

MAKIKO HARRIS

‘NEEDLE DANCE’

MAKIKO HARRIS PRESENTS A BOLD UNDERWATER FILM AND MULTIMEDIA EXHIBITION EXPLORING FATE, FEMINISM, AND THE POWER OF CONNECTION

17TH FEBRUARY – 2ND MARCH

AT THE ART'OTEL LONDON HOXTON (GALLERY AND AUDITORIUM)

PRIVATE VIEW | 21ST FEBRUARY | 6PM-10PM

THE
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LONDON

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Towering needle sculptures, dancers entwined in brilliant red rope, and a captivating underwater setting converge in *Needle Dance*, the latest work by American-Japanese artist Makiko Harris. This five-minute conceptual art film is premiering from 17 February to 2 March at art'otel London Hoxton. The film and corresponding sculpture and two-dimensional artwork exhibition is co-presented in collaboration between art'otel and Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery which represents Harris.

‘**Needle Dance**’ was created in collaboration with **Director Peter Gray** (renowned as a prolific and imaginative image-maker, contributing to editorial shoots for a range of luxury and style titles including *Italian*, *American* and *British Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*), **Costume Designer Deborah Milner** (noted for her sculptural and innovative couture, she also consulted for Alexander McQueen realising some of his most iconic showpieces), and **Composer and Executive Producer Carlos Basilisco**. The ambitious violin score that accompanies the film was also co-composed and performed by Harris.



MAKIKO'S WORK DELVES INTO THE INTERPLAY OF AUTONOMY, FATE, AND DESIRE, CONTINUING HER FAR-REACHING EXPLORATION OF CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST IDENTITY.

art'otel
LONDON HOXTON

KH
Kristin Hjellegjerde

Makiko Harris, an interdisciplinary artist exploring themes of feminism, identity, and desire, has earned significant recognition for her work across painting, moving image, sculpture, and sound. Harris earned her Masters in Contemporary Art Practice from the Royal College of Art London in 2023. Her first artist film premiered at Tate Modern in March 2023 as part of the Tate Lates series, a significant milestone that signalled her rapid rise in the international art scene. Harris has received numerous prestigious accolades, including the Grand Prize at The HIGH Prize for Excellence (2023), receiving a grant from the Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation (2022), and residencies such as PADA Portugal (2024) and the Buinho Creative Residency (2022). A finalist for the Ingram Prize in 2024, her sculpture *Sewing Needle 2* (Black and Gold) earned critical acclaim. Her work is held in private collections worldwide, and in 2024 was placed in the permanent collection of The Bunker Museum, Florida. She has exhibited across the U.S., UK, Japan, Canada, Austria, Singapore, and Germany, with notable solo exhibitions such as *Lacquered Rebellion* at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London (2024), and group exhibitions such as *Confront and Constrain* at Ames Yavuz Gallery, Singapore (2024). In 2024, Harris was a featured speaker at the Bonhams x The Art of Seeing Magazine event in Munich, Germany, and that same year, delivered an artist talk in conversation with curator Marcelle Joseph. Her work has been featured in the HIGH Fashion Collection (2023) and in the San Francisco Symphony's 2021–2022 season campaign, highlighting her dynamic presence across the arts and cultural sectors.



[A Cinematic Immersion: The Exhibition at art'otel Hoxton](#)

The art'otel Hoxton provides a dynamic stage for Harris's vision, offering both a surround-sound cinema and a dedicated gallery space. In the cinema, visitors can watch *Needle Dance* on a continuous loop, interspersed with behind-the-scenes footage that reveals the intense process of filming underwater and the collaboration between Harris, Gray, Milner, and Baslisco. Meanwhile, the gallery will be transformed into an immersive showcase for Harris's monumental needle sculptures, two-dimensional artworks, and Deborah Milner's original costumes—ensuring audiences experience every facet of this multidisciplinary project.

Needle Dance marks Harris's second solo exhibition, following the critically lauded *Lacquered Rebellion* at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery (2024). Harris has rapidly gained recognition for her fearless embrace of media—from painting and sculpture to moving image and sound.

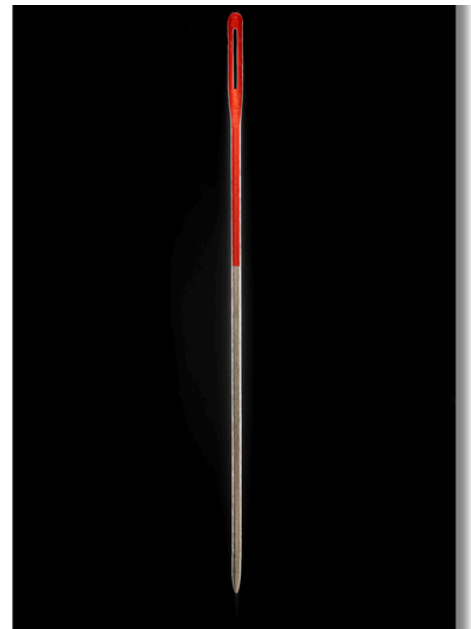
[Threads of Myth and Modernity: The Red Thread of Fate](#)

Central to *Needle Dance* is the Japanese legend of the red thread of fate, an ancient myth positing that an invisible red string binds two people destined to meet. Although the string might stretch or tangle, it is ultimately unbreakable - representing a force beyond human control. In Harris's interpretation, this notion of destiny rubs against the contemporary feminist imperative for self-determination: Must women accept a path laid out by tradition and ancestry, or can they wrest agency and independence from the weight of heritage? The tension between fate and autonomy is a thematic thread running throughout Harris's practice, prompting viewers to question whether destiny complements or challenges the pursuit of personal freedom.

[Submerged in Symbolism: The Underwater Film](#)

Filmed entirely underwater, *Needle Dance* magnifies the poetic resonance of the dancers' movements, reflecting a state of suspension akin to the red thread's flexible yet unbreakable nature. The water environment functions as both resistance and liberation: the dancers appear weightless, yet they must continually move towards their pre-destined fate. In the myth, the red threads of fate are a destiny we are born into, our future written in the stars. Here the water evokes an amniotic fluid - as soon as we exist, what lies ahead is already cast. This setting captures the perpetual struggle between being bound to others—through romance, family, or communal ties—and the primal human urge to forge an individual path.

"For me, filming underwater epitomises the feeling that we're constantly navigating unseen currents, both literal and metaphorical," Harris explains. "It allows the dancers' movements to appear dreamlike, yet it underscores how every graceful gesture requires effort—mirroring the push and pull we feel when deciding whether to follow fate or assert our own autonomy."



Reimagining Feminist Power: Enormous Needle Sculptures

While studying at the RCA, Harris inherited her grandmother's sewing kit. Moved by the intimacy of these tools, as well as their link to the feminist legacy of textile arts, Harris set out to upend their domestic connotations. She began forging needles on a monumental scale, sometimes one to two meters tall, elevating them from dainty implements of "women's work" into towering sculptures that demand attention.

"Historically, the needle was overshadowed by the pen—but if we enlarge it to the size of a weapon, we subvert the idea that women's work must remain small," Harris explains. Influenced by Judy Chicago's textile-based practice from the 1970s feminist art movement and Louise Bourgeois's consideration of family relationships and oversized needle sculptures, Harris's larger-than-life needles embody both fragility and confrontation. They become emblems of defiance as well as reparation—repurposing a traditionally domestic tool into a powerful feminist symbol.



A Journey From Weaponry to Care

In the early stages of this project, Harris viewed the enlarged needles through a lens of almost militancy, echoing her sense of personal and generational struggle. She speaks candidly of developing these works in a time when she lost her grandmother, simultaneously experiencing the end of her marriage: "These events forced me to reckon with what it means to keep a family lineage alive while also shaping a new voice for myself," she notes. "Initially, the needle sculptures felt like an arsenal—tools for battling against the lack of agency women in my family have faced."

Over time, however, the symbolism evolved. Harris found herself drawn to the needle's capacity to mend, stitch, and unify—qualities she now highlights in *Needle Dance*. "I still see the needle as strong and powerful, but I also embrace its role in linking us together with love and care," she says. "My grandmother had so few choices – she didn't have access to an education past the age of 12, she didn't choose who or if she married or had children – but her sewing was a form of self-expression. That's a reminder that even small acts of creation can be revolutionary. By magnifying the needle, we reclaim it as an instrument of feminist power, reparation, and healing."

Feminism, Desire, and Belonging: Woven Into Motion

Through myth and movement, *Needle Dance* illuminates Harris's core themes of feminism, identity, and belonging. Desire also emerges as a key force—if the "heart wants what it wants," how much of our longing is shaped by destiny, and how much do we shape ourselves? If fate binds people together, does this increase equality, or does it confine individuals to inherited roles?

Similarly, the idea of belonging echoes through the powerful motif of the red thread. Being bound to someone by fate might represent ultimate closeness, yet it also provokes questions of personal freedom. Harris invites viewers to contemplate whether connection and independence can truly coexist. "It's always going to be a struggle," she says, "being close with others—romantically or within our families—while trying to define our own paths. I want *Needle Dance* to acknowledge that tension but also to celebrate that these bonds are what make a meaningful life."

Director - Peter Gray: Blending High-Fashion Expertise with Artistic Vision

An internationally acclaimed hair stylist and accomplished film director, Peter Gray brings a refined, avant-garde perspective to *Needle Dance*. Renowned for his exceptional cutting skills and lightness of touch, Gray's creative flair has since elevated editorial shoots for *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *T Magazine*, and more, while fashion houses like Hermès, Ungaro, and Dsquared have sought out his visionary runway looks. Gray's clientele spans top-tier celebrities—Sigourney Weaver, Kate Hudson, Beatrice Grannò, and Kat Graham, among others—drawn by his rigorous technical grounding and conceptual approach to beauty. In addition to his achievements in editorial and advertising, Gray is an accomplished motion-image director. His directorial debut, *Shoot Doris Day*, was the first music video created specifically for DVD, marking an early expansion of his creative repertoire. Now, with *Needle Dance*, Gray contributes his distinct blend of high-fashion sensibility and cinematic vision to Makiko Harris's underwater exploration of fate, feminism, and artistic transformation.

Costume Designer - Deborah Milner: Elevating the Underwater Aesthetic

Deborah Milner is an acclaimed couture designer renowned for merging artistic vision with technical mastery. Her fascination with drawing and painting the human form naturally led her to the forefront of fashion and art, culminating in a tenure consulting and then heading up the Alexander McQueen Couture Studio (1997–2015), where she realized some of McQueen's most iconic and intricate showpieces. Collaborations with creative luminaries like Isabella Blow, Philip Treacy, and Nick Knight underscore her innovative credibility and broad media appeal.

Beyond haute couture, Milner has applied her expertise to stage and film costume design, cultivating a style that balances elegance with bold experimentation. She has produced show-stopping pieces, including the Dior-inspired gown worn by Helena Bonham Carter at the Oscars, and launched her Ecoture™ with Aveda label, reflecting her dedication to pushing the boundaries of traditional fashion.

Currently, she is developing a prêt-à-porter initiative set to launch in 2025, promising to integrate sophisticated modern design with a commitment to sustainability. Milner's enduring impact is further highlighted by her portrait's inclusion in the National Portrait Gallery's "Legends" exhibition by Zoe Law, and by high praise from *American Elle*, which dubbed her "London's best-kept secret for extraordinarily beautiful designs and unconventional sculptural shapes."

For *Needle Dance*, Milner draws on her flair for dramatic silhouettes to enhance Makiko Harris's underwater choreography, weaving each rope-based design with a nuanced blend of fragility and strength. By uniting artistry, craftsmanship, and a flair for theatrical impact, Milner's costumes become a powerful element in *Needle Dance*'s exploration of fate, feminism, and the transformative potential of "women's work."



From Classical Strings to Layered Soundscapes

Amplifying the cinematic impact of *Needle Dance* is Harris's original violin score, showcasing her sophisticated musical background. Trained at a pre-professional level, Harris attended conservatory preparatory San Domenico School in California, performed with the San Francisco Youth Symphony, and appeared on NPR's *From the Top*. At 18, she stepped away from a career in classical music to pursue a broader artistic practice, yet her meticulous training remains evident in this project.

Drawing inspiration from composers like Hans Zimmer, Harris collaborated with co-composer Carlos Basileisco to lay down a percussion-driven, MIDI-infused track. She then improvised her violin over it, layering more than 20 separate takes. "I wanted the music to feel simultaneously epic and intimate," she explains. "Eventually, the track culminates in a purely violin section—a sort of a cappella moment—to offer a pause from the intensity of the visuals, allowing viewers to sink deeper into the emotional undercurrent of the work."

Carlos Basileisco: Melding Eclectic Influences into a Singular Sound

Carlos Basileisco brings a diverse perspective to music composition. Raised in a family of artists—his father a flamenco guitarist—he grew up immersed in flamenco, classical guitar, rock, jazz, and electronic styles. In recent years, Basileisco has led a musical ensemble while also performing as an electronic DJ for over 20 years. For *Needle Dance*, he joins forces with Makiko Harris to craft an innovative, genre-blending score that reflects the project's fusion of tradition and modernity.

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MAKIKO'S PERSPECTIVE WORDS FROM THE ARTIST

“I WANTED TO HONOUR MY LINEAGE AND ANCESTORS WHILE STILL FORGING MY OWN PATH. GROWING UP, I WATCHED MY GRANDMOTHER—A WOMAN WITH ALMOST NO CHOICES—EXPRESS HER AGENCY THROUGH SEWING. INHERITING HER NEEDLES MADE ME REALIZE HOW CREATIVE EXPRESSION CAN THRIVE EVEN WHEN OPPORTUNITIES ARE LIMITED. TO ME, THESE NEEDLES BECAME SYMBOLS OF WOMANHOOD AND CREATIVE POWER. MAKING THEM THE SIZE OF WEAPONS CAPTURES THE TENSION BETWEEN FATE AND AUTONOMY—IT'S ALWAYS A STRUGGLE TO HONOUR THE PEOPLE YOU LOVE WHILE DEFINING YOUR OWN PATH. BUT THE NEEDLE CAN ALSO BE A TOOL FOR REPAIR AND FORGIVENESS, ECHOING LOUISE BOURGEOIS'S IDEA THAT IT'S MEANT TO MEND RATHER THAN HARM. FOR ME, THAT KIND OF HOPE IS AT THE HEART OF THIS FILM.”

COLLABORATORS:

PETER GRAY - DIRECTOR

DEBORAH MILNER - COSTUME DESIGNER

CARLOS BASILEISCO - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER,
COMPOSER, MUSICIAN

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