

HEIRLOOM  
center for art and archives

*Textile Memories*

Majd Abdel Hamid, Julia Jupiter Child, Melanie Kittl,  
Oscar Lara, Sonja Ferlov Mancoba and Ernest Mancoba

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Textiles are often seen as utilitarian objects with a decorative function, but they may also serve as vessels for knowledge. Textiles carry stories that can be passed on – through symbolic motifs in a rug, for instance. *Textile Memories* focuses on the work of a number of artists exploring the memories and narratives found in specific textiles.

At the centre of the exhibition is the *Mancoba* textile. In 1947, artist Sonja Ferlov Mancoba (1911–84), who is best known for her sculptures, exhibits a textile piece at the annual crafts exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts in Copenhagen. The textile met with critical acclaim. Later versions however did not meet the commercial success Mancoba had hoped. There is reason to believe that the exhibited work was the printed textile *Mancoba*, which is most likely a collective work created by Sonja Ferlov together with her South African partner, artist Ernest Mancoba (1904–2002). The *Mancoba* textile may be seen as an illustration of the story of these two artists, who wished to inspire compassion and community through their practices. The Mancoba couple saw art as a potential space for implementing and living out these values. In Denmark, Sonja Ferlov Mancoba is the better-known artist of the two, while in international contexts it is Ernest Mancoba who has gained prominence in recent years. The exhibition at HEIRLOOM traces the history behind the overlooked textile, which falls outside the respective practices of the two artists, yet embodies an artistic vision that characterised both.

*Textile Memories* is a group exhibition and presents further works by Majd Abdel Hamid, Julia Jupiter Child, Melanie Kitti and Oscar Lara. The exhibited works examine the current necessity – in light of the colonial past – to take new approaches to our understandings of people and communities. The Mancoba piece is brought into conversation with these contemporary works, which contextualise in each their own way the significance of art in relation to global, spiritual and craft traditions.

Majd Abdel Hamid uses embroidery as a form of meditation to process trauma in his artistic practice. In the video work *Double Sheet* (2021), Hamid unravels a sheet while listening to an interview with Syrian opposition leader Riad al-Turk. Al-Turk describes how he, each day throughout his 17-year solitary confinement, would create geometrical patterns on the floor of his cell using lentils from his soup, only to erase them again every evening; a ritual that elicited an inner sense of freedom in spite of his circumstances, and without leaving any trace. In addition to this work, the exhibition features two of Majd Abdel Hamid's embroidered works entitled *Borderlines Jordan- Iraq- Syria- Saudi Arabia* and *Borderlines, 4 countries*, in which he scales down and gives shape to border territories.

Melanie Kitti contributes to the exhibition with two of her organically-shaped stuffed works. The works are upholstered with

suede in varying colours upon which abstract colour fields meet an assemblage of images, including cats and insects. In these works, Kitti takes an intuitive approach to an image vocabulary that is rooted in her Nordic childhood memories, connecting old and inventing new narratives, which are retold in small pictorial fragments, drawing upon conflicted feelings around belonging. Kitti is interested in themes dealing with the relationship between interior and exterior worlds, and she seeks in her artistic practice to expand our understanding of what constitutes domesticity and home.

In his extensive artistic research project *Within Heritage Movements* (2013–21), Oscar Lara examines the history of the rare Peruvian pre-Columbian *Paracas* textiles: How a great number of them were stolen from an approximately 2,000-year-old grave in the 1930s in Peru and smuggled to Sweden, before eventually being returned over the course of the past 20 years. Both times, the exchange took place via diplomatic pathways. Baffled by these events, Lara explores how it is possible for him in his position as artist to arrange a similar journey. Lara has the textiles reproduced and sends them in the opposite direction – from Peru to Sweden. In the video piece, the painstaking work to replicate the craftsmanship stands in stark contrast to the framework for the textiles' travels. The film portrays the caring and meticulous approach of the conservators against the backdrop of violent geopolitical history, raising a number of questions about the colonial foundations on which Europe's ethnographic museums are built.

Julia Jupiter Child takes part in the exhibition with a number of collages from the series *Decolonial Textiles*. In Jupiter Child's own words: "In much of my practice, I work with textiles, because they are synonymous with the skin that surrounds our bodies and frames our thinking. But also because they honour various textures, colours and histories. I wish to show how it is possible to highlight decolonial processes through textiles." This production of works has its origins in the African Bantu peoples; specifically the Makone, Ndebele and Dogon peoples, of whom Jupiter Child is a descendent. The women in these tribes create murals and textiles consisting of geometrical and asymmetrical abstract patterns. One key intention underlying these techniques is to sustain a telepathic communication between women in the community that is not based on verbal exchange.

**Majd Abdel Hamid** (PS) is a visual artist who studied at Malmö Art Academy and the International Academy of Art in Palestine. He works across a wide range of media, examining themes such as the processing of trauma and national identity.

**Melanie Kitti** (SE) is a visual artist, poet and activist. She is a graduate of the Oslo National Academy of the Arts and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, as well as the Danish Academy of Creative Writing in Copenhagen. In August 2022, Kitti's first poetry collection, *Halvt urne, halvt gral* (Half Urn, Half Grail), was published by Gyldendal.

**Oscar Lara** (PE/SE) is a visual artist and graduate of the University of Wollongong, Australia. He is currently a PhD candidate at the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm. Lara's practice researches social structures and relationships, often recontextualizing ethnographic material to examine colonial power relations.

**Julia Jupiter Child** (MZ/DK) is a visual artist and performance artist who primarily draws her inspiration from Black art movements. She combines theatre, dance, spoken word and storytelling from her upbringing.

**Sonja Ferlov Mancoba** (DK/FR) was a Danish-born sculptor (1911–84). Her work encompasses painting, collage, drawing and, above all, sculpture. Running through Ferlov Mancoba's oeuvre is a transnational outlook. She was co-founder of the surrealist artists' association Linien (The Line) and member of the avant-garde movement CoBrA.

**Ernest Mancoba** (ZA/FR) was a South African-born visual artist who spent most of his life in Europe (1904–2002). Mancoba began as a sculptor but shifted towards drawing and painting, and it is this work he is today best known for. In addition to his artistic work, he was an outspoken social critic who advocated for universal humanism.

Research and written contributions by Winnie Sze, Åse Eg Jørgensen and Johanne Løgstrup.

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**Majd Abdel Hamid**

- 1 *Double Sheet* (2021)  
Video, 5.51 min
- 2 *Borderlines Jordan- Iraq- Syria- Saudi Arabia* (2021)  
Cotton thread on fabric, 24 × 18 cm
- 3 *Borderlines, 4 countries* (2021)  
Cotton thread on fabric, 24 × 18 cm

**Melanie Kitti**

- 4 *I borrowed someone else's udders* (2022)  
Suede, tusch and ink

**Oscar Lara**

- 5 *Within Heritage Movements* (2013-21)  
Video, 27 min
- 6 *Within Heritage Movements* (2013-21)  
Archival material from the Museum of World Culture,  
Gothenburg, Sweden

**Julia Jupiter Child**

- 7 *Nhumba [home]* (2022)  
Acrylic paint, denim fabric
- 8 *Dogon* (2022)  
Acrylic paint, denim fabric
- 9 *Makonde* (2022)  
Acrylic paint, denim fabric

**Sonja Ferlov Mancoba with Ernest Mancoba**

- 10 *Mancoba* (1951)  
Textile (used as a tablecloth)
- 11 Contextual material by Winnie Sze,  
Åse Eg Jørgensen and Johanne Løgstrup  
The material is available on [www.heirloom-caa.org](http://www.heirloom-caa.org)

