

## M4C Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA)

<b>PROJECT TITLE</b>				
Embroidering Empire: Women, Textiles, and Colonial Collecting, 1872-1950				
<b>LEAD INSTITUTION</b>				
Name of HEI institution	De Montfort University			
Lead regional city	Birmingham <input type="checkbox"/>	Coventry <input type="checkbox"/>	Leicester <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Nottingham <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>PARTNER ORGANISATION</b>				
Name of organisation	Royal School of Needlework			
Website	<a href="https://royal-needlework.org.uk/">https://royal-needlework.org.uk/</a>			
<b>THE PROJECT</b>				
<p>Nineteenth- and twentieth-century British women collected and creatively engaged with ideas of Empire through embroidery. Working closely with the collections of the Royal School of Needlework (RSN), and particularly Georgina Annie Grove's collecting of a millennium of global textiles, this M4C CDA will investigate the relationship between embroidery and Empire.</p> <p>Britain's imperial legacies are widely recognised in country houses, statues, and national institutions. Yet the ways in which Empire was collected, experienced, and creatively engaged with within the home, and especially by women, remains relatively understudied. This project builds on work which has explored the impact of the East India Company and Empire on eighteenth-century domestic interiors (Finn and Smith, 2018) and embroidery (Smith, 2024). Bringing this work forwards into the nineteenth and twentieth century, this project interrogates the role of embroidery in mediating understandings of and creative engagements with Empire.</p> <p>The Grove book, a volume filled with hundreds of textiles collected from all corners of the world, will form the central starting point for the project. Collected by Georgina Annie Grove, the wife of a brigadier-general who served in British India, this volume represents a millennium of textile history, which Grove placed in conversation with snippets of contemporary domestic interior magazines. This example of women's colonial collecting will be contextualised against textiles given to the RSN by Queen Mary of Teck and British and Indian textiles connected to Queen Victoria's jubilees and role as Empress of India. The examination of these objects will help to untangle the complicated relationship between women and textile collecting and production in the British Empire.</p> <p>This project addresses urgent questions around the ways in which embroidery acted as a microcosm of broader colonial encounters and legacies:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) In what ways has English embroidery mediated colonial relationships?</li> <li>2) To what extent do textiles help elucidate the role of women as participants in Empire?</li> <li>3) How did colonial collecting intersect with the design and use of embroidered textiles in nineteenth-century domestic interiors?</li> </ol>				
<b>THE PROCESS</b>				
<p>The project will employ a material culture approach (Prown, 1982; Dyer, 2021) and will be especially attentive to the significance of materiality in shaping ideas of Empire. The student will work closely</p>				

with the RSN collections, contributing to cataloguing and mining the collections for their research using deep object analysis. This research will follow a Prownian approach of description, deduction, and speculation. The project will focus primarily on the Grove book and other items in the RSN collection which were connected to nineteenth- and twentieth-century women collectors. Alongside this material culture approach, archival methods will be used to delve into the RSN's archive and other archives with holdings relating to the RSN, Grove, and further women who travelled and collected textiles. Both the RSN's records and those at other archives offer a rich repository of information about the RSN's many patrons, customers, stitchers and associated designers.

## THE PLACE

The PhD student will spend approximately 12 weeks per year working at the RSN to catalogue and research within their collections. DMU's Dr Serena Dyer (Material Culture History), Dr Emily Baines (Global Textile History) and Dr Laura Beltrán-Rubio (Colonial Dress and Textile History) will provide the academic expertise and guidance alongside RSN's curatorial team. Additionally, the PhD student will add to the RSN's outreach and curatorial life through contributions to the RSN's public programming, social media outreach, the RSN blog, the annual exhibition programme, and to curate a digital exhibition. The student will also have additional paid teaching opportunities at RSN, where they will be embedded in curatorial life. At DMU, the student will benefit from a vibrant community of dress and textile researchers and PhD students. They will participate in the annual Design Cultures symposium and will be encouraged to co-organise an M4C conference around colonial material cultures with peers across the consortium.

## THE PERSON

Applicants should have a background in material culture, fashion / textile history, gender history, or colonial histories. And interest in museums and curatorial work would also be an advantage. Individuals with a material culture or fashion / textile history background do not need to have knowledge of colonial histories; similarly, applicants with a background in gender or colonial history do not need to have knowledge of material culture or fashion / textile history. No specialist knowledge of embroidery is required.

**HOW TO FIND OUT MORE.** Please email the lead university supervisor if you want to find out more about this CDA project.

Lead HEI Supervisor:	Dr Serena Dyer
Lead HEI Supervisor Email:	<a href="mailto:serena.dyer@dmu.ac.uk">serena.dyer@dmu.ac.uk</a>