

Fibre and Form
Anna Ray
26 November 2021 – 17 April 2022
St Albans Museum + Gallery, Weston Gallery

UH Arts
+ Culture



UH Arts + Culture and St Albans Museum + Gallery are delighted to present the first major survey exhibition of sculptural textile work by acclaimed artist Anna Ray

Working from a studio in Hertfordshire, Anna Ray has an impressive international commissioning and exhibition record with her stitched artwork. **Fibre and Form** focuses on large-scale sculptural wall pieces created over the past 20 years. It features two newly commissioned works entitled *Mesh* and *Rosette*, which have been fabricated during the pandemic, supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. The exhibition pivots on these ambitious new assemblages and Ray's seminal wall piece *Margate Knot*, originally produced for the exhibition 'Entangled: Threads & Making', Turner Contemporary (2017).

Ray offers an artistic practice that is highly accessible and appealing to the public, while also pioneering within the field of art textiles and soft sculpture. Her assemblages are full of joy and life; their palette bright and varied; their form and surface rich and highly tactile. In their fabrication, the artist has developed specialist techniques of stitching, wrapping and stuffing fabrics, which repeat and build in relation to each other – enabling new possibilities. Ray's practice is a perpetual experimentation; she will have half a dozen artworks in development at any one time. She sees herself and the actions of her body as part of the work; building and dismantling component parts becomes a form of performance.

Ray's vast *Margate Knot* takes on the appearance of a Pointillist painting, yet on closer inspection this energetic mass of 2000 multicoloured sewn elements are tied together to create a 3-dimensional 'tapestry'. A smaller, padded sculpture *Ribbon Chain* (2019) with its interlocking and coiled links – exhibited at St Albans Museum + Gallery for the first time – complements the scale and palette of *Margate Knot*.

The newly commissioned *Rosette* is a bold, brightly painted textile wall piece inspired by Ray's Huguenot ancestors who were silk weavers and manufacturers of fancy trimmings in Spitalfields during the 1700s. *Mesh* by contrast is a more subdued monochrome structure, with component parts laced imaginatively together, inspired by the boning of 18th Century clothing. With both new works, sculptural components are slotted in place, stacked, and resting, building up within the space, to create complex surface and visual crescendo.

The scope of the space at St Albans Museum + Gallery offers a unique opportunity to unite and showcase an extraordinary collection of sculptural textile work by an artist working locally but with international ambition and context.

"I want my pieces to float, gather or fall naturally – to be themselves, to become exquisite. I am interested in the exact qualities of the materials I work with, their subtleties, how they look and feel alongside each other, as much as in their overall visual effects. I want the work to be deep, not superficial. The qualities – weight, strength, weakness, drape – of the artwork as it develops tend to lead the way in terms of final install, so there is an element of problem solving until the very end of the process." *Anna Ray, artist.*

“We are delighted to be showcasing incredible pieces, both early and new, from Anna Ray’s collection at St Albans Museum + Gallery. Acknowledging and supporting local artists is a central focus for the museum, so to host an exhibition from an internationally acclaimed artist is a pleasure and a privilege.” *Cllr Anthony Rowlands, Chair of St Albans City and District Council’s Public Realm Committee, and Lead Councillor for museums.*

“This remarkable exhibition gives us glimpses into Anna’s studio practice and her creative process from initial experiments to epic soft sculptures.” *Annabel Lucas, Head of UH Arts + Culture.*

Fibre and Form will be extended through a range of digital and live resources and events. St Albans Museum + Gallery will host live workshops and talks – complemented by an artist film, online creative activities, and collaborative workshops. The exhibition and Ray’s artistic practice will be further explored in a text by Ann Coxon, Curator, International Art, Tate Modern.

ENDS

For further press information, images, and interview requests, please contact:

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Exhibition & Events Programme

Fibre and Form

26 November 2021 – 17 April 2022

St Albans Museum + Gallery, Town Hall, St Peter’s Street, St Albans, AL1 3DH

<https://www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/whats-on/anna-ray-fibre-and-form>

Festive Garland Workshop

5 December 2021 at 2.30pm

£25 per person

St Albans Museum + Gallery, Town Hall, St Peter’s Street, St Albans, AL1 3DH

<https://www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/whats-on/festive-garland-workshop>

Soft Sculpture Workshop

13 March 2022 at 2.30pm

£25 per person

St Albans Museum + Gallery, Town Hall, St Peter’s Street, St Albans, AL1 3DH

<https://www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/whats-on/soft-sculpture-workshop>

Family Block Printing Workshop

6 April 2022 at 2pm

£10 per child

St Albans Museum + Gallery, Town Hall, St Peter’s Street, St Albans, AL1 3DH

<https://www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/whats-on/family-block-printing-workshop>

Image & Credits

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Anna Ray

Anna Ray studied BA (Hons) and MFA Tapestry at Edinburgh College of Art between 1994 and 1999. Over the last 25 years she has been granted major awards for her work and has exhibited nationally and internationally in both fine-art and applied-art contexts. In 2015-2016 Ray was artist-in-residence for The RHS Chelsea Flower Show. She went on to exhibit in 'Entangled: Threads & Making' curated by Karen Wright at Turner Contemporary in Margate (2017). Other highlights include Ray's commission to make new work for Art in Manufacturing at the National Festival of Making in Blackburn, following a residency at Forbo Flooring (2019). In spring 2020, she completed 'Loom', a large-scale commission for Facebook London Offices, part of the FB AIR Program.

<http://www.annaray.co.uk/>

@annarayart

About St Albans Museum + Gallery

University of Hertfordshire, St Albans City and District Council and the St Albans Museum and Galleries Trust have worked together for over 10 years to replace the former university gallery and city museum in Hatfield Road with a new international quality resource offering an exciting and innovative programme. Set to be a world-class centre for arts and culture at the heart of one of Britain's most historic cities, the St Albans Museum + Gallery is free to all visitors. It showcases over 2,000 years of priceless heritage and hosts cutting-edge art exhibitions, sharing local, national and world treasures with all. National-touring exhibitions from top UK museums are also available for visitors to enjoy for a small entry fee. For more information, visit www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk @stalbansmuseums

About UH Arts + Culture in the School of Creative Arts, University of Hertfordshire

Sitting within the School of Creative Arts, UH Arts + Culture offers a vibrant arts and cultural programme for the University of Hertfordshire's campus and local communities, working cross-arts with artists and performers. With a programme of exhibitions, performances, residencies and engagement projects, UH Arts + Culture delivers excellent, innovative arts and culture with associated research; offering space for artists and performers to experiment, and audiences to engage and co-produce. Working in collaboration with St Albans Museum + Gallery, and other key partners, UH Arts + Culture presents off-campus exhibitions and events, displaying works from around the world in new contexts. For more information, visit www.uharts.co.uk @unihertsarts