

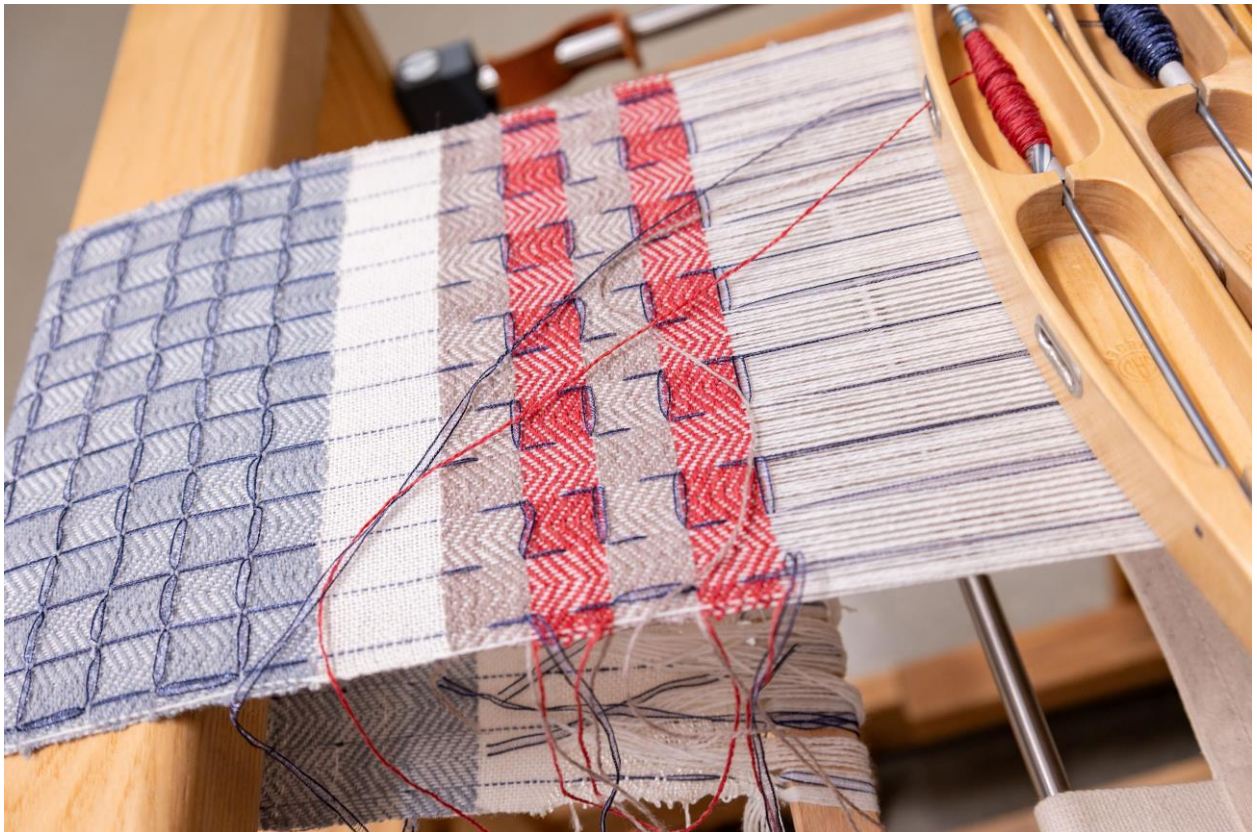
IKON

Ikon Gallery
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Birmingham B1 2HS
0121 248 0708 / ikon-gallery.org
free entry / donations welcome
Registered charity no. 528892

THREAD THE LOOM

25 JUNE – 7 SEPTEMBER 2025

IKON GALLERY



AVL Studio Dobby loom, Birmingham City University (2024). Image courtesy Ikon. Photo by Tegen Kimbley.

For summer 2025, Ikon presents *Thread the Loom*, a group exhibition celebrating the art of weaving.

An AVL Studio Dobby loom, on loan from Birmingham City University (BCU), will be activated through a series of micro-residencies with five West Midlands weavers Chantelle Folarin, Mahawa Keita, Clare Langford, Andrée Walker and Theo Wright, and international artist Seulgi Lee. Textiles produced on the loom will be exhibited alongside work by contemporary artists Raisa Kabir, Alis Oldfield, Bharti Parmar, Dinah Prentice and Su Richardson. Combining the tradition of hand weaving and computer-aided design, *Thread the Loom* invites the weavers and artists to exchange ideas, materials and structures that connect to the past in developing a sustainable future.

Ikon's display of contemporary art with textiles, curated by Daphne Chu, positions the loom as a metaphor for community, storytelling and intergenerational knowledge. Curatorially anchored by Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* (1986), the motif of the bag threads through works by Alis Oldfield, Dinah Prentice and Su Richardson. Oldfield's practice of gathering rush from riverways and basket weaving speaks to the act of tending to ecologies. Prentice's silk chiffon pouches, created amid waning eyesight, embody resilience – an effort to reconstruct the world around her. Richardson's crocheted life-size self-portrait frames the body as a portable vessel for identity, freedom and ability to move on. In essence, both story and journey hold and carry. Raisa Kabir and Bharti Parmar explore how histories are held and carried in materials. Parmar works with Khadi cotton – punched with printmaking tools to create voids – drawing on its ties to Indian independence from British Colonial rule while echoing the vocabulary of loom cards and early computing. Kabir engages her body against the landscape and networks, interrogating the politics of labour, gender and embodied geographies through acts of weaving and un-weaving.

The micro-residencies champion a 'learning by doing' approach, whereby visitors can observe, engage with and participate in traditional and contemporary art and craft practices. Each resident weaver brings a wealth of professional experience, working in teaching, running social enterprises and designing for textile companies (see biographies below), demonstrating diverse economies and ecologies of practice. International artist Seulgi Lee, whose solo exhibition at Ikon Gallery – her first in the UK – coincides with *Thread the Loom*, also undertakes a micro-residency on the Dobby loom.

"Ikon's weaver residencies will raise the profile of textiles generally, and weave specifically. At a time when creative subjects are under pressure within the school curriculum it is a valuable opportunity to showcase the origins of the materials that feed more familiar design disciplines, including fashion and interior textiles. Whilst there exists a whole network of weavers across the country, with hotspots in Lancashire and Sudbury, echoing the historical heyday of the industry responsible for fuelling the industrial revolution, there are also the weavers who have looms in studios and spare bedrooms. For many visitors, seeing a Dobby loom in action at Ikon Gallery will be intriguing and enlightening." Zoë Hillyard, Senior Lecturer BA (Hons) Textile Design, BCU

Thread the Loom is the second in a series of three exhibitions at Ikon Gallery which highlights the dynamic intersection between heritage crafts and contemporary art practice. In summer 2024 Ikon presented *Start the Press!* which focused on printmaking and in 2026 Ikon explores ceramics.

"Thread the Loom is part of a series of Ikon exhibitions that celebrate the art school infrastructure of the West Midlands. The weaving loom is intervening in the gallery space, transforming it into a studio, where messy practice and critical discourse coincide. By bringing together groups of textile weavers and visual artists, and involving a wider community of older and young people, we hope to facilitate knowledge exchange and skills sharing in a way that reveals the true value of art education." Linzi Stauvers, Artistic Director (Education), Ikon

This exhibition is supported by Jerwood Foundation, Cotton Textiles Research Trust, The Saintbury Trust and Freelands Foundation.

About the West Midlands weavers

[Chantelle Folarin](#) is a visual artist and graduate of BCU's Textile Design programme. Her practice explores the intersection of traditional textile techniques and contemporary art, incorporating constructed textiles, print, collage and embroidery. She is interested in material experimentation, repurposing found and unused objects to create tactile, visually engaging works that invite personal interpretation. Folarin is a Director of Glue Collective, a cooperative of artists and community workers based in Birmingham, seeking to address social, health and economic challenges in their local community.

[Mahawa Keita](#) is a textile artist whose practice explores personal and communal narratives through yarn, structure, texture and colour. She uses textiles as a means to connect with people and their stories, raising awareness of issues that impact different communities. Working with sustainable materials, Keita incorporates knit, crochet, macramé and hand embroidery to create both large and small sculptural pieces. Her work is deeply rooted in storytelling, weaving together themes of identity, relationships and shared experiences.

[Clare Langford](#) is a teacher, material explorer and weaver whose practice is rooted in curiosity, experimentation and the joy of discovery. Whether on or off the loom, she approaches making with a methodical and structural mindset, always guided by a deep sense of inquiry. Langford began her career in 1999 as a designer-maker, exhibiting work at galleries and craft fairs while also working as a freelance woven textile designer. Over the past 20 years she has focused on teaching, dedicating her time and creative energy to her role as Senior Lecturer at Birmingham City University's Textile Design course.

[Andrée Walker](#) graduated from Nottingham Trent University with a degree in Textile Design, specialising in woven design. Her career has taken her to the USA and back again, working predominantly in the commercial manufacturing of constructed woven textiles; dobby and jacquard, flat wovens and velvets, as well as tufted carpet design. Walker is dedicated to crafting of one-of-a-kind handwoven pieces. The creation process she embraces is slow and labour-intensive and deeply personal. Inspired by vivid and arresting moments of colour, discovered while walking in industrial or natural landscapes, the pieces focus on the visual journey.

[Theo Wright](#) is a Coventry-based weaver and textile designer whose work explores pattern, contrast and colour through a structured yet exploratory process. Completing a Textile Design degree as a mature student following a career in technology, he established his textile design business in 2011, creating geometric textiles that blend digital precision with traditional craftsmanship. His design process begins with computer-based experimentation, using spreadsheets as electronic graph paper to map out patterns before transitioning to the loom, where he refines his designs through weaving.

For more information, press appointments, high-res images and to request interviews please contact Rebecca Small by email r.small@ikon-gallery.org or call Ikon on 0121 248 0708.

Social Media: [@ikongallery](#) [#IkonGallery](#) [@textilesBCU](#) [@jerwood_foundation](#) [@ace_national](#)
[@aceagrams](#) [@ace_midlands](#)

Notes to Editors:

1. **Ikon** is an internationally acclaimed contemporary art gallery, situated in Birmingham's city centre. Established in 1964 by a group of artists, Ikon celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2024. It is an educational charity with free entry for all, and works to encourage public engagement with contemporary art through exhibiting new work in a context of debate and participation. The gallery programme features international and local artists working in a variety of media, including sound, film, mixed media, photography, painting, sculpture and installation. Ikon's off-site programme develops dynamic relationships between art, artists and audiences outside the gallery. Projects vary enormously in scale, duration and location, challenging expectations of where art can be seen and by whom. Education is at the heart of Ikon's activities, stimulating public interest in and understanding of contemporary visual art. Ikon aims to build dynamic relationships with audiences, enabling visitors to engage with, discuss and reflect on contemporary art. ikon-gallery.org
2. **Ikon** is open Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays, 11am-5pm. Free entry, donations welcome. Ikon is supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England.
3. **Jerwood Foundation.** Established in 1977 for John Jerwood MC (1918-1991) by Alan Grieve CBE, Jerwood Foundation is a UK charity committed to supporting excellence and emerging talent in the arts in the UK. Alan Grieve was appointed Chairman Emeritus in 2023, and at this time Rupert Tyler was appointed Chairman. The organisation is led by Lara Wardle, Executive Director and Trustee and to date Jerwood Foundation has committed over £112 million to support the arts in the UK. Jerwood Foundation owns the Jerwood Collection of modern and contemporary art, and an important part of Jerwood's philanthropic mission is delivered by the Collection through its loaning programme and promotion of a broader understanding, interpretation and enjoyment of art. Also included in the Jerwood group of organisations is Jerwood Space, which was Jerwood's first major capital project when established by Jerwood Foundation in Southwark in 1998. Jerwood Space is a dedicated rehearsal space providing theatre, musical theatre, opera and dance companies with an outstanding environment within which to create their work. jerwood.org
4. **The Cotton Textiles Research Trust (CTRT)** is a charitable organisation that provides funding and support for projects within the remit of the Trust, which is to support activities that will improve processes, systems and knowledge to the benefit of the UK textile industry and the people engaged in it. Further information is available at cottontextilesresearchtrust.org
5. **The Saintbury Trust** is a medium-sized grant-making registered charity which seeks to help charities in its geographical area of parts (but not the whole) of West Midlands, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and North Gloucestershire. A major part of its interest is in Birmingham itself and around Worcester. The Trust's interests are wide-ranging but the trustees have a particular interest in the arts, heritage, the environment and helping those with disabilities. thesaintburytrust.co.uk
6. **Freelands Foundation** believes art is central to a broad and balanced education, and a right for everyone. They are driven by a conviction in the vital role of learning and making to foster creativity, resilience, criticality and problem-solving that empowers and equips us for the future. As the Foundation approach their tenth anniversary, they resolve to strengthen their work with teachers, students, schools, universities, artists and cultural organisations. freelandsfoundation.co.uk
7. **Arts Council England** is the national development agency for creativity and culture. ACE have set out their strategic vision in *Let's Create* that by 2030 they want England to be a country in which the creativity of each of us is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone of us has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. From 2023 to 2026 ACE will invest over £467 million of public money from Government and an estimated £250 million from The National Lottery each year to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. artscouncil.org.uk