OPEN CALL: UNRAVEL - Artist/Researcher Residencies

Gawthorpe Textiles Collection × British Textile Biennial

Gawthorpe Textiles Collection (GTC) and the British Textile Biennial (BTB) are inviting three artists/researchers/curators to take part in Unravel, a new 18-month programme exploring the global histories held within GTC's collection.

Three six-month residencies will focus on:

- **West African Textiles**
- **South Asian Textiles**
- **Lancashire Export Textiles**

About *Unravel*

Unravel aims to give these areas of GTC's collection greater context, visibility and care, and improve how they are understood, interpreted and accessed.

GTC holds more than 30,000 textiles and craft objects spanning five centuries, from all over the world, including objects made in Lancashire and across the UK. Many objects entered the Collection at a time when information about their origins and cultural contexts was not recorded in the way we would expect today. As a result, there are significant gaps in what we know about parts of the Collection, including where objects came from, who made them, how they were made or used, and their cultural significance.

Unravel brings together visiting curators with specialist knowledge, artists and researchers, communities and GTC's collections team. The project focuses on West African and South Asian textiles, alongside textiles made in Lancashire for export to these and other global markets.

It is hoped that this research will develop a broader understanding of how materials, designs and skills moved between continents, and how these movements connect to histories of trade, colonialism, industry, migration and identity.

The residencies are intended to support the development of new work for British Textile Biennial 2028, which will explore how textiles act as vehicles of resistance to identities imposed by forces of power, including colonisation and marginalisation. Previous biennials have investigated how European powers used cloth, raw materials and fashion to extract wealth, destroy local economies and control populations across the globe; BTB28 will present textiles as platforms of resistance against these systems.

The Residencies

We are offering three six-month residencies, each focusing on a different area of GTC's collection. Artists/researchers will have supported access to the Collection and opportunities to connect with visiting curators, communities and project partners involved in Unravel.

We are interested in how these textiles were made, used and collected; the people and cultures behind them; and their connections to histories of trade, colonialism, migration and identity.

The residencies offer time to research, experiment and develop new work. In response to this brief we are not asking for a finished artwork proposal, but want to understand your interests, the questions you might explore and how you would approach the research.

1. West African Textiles

Research into GTC's under-explored West African textiles, their making, cultural significance and histories of collection.

2. South Asian Textiles

Exploring the material and cultural histories of GTC's South Asian textiles, including embroidery, weaving and dress, and their connections to identity, migration and South Asian communities in East Lancashire.

3. Lancashire Export Textiles

Investigating textiles made in Lancashire for international markets, including their connections to West African and South Asian textiles, and questions of influence, adaptation, appropriation and exchange.

Who can apply?

We welcome applications from artists, makers and researchers working across different disciplines. You do not need to be a textile artist or have previous experience of working with museum collections. BTB is not a biennial of textile art but a biennial about textiles. We are interested in practitioners working across contemporary art, design, writing, film, performance, sound, socially engaged practice, material research and other disciplines.

These collections contain complex and sometimes contested histories. We are looking for people who are curious about the Collection and interested in asking questions, making connections and bringing knowledge and new perspectives to it.

Budget & Support

Each residency has a total budget of £7,500:

- £5,000 Artist/Researcher Fee
- Up to £1,500 Materials Budget
- Up to £1,000 Travel Budget

Each residency will take place over approximately six months.

The travel budget must cover all travel-related costs connected to the residency, including transport and accommodation, visa costs etc. Given the limitations of this allocation, we expect applicants for these opportunities will be UK based. (Further opportunities to apply for residencies as part of this project will be made available later in 2026, which have a specific focus on artists/curators/designers working in the identified geographies directly.

The selected artists / researchers / curators will have supported access to the Collection and relevant collections information, with support from both GTC and BTB. We will also make introductions to relevant communities, researchers and project partners where appropriate.

Timeline

Three artists/researchers will be selected through this open call. Each residency will last approximately six months and take place within the wider 18-month Unravel programme. Exact dates are flexible and will be agreed with the selected artists/researchers following interview:

Open Call Deadline: Noon, 7th December 2026
Interviews: Week commencing 4th January 2027
Artists notified: Week commencing 11th January 2027
Residencies will take place between: February 2027 - February 2028 (with flexibility within this timeframe)

How to Apply

Please send **one compressed PDF** containing:

- **A short outline** of why the residency interests you and how it connects with your practice.
- **An initial proposal** for how you might approach the residency and the ideas or questions you would like to explore. We are interested in your ideas and approach rather than a fully resolved project proposal.
- Examples of no more than **four previous projects** that demonstrate why your practice is relevant to the opportunity, including images and/or links to film, sound or other documentation where appropriate.
- **A simple outline budget**, including artist fees/daily rates and indicative costs for materials, fabrication, travel and other expenses. If selected, we will work with you to develop a detailed project budget.
- Details of any **access requirements** for the application or interview process.

Applications should be sent to **emily@britishtextilebiennial.co.uk** by **noon, 7th December 2026.**

Please use one of the following email subject lines:

Unravel – West African Textiles
Unravel – South Asian Textiles
Unravel – Lancashire Export Textiles

If you are applying for more than one residency, please make this clear in your application and email subject.

FAQs

Can international artists/researchers apply?

Yes. We welcome applications from artists and researchers based outside the UK.

The residencies require in-person research with Gawthorpe Textiles Collection in Lancashire. Each residency includes a travel budget of up to £1,000, which must cover all travel-related costs, including flights or other transport, accommodation and visa costs where required. International applicants should consider these costs carefully when preparing their proposed budget.

Do I need to be based in Lancashire during the residency?

No. You do not need to be based in Lancashire or the UK for the full six months. But spending time with the Collection in person is an important part of the residency. We will agree a suitable pattern of visits with each selected artist/researcher, depending on their research and where they are based.

Can I apply for more than one residency?

Yes. You can apply for more than one, but we can only offer **one residency per person**.

Do I need experience of working with museum collections?

No. Previous museum or archive experience is not required.

Do I need to be a textile artist?

No. We welcome artists and researchers working in any medium whose practice connects with the histories and questions explored through textiles.

Do I need to propose an artwork?

No. We want to understand **how you would approach the research** and what interests you about the Collection. We expect ideas and new work to develop during the residency.

Will work developed during the residency be shown at BTB28?

The residencies are intended to support the development of new work for **British Textile Biennial 2028**. We are not asking applicants to propose a finished artwork now. How the work might be presented at BTB28 will develop during the residency in conversation with GTC and BTB.

Access

We want our application process and residencies to be accessible. If you have access requirements or need to apply in a different format, please contact Emily at **emily@britishtextilebiennial.co.uk** and we will work with you to find a suitable way to apply.

Gawthorpe Textiles Collection
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