

# Labour of Love - Rachel Dedman

[\*Labour of Love: New Approaches to Palestinian Embroidery\*](#)

curated by Rachel Dedman

[\*\*The Palestinian Museum, Birzeit, Palestine\*\*](#)

**18th March - 31st January 2019**

In a moment of heightened global conversation around women's rights and dominion over their bodies, *Labour of Love* explores Palestinian embroidery through the lenses of gender, labour, symbol, capital and class. Structured around these thematic poles, the exhibition traces Palestinian embroidery's shift from an historic, individual practice, associated with self-expression, to a cultural artefact and marker of national identity. The exhibition examines the politicisation of Palestinian embroidery, its circulation as image in paintings and posters, the implications of its commodification, and the nature of its production by NGOs today.

The second exhibition by curator Rachel Dedman for the Palestinian Museum, *Labour of Love* expands upon the Museum's 2016 satellite exhibition, [\*At the Seams: A Political History of Palestinian Embroidery\*](#), Dar el-Nimer for Arts and Culture, Beirut. Building on years of research and fieldwork, this new edition seeks to critically re-orient approaches to Palestinian embroidery's history and contemporary significance.

*Labour of Love* unfolds a material history of Palestine, telling little-heard stories through the intimate catalyst of clothing. At the heart of the exhibition are 100 historic dresses and accessories, drawn from every region of Palestine. These range from militant, nationalistic 'Intifada dresses', which rendered women's bodies active sites of political resistance during the First Intifada; to a dress donated from one woman

to another after the Nakba, patched with cloth from a sack of UNRWA flour. Other objects speak to the melding of foreign fashion with traditional detail as early as 1921, and to the use of embroidery in the self-fashioning of Palestinians in 1970s Beirut, through polaroids of bouffanted women in pink embroidered jumpsuits—the earliest designs of Inaash al-Mukhayim. Though men are generally not perceived as embroiderers, the exhibition features objects and testimonies from men who embroidered inside Israeli jails. Their work mingles expressions of national pride with romantic love, challenging reductive definitions of embroidery as ‘women’s work’.

Placing dresses in conversation with archival photographs, posters, paintings, music and newly-commissioned video, *Labour of Love* brings together diverse narrators and narratives, casting fresh light on paradigmatic cultural material.

*Labour of Love* also includes a parallel public program of lectures and events, an educational program tailored for children, and a catalogue written by Rachel Dedman and edited by Shuruq Harb. Launched in October, the publication features commissioned photographs by Kayané Antreassian and written contributions from anthropologists Chiara de Cesari and Kirsten Scheid, and art historian Kristine Khouri. The show is designed by London-based exhibition designers, Plaid, with graphic design by Sara Sukhun, and film commissioned from artist Maeve Brennan.