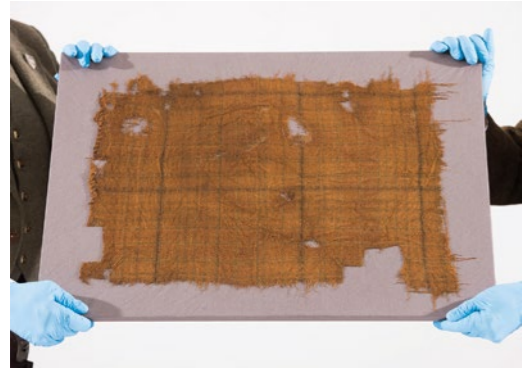


# Tartan

Jennifer McLaren



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- 1  
Glen Affric tartan, Scotland's oldest-known true tartan discovered by The Scottish Tartans Authority to go on display for the first time at V&A Dundee's Tartan exhibition
- 2  
Intersectional Family by Olubiyi Thomas at V&A Dundee Tartan

## V&A Dundee Until 14 January

Scotland's design museum, V&A Dundee, celebrates its fifth birthday in September and is marking the occasion with *Tartan*, the first exhibition curated by the team at the museum, alongside consultant curator and author of a renowned book on the subject, Jonathan Faiers. This vibrant explosion of life and colour takes a meticulous look at Scotland's unmistakable textile. And it's the first exhibition on tartan in Scotland for more than 30 years, the last being at Edinburgh's Talbot Rice Gallery in 1989.

Tartan can be bold, brash and overwhelming, so to have so much of it in one place (over 300 objects) makes a powerful statement. Losing yourself in the delightfully discordant displays, however, is truly immersive. Just like the mirrored corridor where colours resonate in kaleidoscopic swathes, the exhibition reflects on the fabric's past, present and future. And, organised around five themes, it's a conversation as well as an education.

From kings to kitsch, riots to relics, there apparently isn't much tartan hasn't done in its hundreds of years of

existence, and the pieces on show range from fashion and architecture to art and film. The fabric's order and precision are examined, the 'rules of the grid' explained, and echoed in works such as Donald Judd's 1992–93 untitled woodcut prints, which revere uniform simplicity.

But disorder howls just as loudly, from the punk-inspired garments of Vivienne Westwood and Louise Gray to a disquieting piece from Alexander McQueen's 'Highland Rape' (1995) collection, referencing the Highland Clearances. Elsewhere, an unassuming piece of brown-tinged material in the exhibition's first room is the Glen Affric tartan (c.1500–1600), on public display for the first time. Discovered in a Highland peat bog, it's the oldest-known specimen of true tartan.

New works include the haunting 'Intersectional Family' (2023) in which designer Olubiyi Thomas has dressed figures in a new tartan reflecting his cross-cultural identity. They hover above the floor, wearing copper masks that represent the commodification of

enslaved people. The curatorial team also launched The People's Tartan appeal in order to feature pieces belonging to members of the public, including a 1976 Hillman Imp Caledonian with a tartan-inspired interior.

And, in tartan's unique way of evolving to meet the needs of the modern day, a kilted dressing table has taken no time in fashioning itself as a prime selfie spot, capturing the poser's reflection in its oval vanity mirror.

*Jennifer McLaren is an arts writer based in Dundee*

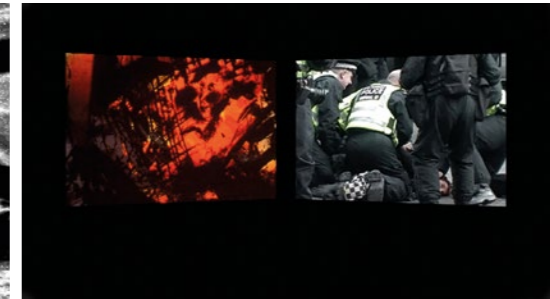
**Tartan**  
V&A Dundee  
1 Riverside Esplanade, Dundee, DD1 4EZ  
T: (0)1382 411 611 | [vam.ac.uk/dundee](http://vam.ac.uk/dundee)  
Open: Daily 10am–5pm

# Unravelling Times

Greg Thomas



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- 1  
Lis Rhodes, *Ambiguous Journeys* still 2018
- 2  
Lis Rhodes, *Dissonance and Disturbance* still

## The Hunterian, Glasgow Until 15 October

'Will exposure bring reason in unravelling times?' This is the question posed towards the end of Lis Rhodes' *Ambiguous Journeys*, a film-poem of sorts, and a searing 40-minute indictment of contemporary casualised and indentured labour around the world, a system often exploiting migrants and refugees. The artist's cut-glass voiceover draws much of the attention, swivelling between evocative allegory and documentary-style exposition. The visual element is mostly rough photo-collage, with snatches of sudden naturalistic clarity. Towards the end, a static shot shows an outside wall in some barren place that looks like an internment or processing facility, with low-roofed buildings in the background; the words 'God Help Me' are scrawled on the surface in marker pen.

Rhodes rose to prominence with films such as 'Pictures on Pink Paper' (1982), also included in *The Hunterian's* new group show *Unravelling Times*, alongside works by contemporary Glasgow-based artists Anne-Marie Copestake, Francis McKee and Iman Tajik.

As outlined in Marcus Jack's catalogue essay, this earlier composition partly traces Rhodes' movement away from the strictures of so-called structuralist or materialist cinema, a late-modernist style which emphasised the materiality of photochemical film through various formal experiments. The 1982 piece also reflects the artist's sense of the burgeoning significance of women's roles in contemporary protest movements, notably at Greenham Common.

While there remains a strong strain of defiance and hope in Rhodes' earlier piece, the later works on display, including 'Dissonance and Disturbance' (2012) which runs in sequence with 'Ambiguous Journeys' (2019), are more gruelling and pessimistic affairs. The 2012 film has a conceptual architecture that's harder to prop together, connecting Israeli attacks on a flour mill in Gaza with footage of protestors being kettled and restrained by police in London. There's a sense of the insidious grip of Western or Western-backed police and military forces across the world, abetted by the media.

Rhodes' themes of displacement and migration form effective conversations with Tajik's 'Bordered Miles', photographs of the artist grappling with a golden flag in rural landscapes, and a multi-channel video-work showing his day-long walk from Glasgow to Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre. Meanwhile, McKee's photographs of protest and resistance, and Copestake's beautiful film 'A love' (2019), which explores moments of domestic intimacy including in a 'temporary community', offer nooks of respite within the emotional terrain of the show.

*Greg Thomas is a critic and editor based in Glasgow*

**Unravelling Times**  
*The Hunterian*  
University of Glasgow, 82 Hillhead Street, Glasgow, G12 8QQ  
T: (0)141 330 4221 | [gla.ac.uk/hunterian](http://gla.ac.uk/hunterian)  
Open: Tuesday to Sunday 10am–5pm