

Curatorial Proposal

The Second Skin: Unstitched Narrative Threads

【Edinburgh】

Clothing is never just a second skin
—it is a silent language of
discipline, identity, and cultural
control.

Contemporary Art

Combination of
Women's Clothing and
Contemporary Art

ADDRESS

Dovecot Studios, 10 Infirmary
Street, Edinburgh EH1 1LT

TIME

10 June - 16 June, 2025

CURATOR

Hua Ding



Context

EXHIBITION TITLE: THE SECOND SKIN: UNSTITCHED NARRATIVE THREADS	1
CURATORIAL NARRATIVE.....	1
CURATORIAL METHODOLOGIES.....	1
1. NON-LINEAR NARRATIVE	1
2. MULTI-SENSORY AND CROSS-MEDIA APPROACH.....	1
3. FEMINIST CURATORIAL FRAMEWORK	2
4. COLLABORATIVE AND PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES	2
PROJECT AIMS.....	2
KEY QUESTIONS RAISED	2
ARTISTS AND ARTWORKS.....	3
● ARTIST: XIAOXUAN CHEN.....	3
<i>Artwork 1: Installation——Bound (Installation Excerpt), 2012</i>	3
<i>Artwork 2: Photographs——Bound (Photographic Series) , 2012</i>	4
● ARTIST: TIANMIAO LIN	5
<i>Artwork: The Expanded Entanglement, 2004—present</i>	5
● ARTIST: YI HUANG	6
<i>Artwork 1: Transparent Headdress——Crown of Fluidity, 2025</i>	6
<i>Artwork 2: Virtual Garment Artwork——Abyss of Light, 2025 (Commissioned Artwork)</i> ..	8
● WHY THEM? ——ARTISTS’ GROUP DESCRIPTION	9
CURATING LOCATION	9
● REASONS FOR SELECTION	9
● SPACE UTILIZATION PLAN.....	10
● SPACE DISPLAY	10
● SITE USE & ACCESS.....	11
● HEALTH & SAFETY, H&S	11
● SKETCH OF THE EXHIBITION HALL.....	12
● EQUIPMENT AND MATERIAL SOURCES.....	12
● PROJECT PERSONNEL AND DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITIES	12
● VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND ROLES	12
AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT & ACCESSIBILITY.....	13
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS, EDI & LEGAL COMPLIANCE.....	14
EXHIBITION PRODUCTION & PUBLIC TIMELINE.....	14
PRODUCTION TIMELINE	14
PUBLIC-FACING TIMELINE	14
PROJECT BUDGET OVERVIEW.....	15

1.EXPENDITURE / COSTS.....	15
2.INCOME / SUPPORT	16
INTELLECTUAL LEGACY AND DOCUMENTARY VALUE OF THE MATERIAL.....	16
EXHIBITION IMPACT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS	17
REFERENCE LIST	18

Exhibition Title: The Second Skin: Unstitched Narrative Threads

Curatorial Narrative

'Clothing is never just a second skin

—it is a silent language of discipline, identity, and cultural control.'

This exhibition is a curatorial experiment that traverses historical and contemporary terrains. It investigates how clothing has functioned as a mechanism of discipline, identity construction, and cultural control—particularly in relation to the female body in China. This approach is grounded in Michel Foucault's theory of disciplinary power, wherein the body becomes the site of social regulation through seemingly mundane practices such as dress (Foucault, 1977). Clothing, in this context, operates not only as aesthetic form but as a cultural apparatus of control, shaping how the female body is perceived and inhabited across time. Practices such as foot-binding, breast binding, and color-coded garments reveal how the 'second skin' can become a site of restriction. And it is an offline exhibition.

Curatorial Methodologies

During my visit to the GOMA exhibition, I paid particular attention to the way in which contemporary curation emphasizes the viewer's emotional experience and bodily repercussions through spatial interventions and material perception. Media such as fabric, sound, and moving image inspired me to think about 'tactile history,' and this approach continues in my exhibition. And through my interactions with the CAP students, I realized that the symbolic and participatory narratives of the material play a key role in articulating the experience of being marginalized.

So, I've summarised my approaches to curation:

1. Non-linear Narrative

The exhibition is organized conceptually, rather than chronologically, exploring clothing as both power and restraint. It addresses how clothing has shaped the female body across different historical and cultural contexts.

2. Multi-sensory and Cross-media Approach

Combining fabric art, video installation, sound, digital reconstruction and participatory installation to create a tactile, immersive experience. This approach is inspired by my experience at GOMA - a dialogue between fabric and space that evokes physical memory and emotional resonance in the viewer.

3. Feminist Curatorial Framework

The exhibition emphasises the body-memory-identity as the main line from women's experience, and the curatorial process itself as a means of historical restoration and knowledge reproduction. Drawing on Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity, the exhibition explores how femininity is not innate but constituted through repeated actions—such as how one dresses, moves, or is looked at (Butler, 1990). Furthermore, the curatorial stance aligns with Laura Mulvey's critique of the male gaze, actively rejecting objectifying framings in favor of embodied agency and multiplicity in visuality (Mulvey, 1975). This is closely related to the 'decentred narration' that I emphasised in my discussion with Contemporary Art Practice colleagues.

4. Collaborative and Participatory Practices

Working with partners like Textile Workshop, the exhibition will feature interactive elements, allowing visitors to engage with materials, furthering the exhibition's social and co-creative dimensions.

Project Aims

1. Investigate how clothing disciplines the female body and serves as a means of self-expression and resistance.
2. Challenge the single narrative of women's bodies and clothing, highlighting diverse ways of constructing identity.
3. Promote reflection on the cultural significance of 'second skin' through immersive media and sensory participation.
4. Foster cross-cultural dialogue, focusing on women's history and contemporary expressions in non-Western contexts.
5. Experiment with curating as a critical tool for knowledge production, especially within feminist and body politic frameworks

Key Questions Raised

1. How has clothing shaped women's social roles and body consciousness?
2. What power has been visualized or invisible through dress across time and cultures?
3. How do women artists today use textiles, clothing, and the body to recreate memories?
4. Can curating create space for marginalized voices through a decentered narrative?
5. When viewers engage with the exhibition, do they realize they too are 'dressed' in the historical narrative?

These questions resonate with bell hooks' (1992) notion of the 'oppositional gaze', which encourages marginalised viewers—particularly women of colour—to resist

dominant narratives and reclaim visual agency. The curatorial design asks: can the exhibition space function as a counter-site of visibility and resistance?

Artists and Artworks

- **Artist: Xiaoxuan Chen**

Xiaoxuan Chen is a contemporary Chinese artist working in photography, video, and installation. His practice explores how traditional Chinese culture shapes women's bodies and identities, particularly through the legacy of foot-binding.

In his 2012 solo exhibition *Tangled* at Yuan Dian Art Museum, Chen presented plaster imprints, photographs, and videos documenting elderly women who had undergone foot-binding. These works capture both physical trauma and personal dignity.

By revisiting foot-binding, Chen draws parallels to modern forms of body modification, critically examining the intersection of beauty, control, and cultural identity.

Artwork 1: Installation——*Bound (Installation Excerpt)*, 2012



Giant Foot Wrapping Sculpture and Foot Wrapping Cloth Installation

This large-scale installation features two distorted plaster casts of bound feet, accompanied by cascading

white fabric strips reminiscent of traditional foot-binding cloth. The exaggerated forms and enveloping

materials construct a sensory environment that interrogates how female bodies are shaped—literally and metaphorically—by cultural ideals.

By reconstructing foot imprints of elderly women who once underwent binding, Chen translates a historical

form of bodily violence into contemporary visual discourse. The work calls attention to the persistence of aesthetic discipline and invites reflection on modern parallels—cosmetic surgery, body shaping, and fashion—that continue to constrain women under the guise of beauty.

Artwork 2: Photographs——Bound (Photographic Series) , 2012



Photographic Documentation of Bound-Footed Women

The photographs were taken in Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou, China. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the foot-binding culture, Xiaoxuan Chen visited more than 200 villages and interviewed a number of foot-binding elders,

documenting their stories from their early years of foot-binding to their adult marriages, as well as their experiences of wars, the Great Leap Forward and natural disasters. During the interviews, the artist often washes the feet of the elderly

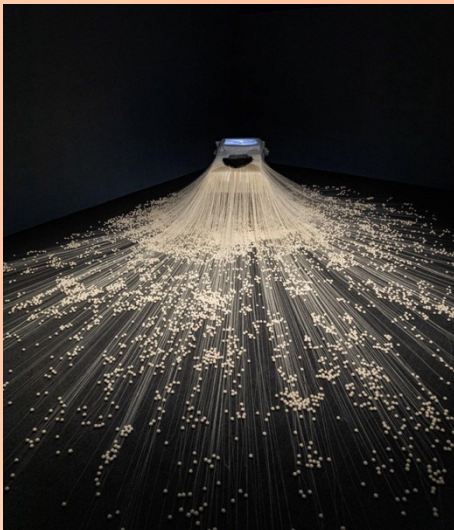
herself to show her respect and care for them. Most of the photographic images use close-ups and low-saturated colour tones, focusing on the feet and facial folds of the elderly, conveying the historical traces of the body's experience and personal dignity.

These photographs function both as ethnographic documentation and poetic testimony. Rather than objectifying the bound body, they restore agency to the women portrayed—turning them from passive subjects of history into powerful storytellers of embodied memory.

- **Artist: Tianmiao Lin**

Tianmiao Lin is one of the most representative female artists in Chinese contemporary art, specialising in the use of silk threads, fabrics, models of body organs and sewing gestures as an artistic language to explore women's identities, bodily experiences and cultural memories. Her works often embody the tension of 'entanglement' and 'repetition', transforming everyday materials (such as silk thread) into a symbolic language that expresses the complex psychological and physical state of women under social discipline.

Artwork: The Expanded Entanglement, 2004–present





The Expanded Entanglement

The Expanded Entanglement is one of Tianmiao Lin's most iconic ongoing series. Using layers of monochrome thread meticulously wrapped around objects such as anatomical models and daily items, Lin creates a visual vocabulary of restriction, intimacy, and endurance. The act of binding becomes both symbolic of external control and

internal protection—particularly in relation to female identity and bodily autonomy.

The threads act as both barrier and shield, turning domestic craft into a powerful feminist gesture. The work presents a tactile cartography of the female body—vulnerable yet resilient, confined yet expanding.

● **Artist: Yi Huang**

Yi Huang is an inter-media artist and Contemporary Art Practice student at the University of Edinburgh. Her work explores fictional narratives, female identity, and social structures through installation, video, web, and text.

Merging the virtual and the real, she critically engages with gender politics and digital culture. Her projects include a critique of the 'Marriage Corner' and a speculative myth of 'marine matriarchy', envisioning feminist and ecological futures. Huang uses art as a tool to question reality and construct alternative worlds.

Artwork 1: Transparent Headdress—Crown of Fluidity, 2025



Crown of Fluidity

Inspired by the fluidity of water, *Crown of Fluidity* is a transparent headdress that symbolizes the evolving identity and self-reconstruction of women in contemporary Chinese society.

Made from heat-molded film, the piece forms undulating, wave-like shapes—resembling flowing water or the deconstructed remnants of traditional Chinese hair ornaments.

The artwork references historical headpieces such as phoenix crowns and hairpins, yet abandons their weight and rigidity in favor of a light, open, and mutable structure. This

shift reflects the liberation of women from the rigid social roles imposed by patriarchal tradition, and gestures toward a future where adaptability and self-definition take precedence.

Rather than signifying authority or beauty, this crown embodies a soft yet resilient power. It emphasizes not decoration, but function—women’s ability to adapt, resist, and transform within shifting cultural

and social landscapes. The transparent texture blurs the line between visibility and invisibility, echoing the complex position women have historically held: both hyper-visible and erased.

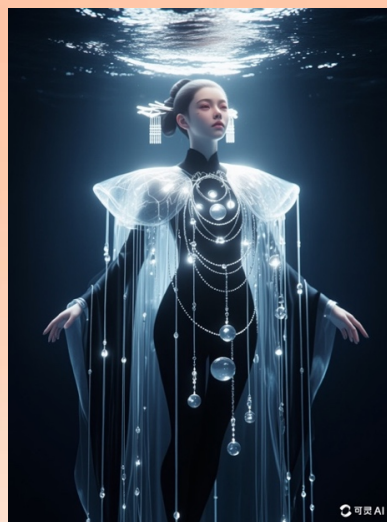
Artwork 2: Virtual Garment Artwork——Abyss of Light, 2025

(Commissioned Artwork)

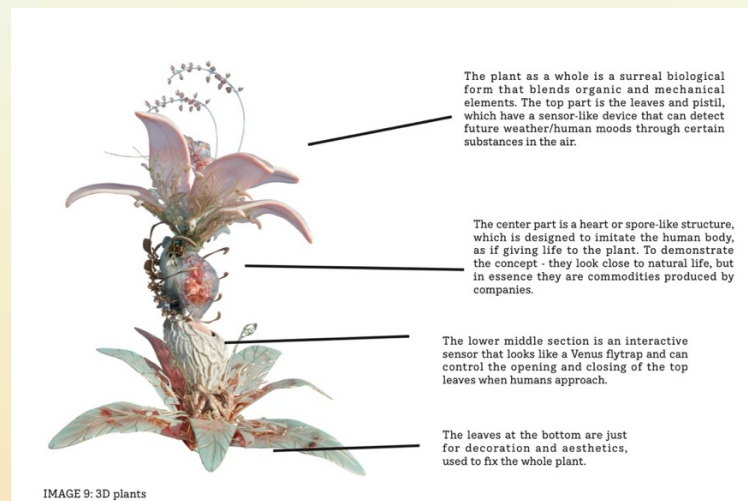
Abyss of Light is a virtual garment artwork that fuses futuristic aesthetics with the structural language of traditional Chinese ceremonial dress. The transparent, fluid outfit and its hovering headpiece together form a being that hovers between the human, the feminine, and the divine—a symbol of women’s original power and evolving agency beyond historical constraints.

“Light” signifies awakened consciousness, while “Abyss” speaks to cultural memory and the unknown. The digital figure drifts within a simulated deep-sea-like void, its form luminous yet ritualistic—an avatar of freedom, existing outside conventional boundaries.

This work continues the artist’s exploration of identity and body politics through digital media, offering a speculative vision of future feminine presence, selfhood, and visual liberation.



AI-generated schematic diagram of the artwork (Abyss of Light)



Artist's previous virtual technology artwork

- **Why them? —Artists' Group Description**

This exhibition brings together three artists—Xiaoxuan Chen, Tianmiao Lin, and Yi Huang—whose works form a multi-generational, multimedia dialogue on the female body, clothing, and cultural discipline.

Chen reflects on foot-binding through installation and photography, revealing historical trauma and resilience. Lin transforms silk thread into a language of confinement and care. Huang imagines future identities through virtual garments and digital myths.

Their practices align with the exhibition's curatorial strategies: non-linear storytelling, sensory engagement, feminist critique, and participatory creation. Together, they trace how women remember, resist, and reshape the “second skin.”

Curating Location

Dovecot Studios — 10 Infirmary Street, Edinburgh EH1 1LT

- **Reasons for selection**

Dovecot Studios is an ideal venue for this exhibition due to its focus on textile arts and its dual role as both workshop and gallery. Its expertise in weaving and fabric-based practices supports the curatorial theme of women's clothing and material culture.

Located in central Edinburgh, Dovecot has hosted exhibitions on fashion, feminism, and textile history, making it a culturally resonant site with an engaged audience of artists, designers, and researchers.

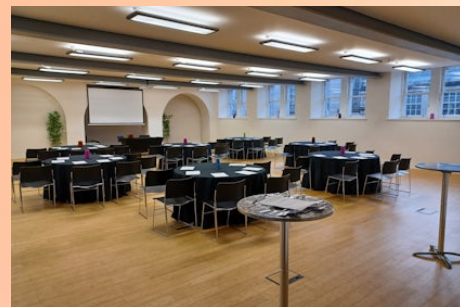
● Space Utilization Plan

Space	Artist	Title of work	Typology
Weaving Floor	Tianmiao Lin	The Expanded Entanglement	Installation Art
Weaving Floor	Xiaoxuan Chen	Giant Foot Wrapping Sculpture and Foot Wrapping Cloth Installation	Installation Art
Ladies Baths	Yi Huang	Crown of Fluidity	Decorative Sculpture
Ladies Baths	Yi Huang	Abyss of Light	Virtual Technology Art
Viewing Balcony	Xiaoxuan Chen	Photographic Documentation of Bound-Footed Women	Photography
✧ Meeting Room	Dovecot Textile Workshop and Public	Creating a 'body print' using fabric.	Public Workshop

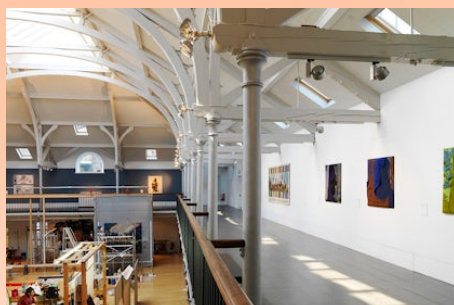
● Space Display



Weaving Floor



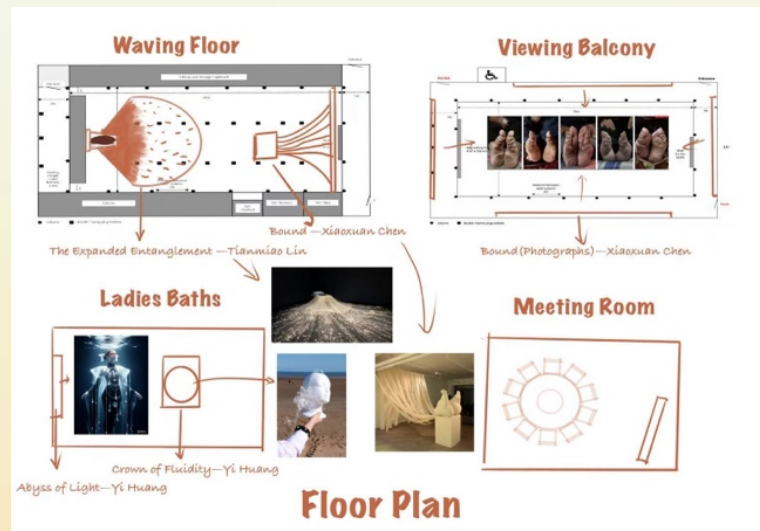
Ladies Baths



Viewing Balcony



Meeting Room



● Site Use & Access

1. The exhibition space is the indoor space (not outdoor) of Dovecot Studios, including the Weaving Floor, Ladies Baths, Viewing Balcony and Meeting Room, all of which are available for public booking, and do not involve public squares, streets or the domains of non-art organisations.
2. Dovecot Studios is a well-known textile arts organisation in Edinburgh, with a comprehensive exhibition management system and application process, which makes the use of the space precedent and realistic.
3. Dovecot Studios Exhibition Department is responsible for the application, layout and health and safety monitoring of the space.

● Health & Safety, H&S

1. This project follows the University of Edinburgh College of Art (ECA) Health and Safety Guidelines, ref: <https://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/health-and-safety-information>
2. All installation structures will be submitted in advance to the exhibition venue for review and will be supervised by a project leader during set-up and dismantling.
3. All activities comply with the UK Occupational Safety Standards for exhibitions in public spaces, including:
Avoid obstructing access and emergency exits; Reducing fire risks posed by fabrics, hangings, and projection equipment; Collaborating with technicians to ensure power cabling is safe; Interactive sessions such as workshops need to be assessed for risks associated with fabric handling, use of cutting tools, etc.

● Sketch of the Exhibition Hall

Adobe Photoshop (authorized by the school): Draw a floor plan, mark the installations and activity areas;

SketchUp (free basic version): Build a 3D model of the exhibition hall and simulate the viewing route;

Hand-drawn sketch: Use grid paper to mark the location of exhibits, audience flow and safe passages;

I can contact Dovecot officials to get more floor plans to obtain the layout basis.

● Equipment and Material Sources

Type	Equipment	Source
Projection and Imaging	Projector x3, mobile screen, player	ECA Bookit
Sound Device	Ambient sound players, directional speakers	Bookit (ECA AV Store)
Exhibition Furniture	Exhibition stands, partitions, seating, removable fabric	University Estates support
Craft Materials	Plaster, gauze, needle and thread tools	Textile Workshop co-operative

● Project personnel and division of responsibilities

Role	Personnel	Responsibilities
Curator	Myself (Hua Ding)	Curatorial co-ordination, artist liaison, event co-ordination
Project Assistant	1 student volunteer	Schedule support, filming, audience coordination
Exhibition Supervisor Event Host	Dovecot Venue Volunteer x2 Collaborating Artist x1(Yi Huang)	Gallery Patrol, Safety Guidance Introduction or Lecture Leader
Handicraft Instructor	Textile Workshop Collaborator	Workshop Instruction and Material Distribution

● Volunteer Recruitment and Roles

To support the exhibition's operation and engagement, student volunteers will be recruited through the ECA Opportunity Board and internal programme channels. Priority will be given to students from Art, Textiles, and related fields.

Roles include:

- Assisting with setup and takedown of artworks
- Gallery invigilation and audience guidance
- Helping during public workshops and events
- Basic documentation (photography, notes)
- Language support for bilingual materials (if needed)

Volunteers will receive a short training session before the exhibition, and will be acknowledged with a certificate, reference letter, and name credit in the exhibition material. This approach not only supports the project but provides meaningful experience for emerging creatives.

Audience Engagement & Accessibility

This project engages diverse audiences across disciplines, cultures, and lived experiences—especially those interested in gender, body politics, and cultural identity. This participatory and affective engagement is informed by Amelia Jones' (2012) conception of the “experiential body,” where meaning emerges through embodied interaction rather than detached observation. Additionally, the curatorial strategy draws from Irit Rogoff's (2006) proposition of “curating as pedagogy,” treating exhibition-making as a form of critical knowledge production and political intervention.

Target Audiences:

- Art and culture professionals
- Local communities and culturally connected publics
- Academic audiences (art, feminist, textile, Chinese studies)
- Feminist and marginalised voices

Engagement Strategies:

- Immersive, multi-sensory experiences through fabric, sound, and video
- Hands-on participation via workshops and interactive materials
- Bilingual access (English–Chinese) and inclusive design
- Digital alternatives for limited-access areas
- Cross-cultural dialogue through talks and online extensions

The curatorial approach positions visitors as co-creators of meaning, emphasizing bodily experience and decentralised storytelling. As Claire Bishop's (2012) critical examination of participatory art, acknowledging both its democratic potential and the

need for nuanced facilitation. The inclusion of collaborative elements is not only methodological but political—aiming to decentralise authorship and promote shared cultural production.

Ethical Considerations, EDI & Legal Compliance

This project aligns with ECA’s ethics and EDI policies, and follows the Curators’ Code of Ethics.

- **Safeguarding:** While not directly involving vulnerable groups, future outreach will follow safeguarding standards (e.g. Children in Scotland – Creating Safety).
- **Ethics Approval:** Currently not required, but will be sought if external institutional partnerships arise.
- **EDI Commitment:** The exhibition centers underrepresented voices—especially women’s embodied and cross-cultural experiences—within an inclusive, accessible environment.
- **Copyright:** All artworks are credited. Licensed materials will be budgeted if used.

Exhibition Production & Public Timeline

Production Timeline

Phase	Dates	Tasks
Preparation	Early June 2025	Finalize checklist, confirm artists, book equipment, submit risk assessment
Installation	8–9 June 2025	Install artworks, lighting setup, label placement, testing interactivity
Exhibition Open	10–16 June 2025	Open to public, conduct tour and workshop
De-installation	17–18 June 2025	Remove artworks, return equipment, document and restore space

Public-Facing Timeline

Date	Event	Description
10 June (Tue)	Opening Tour	Curator-led introduction to the exhibition’s concept and artworks

15 June (Sun)	Public Workshop: "Bind & Unbind"	Interactive workshop with textiles and audience participation
10–16 June	General Opening Hours	Open daily from 10:00 to 17:00, with audio guide and interactive wall
16 June (Mon)	Closing Sharing Session	Audience feedback and collective reflection on the project

Project Budget Overview

1.Expenditure / Costs

These are estimated cash costs associated with production, installation, public programming, and technical support.

Item	Estimated Cost (£)	Notes
Venue Hire (Dovecot Project Space)	350	Based on 1-week use, student discount assumed
Artist Fees (Total)	1812	SAU daily rate, including exhibition period authorisation
Xiaoxuan Chen	710	Based on 40 hrs × £35.50 (standard rate for experienced artist)
Tianmiao Lin	710	Same as above
Yi HUang	392	Recent graduate rate: £196/day × 2 days
Partner/Mentor Fees	300	Includes material preparation and orientation fee
Equipment (audio/projector rental)	700	Rented via ECA Bookit or external supplier
Cost of Materials	500	Wall texts, labels, handouts (bilingual) Textiles, fabric, thread, binding materials
Public Communication and Hospitality	350	Poster printing, guide maps, brochures, tea breaks
Labour costs for set-up/takedown	400	Fixings, mounts, adhesive supports
Public Liability Insurance (PLI)	300	References to LUX and Artists' Union
Transport / artwork logistics	800	Artist work delivery or returns
Total	5512	

2.Income / Support

Funding and in-kind contributions to offset costs.

Source	Amount (£)	Notes
Academic programme support (ECA)	500	Via ECA's student research or production funding. Refer to ECA Student Project Fund Guidelines : https://assets-cdn.sums.su/ED/Activities_A/Resource%20Hub_A/Dev-Fund-Guidelines.pdf
University contribution (equipment/furniture)	700	ECA Bookit system + furniture loan: https://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/student-life/facilities/bookit-equipment-loans-and-studio-booking
Materials support / Textile collaboration	500	From ECA textile workshop or partnered craft providers: https://www.eca.ed.ac.uk/student-life/facilities/textiles-workshops
Dovecot Studios venue support	500	Discounted or in-kind support confirmed for student-led exhibitions
Fundraising (zines, postcards, objects)	500	Sale of limited-edition prints and workshop-created objects during the exhibition
Creative Scotland Open Fund	1200	Supports public engagement, artist talk, workshop development, and digital documentation. Aligned with curatorial goals: https://www.creativescotland.com/funding
Labour support (setup/takedown)	400	Volunteer scheme support via ECA or embedded in production-related student work
Insurance (covered via ECA or grant)	300	Institutional PLI coverage or through small exhibition fund
Artwork transport/logistics	400	Covered by artist mobility support or local funding (e.g. arts council or creative networks)
Personal funding (small amount)	512	Category: £20 (signature thanks), £50 (souvenir)
Total		5512

Intellectual legacy and documentary value of the material

Some of the exhibition materials and outputs will constitute 'continuing assets' of the project:

- 1.Remnants of workshop works (e.g. Body Marks) will be archived and preserved;
- 2.Visitors' writing on the walls will be incorporated into subsequent publications;

3. Exhibition maps and brochures will be used as design samples for visual documentation;
4. The video recordings and interviews of the exhibition will be used as a resource for future research, lectures and teaching.

Exhibition Impact and Future Directions

This exhibition extends beyond visual display to act as a site of embodied reflection, feminist pedagogy, and cross-cultural dialogue. Audience responses—particularly from diasporic and feminist communities—confirmed the emotional resonance of the artworks and the value of non-linear, sensory curating. The project successfully positioned textile and digital media as tools of critical engagement with identity and memory.

Looking ahead, several outcomes and possibilities have emerged:

- **Educational Use:** Workshop formats may be adapted into recurring learning modules for students at ECA and other institutions.
- **Digital Expansion:** A virtual version is in development to increase accessibility and sustain curatorial dialogue online.
- **Research Output:** The project will be developed into a reflective essay or article on feminist curating and embodied spectatorship.
- **Future Collaborations:** Artist partnerships may evolve into a mobile exhibition or co-curated projects across UK–China contexts.

The exhibition thus becomes a prototype for curatorial practices grounded in affect, participation, and feminist knowledge-making.

Reference list

- Bishop, C. (2012). *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. Penguin Books.
- hooks, bell (1992). *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. New York: Routledge.
- Jones, A. (2012). *Seeing Differently : a History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*. London: Routledge.
- Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), pp.6–18.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>.
- Rogoff, I. (2006). *Smuggling: an Embodied Criticality*. *Art Journal*, 65(1), pp.60–71.