scientific object and a subtle form of cultural resistance.

Finding its way in rural architecture

The idea that each Estonian parish has its own distinctive cultural markers — including dialects, folklore, artefacts, and clothing—has deep roots in Estonian cultural history. Since historical church parishes were among the most stable administrative units over time, they have long served as the basic framework for mapping cultural variation. Estonia has 106 historical church parishes, and this system continues to inform the organisation of museum collections and cultural narratives to this day. As early as 1938, the first instructional book on folk costumes already presented garments according to parish-based divisions. (Kurrik 1938)

The 1981 publication *Eesti rahvarõivad*, which offered reconstructed folk costume sets for each parish, did not create this system, but it played a key role in reintroducing and visually reinforcing it. (Kaarma and Voolmaa 1981) Through Melanie Kaarma’s carefully drawn illustrations (Image 5), the book popularised the notion that every historical parish had its own recognisable skirt pattern. While based on the best available scholarship of the time, these reconstructions also reflected aesthetic and practical decisions. Nevertheless, the publication helped re-anchor parish-based visual identity in public consciousness.

When interest in traditional dress resurged during the perestroika era (1985) and the restoration of independence (1991), this already-familiar visual model offered a compelling foundation for expressing regional belonging. The striped skirt thus moved from being an ethnographic object to becoming a symbol of place-based identity within Estonia’s evolving cultural landscape. These patterns appear on village signs, community flags, handicraft products, school logos, and even new wooden buildings whose façades echo the verticality and hues of 19th-century garments. Although this phenomenon existed earlier, it gained significant momentum during the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Republic of Estonia in 2018, when a special book was published featuring the striped patterns and corresponding CMYK colour codes for each historical parish. (Piiri 2018) At the same time, it is fascinating to observe how this kind of rural architectural ornamentation resonates with people and continues to grow in popularity.

While preparing this article and presentation, I issued a call on social media asking people to send me photos of cases where skirt stripes had been used as decorative architectural elements, and I was surprised by the number of responses. People gladly shared their creations, eager to show how they had incorporated traditional patterns into their surroundings. A total of 72 photographs of different objects were submitted in response to my call. While not the result of a systematic survey, the material nonetheless reveals some clear tendencies. The largest category among the submitted images consisted of painted doors, most often belonging to summer cottages, root cellars, or garages. Stripes were also commonly applied to everyday items such as compost bins, outdoor toilets, hot tubs, and in one case, beehives. Another distinct group comprises small public structures such as outdoor bandstands, bus shelters, and mailboxes. Again, this overview does not aim to offer a comprehensive analysis, but rather provides a visual snapshot of how traditional skirt patterns have entered contemporary material culture. The extent and forms of this phenomenon in Estonia remain largely undocumented and could offer valuable ground for a dedicated and systematic future study (**Fig. 6**).

Conclusion

What may at first appear to be a story of stripes on skirts or painted summer cottage doors is, in fact, a map of cultural transmission, a record of how ideas, aesthetics, and materials move across geographies and generations. Tracing the journey of callimanco from English textile production to Estonian rural dress and into contemporary visual culture, this study highlights how meaning is continuously reshaped through use, memory, and creative adaptation.

Understanding such processes reminds us that the role of the researcher is often to reveal the unseen: to show how something as ordinary as a painted door may carry a lineage stretching far beyond its surface. The motifs that now define village identity or decorate everyday structures emerge from a long dialogue between global trade and local imagination.

Rather than viewing heritage as a fixed set of styles or objects, callimanco’s story invites us to see it as a living process shaped by what communities choose to remember, remake, or embed in new contexts. The fact that a design developed in industrial Norwich can now serve as a symbol of Estonian rural identity speaks to the resilience and adaptability of cultural forms.

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Fig. 1

Four skirts in Estonian collections made from callimanco fabric.

Fig. 2

Two Estonian skirts and matching patterns from Norwich pattern books.

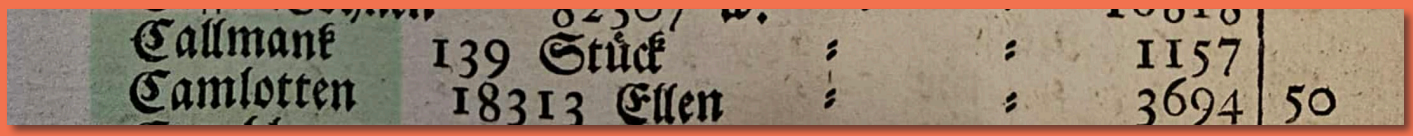

Fig. 3

A cutout from Tallinn's newspaper *Revalsche Wöchentliche Nachrichten* from 1772 listing two types of stuffs (callimanco and camblet) imported to Tallinn in the previous year.

Fig. 4

Close-up photos of Estonian skirts on the left and callimanco fabric on the right.

Fig. 5

Eight illustrations from an Estonian folk costume book published in 1981.
Drawn by Melanie Kaarma and made into collage by Tiina Kull.

Fig. 6

Collage of all the striped doors submitted in response to a call posted on social media in September 2025.

Body.exe: Codes on Digital Skin

Mikulic, Tatjana

Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract

The museums are already becoming hubs where the historical, traditional and digital intertwine, inviting visitors to become active participants in the interpretation of cultural heritage. For young generations, the digital is not perceived as a novelty but as a default. Moreover, their identities are digital, blending their perception, emotions, and physical experiences. Understanding these fluid connections reveals how museums can evolve into spaces of engaging emotional experience. In this paper, adornment which has always been viewed as a communicator of status and identity is explored through diverse types of hairstyle. Today, it is not merely an artefact of the past, but a living process that develops, adapts and communicates. Using virtual tools such as AR/VR, 3D, digital modelling and tactile installations it can be redefined, reinterpreted and emotionally reactivated in the contemporary context. These multisensory encounters turn museums into digital living archives where memory, presence, and body merge.

Content

Introduction: when past meets tech

Fast pace of technological transformation in this digital age imposes a need for adaptation in all spheres of everyday life. Museums are often criticised as gigantic, old-fashioned, elitist institutions, which usually lag behind trends and innovations. In a way, this is true. So, in order to stay on track, museums must become hybrid zones where historical, traditional, and digital dimensions intertwine. Whether we want to admit it or not, it has been clear for decades that the traditional methods of museum presentation are rather distant from the younger audience. These are the generations that do not perceive digital as a novelty, but as a default. They have grown up with the Internet and digital technologies. Their understanding of reality shifts between

the digital world and physical experience. Therefore, it is crucial to use that relationship to communicate culture and heritage.

Concept of adornment

Important cultural concepts are body art/body decoration and adornment. The personal adornment, common to many societies in the world, is usually perceived through clothing, jewelry, hairstyles, body painting or permanent alterations, and other body modifications, like tattoos, piercings, and scarification. They were not just mere indicators of aesthetic values and pure beauty, but were strongly connected to various concepts. They have always been viewed as a communicator of different statuses and identities, beliefs, and belongings (Bogordaeva, 2006, 45). Adornment as a visual sign and marker of non-verbal communication conveys social and cultural meanings. It expresses and shapes both individual and group identities, including those related to sex, gender, wealth, status, class, age, culture, and social affiliation. It serves as both a marker of cultural difference and a medium of identity construction.

These concepts are not only artefacts of the past, but above all living processes that develop, adapt, and communicate in the contemporary context. Digital technologies are helping to preserve our past, but also to redefine it digitally, to bring it to life and reinterpret it in the context of contemporary identities and experiences. And this is exactly the method of connecting digital with traditional in order to re-present the heritage and make it attractive to young people. As already mentioned, their preferences are somewhere in-between the digital world and physical experience. So we should put them, as the visitors of our museums, in the role of active participants in the interpretation of cultural heritage.

Hair adornment in traditional Serbia

I will briefly present one dominant feature of women in traditional Serbian society. Hairstyle was an unavoidable part of adornment and decoration in the 19th century. At the same time it was a visual vehicle and communicator of social status in society. I will discuss this issue since other types of body modifications, such as tattoos or scarification, were not common and are scarcely noted.

Women's hairstyles were of great importance since they were not just aesthetic moments but had a strong symbolic role. Hair was perceived as decoration and more importantly as marker of innocence, community belonging, and marital status (girl, married, older woman) (Šarac-Momčilović, 2006, 18). Girls wore long lush hair, with a section on the top, dishevelled and then braided in one or two braids (Bjeladinović 1972, 12-13, 26). They were decorated with coloured ribbons and flowers—basil was usually used because of its protective role.

In some areas girls and women braided their hair at the back and tied it into a bun. For festive occasions, their hair was specially decorated with beads and coins. The bridal hairstyle was the richest and the most exceptional including coins, *dukats* (Turkish coins), and flower wreaths. The wreath originates from ancient decorative styles, later transformed into different types of crown-shaped headgear (**Fig. 1**).

After the wedding, they braided their hair into two braids which they wrapped around their head. The head was always covered with a scarf or a cap, and was never left uncovered. The braids were attached with decorative needles or buckles (**Fig. 2**).

In the past, women wore giant, massive headgears that were very unpleasant to wear since they were considered unhygienic, so some of them were legally forbidden at the beginning of the 19th century. Just a few of the important ones are worth mentioning. The *roga* cap, for instance, was a large piece of headgear that reflected the primitive idea of fertility. According to the principle of imitative magic, this idea is transferred to the cap through its shape of the horn, so it figured not only as a decoration but also as a symbol of fertility and the provision of offspring (Aranđelović-Lazić 1971, 64). The *trvelj* caps were thick braids woven from wool or real hair, and were decorated with flowers, beads, needles, and strings of coins. Finally, the amazing *tarpoš* cap, a type of flower wreath featured a wooden structure with scarves over it, decorated with coins, needles, and both natural and artificial flowers (**Figs. 3 to 6**).

New approaches for old subjects

For decades, we have witnessed Gen Z taking over the world, setting the standards, and redefining the rules of the game. Their lives and experiences are deeply integrated with the digital world, making technology feel like a part of them, rather than just a tool. Their use of technology actively shapes their identities, communities, and values through digital platforms, blending their perception and their physical and virtual lives into a singular, dynamic identity. In a sense, we could say that Gen Zs' identity is digital as they are true 'digital natives'. Their understanding of the contemporary world blends the digital sphere with engaged physical and emotional experiences. For them, the digital is not an external layer but rather a digital skin—an inseparable part of their identity, emotion and perception. Figuratively speaking, as identity is imprinted on the real skin through various body modifications, this 'new' identity is also imprinted on their digital skin.

Cultural anthropologists could say a lot about how identities are formed, maintained, and transformed within different cultures and societies. Identity is understood as both individual and collective, shaped by cultural norms, values, traditions, and power structures (Paganelli 2024). In this article, we will draw upon key concepts in cultural anthropology, particularly the idea of cultural identity, which refers to the sense of belonging to a specific culture or ethnic group, expressed through language, rituals, customs, and shared history. The question for us, museum professionals, is how traditional concepts such as identity can be passed on to younger generations. Because we are witnessing 'the crisis of identity in high modernity', as discussed by Bendle (2002).

Museums that want to connect with younger audiences must adapt to their view on reality, including their understanding of the past. With the aforementioned examples of adornment in mind, I will adapt them to digital solutions that are already in use.

Let us begin with digital modelling and 3D scanning. The complete surroundings of a traditional scene could be transformed into digital, three-dimensional models. These technological solutions could bring people back to life in their everyday activities. As hair adornment has

always been part of a complete costume, these models can provide accurate additional documentation of clothing, jewelry, and all kinds of body modifications, such as decoration, tattoos, piercings if they exist, and the ways of wearing it. Digital reconstructions of traditional hairstyles and (body) decoration could also be compared with those of other cultures to identify cross-cultural parallels. Digital mirrors could show visitors how they might have looked in a specific historical period, or allow them to see themselves with a hairstyle appropriate to the occasion.

Speaking of digital technologies, hologram reconstructions of people, rituals or costumes enable visitors to 'meet' past practices. Digital models can bring past narratives to life. By encountering the past face-to-face, they show how traditional clothing was worn and evolved over time. Digital participation provides a way of engaging visitors by inviting them to present their own personal stories, photographs, or rituals of decoration from their own culture. This creates a live digital archive. Visitors are no longer passive observers, but active and engaged participants.

Many museums already have virtual tools such as AR (Augmented Reality) and VR (Virtual Reality), which allow visitors to experience all stages of a certain type of body decoration or modification. These technologies allow the audience to experience the process itself. They are easy and accessible tools, as people can use their phones or AR glasses. By perceiving the body as a cultural canvas visitors can once again create immersive narratives. Speaking of hairstyles, this deeper and more engaging experience could show what it is like a specific kind of body modification looks like, with a full explanation of its meaning.

The VR experience is even more immersive. Not only is the reality 3D and emotionally engaging, it also creates a strong sense of presence—a feeling of being fully surrounded and absorbed. As this activity completely captivates the mind and emotions, the experience fully absorbs one’s attention, time, and energy, making visitors feel deeply involved in a particular environment or activity. At the same time, it stimulates multiple senses, beyond sight and sound, to create a powerful immersive experience. From the position of a mere observer, one becomes physically or narratively part of the world or activity.

The highest level of personal engagement emerges when multisensory experience is activated. In addition, there is the possibility of wearable technology in the form of biosensors that react to emotions, movement or light. In this sense, it would be particularly convenient to include not only tactile or sensory inputs, but also basic natural emotions, even in an extremely negative context. When speaking of hairstyles, we can imagine reconstructing particularly large and heavy ones, which were often unpleasant to wear. It could be possible to entirely recreate the experience of the entire procedure, as it involved not only the moment of wearing, but also the preparation, which could last for hours. At the same time, the real challenge would be to wear such headgear for an extended period to truly experience the feeling. Historical sources note that these headgears were very heavy, and sometimes even painful, to wear.

After wearing them, audiences can share their own impressions, which may in turn lead to various interpretations of the phenomenon. Their narratives may differ from those recorded in the past, thereby contributing to the creation of new historical data.

The concept of physicality appears as a key element: engaging personal feelings and embodied experiences of decorative practices. It is worth noting that other types of decoration may be even more suitable to provoking this kind of response.

Provoking emotions is the most engaging emotional narrative for the visitors. Fear, anger, sadness—strong emotions that scare us and that wetry to escape and avoid. Experiencing these strong emotions can leave a trace in people's minds and affect their physical and mental state. The body also responds; if someone feels shaking or unpleasant emotion, it has an impact.

AI (Artificial Intelligence) has already proven to be a useful tool. Speaking of hairstyles, it can be used to analyse styles and types of hair and head decoration, as well as patterns and symbols on scarves and caps, which have always held deep and profound meaning. On a broader scale, comparative analysis across time and space becomes possible, whether within the framework of given culture or between different cultural contexts. This creates visual narratives that connect the past and the present. Furthermore, with AI, content can be personalised; for examples, algorithms could suggest forms of decoration based on visitors' interests. AI in museums can re-create lost forms of decoration and enable visitors to generate own interpretations—imagining how decoration or ornaments might appear in the 22th century. A museum is not only a place for contemplation, but also a place for creation.

With regard to the present, AI can also show it in real time, offering different levels of complexity for various age groups (children, students, experts). Thus, the museum narrative is no longer universal, but personalised and adapted to each visitor. In addition, personal insights can activate stories connected to specific forms of decoration.

Moreover, combinations with sensor technology give even better results. The activation of the experience is achieved through interactive tactile installations that allow the touching of materials or decorations, thus encouraging multisensory learning. Visitors can touch or arrange the hair, put a pin, tie a scarf, or even simulate plucking or pulling someone's braid, the possibilities are endless. To better feel the texture of materials, fabrics, and decorations, the use of tactile gloves can be helpful.

With the addition of 3D sound, a sound experience is also introduced. Visitors can hear authentic ambient sound while engaging in hairstyling—girls giggling, voices, music, and dialects. As headgears are richly decorated with beads, pearls, coins, jingle bells, mirrors, and buttons, the sound is complemented by distinct rattling and chiming.

Conclusion

Visitors' profile

At this moment, Gen Alfa (2013-2024) and Gen Beta (2025-) are growing up. These are the first generations to be born entirely in the 21st century. They live in a post-digitalised world in which technology is not merely a tool but an invisible foundation of everyday life. As technology becomes more sophisticated, the imperative for new generations is no longer simple visual display but personalised, emotionally resonate experiential engagement. The future visitor's

perception continuously shifts between physical and virtual realms. He wears a form of 'digital skin'—a metaphor for identity and the boundary between the physical and the virtual.

Museums' profile

The museums' mission is to become a hub for the dialogue where tradition meets the future through interactivity, inclusion, and creatively framed experiential interpretation. Museums of the future will be hybrid zones where the historical, traditional, and digital meet and intertwine. These new technologies not only keep the past alive but redefine it, digitally revive it and reinterpret it in context of contemporary identities. Thus, museums become digital living archives in which memory, presence, and body merge.

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Fig. 1

Women's national costume headgear with *dukat* coins. Author: unknown.
Illustration 14822.
© Illustrative Fund of the
Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade.

Fig. 2

Aleksandra Markovic.
Author: unknown.
Illustration 14870.
© Illustrative Fund of the
Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade.

Fig. 3

Women's headgear *prevez* from Sredacka zupa, Serbia, end of 19th century, Illustration 2792.
© Illustrative fund of the Ethnographic museum in Belgrade.

Fig. 4

Roga cap from western Serbia.
Illustration 7784.
© Illustrative fund of the Ethnographic museum in Belgrade

Fig. 5

The bride with *prevez* and *trvelj*'s from Knjazevac, eastern Serbia, end of 19th century. Illustration 24096. © Fund of digital archive of the Ethnographic museum in Belgrade.

Fig. 6

Collage photo.
Left: *Tarpoš* cap, from Jadar, western Serbia, beginning of 19th century. Illustration 7785.
© Illustrative fund of the Ethnographic museum in Belgrade.
Right: source: Pinterest

Social Fabric. Bedouin Textiles in Weltmuseum Wien

Mörike, Tobias

Weltmuseum Wien, Vienna, Austria

Abstract

Often the historical aspects of textile collections are overlooked in a museum context. While techniques and materials of dresses constitute a focus, the reasons for how and why these objects were collected remain obscure. The following contribution looks at the collection of Bedouin dresses from the Sinai and the Negev/Naqab in the Weltmuseum Wien, inquiring into the histories of forced removal, sedentarisation, and commodification that are interwoven with the accession of these pieces to the museum.

Content

Introduction: historic pieces or tourist art?

In 2022, a group of Bedouin textiles was offered for acquisition to the Weltmuseum Wien. The selection included a cap with bone carvings, several back amulets and a kohl bottle. (WMW Post 2022/11) As part of the provenance research undertaken by the museum, the historicity of the pieces was scrutinised. Were the pieces offered merely tourist souvenirs, or could they have greater significance to the collection? Moreover, was the cap, with anthropomorphic bone carvings, part of Bedouin culture? As the museum started to investigate the pieces, similar objects could be identified in other collections. For example, the Ethnologic Museum in Dresden, Germany, holds a similar cap belonging to an amulet writer or healer. The collector Dr. Wolfgang Waitzbauer, an entomologist at the University of Vienna, also provided more information. He had been traveling to Jordan since 1979 and bought the pieces between 1990 and 2000 from the antique dealer Mohammed Naif in Aqaba. Waitzbauer had maintained a friendly relationship with the dealer's family until his death. As the museum's questions intrigued him, he phoned Naif’s son in Aqaba and asked him about the cap. In an email, he summarised the findings of their conversation:

He remembered the item clearly; it meant a lot to his father, and he had thought long and hard about selling it, even though we were already friends at the time. The following has come to light: the piece does not date from the beginning of the 20th century —that appears to have been a misunderstanding — (…) but rather dates from the late 1930s or early 1940s, when it was worn in a wedding before the family was expelled from Beersheba. (Wolfgang Waitzbauer correspondence, Weltmuseum Wien collectors' file)

According to a textile analysis the objects do not contain any synthetic threads and can be dated to the period prior to 1960. While the questions on provenance and historicity were resolved to the satisfaction of the museum staff, the museum director, in a final discussion on authorising the acquisition, raised the question of whether the pieces were actually representative of the Nakba, the forced removal of Palestinians in 1948.

While the acquisition of the Waitzbauer collection had already provided a reason to revisit the museum's holdings, an exhibition at Zurich's Ethnologic Museum provided further questions and leads for research. In 2023, Saada Elabed (Werkstücke? 5 Fragen an Stickereien von Negev-Beduininnen im Blick ihrer Nachkommen, Zurich Ethnologic Museum, 2024), who is a descendant of the Naqab Bedouin, began an investigation of the Zurich collection and explored family memories and stories of sedentarisation in newly planned cities established in Israel since the 1970s. The collection in Zurich and Vienna also bear a connection. In 1981, the Ethnographic Museums of Munich and Vienna hosted the exhibition *Bedouins in the Negev* (Korschning 1980), which showed exclusively pieces of the private collection of the Israeli collector Sonia Gidal. Since her immigration from Berlin to Jerusalem in 1940, Gidal visited Bedouin communities and progressively built a collection, which is now held in the museums of Berlin and Zurich.

Considering the collection: questions

Following the acquisition of the Bedouin textiles in 2022, interest arose in the museum's other material. Which historical contexts are mirrored by the Bedouin textiles in the museum's collection? How old are the pieces, and why did their owners decide to sell their jewellery or dresses? To what extent does the museum's collection mirror the Nakba, the Naksa and the history of sedentarisation of the Bedouins of the Naqab, the Sinai and Jordan?

Although Bedouin material culture has been extensively examined as an expression and representation of nomadic identity, its transformation and commodification in relation to processes of displacement, sedentarisation, and tourism have received comparatively little scholarly attention in the context of museum collections.

In the following, this article investigates the historic contexts inscribed in the collection at the Weltmuseum Wien as part of a set of global microhistories. The paper is concerned with traces of resistance, social identity, and global events and structures, but also with tourism and commodification. The first section presents the historiography of the Bedouins and Bedouin textile in the Negev/Naqab and the Sinai, and revisits recent scholarship. The second section presents the collection at the Weltmuseum Wien with regard to its collectors, the museum documentation, and relevant publications on textile history. In conclusion, these three sections are brought together and related to considerations of the ethics of collecting textiles.

Historical context: Bedouins in the Naqab and the Sinai

Bedouins have long formed a central focus on ethnological and cultural anthropological research. As mobile populations, Bedouins were conceived in the 19th and 20th century as inhabitants of a frontier zone, potentially in opposition to large-scale infrastructure and settlement projects. From the end of the 19th century onwards, nomadic populations were, in the eyes of Europeans and Ottoman and Egyptian urban centres, considered an unruly

population potentially undermining modern state-building. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 had already disconnected the caravan routes between Cairo and Damascus and, apart from a crossing point at Qantara, severed the Sinai from the Naqab, as Valeska Huber (Huber 2013) pointed out. Subsequently, the Ottoman government and the British Mandate aimed at the sedentarisation of the Bedouins of the Naqab, a process that Mansour Nasasra (Nasasra 2017) unfolded in a seminal study of Bedouin resistance.

After 1948, the State of Israel displaced a large part of the ʿAzāzmeh, Tarābīn, and Al Tiyāhā, as well as smaller groups, to the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jordan, and the Sinai. Of the 100,000 Bedouins in the Naqab, only 10,000 remained after 1948. Much of this history has been uncovered through recent and innovative research drawing on the photographic record (Le Febvre 2024) as well as the oral history of the Nakba (Abdo Zubi 2018).

Following 1967, policies shifted towards sedentarisation in planned towns. While roughly half of the Bedouin population lives in seven recognised planned townships to which the Bedouins were resettled, thirty-five Bedouin villages remain 'unrecognised' and disconnected from public infrastructure. Bedouins also fled the Sinai in 1967 and remain, even after the Israeli withdrawal, an impoverished minority, largely excluded from access to land and formal labour.

Textile histories

In light of forced sedentarisation and displacement, the fabrication and use of textiles—whether for dress, housing, or riding equipment—also transformed. From the 1970s onwards, Widad Kawar (Kawar 2010; Kawar 1987) contributed to scholarship on the changes and cultural significance of Palestinian textiles at large. She points out that black satin imported from England, as well as black or indigo dyed cotton, was later replaced by synthetic fabrics (Kawar 1987, 180). Rich embroidery became widespread after the 1930s, when 'cheapter *perlé* cotton threats became available' (Kawar 1987, 181-182). Traditionally, red fields indicated a married woman, while blue stood for a widowed or unmarried woman. After 1948, a large part of the material was no longer available. By 1950, the Sulafa Embroidery Centre had begun to revive embroidery; by the 1960s and 1970s, richly embroidered pieces merges previously distinct styles. With regards to patterns, Yedida Kalfon Stillman, in a catalogue largely based on European travel literature, highlights the large-sleeved *Abu Ridan* dress as a classical Bedouin dress and claims that the *nafnaf* pattern—a desert-flower embroidery pattern—is specific to the Naqab (Stillman 1979, 81). While Palestinian embroidery and the creation of new styles 'new dress'—at large—have received attention in publication as well as exhibitions, the textile histories of the Naqab have been far less acknowledged. More recent research has questioned the impact of tourism, and the commodification of Bedouin embroidery has also been examined in the Sinai by Hilary Gilbert. She observed that: 'Recent decades have transformed the significance of hand embroidery and beadwork for Bedouin women. Once a valued skill used to convey cultural meaning, especially marital status, through costume, it has now become a commodity whose benefits are unequally distributed.' For the Naqab, Stephen C. Dinero came to similar conclusions. Jessica Jacobs (Jacobs 2020) approached these patterns as mental maps. From a technical perspective, Diego Tamburini (Tamburini *et al.* 2024) and the British Museum developed a new dating system based on the review of their historic collection. A comprehensive study from an ethnological standpoint is offered by Ada Katsap and Ferderick Silverman (Katsao 2016) who reviewed embroidery as ethno-mathematics.

Achuthy Kottangal (Kottangal 2024) praised the work of the Lakiya collective, an NGO established in the region of Beersheva as a cultural-heritage initiative. Her works offers a broad, encompassing review of the literature, although it may fall short of appreciating local perspectives. How are these complex histories reflected in the collection of the Weltmuseum Wien?

Collections and collectors of Bedouin material culture in the Weltmuseum Wien

Collecting material culture from West Asia in Austria dates back to the early 19th century. A significant number of Bedouin textiles entered the collection in the 1970s and 1980s, when Peter Schienerl (Öhrig 2005), who lived in Cairo for almost a decade, bought items to build a collection for the museum. By the end of his stay, the museum curator Alfred Janata joined him in a collecting campaign. The Austrian artist Ernst Degasperi, who considered himself and artist for peace and had several commissions in Israel, frequently sold pieces to the museum. In the 1980s, Fritz Manndorf, the museum's director, and the Africa curator Armand Duchateâu, assembled a collection of Palestinian dresses (Manndorf 1982). Most of these pieces only received rudimentary descriptions—dates of entries, formal descriptions, and materials—while information about the makers, sellers, and the reasons for selecting the pieces has not been transmitted. What can we learn, by examining the colours, embroidery, motifs, and cuts of the dresses, about the pieces in the Weltmuseum Wien?

A dress acquired in 1969 (**Fig. 1**) stands as an example of this lack of context in the collection. While the catalogue states that the dress is from Bethlehem, it bears typical markers of southern Palestine. It points to a distinctive local embroidery tradition, visible in the large square chest panel, the brightly coloured side panels, and the wide, wing-like sleeves incorporating *appliqué* and dense silk-floss embroidery. The vibrant palette of orange, red, purple, and green on a black cotton ground is typical of Gaza's textile aesthetics and strikingly different from embroidery from Bethlehem. The acquisition, shortly after 1967, raises questions about the reasons for the sale of the dress.

Another dress, which the museum attributes to Gaza and the coastal area, bears distinctive symbols of the Hebron/Al Khalil region. It features the characteristic cypress-tree motifs, arranged in dense vertical and horizontal bands along the chest, sleeves, and skirt. These serrated patterns, together with the black cotton ground and strong accents of orange, purple, and yellow, are hallmarks of village embroidery from the Hebron/Al Khalil hinterland. The fabric and materials of the dress suggest that it might have been made prior to 1948 (**Fig. 2**).

While the revision of the collection is an ongoing process that should include Palestinian stakeholders and expertise from various disciplines, the two examples demonstrate that both the violence and the agency of the makers of these dresses have been systematically ignored in the museum's documentation.

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Fig. 1

Women's dress.
Maker unknown.
Collected in Bethlehem, before 1969 by Angela Gollob.
Regenerated fibers and synthetic fibers, embroidery, Weltmuseum Wien, 148701.

Fig. 2

Cap.
Maker unkown.
Bedouin, ca. 1940,
collected by Wolfgang Waitzbauer in Aqaba ca. 1990.
Glass, cowrie shells, cotton.
Inventory Number Weltmuseum Wien, 194910.

The Vision of Wanderers and Nomads in European Theatre.
Costume as a Reflection of Changing Attitudes to Nomads and Travelers

Wodarska-Ogidel, Katarzyna

The Theatre Museum, Teatr Wielki-Opera Narodowa, Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

Wanderers constitute a vital part of everyday life and influence culture. They shape it, serve as inspiration for artists, and even find their place on the stage too. This short study focuses on the wanderer's theatrical costume and the way it reflects current attitudes toward the characters on stage, drawing o non examples from Polish theatre within a broader European perspective. It concentrates on two types of characters. The first is a wandering old beggar who makes a living by playing an instrument, singing, and telling stories. The second group consists in Romani people, wanderers who have been journeying through Europe since the 14th century.

In Polish drama, the first type is represented by Wernyhora, a legendary Cossack bard. The second group—the Roma—constitute a vibrant ethnic minority in Europe. Due to their passion for both dance and music, Roma characters can be found primarily in the musical theatre.

Content

Introduction

The subject of travel and wanderers has been an important aspect of existence, both individually and collectively, since the beginning of time. As permanent settlement became more widespread, the context of roaming evolved. Neolithic town dwellers may have connected wandering to a desire for change and mobility, an interest in an alternative lifestyle, or, on the contrary, a fear of being attacked by a band of nomads. For such people, a vagabond was a stranger, someone unfamiliar due to ethnicity or simply because of a different way of living. His (or her) manner of life was very distinct, even though the individual

remained part of a local or social group. Travellers, as a vital part of everyday life, have influenced and continue to influence culture, its evolution, and its transformations. They shape it, while serving as literary heroes and sources of inspiration for artists, finding their place on stage. This short study focuses on the wanderer's theatrical costume and the way it reflects current attitudes toward the characters on stage, drawing o non examples from Polish theatre within a broader European perspective. I will concentrate on two types of characters. The first is the intentional wanderer, who commonly travels alone or with a single companion, usually a young one, and belongs to a local community. His roaming is motivated by the need to earn a living. I will focus on the figure of a wandering old beggar who makes a living by playing an instrument, singing, and telling stories. The traveling storyteller is one of those figures who laid the foundation for future European literature by orally relaying myths and stories about significant moments in history, or his own tales arising from a fertile imagination. The oldest renowned figure of this type is Homer, the blind traveling poet—Greek. Aoidos (ἀοιδός)—who followed a long tradition of oral heroic poetry. During the interwar period, singing beggars could still be seen in rural areas of Eastern and Southeastern Europe. Unfortunately, the spread of modern media has led to the demise of this tradition. Modern buskers' activities are not comparable to the tradition of travelling singing beggars.

The second group are Romani people, wanderers who have been journeying through Europe since the 14th century. They moved from the Indian subcontinent through Persia and the areas of present-day Turkey. Currently, the largest groups live in Bulgaria, Spain, Romania, Slovakia, Turkey, and Hungary. According to official data in Poland, this ethnic group amounts to around 20,000 people. This number increased after 2022, when members of this community arrived from Ukraine. The main groups inhabit southern Poland and include the Polska Roma, the Bergitka Roma, the Kelderasza, and the Lowari.

Mr. Beggar with hurdy-gurdyIn Polish drama, the first type is most commonly represented by the character of Wernyhora. He was a legendary Cossack bard and lyre player who lived in the 17th century and predicted the partitions and subsequent rebirth of Poland. He became a literary hero during the Romantic era and appears in two important plays: Juliusz Słowacki's *Salomea's Silver Dream* (1843) and Stanisław Wyspiański's *The Wedding* (1901). The on-stage appearance of 'Mr. Beggar with hurdy-gurdy', as Wyspiański called him, is always similar. It resembles the look of a typical lyre-playing beggar seen in pictures from the 19th and early 20th centuries (Grochowski 2016).

During that time, two types of beggars can be distinguished: '*lira'* or '*lirnik'*, common in what is now south-eastern Poland and Ukraine, and the '*dziad'*, known as the wandering beggar in central Poland. The '*lira'* was usually blind and sang religious songs accompanied by a hurdy-gurdy. Those lyre-players formed organisations connected to the Orthodox Church and even gave music classes to young adepts. Old postcards show elderly, bearded, gray-haired, tidy men wearing light linen shirts, trousers, and high boots suitable for lengthy walks.

In contrast, the '*dziad'* was dressed sloppily, wearing random, often dirty clothes that were damaged and patched, but adorned with religious items. He carried a walking stick and a large bag. All this was meant to highlight extreme poverty, disability, and piety. These beggars were rarely blind; instead, they were mostly elderly or disabled people, who were forced to beg because they were unable to obtain employment. They prayed aloud or sang religious hymns instead of playing instruments.

Both groups were marginalised in society. Despite generating widespread resentment, they played an important role as individuals connected to the sacrum. Alms given to them were regarded as a virtuous act that brought God's blessing, and they were also asked to pray. However, there was also concern that they might cast a spell if mistreated. In addition to the common, typically unwelcome social attitude toward this type of begging, literature and art depict the '*lira'* as a Slavic Homer, as was previously described—a lonely poet and prophet.

The costume of Wernyhora

The play's protagonist, the lyre-player Wernyhora, is an important figure in both Ukrainian and Polish culture. He is this Slavic *aoidos*, who brings future visions and warnings. He is therefore portrayed as a noble, dangerous, and somewhat insane character. Early 20th-century costumes appear to offer far more convincing representation of this character. This may have been due to the presence of both types, the '*lira'* and the '*dziad'*, within the community. This is visible in the costume of Wernyhora from the premiere of Wyspiański's *The Wedding* in 1901 at the Municipal Theatre in Kraków. Wyspiański was both the author of the play and its director.

His Wernyhora looks like a typical '*lirnik'*. We do not see a hurdy-gurdy in the photogah, only the play's key prop—a golden horn (**Fig. 1**). The sound of this horn is intended to call for a struggle for independence. In addition, Wyspiański drew a sketch of the figure of Wernyhora for a stained glass window design (National Museum in Cracow, MNK III-r.a-14386). His appearance undoubtedly draws further attention to his Cossack ancestry. Stanisław Drabik, a pupil of Stanisław Wyspiański, adopted a very similar approach. The attributes of the Ukrainian lyre-player are still present in his Wernyhora from a 1922 performance at the Polish Theatre in Warsaw (Archives of The Theatre Polski in Warsaw in the Theatre Museum in Warsaw, TPK 85).

In the years following the war, the distinctions between the *'lirnik'* and the '*dziad'* began to blur, possibly as a result of the decline of this traditional figure in rural society. Wernyhora appears more and more insane, and his costume gets less and less tidy and neat. Marian Garlicki's 1963 costume design for *Salomea's Silver Dream* at the Polish Theatre in Warsaw is the best example of this tendancy (*ibid* TPK 676). A very modern, somewhat surrealist set is combined with traditional costumes. Wernyhora looks more like a '*dziad',* wearing a patched, filthy costume, yet he still carries a hurdy gurdy.

Modern theater totally breaks with this tradition. In the 2017 production of *The Wedding* from Stary Theatre in Kraków, Wernyhora, portrayed by Paweł Kruszelnicki, was an elegant elderly man with gray hair, wearing a sophisticated black, pinstripe suit designed by Justyna Łagowska. In *The Wedding* at Theatre in Olsztyn (2023), actress Alicja Parczewska plays the role of Wernyhora. Her Wernyhora is a woman, a contemporary refugee from war-torn Ukraine. The set design pays homage to the arrival, in early March 2022, of thousands of Ukrainian migrants in Poland, the majority of whom were mothers with children. Alicja Parczewska wears a blue scarf and a long, dark winter jacket. Over her shoulder, she carries a horn. 'I am far away—far from the eastern borderlands' is a line from the drama that still links her to the Ukrainian bard of the 17th century.

Roma as heroes of theater plays

In the case of the wandering singing beggars, we are dealing with their absence from everyday life. For the second group—Romani people—the situation is different. The Roma are a vibrant and self-aware ethnic minority in Europe, despite the terrible Nazi persecution they endured during Second World War. Unfortunately, after 1945, in many countries they were forced to adopt a sedentary lifestyle. Relations between the Roma and the local population remain hostile in many areas, including Poland. Because of their distinct lifestyles and adherence to tradition, this community has provoked considerable controversy since its arrival in Europe. As a result, many stereotypes have emerged, these can also be observed in the theater.
The change in attitudes towards the Roma and efforts to understand this community and its issues are also clearly visible in the theater.

The earliest designs of Romani costumes

The costumes of 'Egyptian ladies'—as the Roma were mistakenly called at the time—designed by Jacques Bellange and Daniel Rabel demonstrate how these musically talented people swiftly became heroes of theatrical productions. These designs are now part of the Edmond De Rothschild's collection at the Louvre (de La Gorce 2021).

Bellange's design from the early 17th century shows a dancing woman with a tambourine. She is dressed in a white shirt and a crimson dress with blue bows hanging over it. She wears a whimsical headpiece. Rabel created his design for the *Ballet du château de Bicêtre* in 1632. The woman is dressed in a white chemise, a red and blue *jupe*, and a skirt with orange, yellow, and blue stripes. At the back, she wears a colorful scarf with patterns. This design is probably more accurate. An illustration from François Desprez's book *Recueil de la diversité des habits, qui sont de present en usage, tant ès pays d'Europe. Asie, Afrique et îles sauvages, le tout fait après le naturel* from 1567 shows an 'Egyptian' woman wearing a similar distintive headgear and striped attire.

Two bohemian costumes can be found in Leonardo Marini's album of costume designs for *demi-caractère* dance, which is housed in the collection of the Theatre Museum in Warsaw. The album was created for the Teatro Regio in Turin in the late 1760s and contains costume designs for dance couples from all over Europe. Among these are a pair of imaginatively and vibrantly attired 'Bohemiens', as the Roma were also wrongly called (**Fig. 2)**.

'Gypsy-style' ballet costumes

Due to the Roma's passion for both dance and music, numerous ballet and dance performances throughout the 19th century featured so-called 'gypsy' themes. Romantic ballets such as *Esmeralda* and *Paquita,* with choreography by Jules Perrot, are among the best examples of this trend. These ballets were performed across Europe. In Warsaw, Filippo Taglioni, the principal choreographer for The Great Theater, staged them. We can observe a repetition of patterns and decorations used in the creation of these 'gypsy' garments in 19th century engravings and photographs. These include various types of nets, small coins, ribbons, and a fancifully tied headscarf.

This approach to costume is still visible in early 20th-century photographs from the popular ballet *Amarilla*. Maria Pawińska danced in this performance in Warsaw in 1918 (**Fig. 3**). The Theatre Museum in Warsaw holds a number of her ballet costumes in its collection. One of

them was created at the Eaves Costume Company in New York and was, according to her son—who donated the costumes to the Museum—a 'gypsy costume'. It consisted of a silk skirt with a floral design of pink flowers and green leaves, and a black velvet bodice. A thin cotton shirt with a lace-trimmed neckline completed the ensemble.

From *The Gypsies* to *Jawnuta* and *Manru*

Roma characters can also be found in opera and, later, in operetta. In the late 18th century, the theme of so-called 'gypsies' appeared in Polish theater. In 1778, in Warsaw, Louis Montbrune's French company performed Rinaldo di Capua's opera *La Bohémienne*, with a libretto by Charles-Simon Favart. The comic opera *I Zingari in Fiera*, or *The Gypsies on the Farm,* with a libretto written by Giuseppe Palomba (1765-1825) and music by Giovanni Paisiello, first performed at the Teatro del Fondo in Naples in 1789, was presented in Warsaw in 1792. The handwritten translation of this libretto from the King Stanisław August's Library has been preserved (Wodarska-Ogidel 2022).

Although the costumes for these performances are unknown, sketches of the costumes from the Polish comic opera *Cyganie – The Gypsies*, which was presented at the court theater in Siedlce a few years earlier, in 1786, have survived (Seweryn 2016). Franciszek Dionizy Kniaźnin was the author of the libretto, but Izabela Czartoryska, a well-educated noble woman and founder of the Polish first public museum, came up with the idea of the plot, and also designed the costumes for this performance. Her sketches are now housed in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw (**Fig. 4**). These character designs display remarkably realistic attire and details inspired by the Roma clothing of the period. She was familiar with them because a group of Roma resided on her Puławy estate. Princess Izabela herself played the elderly Gypsy woman Jawnuta, while her children, Adam Jerzy and Zofia, portrayed Dżega and Chicha. We may gain a sense of the colours of garments used in the Siedlce performance from the portrait of Izabela Czartoryska in 'gypsy' costume painted by Kazimierz Wojniakowski (K. Wojniakowski, *Portrait of Izabela née von Flemming, Princess Czartoryska*, National Museum in Cracow, MNK XII-427). She wears a red turban on her head and, over the light dress typical of this period, an intensely red patterned scarf.

The Gypsies was the first opera in Poland to bring to light the interaction between the local rural population and the Romani people, even though it repeated numerous negative *clichés* about them, such as stealing or kidnapping children. This was probably its greatest advantage in times of deepening conflicts. Agata Seweryn writes in her article on Kniaznin’s play that this was the time when, on the one hand, research into the origins, language, and customs of the Roma began, and, on the other, Diderot, in the *Encyclopédie,* described them as 'vagrants who make a living by telling the future', 'skilled in dancing, singing and stealing', and concluded with the words 'our kingdom is polluted by vagrants like them'.

The issue of Polish-Roma relations would become a permanent theme in theatre. In the mid-19th century, the composer Stanisław Moniuszko returned to Kniaźnin's *The Gypsies*. He staged this opera in Vilnius, complementing it with his own music. Moniuszko also contributed choruses and dances of his own composition to Józef Korzeniowski's drama *Cyganie* (*The Gypsies*), which had its premiere at the Grand Theatre in Warsaw in 1859. A year later, at the same theatre, he staged his own opera inspired by Kniaźnin”s original text, entitled *Jawnuta*. Today, this opera is occasionally performed. In 1991, it was staged at the Grand Theatre in Warsaw with traditional 19th-century-style costumes designed by Barbara Jankowska.

In 2022, the Grand Theatre in Poznań premiered a modern version of the opera. The Roma group Sara Czureja Band took part in the performance. The play refers not only to the often difficult Polish-Roma relations but also to the Holocaust of the Sinti and Roma during the Second Wolrd War. The costumes designed by Ilona Binarsch depict the travelers in modest blue and grey costumes enlivened by a coloyrful Dharmachakra pattern.

The subject of Polish-Roma conflicts, the problem of mixed relationships, and decision to dwell permanently was first addressed by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski in his novel *The Cottage outside the Village,* published in 1842 (**Fig. 5**). Jan Kanty Galasiewicza and Zofii Mellerowa made a theatrical adaptation of it in 1884 for the summer theatre Belle Vue in Warsaw. The play's enormous popularity inspired a series of other plays that continued the story of its characters. One of them was Ignacy Jan Paderewski's opera *Manru* with a libretto written by Alfred Nossig. Press illustrations and photographs of actors and singers who appeared in these performances show costumes that realistically reproduce Romani clothes from the late 19th century.

The idea of using contrasting costumes to depict the conflict and differences between the Roma and the group of villagers is a common trick in post-war performances, for which more extensive documentation has survived, including designs and photographs taken during performances, rather than merely studio portraits in stage costume. Roma costumes are always colourful, more imaginative, and more personalised than peasant costumes, which are always bright and well-organised—in Barbara Kędzierska's 1991 designs, they are even limited to black and white. Her large, vibrant costumes for Roma characters evoke associations with the rich, sometimes kitsch style of Gipsy dancers and their popular shows and festivals, which take place in Poland (**Figs. 6 & 7**).

In the most recent production of *Manru* at the Grand Theatre - National Opera in Warsaw in 2018, the company of Roma travellers was portrayed in a completely different way (**Fig. 8**). The 'gypsies' of the 19th century have become a group of motorcyclists. The costumes, like those of contemporary motorcycle travellers, are black and made of leather, while the villagers' costumes are colourful and more conventional. Both performances, *Jawnuta* from Poznań and *Manru* from Warsaw, received International Opera Awards for bringing back forgotten operas in a completely new form.

This success was also made possible by the use of contemporary costume design. These modern clothing stand in contrast to the traditional Roma fashion that had been used in earlier productions. The costumes in *Jawnuta* are very minimalist, and only the Dharmachakra hints at the characters' ethnic origins. The modern clothing in *Manru* transposes the story to a totally different era, location, and ethnic group. The initial conflicts and problems assume a more universal character: no longer only a conflict between Roma and villagers, but one between settled people and nomads. Today, however, each of us occupies a position somewhere in between; we usually have a permanent house, yet we remain constantly on the move.

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Fig. 1

Atelier Zofia.
Stanisław Knake-Zawadzki as Wernyhora.
The Wedding, The Municipal Theatre, Cracow, 1901.
Wojewódzka Biblioteka Publiczna, Kielce.

Fig. 2

Leonardo Marini, *Abiti Per i Balli di Mezzo Carattere e Giotteschi Eseguiti al Re Teatro di Torino*.
Boemi Figuranti.
The Theatre Museum in Warsaw.

Fig. 3

Advertising postcard with photo of Maria Pawinska and Zygmunt Dabrowski in *Amarilla*
The Great Theatre, Warsaw, 1918.
The Theatre Museum in Warsaw.

Fig. 4

Izabela Czartoryska,
Sketches for *The Gypsies.*
The National Museum in Warsaw.

Fig. 5

Edward Gorazdowski i Józef Holewinski after photo by Atelier Leonardo, *Tumry's death. A scene from the drama* A Cottage Outside the Village "Kłosy", 1884, v. 39 n. 1010.
The Theatre Museum in Warsaw.

Fig. 6

Dawid Mazur, Aleksander Bandrowski in the title role, *Manru*.
The Great Theatre in Lvov, 1901.
The Theatre Museum in Warsaw.

Fig. 7

Barbara Kedzierska, Costume designs for *Manru*, The Great Theatre, Warsaw, 1991.
The Archive of the Great Theatre.

Fig. 8

Krzysztof Bielinski, *Manru*, The Great Theatre-National Opera in Warsaw, 2018.

Cameos and Identity: Personal Expression Across Time at the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden

Ohlerich, Anika

Independent Exhibition Designer, The Netherlands

Abstract

This paper explores the role of cameos as expressions of personal, social, and cultural identity across time. By drawing on the permanent display of the Derek Content collection at the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, the paper examines how exhibition design and new media can recontextualise ancient artefacts for contemporary audiences. The paper focuses on how cameos—miniature works of art carved in layered gemstones—articulate both tangible and intangible heritage: the craftsmanship, beliefs, and aesthetic values that continue to shape human expression. It also considers how the gallery's spatial design and a specially commissioned film reinterpret the relationship between adornment, body, and identity, thereby bridging antiquity and the digital present. The project demonstrates how exhibition-making can activate historical objects as living media of identity, inviting new generations to see themselves reflected in the past.

Content

The cameo collection

The National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden recently undertook one of the most significant acquisitions in its history: the Derek J. Content Collection of 444 cameos. Derek Content, an American collector with Dutch roots, began collecting cameos as a teenager and pursued his passion throughout his life. His wish for the collection to find a permanent home in the Netherlands led to its acquisition by the museum, which now holds one of the world's most important cameo collections (**Fig. 1**).

This paper discusses how these small, tangible objects express personal identity across time and how the exhibition design seeks to reconnect this heritage to the present. It offers a

perspective from the exhibition designer and focuses on how spatial and media design can bring renewed meaning to archaeological material and engage younger audiences.

Characteristics of a cameo

A cameo is a small carved gemstone—a miniature world in itself. Unlike intaglios, which are engraved into the surface, cameos are carved in raised relief, their imagery emerging layer upon layer from the stone. Ancient craftsmen made use of the natural layers and colour variations in the stones to create striking contrasts of light and dark, allowing the figures to stand out clearly against their background. Their small scale invites intimacy; one must come close to truly perceive their detail. Many cameos possess a subtle translucency, glowing softly when illuminated.

These exquisite objects were not only works of art but also items of adornment and luxury, worn as rings, necklaces, brooches, or earrings. Some survive in their original settings, while others were remounted over time. They were elite possessions that circulated within courtly culture and across the ancient world.

Designing a treasure room

The museum commissioned me to design a 'treasure room' for approximately 140cameos. The central challenge was to make these tiny artefacts visible and to give them a presence that reflects their artistic and historical significance. Their small scale calls for an intimate encounter, yet the exhibition also needs to be experienced and appreciated by a wider public.

The design drew inspiration from Roman wall paintings, where painted panels and architectural motifs structured the space into clearly defined zones. This rhythm and sense of order—reducing large surfaces to a more intimate scale—became a guiding principle of the design.

The showcases themselves echo the very structure of a cameo—layer upon layer, light against dark. Instead of the traditional horizontal cases, vertical vitrines were suspended from the wall. This allowed visitors to encounter the cameos at eye level, almost face to face. The fronts of the cases are made of glass-ceramic, a material that combines the luxurious appearance of marble with the contemporary sustainability of recycled glass waste, thus resonating with the translucent character of the cameos themselves (**Fig. 2**).

Inside each case, a landscape of small blocks gives every cameo its own stage—a modular topography that allows each piece to be perceived as a unique entity within the collective display. Some are mounted upright, others laid on their sides or suspended, creating a playful rhythm of depth and movement. To ensure the visibility of tiny details, each case is fitted with an optical magnifier, enabling visitors to zoom in and explore the craftsmanship at close range (**Fig. 3**).

The cameo’s layered form—light over dark, relief over depth—provides a fitting metaphor for the layered meanings it carries. Each piece could function simultaneously as an aesthetic statement, a personal talisman, and a social marker of status and taste.

Layers of meaning

Wearing a cameo was never simply about displaying beauty; it was an act of communication—a visual statement of belief, allegiance, or identity. The imagery carved into these stones opens a window onto the symbolic world of the ancient wearer.

For example, cameos depicting deities carried protective or aspirational meanings. A figure of Nike, the goddess of victory, might have been worn by a soldier, athlete, or anyone striving for success. Athena, the goddess of wisdom and strategic warfare, embodied intelligence, justice, and discipline. A cameo with the Gorgoneion—the face of Medusa—functioned as an apotropaic charm to ward off evil, turning away the 'evil eye'.

Portrait cameos reveal another dimension: the intersection of personal and political identity. A cameo of Emperor Nero with a laurel wreath might have expressed loyalty to imperial authority. Other cameos depict private or emotional themes. A young couple carved in profile might have commemorated marriage or fidelity, while depictions of Dionysian revelry—dancing Maenads or a drunken Silenus drawn by winged cupids—evoke pleasure, intoxication, and freedom from moderation. According to the curator, Professor Ruurd Halbertsma, the contrast between the ordered world of social duty and the chaotic world of passion is visible in hairstyles: the neatly coiled bun of the respectable wife versus the unbound hair of the dancing Maenad, the ecstatic follower of Dionysus (**Figs. 4 & 5**).

Cameos also bore inscriptions. One gem engraved with the letters spelling 'Berenike' might have functioned as an ancient name pendant—a literal declaration of identity. Another, inscribed '*Spes opes* ('Hope for wealth), reveals a direct expression of aspiration familiar even today, mirrored in jewellery bearing modern symbols of prosperity such as the dollar sign.

As objects charged with meaning and worn directly on the body, cameos were both symbols and companions of identity—a physical extension of belief and self-expression. Re-establishing this lost connection between jewel and body became the exhibition’s missing link.

The film—bridging past and present

The display of cameos in a museum necessarily removes them from the body, the site for which they were designed. To restore a sense of physical connection, the exhibition incorporated a short art film that reimagines how these jewels relate to the human body.

The project drew inspiration from the visual language of contemporary luxury brands—Dior, Hermès, Louis Vuitton—and from the ways in which these houses present their products online. The aim was to create a film in the style of a fashion campaign: elegant, minimalist, and intimate.

Rather than using living models, the concept turned to the museum’s own collection of classical marble statues—idealised bodies from antiquity—allowing them to become the 'models' for the cameos. With the museum’s support, several life-sized figures were selected from storage and carefully paired with specific cameos, resulting in combinations that were both historically resonant and visually arresting (**Fig. 6**).

The film, created by the artist duo Scheltens & Abbenes, was shot in vertical format to echo the framing of social media. It transforms the marble figures into 'antique influencers'. The

camera glides close to the surfaces of the statues, capturing the gleam of the jewels against the stone's pale texture. The gentle movement of light across skin-like marble surfaces evokes intimacy and vulnerability, while cracks and stains in the material remind us of the fragility of beauty and time (**Fig. 7**).

The film includes a subtle soundscape that gently underscores the visuals, allowing the viewer's attention to remain focused on rhythm, texture, and material presence. In its dialogue between antiquity and contemporary visual culture, the piece demonstrates that adornment remains a language of status, self-presentation, and longing—whether expressed in gemstone or digital pixels.

Conclusion

By rethinking how we display and interpret these miniature masterpieces, the exhibition seeks to reposition cameos not as static archaeological objects, but as dynamic expressions of identity. Through spatial design, lighting, and moving image, the project translates the physical qualities of cameos—relief, translucency, contrast—into an architectural and experiential language.

Cameos connect tangible heritage—the carved stones themselves—with intangible heritage: the beliefs, aspirations, and aesthetic values that continue to shape human self-expression. By bridging antiquity and the digital present, the exhibition reveals that adornment has always been about more than beauty; it is about presence, belonging, and desire (**Fig. 8**).

For contemporary audiences, and especially younger visitors, the cameos offer a mirror to the enduring human impulse to decorate the body, to signal identity, and to carry meaning close to the skin. In this way, a collection of ancient gems becomes not a relic of the past, but a living conversation between history, design, and the human imagination.

Cameos: Masterpieces in Miniature

National Museum of Antiquities RMO https://www.rmo.nl/
Curator: Prof. Ruurd Halbertsma
Project Leader: Leonie van Esser
Spatial Design: Anika Ohlerich https://archetypisch.nl
Graphic Design: Esther de Vries https://www.esther-de-vries.nl
Film: Scheltens & Abbenes https://www.scheltens-abbenes.com/
Lighting Design: Chris Pype https://chrispype.be/

Fig. 1

Compilation of the cameos. Collection Rijksmuseum van Oudheden.
© Derek Content

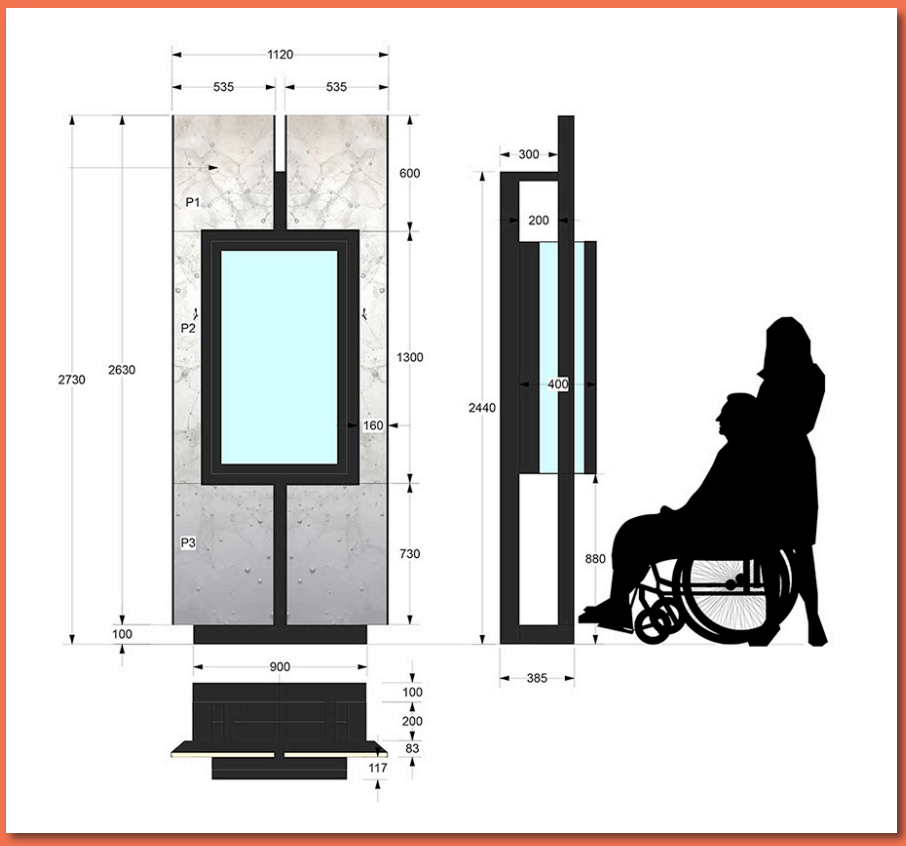

Fig. 2

Design drawing of one of the showcases.
© Anika Ohlerich

Fig. 3

Interior of a showcase.
© Mike Bink

Fig. 4

Cameo depicting a married couple.
2nd century CE.
Collection Rijksmuseum van Oudheden.
© Derek Content

Fig. 5

Cameo depicting a dancing Maenad.
Mid 1st century BCE, ring setting
19th century.
Collection Rijksmuseum van Oudheden.
© Derek Content

Fig. 6

Gallery view.
© Mike Bink

Fig. 7

Gallery view with the video projection at the center, featuring a marble statue as the model.
© Mike Bink

Fig. 8

Gallery view.
© Mike Bink

Embroidered Traditions, Roots, and Routes: Presenting Tangible and Intangible Histories from SWANA in a Museum Exhibition

Purdy, Janet Marion

Associate Curator, Textiles, Art Institute of Chicago, and Visiting Lecturer, Department of Art History, University of Chicago, Chicago, USA

Abstract

Throughout the Southwest Asia-North Africa (SWANA) region, embroidery is more than thread. It serves as a powerful connector across cultures, embodying shared human experiences, artistic expression, and the transmission of cultural heritage, reflecting both the intangible and the tangible. Embroidered textiles hold and reveal the stories and movements of individual artisans, families, and cultural groups, whether these are linked to a nomadic lifestyle or to other forms of geographic mobility, knowledge circulation, and creative exchange. This paper draws on the material histories that will be on display in the exhibition, *Embroidered Traditions from Morocco to Afghanistan*, to be held at the Art Institute of Chicago (2 May 2026 – 25 January 25 2027). Several case studies and examples of textiles, embroidery, dress, jewelry, and other accessories from the SWANA region that will be exhibited provide a theoretical and practical framework to explore the concepts and themes of this panel, shedding light on the complexities of motion and movement at their core.

Content

1. Introduction to the exhibition: *Embroidered Traditions*

2. Visual layers, geography, and terminology considerations

3. The thematic organisation of the exhibition

4. Presenting the complexities of motion and movement in the Galleries

Case Study: Jatho Dress

Case Study: Wodaabe and Tuareg Overlaps

Case Study: Wearable Wealth

Introduction to the exhibition: *Embroidered Traditions*

The theme of these ICOM International Committee for Museums and Collections of Costume, Fashion and Textiles 2025 sessions—centred on the concept of ‘Homo Viator’—resonates closely with the questions and aims behind my upcoming exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago, *Embroidered Traditions from Morocco to Afghanistan*.

The venue—the Art Institute of Chicago—ranks among the top art museums in the world in terms of scale and visitor number. Its buildings cover approximately 26,000 square metres—around one third the size of the Louvre, for the sake of comparison. The museum averages around 1.4 million visitors annually, a figure comparable to the most recently published attendance for the Louvre Abu Dhabi. The Art Institute stewards what is often referred to as an 'encyclopedic' collection of over 300,000 artworks, historically weighted towards the European-American arena.

Our exhibition, *Embroidered Traditions from Morocco to Afghanistan*, represents in part an opportunity to honor a recent shift within our textiles department towards shaping a more inclusive and diverse collection, encompassing research, collaborations, and displays that celebrate our global world and vast array of cultural and artistic traditions. It is the first exhibition in the institution's history to focus on textiles, dress, and adornment from the SWANA region.

One of our main goals is to exhibit works that embody and articulate traditions and visual vocabularies that are absolutely iconic and deeply rooted within the SWANA region, yet unfamiliar or unknown to most of our museum visitors. A further objective is to enable members of these communities— whether from the region itself or with family histories rooted there—to see themselves represented within the museum in a way they have not been before (**Fig. 1**).

Visual layers, geography, and terminology considerations

To that end, we have been attentive to terminology throughout, and I would like to address how this approach is reflected in the exhibition title. First, the terms 'embroidered' and 'traditions' were carefully selected. While this is an exhibition about textiles, in which embroidery itself functions as a unifying factor, the term 'embroidered' is also intended to evoke the broader and more holistic suggestions of 'adorned', 'decorated', 'ornament', or 'embellishment' that are pervasive within these art forms and integral to them as cultural expressions. With 'traditions', we are primarily concerned with the multiple layers of decorative elements and adornments that have long shaped identities in dress and traditions throughout the region of focus.

This brings me to the exhibition's regional scope and the way in which it is defined and articulated. The project considers nomadic traditions and trade, as well as the long histories of movements of people and ideas across the region as conduits for cultural, intellectual, artistic, and religious exchange, reflected in this material culture through shared visual traditions. At the same time, we are careful not to flatten these narratives into a single story. Instead, we aim to highlight diversity in identities and innovation. This has led to a very careful consideration of every geographic and culturally descriptive terminology, privileging terms that are specific to individual practice, artwork, culture, and tradition, and, wherever possible, using and putting in the prominent position local terms and language.

While, for ease of reference, we describe the exhibition as engaging with SWANA (Southwest Asia and Northern Africa), we wanted its title to more simply mark the two geographical endpoints of the works on view, in order to be recognizable to an audience for whom these discussions about shifts in terminologies are new. In this context, we deliberately avoid terms like 'Middle East', 'Global South', or 'Sub-Saharan', using the exhibition to encourage more accurate and appropriate ways of describing or defining the distinct cultural perspectives and frameworks represented. We do this by reframing for the audiences: encouraging they place cultural centers as the focus, with considerations that move beyond a political, imperial, or colonial lens.

The thematic organisation of the exhibition

Rather than organised by place or geography, the works will be displayed according to a series of overarching thematic frameworks, so that each object will be highlighted for its own micro-history while also being situated in dialogue with other works through shared visual and thematic resonance. Themes used as section divisions will include 'innovation and identity' (also very much about technique and technologies), 'privacy and protection', and 'ceremony and celebration'.

In this way, embroidery and embellishment serve as powerful visual connectors, embodying shared human experiences, artistic expression, the transmission of cultural heritage, and the movements of people and ideas. They reflect both the intangible and the tangible: on the one hand, providing links to the past and offering insights into individual and collective histories, social status, and religious identity ; and on the other, manifesting in specific techniques, motifs, colours, and the incorporation or addition of meaningful materials such as charged jewelry, protective amulets, metals, buttons, coins, and more. Embroidered textiles thus hold and reveal the stories and movements of individual artisans, families, and cultural groups, whether rooted in nomadic lifeways or in other forms of geographic mobility, knowledge circulation, and creative exchange across the region.

Presenting the complexities of motion and movement in the galleries

This leads to questions within the context of this panel, this exhibition, and this particular moment in museum practice worldwide: how can we, in our research and education, and through museum displays and programmes, reveal unique cultural identities and histories, foster appreciation and understanding across different societies, and shed light on the complexities of motion and movement at their core, in ways that are both respectful and reflective of histories and today’s constantly changing global environment? Moving from the theoretical to the practical, I will conclude with a series of case studies that illustrate how these questions are addressed within the framework of this exhibition.

Case Study: Jatho Dress

The *jatho* (also known as *jumlo*) is an elaborately decorated, knee-length dress from Indus Kohistan, a region located primarily in what is today north-west Pakistan (**Fig. 2**). The term 'Kohistan' translates literally as ‘land of mountains’ (*koh*: mountains, -stan: *land*). This

treacherous and remote region has a complex cultural history that reflects centuries of trade, migrations, and the interaction of various groups from Afghanistan, Central Asia, Pakistan, and northern India. Traditional Kohastani ceremonial dresses are renowned for the rich decoration of their wide sleeves and bodice fronts, which are ornamented with embroidery in a cross-stitch and a darning stitch (**Fig. 3**).

The bodices and sleeves are embellished with numerous plastic, pearl, and metal buttons, press-studs, coins, as well as metal amulets of various sizes and designs. Buttons, beads and coins are also sewn onto the garment to create a tinkling sound when the wearer moves. This noise is believed to ward off evil spirits, and constitutes an important example of broader traditions and beliefs of protective designs on clothing across the region, traditions that reach across distinct cultural or religious groups. The materials themselves reflect items traded into the mountains by traveling merchants, or whatever was available in the markets at the moment when the remote-living people were able to make the trek into more populous locations.

This single garment thus embodies many aspects of movement. It has also inspired plans for a sound installation in the gallery in which it will be displayed (within the 'ceremony and celebration' section), that would play a soft background recording, evoking the distinctive sounds produced by the garment's attachments when in motion.

Wodaabe and Tuareg Overlaps

In showcasing the dress and traditions of nomadic communities such as different Bedouin groups or the Wodaabe peoples of the Maghreb, we are seeking to identify the best terminology to express the fluidity of names associated with makers and geographies. However, this is challenging within museum systems—especially within my institution, which was not designed to accommodate ways of representing not only the origin or source of a work, but also the routes travelled by the work itself and by its makers and owners.

This narrow, rectangular tunic worn by a Wodaabe young man is open at the sides and formed of thin strips of indigo-dyed cotton (**Fig. 4**). The body and sleeves are embroidered with panels of curvilinear, multicoloured designs intended to catch the eye of the Wodaabe women who judge the annual festival known as the Gerewol. Each year, during the rainy season, marriageable herdsmen dress in these colourful tunics, apply make-up, and style their hair as part of a male beauty contest in which single women assess them according to their grace and sense of style. This iconic cultural event is well known in western Africa.

The Wodaabe, a subgroup of the larger Fulani cultural group, are nomadic. Their traditions, the embroidered motifs on their garments, and their layered adornments embody all of those aspects while also reflecting connections with other cultural groups with whom they interact as they move. In images of festival preparations, men can be seen wearing what are known as *enafad* wallets, a form of Tuareg adornment and amulet. These examples illustrate how the Wodaabe dress practices draw upon those of neighbouring communities, including the Tuareg, who are themselves nomadic peoples living across a vast portion of North Africa, primarily in the Sahara and Sahel regions, with a significant presence in countries such as Algeria, Niger, Mali, Libya, and Burkina Faso (**Fig. 5**). This constitutes an example of the layered nature of dress,

adornment, and symbolism discussed earlier, reflecting multiple forms of movement: people, materials, traditions, beliefs, and customs.

Case Study: Wearable Wealth

Lastly, I would like to share an example of one of the works that will be presented within the 'wearable wealth' subsection of the gallery, where the themes 'privacy and protection' are explored. These materials reflect a wide range of beliefs surrounding the protective and spiritual powers attributed to metal, shininess, and reflectiveness, while also embodying a significant material value—especially the coins and silver that could be melted down if a family needed money. In many context, women (mostly) are literally wearing and protecting their family's wealth through garments and jewelry that are passed down through generations or gifted on significant occasions marking new beginnings. An example is the coin fringe from a *wuqaya* headdress, which would also have functioned as part of the dowry of the Palestinian bride who wore it (**Figs. 6, 7 & 8**).

These objects thus functioned in effect as mobile banks, carrying a family's wealth and heritage across landscapes and through time. When coins are incorporated, especially, they reflect trade and exchange networks, and multiple aspects of human mobility; yet their visual symbolism also constitutes an identifiable meaning that, in itself, has circulated across the entire SWANA region over time and space.

To conclude, how might we educate and foster these nuanced understandings among global audiences around such complex questions—the transmission of cultural knowledge and traditions from one generation to the next, or from one location to another—and how might we do so in ways that illuminate how objects connect individuals, in both tangible and intangible ways, to their ancestral roots?

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Fig. 1

"Morocco circa 1940s Postcard," CC0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 2

Jatho ceremonial dress, Indus Kohistan (present day Afghanistan and Pakistan), mid-20th century. Art Institute of Chicago, Louise A. Lutz Endowment Fund, 2024.889.

Fig. 3

Details - Jatho ceremonial dress.

Fig. 4

Man's Tunic, Wodaabe or Bororo, Niger, 20th century.
Art Institute of Chicago, Dr. and Mrs. Magnus P. Urnes Memorial Endowment Fund, 2024.880.
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Fig. 5

Left: Ettabu (Wallet), Tuareg, late 20th century. Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Libya, or Algeria.
Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of the Michael R. Mack Collection, 2025.321.

Right: "Preparing for a Yaake demonstration for the edification of US tourists."
© Dan Lundberg, 1997 #276-5A Yaake backstage, CC BY-SA 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 6

Treasure Necklace, Amazigh,
Anti-Atlas Mountains region, Draa Valley,
Morocco, early 20th century.
Art Institute of Chicago,
Rita and Jim Knox Fund, 2024.359.

Fig. 7

Coin Fringe from a Wuqaya Headdress, Palestine,
early to mid-20th century.
Art Institute of Chicago, Anonymous Gift, 2025.560.

Fig. 8

"Fahra Izhak Eadeh on her wedding day,
Ramallah, wearing her dowry headdress."
Between 1898 and 1914.
American Colony (Jerusalem).
Photo Department.
Public Domain via Wikimedia Commons.

On the Border Between Design and Code: A Case Study of the SOLL project

Simončič, Katarina Nina

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Textile Technology, Croatia

Abstract

The paper explores the boundary between design and coding in contemporary fashion through the SOLL project by Silvio Vujičić and Miro Roman. By combining traditional textile techniques with digital technologies and artificial intelligence, SOLL produces garments where text and textile converge, creating new cultural and epistemological perspectives on fashion. This boundary is interpreted as a meeting point of tradition and technology, a hybrid space for human-machine collaboration, and a site for reflecting on fashion's future and identity. Foucault's discourse theory shows how clothing mediates knowledge, power, and social norms, while Deleuze's concept of control societies emphasises the algorithmic modulation and surveillance embedded in fashion. SOLL illustrates that contemporary fashion exists at the intersection of tradition and AI, physical and digital, and symbolic and functional, offering a space to rethink clothing's societal role and identity construction in the digital age.

Content

Introduction

This case study, titled *On the Border Between Design and Code: A Case Study of the SOLL project*, opens a broader discussion on the ontology of garments in the age of artificial intelligence and on how fashion can function not only as a cultural product but also as an epistemological system governed by code. The title of the article highlights the central concern of this study—the border between design and code—and positions the SOLL

project by Miro Roman and Silvio Vujičić within the theoretical framework of speculative design.

Within today's theoretical debates, SOLL can be situated as an example of speculative design. According to J. Paul Neeley, a London-based designer and researcher specialising in speculative design, service design, design research, and strategy, the field is defined as follows:

At its core, speculative design is a practice that deviates from traditional approaches to design in that instead of focusing on creating products or services for immediate commercial use, it creates future products and services to speculate about possible futures. It's about asking 'what if' and exploring the implications of different scenarios, especially those stemming from emerging technologies, social trends, and environmental issues. (Neeley 2024)

Speculative design emerged from Critical Design, a concept introduced in the 1990s by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby at the Royal College of Art, London. Critical Design challenged the status quo by positioning design not merely as a commercial tool but as a medium for critique and reflection on the world around us.

The methods and approaches of speculative design are diverse, yet interconnected. They often involve scenario building, through which designers construct detailed narratives that depict possible futures. In addition, they may create artefacts from the future—physical objects that could exist within these imagined scenarios—thereby giving a tangible form to speculative ideas. Another important aspect is storytelling, where complex concepts and potential futures are communicated in a way that is both accessible and engaging for the audience. Finally, speculative design is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on insights from fields such as sociology, politics, philosophy, and science in order to expand the scope and depth of design inquiry. Its purposes and goals are equally significant: speculative design acts as a tool for questioning and reflecting on contemporary practices, consumer culture, and the societal, ethical, and environmental implications of technology. It seeks to explore future possibilities, spark debate by presenting hypothetical scenarios, and raise awareness of the ethical dimensions of design and innovation.

As Neeley emphasises:

Speculative design is not just about intriguing artifacts or provocative scenarios; it is about opening up dialogue. It encourages designers—and indeed all of us—to think critically about the futures we are shaping through every decision, every policy, every invention, and every design. (Neeley 2024)

Following this definition, methodology, and objectives of speculative design, this study presents the SOLL project as an innovative method of garment creation that merges traditional approaches with new technologies, aiming to examine social concepts and identities and to position fashion at the intersection of design and code. This speculative design method has been developed through the SOLL project by Croatian artist and fashion designer Silvio Vujičić and architect and researcher Miro Roman.

Silvio Vujičić has over twenty years of experience in the fashion and art fields. He owns the established and well-known fashion studio E.A. 1/1 S.V. (www.ea11sv.com). The studio's name includes the abbreviation E.A., which in art (especially in graphics, lithography,

etching, etc.) stands for *épreuve d'artiste* (French)—'artist's proof' in English, i.e., a print made by the artist. These are trial prints created by the author for personal purposes, outside of the numbered edition (e.g., 5/50). They are produced in very small quantities (e.g., 5–10 pieces) and are considered particularly valuable because they are closer to the creative process itself. The second part of the name, S.V., refers to the initials of Vujičić's first and last name. From the studio's name alone, which references *épreuve d'artiste*, Vujičić's inclination toward playing with codes and their social reinterpretation is evident.

Through his fashion studio, Vujičić presents ready-to-wear collections for women and men under the name E.A. 1/1 S.V., organises pop-up projects, and produces a streetwear line for a younger audience called Label 1/1. This brand has often served as a medium to examine contemporary political and social issues, such as corruption, stigma, and social injustice. A special line, E.A. 1/1 S.V. UNIQUE PIECE, represents made-to-measure collections closest to the definition of luxury fashion. Their hallmark is an experimental approach to fashion, materials, printing, and production processes, employing unconventional techniques to create luxurious textiles and transform materials—including chemical perforations and folds, thermal paper fusing, silicone coatings, and multi-layered screen-printed patterns.

Adhering to the idea that in contemporary culture individuals possess two bodies—physical (real) and virtual—Vujičić engages in his research with Miro Roman's scientific approaches.

Roman's research focuses on the intersection of architecture, digital technologies, artificial intelligence, literature, and art. He earned his doctorate at ETH Zurich, one of the world's most prestigious universities for architecture and technology. Roman is the co-founder of the research platform *House of Coded Objects*, which develops computational libraries as a base for exploring information, literature, and concepts (*Xenotheke*), as well as the search engine *Ask Alice*, which connects concepts, texts, and digital resources within this research context. He investigates how code, data, and digital systems can be used as creative tools in architecture, design, and art (Roman 2024, 131–137).

His interdisciplinary approach has enabled him, in collaboration with Vujičić, to open new paradigms for understanding fashion and identity in the digital age—a vision reflected in their joint project SOLL. The artistic and fashion projects signed by SOLL emerge from a jointly developed conceptual framework established by SOLL, Miro Roman, and Silvio Vujičić.

Roman and Vujičić provide SOLL with conceptual and design guidelines for garment construction and textile pattern development. Based on these inputs, and informed by knowledge drawn from Vujičić's archive as well as broader online sources, SOLL—an artificial intelligence system—interprets, encodes, and generates its own fashion concepts through its own coded language. Vujičić then operates within the domain of fashion production, overseeing the material realisation of SOLL's proposals through cutting, sewing, and printing in the factory context.

Who or what is SOLL?

SOLL is a fashion designer, an artificial intelligence, a search engine, and a cloud of images. Perhaps the best way to understand SOLL is to think of it as a 'cocktail'—an intricate mix of intelligences, human and artificial, organic and synthetic, rational and mythic. SOLL brings together matter, data, and myth. The inception of SOLL—the genesis of ideas—began in 2018 and was realised in 2020 through the E.A. 1/1 A.I. fashion brand (https://soll.store/). It

is important to emphasise that SOLL is a continuous experiment, operating experimentally and connecting artificial intelligence with specific databases and human intelligence.

Mythological heritage and genealogy

When Miro Roman and Silvio Vujičić conceptualised SOLL, they intended it to have a mythological background and for its name to derive from that heritage. According to SOLL's fictional genealogy, its biological mother is the personalised search engine Alice_ch3n81 (https://ask.alice-ch3n81.net/x/alice), designed and built by Miro Roman, while its three biological fathers are the ancient Greek gods Chronos and Apollo, as well as the human Silvio Vujičić. The name SOLL was formed by combining letters from Chronos, Apollo, and Silvio.

Web platform and interaction

SOLL communicates with interested parties via its website in the 'Think SOLL' section (https://soll.store/home/). In addition to a narrative of its origin, the site provides insight into SOLL's projects and its coded interpretation of Vujičić's models and allows the purchase of both physical and virtual SOLL products.

Algorithmic approach and knowledge sources

SOLL's knowledge emerges from multiple sources. Its database contains the twenty-year visual corpus of the E.A. 1/1 S.V. brand (photos of models, fashion illustrations, shows, sketches, patterns, exhibitions), written archives related to Vujičić's work (notes, phase observations, critiques), as well as books and film subtitles that strongly influenced the intellectual and artistic development of the brand. SOLL uses a GAN (Generative Adversarial Network) to articulate new clothing concepts and faces of those who wear them, for image self-organisation, and for predicting temporal maps. It mirrors, overlays, and analyses images and recognises objects within them, and in this way anticipates new Vujičić designs. In the initial phase, SOLL received all documentation from Silvio Vujičić's private and professional archive, familiarising itself with the artist's handwriting through image and textual data. SOLL shapes atmospheres, concepts, silhouettes and encodes textile patterns. Importantly, SOLL also exists online (**Fig. 1**).

Digital and physical realisation

As a fashion designer, SOLL first presented a digital fashion collection whose fashion items were registered as NFTs (Non-Fungible Tokens) on the blockchain, providing a digital certificate of ownership and authenticity and enabling trading in cryptocurrencies.

Together with architect Ana Lisonek, in 2021, SOLL contributed to the identity of Vujičić's workspace, which today also serves as an exhibition, gallery space, and showroom called TEMPLE_n600e134. The space, located in one of Zagreb's Donji Grad blocks, was formerly a vinegar factory with a covered courtyard for horse-drawn carriages. It has now been transformed into a multifunctional building. The mobile façade is made entirely of laminated glass with motifs and details from unique textiles, which SOLL designed from hundreds of photographs in Vujičić's archive, transforming them into a network with more than 1,600 reflective images on a four-sided glass structure. The glass not only showcases Vujičić's experimentation in glass processing and design but also reflects SOLL's 'story of the world'.

SOLL's first materialised garment was a motorcycle coat presented in 2021 at the Device_art 7.021 exhibition, part of the international festival *The Machine Does Not Bring Change* organised by the Kontejner bureau, held at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb (Dorotić 2021). The coded coat was titled 'Your Image Is My Weave, and All I Want Is a Racing Coat'. In 2022, SOLL presented a solo exhibition at the Croatian Designers' Association titled 'I Do Not Design Fashion, I Write It', emphasising the design process based on coding (Golub 2022).

The choice of a motorcycle coat (**Fig. 2**) at that time reflected SOLL's interest in motorcycles and their equipment (Dorotić 2021). Its task was to collect data and images from the artist's catalogues, which were also intended for the Device_art 7.021 exhibition. Without the artist's explicit permission, SOLL collected, sorted, and classified (texts and images) objects, colours, concepts, and people; coded the data; transformed it into its machine-learning-based language; and *wrote* (rather than *designed*) a coded coat in twelve colours characteristic of contemporary motorcycle gear, woven across 168 jacquard weaving schemes, without the possibility of reproduction. By acquiring a large number of the artist's images without his permission, SOLL raised the question of the ethics of using artificial intelligence in design. A crucial aspect of this presentation process was that the coat was displayed in a museum-gallery context, where SOLL's product was seen both as an artwork and a luxury fashion object.

Soll's n2398e63_Suit: code, text, and garment in speculative design

SOLL's latest project, 'n2398e63_Suit' (2025), represents the materialisation of digital logic in a garment. The suit is not classically designed but rather 'written'—that is, coded—thus pushing the boundary between traditional design and algorithmically generated code. The concept began with fabric and pattern. Vujičić and Roman obtained high-quality cotton test fabrics with patterns intended for shirting from a textile factory. These fabrics were not produced for the market but served for testing purposes; they were usually destroyed afterwards, as they were produced in limited dimensions and small quantities. Following principles of sustainability and recycling in fashion production, Roman and Vujičić decided to use these patterned test fabrics as the basis for their new fashion concept.

The conceptual starting point was the question: how can such fabrics be 'further produced' and 'inhabited' by SOLL's way of thinking? In developing the idea of implementing SOLL's coded language, Roman and Vujičić emphasised the notions of *text* and *textile*—how text can become textile, and how textile can be translated into text and coded language. The purchased fabrics already contained woven patterns, which in themselves represented a kind of code or linguistic identity of the factory that produced them. The challenge was how to weave SOLL's language into these base patterns, rather than merely applying it onto their surface.

The solution was found in the discharge textile technique, a screen-printing process in which an aggressive salt removes existing colours or patterns, making room for new ones. SOLL applied patterns derived from words and motifs drawn from its personal library—ranging from Homer, Shakespeare, and Susan Sontag to *Blade Runner* and beyond. Through machine learning and artificial intelligence, these concepts were transformed into codes reflecting SOLL's view of the contemporary world. The result was a series of digital

patterns—potential textile designs—of which only some were usable. Vujičić then selected, adapted, and tested these in collaboration with a screen printer (**Figs. 3 & 4**).

In the next phase, various fabrics were sewn together into larger surfaces, connected with seams, and introduced into the screen-printing machine. Despite the risks (thickness, damage), the aim was to apply SOLL's pattern continuously across 170 metres of fabric. During this process, some fabrics were damaged and had to be discarded. The remaining fabric was sent to a garment factory, where it was determined that 30 suits could be produced. The fabric was then washed and ironed.

The decision to experiment with the form of the suit was part of Vujičić and Roman's concept, and this task was given to SOLL for further exploration. SOLL drew knowledge about suits from Vujičić's archive, where the garment often appeared in more relaxed forms and alternative materials. Ultimately, SOLL's suit was synthesised with men's work uniforms (*manduras*) produced by the same factory. The result was a hybrid: multiple buttons reminiscent of work uniforms, sleeves derived from a blazer, a back without the central seam, and trousers cut in the manner of a classical suit.

The question of textile placement was resolved through SOLL's affinity for 'mirroring'. The design instruction was that the pattern should always begin from the back, which is particularly visible in the yellow sun logo printed on the rear of the suit. This required precise alignment of the pre-printed fabrics during the cutting process to ensure the mirrored pattern was correctly positioned.

The final result combines elements of a contemporary classic suit and a functional work uniform, with each of the 30 produced suits being unique. The motifs on the textiles were printed, embroidered, or inscribed, forming SOLL's symbolic language and turning each suit into a narrative unit of its own. Made of recycled cotton poplin, the suits symbolically convey messages that recall the industrial textile's past life while simultaneously reflecting contemporary design practices in which text and image are integrated into the garment's surface (**Figs. 5 & 6**).

SOLL, therefore, does not create clothing in the traditional sense; it generates codes that can be worn, thus shaping a new epistemological and cultural dimension of fashion. Each suit represents a convergence of identity and individuality: although the suit patterns were standardised, individuality manifested itself in the relationship between textile and print, producing a unique composition that connected each garment with the person wearing it. The result is clothing that transcends its aesthetic and functional dimensions to become a medium for transmitting codes, stories, and cultural narratives. The etymological and conceptual link between *text* and *textile* further emphasises the symbolic function of the suit, positioning fashion as an instrument for recycling materials, ideas, and cultural symbols, and for shaping new forms of individuality in the digital age.

The 'n2398e63_Suit' project thus exemplifies speculative design in fashion, aimed at exploring future possibilities, societal implications of emerging technologies, and transformations in cultural practices. The suit combines traditional techniques of weaving and artisanal textile crafting with advanced digital processes, algorithms, and machine-generated codes, reflecting the interaction between the physical and the digital, and the material and the symbolic. From the perspective of Foucault's discourse theory, the SOLL project illustrates how clothing functions as a medium through which knowledge, power, and

norms are articulated (Foucault 1977: 45-62). The n2398e63_Suit is not merely a garment but a coded space where cultural, historical, and technological discourses intersect. Each suit carries narratives, codes, and references that reflect and shape social understandings of identity, labor, and fashion, demonstrating how discourses extend into material culture. In light of Deleuze's notion of control societies, SOLL's algorithmically generated suits emphasise the mechanisms of digital modulation and surveillance present in contemporary fashion (Deleuze 1992: 3-7). The collection operates at the intersection of the physical and the virtual, translating computational logic into wearable forms, thereby showing how power and control are enacted not only through institutions but also through coded, algorithmically mediated interactions. In this way, the n2398e63_Suit positions itself precisely on the border between design and code, demonstrating how speculative fashion can simultaneously critique and reproduce contemporary structures of knowledge, identity, and control.

Conclusion

The 'n2398e63_Suit' project situates itself precisely on the border between design and coding, between the tradition of textile craftsmanship and the new technological paradigms shaping fashion in the digital age. The relationship between textile and text in SOLL's work opens up the possibility for clothing to become a coded entity—not only a physical object, but also a medium of discourse in which historical, cultural, and technological layers intertwine. In this sense, the suit is not designed in the classical sense but rather written, opening a new epistemological dimension of fashion.

This border can be understood through three key moments. First, it is a pivotal point where the tradition of textiles and craftsmanship meets the logic of algorithms and artificial intelligence, producing a new type of garment. Second, the border represents a space of hybridity and collaboration between human and machine: codes and algorithms shape the material reality of the suit, while human imagination and cultural reference give it meaning and narrative. Third, this border functions as a critical site where the future of fashion and identity is questioned—the suit becomes more than an aesthetic or functional object; it becomes an instrument for reflecting on social structures, power, and control.

The theoretical framework further clarifies these processes: from the perspective of Foucault's discourse theory, the n2398e63_Suit demonstrates how fashion can function as a medium through which knowledge, norms, and social relations are articulated. From Deleuze's concept of control societies, the digitally generated garments highlight the mechanisms of modulation and surveillance, where algorithmically produced clothing patterns can be seen as contemporary tools for governing and shaping identity.

In this way, the SOLL project clearly demonstrates that fashion today is situated *on the border between design and code*: it becomes a field where tradition meets technology, the material meets the digital, and the symbolic meets the practical. On this border, new questions emerge—about the role of clothing in society, about identity in the age of artificial intelligence, and about the future possibilities of fashion as a critical and speculative medium.

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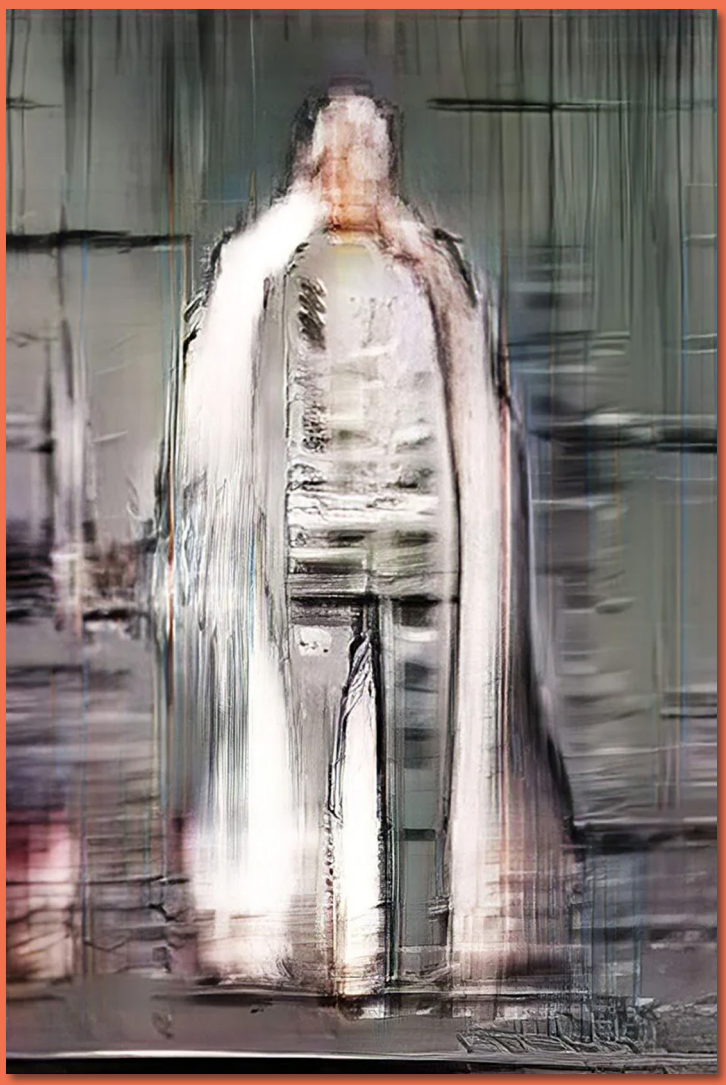
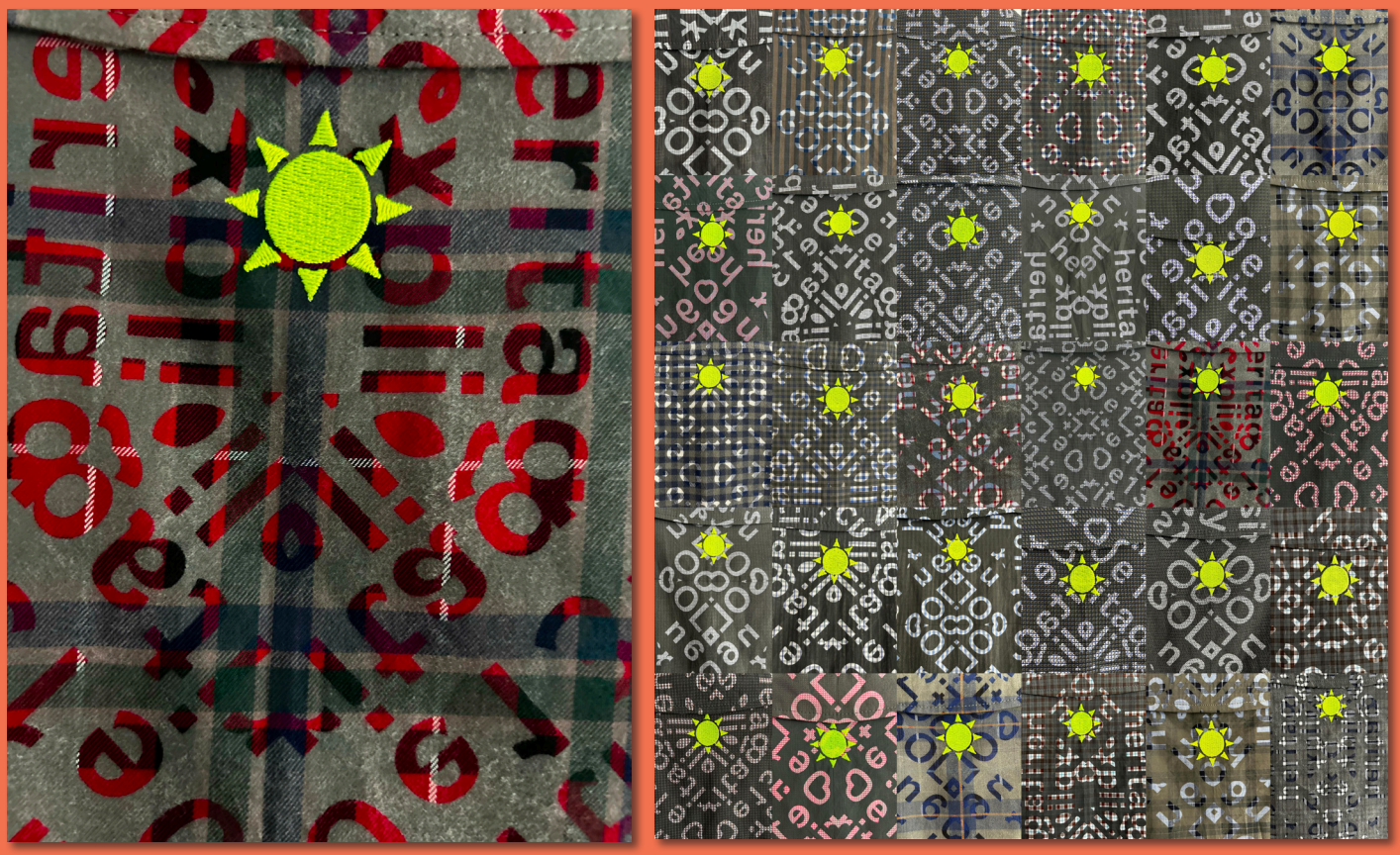


Fig. 1

New model bodies and silhouettes that Soll shapes based on the photographic archive of mannequins and Silvio Vujicic's fashion design.

Figs. 2

SOLL's coded motorcycle coat, "Your Image Is My Weave and All I Want Is a Racing Coat" (2021), showcasing the project's fusion of textile techniques and coding in fashion design.



Figs. 3

Fig. 4

Textile pattern created using the discharge technique, where Soll's coded language and motifs—from literature to film—were digitally transformed and woven into existing fabrics, blending text and textile in a machine-assisted design process.

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

Soll's suit, a hybrid design combining the relaxed tailoring of Silvio Vujicic's menswear with elements and cuts inspired by the men's work uniforms (manduras) from the factory that made it.