

Ottawa International
Animation Festival

Festival international
d'animation d'Ottawa



25-29 September/
septembre, 2024



**Showtimes**
14+Thursday, Sept 26
11:00 am
Arts Court TheatreFriday, Sept 27
5:00 pm
Arts Court TheatreJeudi, 26 Sept
11h00
Cour des Arts ThéâtreVendredi, 27 Sept
17h00
Cour des Arts Théâtre

Threads and Fibres: Animated Textiles

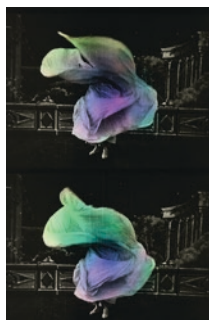
By Alla Gadassik

Social Sciences and Humanities
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Throughout the 1890s, Parisian audiences flocked to see the spectacular stage performances of American dancer Loie Fuller. Draped in hundreds of yards of delicate silk that she manipulated like an undulating screen, Fuller created fluid figures reminiscent of swirling clouds, blooming orchids, and fluttering butterflies. These striking visual effects were amplified by beams of coloured light projected onto the rippling silk. Fuller's performances anticipated the possibilities of animated abstraction grounded in textile materials and forms. Early cinema innovators like Georges Méliès, the Lumière brothers, Thomas Edison, and Alice Guy-Blaché strived to recreate her hypnotic metamorphoses by recording her imitators and hand colouring the film prints with bold and saturated colours.



Danse Serpentine (1900) by Gaumont Studio and *Loie Fuller* (1905) by Pathé studio. Both hand-coloured films feature Fuller's imitators.

Inspired by Loie Fuller's stage performances and their cinematic adaptations, *Threads and Fibres* unfurls the creative potential of fabric in animation. The artists featured in this curated collection of shorts turn to textiles as pliable materials for animating characters and environments; reveal affinities between textile and animated patterns; and use animation to manipulate the very fabric of moving-image media.

Like live-action cinema, stop-motion puppet animation often relies on sewn costumes and props, but in animation these textile materials can be imbued with their own movement and rhythm. Kihachiro Kawamoto's *Kataku* (*House of Flame*, 1979) is a remarkable achievement in activating fabric's expressive potential. Following conventions of classic Japanese puppetry and theatre, the main characters wear exquisitely embroidered robes that convey feelings and desires distinct from their carefully composed faces. As pious maiden Unai-Otome watches two suitors escalate their rivalry for her hand, her luxurious kimono billows frantically in the winds of competing passions. Strands of her hair and clothing are loosened by forces of uninvited desire, lashing at her glimmering prayer beads and disturbing her inner peace. This scene, like much of the film, is styled after silk paintings, with soft background washes that gently bleed into the atmosphere. Silk plays an important role in this film as a translucent screen between carnal and spiritual realms, from the delicate silk fan that unsuccessfully shields the maiden from possessive gazes to the gauzy cinematography that partly veils compositions from the viewer.

Oh Willy... (2012) by filmmaking duo Emma De Swaef and Marc James Roels also fashions a textile material into a connective tissue between physical and psychic realms. When the film's protagonist returns to a naturist colony to witness and mourn his mother's death, he removes his tailored clothing to reveal a plump body sculpted from felted wool. Felt puppets and sets are often warmly lit to amplify their fuzzy textures and convey a sense of homey comfort. *Oh Willy...* relies on this convention to form an analogy between nature and the maternal body – alternately soft and scratchy, soothing and abrasive. When the grieving son squeezes through the torn mesh of a perimeter fence and ventures into the bush in pursuit of his forgotten inner child, the felted wilderness envelops his hirsute body like a vast woolly womb.



Stylish sock puppet ensembles in Osbert Parker's *Clothes* (1988).

Whereas *Kataku* and *Oh Willy...* feature cleverly dressed and undressed protagonists, Osbert Parker's *Clothes* (1988) dispenses with costumed puppets and turns to items of clothing as compelling characters in and of themselves. Manipulating garments and accessories on the floor of his home studio, Parker conjures a sharply dressed musical trio playing an animated rendition of 1940s swing hit "Elks' Parade." Honouring the spirit of jazz performance, *Clothes* balances between planned structure and playful improvisation. The garments move together in tightly coordinated arrangements to form distinctly human figures and gestures, but each item also twists and folds independently in joyful syncopation of flopping sleeves and runaway ties. Choreographing his pliable materials from above, Parker participates as an invisible performer and a conductor of stylish sock-puppet ensembles.

Adorning the body and the home, textile materials and patterns often encode a community's geographic and cultural history. Nina Sabnani's animated documentary *Tanko Bole Chhe* (*The Stitches Speak*, 2009) illustrates how animation can participate in reviving communal and personal

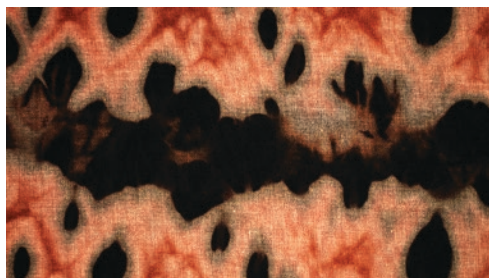
stories embedded in traditional textile handicrafts. *Tanko Bole Chhe* profiles an artisan centre in Gujarat dedicated to the preservation and economic resilience of Kutch embroidery and appliqué techniques. Sabnani adapts appliqué – the technique of sewing fabric cutouts onto a larger background canvas, like a textile collage – into a style of digital cutout animation. Figures and backgrounds from embroidered tapestries depicting the centre's history are digitally excised and stitched together into animated scenes that accompany the voices of interviewed participants. As the participants share memories of wartime displacement and earthquake disaster, sliding fabric edges and stitches mark their movement across geographical space, lived time, and national borders. Character bodies are animated by stretching and warping the digital cutouts like tensile fabric, and the compositions shift or rotate like multidirectional arrangements of many Kutch embroidered designs.



Digital appliqué in Nina Sabnani's *Tanko Bole Chhe* (2009).

The knowledge embedded in artisanal textiles, from their intricate fabrication techniques to the meaning of specific motifs and patterns, is often transmitted across generations through family and mentorship ties. When these ties are disrupted, vital material expertise and cultural memory begin to fade. One of the speakers in *Tanko Bole Chhe* laments the absence of another woman: "all I know about her past is through her work." A similar sentiment guides Lindsay McIntyre's film *Seeing Her* (2020), in which the artist connects with her Inuit maternal lineage through an inherited amauti made by her great-grandmother Kumaa'naaq. Taking up analog cinema as a form of handicraft, McIntyre tenderly studies the amauti's beaded patterns with her camera, hand-processes the celluloid rolls, and strings together the filmed beads and fibres into shimmering sequences. *Seeing Her* is a piercing rejoinder to decades of ethnographic and experimental films that recorded and animated indigenous textiles in search of universal forms and mystical revelations. McIntyre shares experimental cinema's interest in graphic abstraction and transfixing patterns, but she never loses sight of the irreducible, tangible connection between the material and the woman who made and wore it.

Textile handicrafts, frequently developed and sustained by women, have played an important role in mediating social and political belonging. Like *Tanko Bole Chhe* and *Seeing Her*, Jordan Wong's *Mom's Clothes* (2018) turns to clothing to reflect on inter-generational and gendered experience. Made with hand-dyed fabrics and clothes sourced from the animator's mother, acquaintances, and thrift shops, *Mom's Clothes* offers a moving autobiographical portrait of the proverbial queer closet. Using under-the-camera photography, Wong magnifies repeating graphic motifs and assembles them into buzzing, whirling surfaces that mimic the nervous energy of budding intimacies and unspoken truths. As Wong's voice regretfully confesses to years of muted outfits and dampened feelings, the fabrics fulfil his desire for queer acceptance with bursts of flamboyant patterns and saturated colours. *Mom's Clothes* draws on recognizably queer fashion aesthetics – fierce prints and sparkling glitter – before shifting to subtler references in its appeal to broaden the cultural palette of the gay wardrobe.



Inherited threads and patterns in Lindsay McIntyre's *Seeing Her* (2020) and Jordan Wong's *Mom's Clothes* (2018).

By tugging at the seams of conventional filmmaking methods, experimental animators can accentuate the textile qualities of moving-image media. Len Lye's influential cameraless animation techniques treat analog film strips like celluloid ribbons suitable for dyeing, stencilling, and stamping patterns. For his film *Color Cry* (1953), Lye layered pieces of fabric and 16mm celluloid film before exposing them to light, producing photogrammed sequences that amplify the materials' warp and weft. Paired with Sonny Terry's wailing blues harmonica, the animated passages hum and buzz with palpable energy. Woven meshes, twisting threads, and errant fibres trapped in the celluloid's emulsion intertwine to transform film into synthetic cloth.

Digital animation is also indebted to textile media, not least because of the influence of Jacquard loom and Navajo weaving on early computer punch cards, integrated circuits, and the display matrix.

Experimental design studio Zeitguised deepens this technological relationship by testing the possibilities

of procedurally generated fabric. For their short film *empancipath* (2017), Zeitguised collaborated with textile design studio Kvadrat to produce a study of simulated textiles that are equally photorealistic and implausible. Virtually sculpted objects and planes are wrapped entirely in a virtual replica of Kvadrat's signature Canvas fabric, which stretches around corners and curves like an elastic material. The animated threads and knots coincide with the pixelated surface of a typical digital display, ensuring that the speed and resolution at the time of viewing will visibly impact the perceived tensility and coarseness of the canvas.

From the soft and pliable qualities of fabric, to production techniques like embroidery and quilting, textiles share affinity with analog and digital animation handicraft. Working with organic and synthetic fibre materials, the artists featured in *Threads and Fibres* embrace textiles as a tactile medium laden with material and cultural history. Their films use fabric to fashion textured worlds, animate compositions inspired by textile patterns, and explore the encoded meanings of clothing.