

In August 2022, The Whitworth acquired 'Chain Reactions' (2021) a work for their permanent collection by Sarah-Joy Ford - marking their first acquisition by an 'out' lesbian artist. Sarah-Joy Ford is an artist and researcher who uses textiles to represent Queer histories and archives. Her work explores the community through quilting and textiles, subverting traditional practices and preconceptions around craft and textile work, these symbols of domesticity are threaded through with Queer imagery and context. Chain Reactions takes its name from the iconic 'Chain Reaction' which was the UK's first lesbian S&M club in Vauxhall, London.

Chain Reactions, like much of Sarah-Joy's practice, is a celebration of lesbian iconography, history and activism and makes a unique addition to The Whitworth's rich and growing collection of Queer artworks. The work can be described as a "digital quilt", a melange of both digital and traditional form, to achieve a 'log cabin quilt' style, emphasizing themes of domesticity, heart and community amongst women, both in traditional and contemporary senses.

The work is a snapshot of Sarah-Joy's research perspective, a dive into her inspirations and femme aesthetics, featuring imagery that she has plucked from her research across Lesbian archives. These motifs thread all throughout her works as symbols of pride, community and memory. Through her research and practice, Sarah-Joy uses quilting as a methodology to explore these lesbian archives and histories. Chain Reactions delves into the personal archives of Karen Fisch, an activist, archivist, 'Rebel Dyke' and Drag King, known for her 'Frankie Sinatra' Drag King persona and most recently, the Rebel Dykes documentary film. Created originally for the Rebel Dykes Art and Archives Exhibition, Chain Reactions connects pieces of lesbian archival history to form one towering quilt, which serves as a device for Queer memory, activism and empowerment. The quilt shines a spotlight on hidden cultures, lesbian intimacies and legacy, originally to represent the underexposed lesbian communities in 1980's London, of which Fisch was an integral part of. Amongst the embroidered images is a central portrait of a leather jacket wearing Fisch, with 'DYKE' pasted across her chest, adapted from a

photograph taken by photographer Lola Flash. Motorbikes, love making, handcuffs, leatherwear and a labrys make up some of the embroidered images, all evocative symbols of lesbian culture and desire linked to Fisch and her community in 80's London.

The Whitworth houses the second largest collection of textiles of any UK institute after The V&A, yet Chain Reactions is a departure from some of the period styles in The Whitworth's collection. With its bold emphasis on Queer and Lesbian community, Sarah-Joy uses quilting in particular as a means of communicating Queer history and identity and bringing the art of quilting into contemporary space and context with an acknowledgement of the craft and women's histories that came before it. Sarah-Joy Ford's perspective, practice and research across lesbian archives is truly unique - her featuring as the first 'out' lesbian artist to be acquired by The Whitworth is a milestone of the ongoing 'Queering the Whitworth' mission and a step towards a more diverse Queer representation at the gallery.

Chain Reactions represents the beginning of a series of acquisitions by The Whitworth of Sarah-Joy's textiles, with a collection of scarves coming soon. "Memoirs of a Drag King" (2020) is a series of three digitally printed silk scarves, also based on the personal collection of Karen Fisch, featuring further imagery picked from Fisch's own archives and collections of lesbian memorabilia.