

John Frederick Lewis & Orientalism Now and Then

This is a project creating artworks inspired by the English 19th century orientalist painter, John Frederick Lewis & *Orientalism* then and now. It is part of the Art Workers Guild (AWG) outreach programme in partnership with East London Textile Arts, (ELTA) and The Watts Gallery, aimed at bringing crafts practice to wider audiences and participants. It is aimed at communities that do not easily access arts institutions, including ethnic minorities at present under-represented by the AWG. The Watts Gallery has an exhibition of Lewis's work running from June to November 3rd 2019 with work from this project displayed from 30th September to the end of the show. A larger exhibition of the project's work will be held at the AWG from November to mid-February 2020.

Both exhibitions will display textiles, bookbinding and other art forms created by participants from ELTA working with members of the Art Workers' Guild. The main exhibit will be an Octagon Gown decorated with over 200 hundred embroidered octagons made by participants of the project throughout the last year. Members of the guild have then created garments, scarves, hangings, bookbindings from these embroideries, printed and original. The embroideries have been made by highly skilled women, those less skilled, and a long established textile group of adults with learning disabilities - all groups from many different ethnic backgrounds. A further outreach level has been added, by the inclusion of textile groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Lebanon.

This will be the first of a number of in-depth outreach projects that The Art Workers' Guild plans to run on an ongoing basis. Work will have been created over a 15 month period, with trips to museums, visits and teaching by AWG crafts people, and lunchtime and evening conversations where ideas behind the project have been discussed. The aim is to create a community based creative learning programme where people can learn about crafts in depth. It is not about day courses and quick results, but about developing collaborative works of art, over extended periods of time allowing participants to work at their own pace and in their own time. Classes are free and close to home. It emphasises textile skills, creativity and making exhibitions, both local that share work with participants' families and communities, and those in museums and art institutions displaying to wider audiences. Projects between highly skilled professionals, and amateurs making for love, focus on themes, carefully chosen to explore issues in the way we live, and to resonate with as many people as possible. These are not projects only about process, therapy and transferable skills, but also about creating high quality artworks.