

# The Second Skin: Unstitched Narrative Threads

- The ‘second skin’ symbolises the discipline and liberation of the body through clothing, and the ‘unstitched thread’ alludes to the individual female experience that has been obscured throughout history.

# Core Theme

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‘The Shaping and Deconstruction of Female Identity: Clothing as a Symbol of Power, Bondage and Emancipation’ .

Clothing is not only a woman's ‘second skin’ , but also a social symbol that maps the changing status of women in different historical periods. The exhibition explores how clothing has been used as a tool of discipline, how it has been re-empowered by women, and how it has become a medium for identity mobility and dialogue across time and space.



# Curatorial Proposal

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## Reconstructing the Millennium Dialogue on ‘Clothing and Women's Status’ through Contemporary Art

This curatorial exhibition is an offline exhibition that will link the evolution of women's clothing from ancient to modern China with the change of women's social status through the medium of contemporary art, breaking the linear historical narrative and presenting the complex role of clothing as a symbol of power, a container of identity, and a carrier of culture in a multi-dimensional, cross-media format. The exhibition will be divided into three topics—  
—The web of rites, Rights and Clothing, Future of Women’s Wear.

Possible exhibition locations:

- ◆ 6-8 weeks (main exhibition period): at Fruitmarket Gallery, suitable for in-depth research and interaction.
- ◆ During the Edinburgh Festival (1-2 weeks): set up a Pop-up Exhibition to engage an international audience.



Main target groups:

Contemporary art enthusiasts & cultural researchers - those concerned with social issues, feminism, curatorial practice.

Fashion & Design Professionals - fashion designers, fashion industry professionals with an in-depth interest in the relationship between clothing and identity.

Academics & Students -- Scholars and students of art history, fashion history, and women's studies.

Women's Rights Advocates & Social Activists -- Groups concerned with women's identity, social change and cultural expression.



# The Web of Rites:

## Unbinding & Breaking Through

01

- Conceptual keywords:  
clothing discipline, body control,  
identity remodelling, female  
empowerment

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How does clothing become a ‘tool of discipline’ for power over women's bodies through form, symbols and technology? How do women reconstruct their identities and challenge the gaze through clothing?

# Core Exhibits and Interactive Experiences

## 1. The Visualisation of Ritual Symbols

### 1.1 Restoration of ancient Chinese women's clothing using modern technology.

Computer technology that can be utilised in ancient paintings:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3Uy0DDVrl0>



Virtual Hanfu Dance: Fabric solving using 3D clothing models and motion capture of real-life dance.



## 1.2 Entangled' series of comprehensive art works exhibition--Xiaoxuan Chen

The young artist has spent nearly two years conducting in-depth research, interviewing and documenting the foot-binding elderly. Her mixed-media artwork exhibition 'Entangled' presents the memory of these foot-bound (The ancient Chinese custom of requiring women to wrap their feet) elderly people's lives through video and other art forms, revealing the bondage and destruction of foot-binding culture on women.

<https://www.99ys.com/home/1970/01/01/08/127638.html>





### 1.3 Interactive Experience: Bondage Device

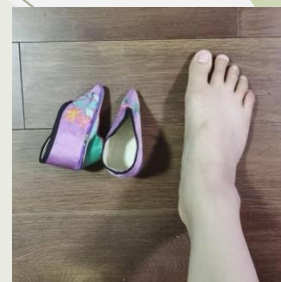
Visitors can try on footwear, breast-bindings and other items to feel the pressure of clothing on the body.



Ancient women's 'three-inch golden lotus'



The shape of the foot after wrapping



Comparison with modern normal female feet

Installation of clothing experiences and visual interaction devices.  
Interactive device for clothing pattern making:



Dressing Machine at  
the National Museum  
of China:





## 2. Clothing as Empowerment

### 2.1 Tangled - Tianmiao Lin

Tianmiao Lin uses textile materials as a medium to create the series 'Tangled'. Through the technique of entanglement and wrapping, she explores the role of women in traditional culture and physical constraints, reflecting the process of women's transition from bondage to the pursuit of physical liberation.

2.2 The 'Heavenly Breasts Movement' - a movement during the Republican era that opposed the traditional practice of binding women's breasts and advocated the natural growth of healthy breasts - is recreated through digital images.

2.3 Archival photography and textile installations are used to recreate the social significance of women's workwear in the 1950s. For example, hundreds of pieces of workwear fabric were hung, each printed with a story about female labourers from the Xinhua Daily, creating a 'fabric archive' of collective memory.





02

## Rights and Clothing: Narratives of the Body in Order and Freedom

Vertical oppression: naturalisation of class differences through rituals (e.g. the bright yellow colour was exclusive to the royal family);

Horizontal Discipline: the use of gender norms to reinforce the common plight of women across class lines (e.g. foot-binding extended to both gentry and commoners);

Symbolic violence: translating economic exploitation into aesthetic hierarchies (e.g. the ‘white, thin and young’ aesthetic derives from aristocratic privileges that are divorced from labour).

1. Ming and Qing women's dress to 'cape' pattern (dragons and phoenixes, Zhai bird) and the number of crown jewellery to distinguish between grades, such as the Empress of the nine dragons and four phoenixes crowns, while the civilian women prohibited the use of gold embroidery.

## 2. Xiuzhen Yin 'Clothes Box'

Collecting old clothes from different eras and classes and compressing them into blocks, the folds and wear and tear of the clothes become material evidence of the history of microscopic power.



3. The Song Dynasty 'Soap Shirt' system for prostitutes: Officials forced prostitutes to wear short black coats and horned crowns to create a visual separation from good women.

The painter Pan Yuliang's 'Self-Portrait' challenges the stigma of the prostitute's identity with nudity, reconstructing the subjectivity of the body as defined by dress.

When women take control of the right to cut their own history, clothing will finally become an epic of freedom.



# Future of Women's Wear

03

- A. Fluid identities: dressing beyond gender and class
- B. New symbols of power: combining technology and tradition

The future of women's clothing is more than just an evolution of clothing; it is a symbol of the changing status of women across time and space. It combines fluid identities, new symbols of power and ecofeminism to show how women can break free from traditional constraints and gain greater autonomy, social influence and freedom of identity in the future.



## A. Fluid Identities: Dressing Beyond Gender and Class

Keywords: Genderless, Adaptability, Transcultural.

Characteristics: Clothing is no longer restricted by gender, class or cultural identity, but is modular and mobile.



## B. New Symbols of Power: Combining Technology and Tradition

Keywords: Tech-Enhanced, Digital Fashion, Power Dress of the Future

Characteristics: Clothing combines Augmented Reality (AR) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to become an extension of digital identity.



- ◆ Past → Clothing was a shackle of identity (bondage to women, fixed class)
- ◆ Modern → Clothing becomes a means for women to express themselves and fight for power (professional dress, fashion freedom)
- ◆ Future → Clothing combines with technology to transcend gender, identity, and power boundaries, symbolising women's freedom of choice and autonomy

The essence of the exhibition is to transform history into experiential concepts. Through thematic focus, spatial experimentation, and audience participation, it is able to reveal the complex relationship between dress and women's status - no longer confined to a linear narrative of progress from oppression to liberation, but showing how power, technology, and culture continue to intertwine with the The exhibition itself has become a 'women's body' exhibition. Ultimately, the exhibition itself becomes an 'open debate', inviting the audience to redefine their own 'clothes of freedom' in the process of travelling through time and space.



# Reference case:

1. There are Beauties in the North - Liao Dynasty Women's Cultural Relics Exhibition, Suzhou Museum.
2. Beauty in the North: Women's Artifacts of the Two Han and Roman Dynasties, Hunan Museum, China
3. Under the Pines and Cypresses of Ancient Love: The Art and Skill of Chinese Women in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Nanjing Museum, China  
<https://www.njmuseum.com/en/generalDetails?id=1289>
4. Peach Blossoms in the Beauty - The Art and Life of Jiangnan Women in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Hangzhou Museum of Art
5. A Thousand Autumns of Beauties - Special Exhibition of Figure Paintings of All Ages in the Collection of the National Palace Museum
6. One Lifetime, One Dress: The Golden Years of Chinese Wedding Dresses  
[https://www.chinasilkmuseum.com/zz/info\\_17.aspx?itemid=31542](https://www.chinasilkmuseum.com/zz/info_17.aspx?itemid=31542)
7. She and Her——On Women and Their Art in Chinese History  
<https://theme.npm.edu.tw/exh109/She/index.html#main>