

the Whitworth

Audio Descriptions transcript

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AUDIO DESCRIPTIONS

Audio descriptions of artworks from the collection of the Whitworth, The University of Manchester.



AUDIO DESCRIPTION: It must be nice to fall in love... by Raisa Kabir (2017)

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This is an audio description of '*It must be nice to fall in love*' -- a woven textile artwork. Created in 2017 by Raisa Kabir, a multi-disciplinary artist, weaver, and writer; Kabir has Bangladeshi heritage, was born in Manchester UK, and currently works in London.

The work was woven on a 16-shaft Harris hand loom and its creation formed part of Raisa Kabir's research into the South Asian textile collection here at The Whitworth; conducted when she was an artist in residence at the gallery in 2016.

In '*It must be nice to fall in love*', Kabir employs an intricate use of a weaving technique called *jamdani*, which has a heritage traced to East Bengal and is now part of Bangladesh. Jamdani is a hand weaving process that has a history going back several centuries and was negatively affected by the import of cheaper made textiles during Britain's colonial rule. The process involves the weft yarn inlaid by hand to create a decorative motif which creates a supplementary weft that appears to float on the surface. In weaving terminology, the warp refers to the vertical threads on a loom for weaving, and the weft is the horizontal threads woven across, which intersect with the warp to create the cloth

If we were standing in front of this textile, we would notice the artwork is mounted on a rectangular portrait cream-coloured board 140cm x 50cm covered by a calico cotton fabric. On the left side of this board, there is an allowance of 10cm; on the upper right, slightly more of the board is showing. The artwork itself is approximately 140cm long by 20cm wide at its shortest section, and 30cm wide at its widest section on its lower half, creating an L shape.

Using yarns of cotton and silk, the textile artwork employs striking contrasts of black, white and red yarn. The colour red has been used by the artist to signify violence and conflict and was dyed using a natural dye called cochineal, which is an historical dye made from crushed scale insects.

Beginning at the top of the work, we notice there is a fringe of about 20cm of white warp, which is knotted together in looped sections. This is followed by ten centimetres of woven white cotton. Then a small section has been woven in black yarn of about 1cm. Because the black yarn used is incredibly fine, the white warp shows slightly on the surface.

In the top half of the artwork, a section is woven in silk yarn of a deep, blood red colour. This midsection of the work pulses with a bright vibrant red. The background red yarn is woven to create a subtle pattern of very small, slightly raised oval forms that vary in size and shape. It has also been woven in variable lengths at either side to create an irregular and tactile fringe.

Inlaid in this middle section of the piece there is a silhouette of a map of pre partition India woven in mainly black yarn, which has the same weaving pattern of oval shapes. This is in the centre of the patterned red cloth. Red and black yarn spills out from the top half of the map design, which correspond with the geographical areas of the 1947 partition of India. This was where an East and West Pakistan was created and separated across the two sides of the Indian

subcontinent. Also marked by texture is the contested region of Kashmir in the North of the map.

The weaving techniques used by Kabir creates areas of texture due to the loose threads of yarn. Red yarn is incorporated in the textured areas with the black as a supplementary weft, making the red yarn a much deeper darker colour and represents the blood spilt from years of war and conflict.

Almost halfway down on the right-hand side, the artist has added a section of thicker, unbleached cream coloured yarn as warp. This widens the width of the artwork by a quarter size, resulting in its L-shape. At the top of this right-hand section, the artist has used a finer red yarn which is distorted by the weaving process and allows much of the thicker white warp to show in variable lines. The ends of the red weft have been left quite long and are overlaying as a loop on top on the fabric. This loop joins into the red patterned area to its left. Further down on the right, there is a tiny irregular dot of red, woven into a background of white like a speck of blood.

Central to the work there is a 2nd map shape representing post partition India. This map shape has been woven in red silk. There appears to be missing areas of the map where Pakistan and Bangladesh should be on the east and west sides, following the 1971 war of liberation. This time the map is much more subtle and very distorted in shape due to the weaving techniques used by the artist. The surface of the map motif is highly textured across its whole surface by loose threads of red yarn and has been woven on top of a background of mainly white.

This yarn hangs very loosely and in unkempt, tangled loops from the surface of the 2nd map-shaped motif, gradually creating fine squiggly lines of yarn that becomes sparser further down the piece. The yarn falls on top of a white woven background; which is approximately 50cm long, where there are a few intricate dots of red and a tiny stain of dye on the right hand side.

Some of the red yarn also lays behind the work and can be seen through the white woven cloth. Both these two map sections are separated by a very thin woven line of solid black. At the bottom of the piece there is a loose fringe of 8cm where the cloth has not been woven and a few strands of weft yarn hangs loosely. Throughout the piece the artist has woven the weft yarns so the edges are not perfectly neat and there are irregular lengths of yarn at the edges.

The different weaving techniques the artist has employed for this work represents the shifting borders and conflict created by India's partition and the social and political upheavals of the Indian subcontinent during the 20th Century. The act of partition and the aftermath created a diaspora of people to Britain, many of whom worked in the textile mills of the North of England. The act of weaving and the yarn come together to physically and metaphorically map spaces of time and memory and their associated tensions.

In this way, 'It must be nice to fall in love' re-utilises the ways textiles have been crucial in the construction of powerful ideas surrounding nationalism and identity.

