

Overview

From March 16, 2026, He Art Museum (HEM), in collaboration with KADIST, presents the group exhibition *Threads of Kinship*, bringing over 40 modern and contemporary artists whose works engage with the lived histories of collectivity through material practices of care, autonomy, and chosen kinship across generations and geographies. Building on its first iteration at KADIST Paris (October 2025–January 2026), this second iteration deepens the curatorial dialogue between HEM and KADIST. The newly added works deepen an exploration of the local legacy of Guangdong's Self-Comb Sisters and engage with the Lingnan cultural context.

The collaboration reflects HEM and KADIST's shared commitment to situate regional histories within global conversations. As a 16,000-square-meter nonprofit art museum designed by Tadao Ando, HEM houses a significant collection of modern and contemporary works rooted in Chinese art history and its international trajectories. KADIST is a non-profit contemporary arts organization with an internationally renowned collection of over 2,500 artworks that operates globally through exhibitions, residencies, and research-driven programs. Together, the organizations activate their collections and networks to foreground how histories of collective life resonate between Guangdong and the wider world.

Structured around four interwoven curatorial strands the exhibition considers: the formation of female collectives and alternative kinship structures through the power of textiles and questions of body and belonging; how diasporic movement, and extractive and economic systems shape both artistic production and lived experience; the historical and contemporary entanglements between coding, weaving, and technological knowledge; and it looks toward speculative futures and mythologies that reimagine how communities might endure and transform.

Drawing from the collections of KADIST and HEM, alongside select loans, the exhibition brings together contemporary artists whose works engage migration, inheritance, labor, and cultural memory. Pacita Abad's early *Masks* series reflects on diasporic movement and textile traditions, Tarik Kiswanson's *Passing* considers intergenerational transmission across borders, Yee I-Lann rethinks sovereignty and labor through weaving and archives, and a newly commissioned work by Jaffa Lam collaborates with factory workers and housewives in Hong Kong to foreground women's often-invisible labor. These works are presented alongside key modernist figures—Pan Yuliang, Chang Dai-chien, Qi Baishi, and Lin Fengmian—whose practices redefined Chinese modernism through processes of reinvention, translation, and cultural inheritance.

Notes from HEM Curatorial Team:

Waters Interwoven

In the Pearl River Delta, waterways intertwine like threads. The West River, North River, and East River meander and converge, flowing into one another to form something larger. Water is like silk—a single thread is fragile, but thousands gain the strength to cross seas.

In the early twentieth century, these rivers witnessed a quiet and steadfast practice weaving intricate bonds of kinship. A group of women in the Pearl River Delta made their living through textile work and made their home in mutual support. They built collective lives beyond the traditional framework. There were no blood ties, no customs to bind them—only the rhythm of daily labor, care, and choice: choosing not to depend but to stay together and redefine "family" in their own way. A comb running through hair, a shuttle crossing warp and weft—they are, in essence, the same act: creating meaning through repetition, forging a path within discipline.

Gazing Across

This exhibition grows out of a dialogue between KADIST and He Art Museum. The Paris Chapter looked back in time, weaving scattered photographs of mutual-aid societies in Nanyang, the silhouettes of elderly women folding clothes, and artists' cross-cultural explorations of hair and textiles into a visual notebook of solidarity and resilience.

Located in Lingnan, the He Art Museum always carries a "Southern Perspective". Here, rivers continue to flow, defining themselves through what they receive and channel. This fluidity mirrors the logic of textiles: threads are slender yet unbreakable, fabrics are light yet warm.

Silk and water both connect through suppleness and gain strength through convergence.

The chapter in Shunde is not simply a relocation of artworks, but a shift in perspective between the tangible and the imagined. The works from KADIST focus on specific social scenes: the collective labor of female textile workers, immigrant communities carrying traditions through migration, and the entanglement of body and hair in rituals. Through images, fabrics, and documents, artists gaze into the gaps obscured by mainstream, recording how people carved out their own paths.

He Art Museum's collection adds another layer. Lin Fengmian's ladies stand by the water, robes flowing in the wind, faces poised between realism and abstraction; Chang Dai-chien's celestial maidens emerge from myth and dream. These images carry centuries of imagination of independence, serenity, and refusal to be defined.

By placing past and present, history and imagination side by side, we imagine that the women who wove, formed communities, and migrated may well have gazed up at these painted figures. These repeatedly depicted ladies may themselves be ideal projections of real lives.

Echoes

Threads of Kinship brings together silk, strands of hair, and invisible lines connecting different times and spaces. Once, they bound together the mutual-aid networks of the self-combing sisters. Now they invite us to ask: What other kinds of kinship are possible? Yet, threads do more than bind. They stretch and relax, leaving room for gaps. As rivers curve and seep into crevices to shape a watershed, kinship need not be fixed—only close enough to hold when needed, and loose enough to let go, drifting like the current.

Silk and water both connect through non-possession.

How do people weave their own bonds beyond prescribed frameworks? How does softness become strength, and daily life become rituals? How do practices labeled "marginal" persist along the upper, middle, and lower reaches of a river system, waiting to meet another tributary?

The exhibition is curated by Shona Mei Findlay, Yuan Fuca, Marie Martraire (KADIST), and the HEM curatorial team.

Threads of Kinship at HEM is supported in part by the Institut français.

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