

HM Hinton Magazine · Feb 12

## Interview with Makiko Harris, the artist behind the bold underwater film and multimedia exhibition ‘Needle Dance’

Makiko Harris is an artist whose latest work seamlessly blends sculpture, music, and performance to explore themes of fate, autonomy, and feminist agency.

*Needle Dance*, is a striking conceptual art film that brings together a multidisciplinary team to create a visually and sonically immersive experience. Inspired by her grandmother's sewing kit and the East Asian myth of the red thread of fate, Harris reimagines the needle as both a tool of creation and a symbol of personal agency. As *Needle Dance* prepares to debut at art'otel London Hoxton, Harris shares insights into the inspiration, symbolism, and collaborative process behind this powerful work.



### Hi Makiko! What can you tell us about Needle Dance?

*Needle Dance* is a five-minute conceptual art film that combines my sculpture practice, lifelong engagement with music, and a live performance. The work is a collaboration between me, director Peter Gray, costume designer Deborah Milner, and composer/executive producer Carlos Basílisco, alongside performers Sabrina Wong and Duane Nasis, who bring the vision to life.

### How did your personal story, like inheriting your grandmother's sewing kit, shape this project?

*I never imagined that something as simple as a sewing kit could evoke so many memories. I remember my grandmother making things with her hands like sewing clothes, mending socks, crocheting cardigans. Those moments were about love, care, and connection. However, looking back and reflecting on the broader cultural context in which these needles were used, I'm aware that the needle isn't merely a tool, it's also a symbol of creative voice and personal agency. These symbols became foundational metaphors in Needle Dance - the needle as a weapon in the fight for feminist freedoms and also a tool in carving a path towards connection and care.*

### Can you explain the myth of the red thread of fate to someone who's never heard of it? How did it inspire your project?

*The red thread of fate is an ancient East Asian legend that suggests we are born with an invisible red cord tied to our fingers, leading us to those we are destined to meet in life, regardless of time or place. This myth conveys the idea that certain encounters and relationships are meant to be, even if they seem coincidental or mysterious. For Needle Dance, the red thread serves as a powerful symbol of destiny and interconnectedness. It inspired me to think about how unseen forces—whether they be our ties to family, culture, or historical legacies—shape the contours of our lives, and I was curious to interplay this with my needle sculptures which were originally imagined as symbols of personal autonomy and self-definition.*

### The interplay of fate and autonomy is a recurring theme in Needle Dance. How do you navigate and explore this tension in your art?

*I think in my work, contemporary issues of feminist agency, the body, and autonomy were always at the core. However, more recently I've started to explore this idea of fate, partially in thinking about how our ways of being in the world are often inherited from our ancestors, our culture, our families of origin. I aim to explore how predetermined narratives (fate) can coexist with moments of deliberate choice (autonomy). In Needle Dance, the red rope is a symbol of fate and the needle is a symbol of autonomy. As the bodies intertwine, these symbols dance together.*

### The collaboration with Peter Gray, Deborah Milner, and Carlos Basílisco brings a multidisciplinary dimension to Needle Dance. How did these partnerships influence the final outcome?

*This work was truly a collaboration between me, Peter, Deborah, and Carlos. We each brought our own domain expertise in directing, design, music, and art, but conceptually we all had equal input. We had a WhatsApp group thread throughout the project and shared loads of images and links at the beginning while we were formulating how to execute the vision. Everyone's particular creative DNA – whether it be Peter's idea to bring the entire shoot underwater, Deborah's mastery of corsetry and draping, Carlos' inclination towards complex drumlines and cinematic layered strings, or my obsession with metal sculpture – makes this project what it is.*

### Sewing is often seen as a domestic act, yet your sculptures elevate it to monumental status. What message do you hope this transformation conveys to your audience?

*By elevating sewing from a domestic act to a monumental one, I hope to challenge conventional narratives about creativity, gender, and labour. There is a big conversation in contemporary art currently around re-empowering traditionally feminine-coded craft traditions and textile arts. Sewing, traditionally associated with the everyday and modest in scale, becomes a powerful symbol of transformation, resilience, and artistry.*

### Can you speak to the role of music in shaping the emotional landscape of the film? How does your violin score interact with the visuals?

*The score is so important to me, equally as important as the visuals. It's all about creating an atmosphere, a world where giant needles exist in an amniotic fluid filled with red rope. The music was composed by my friend and collaborator Carlos Basílisco. Carlos is also a percussionist, so he laid down a track with some beats and chords for me to respond to with violin. I've played violin since age 4 and used to be in an actively recording and performing electro-pop band before moving to London. While Carlos and I were workshopping the track, he had the brilliant idea to add in a violin section I had improvised and recorded a year prior on a completely different track we were working on but had never used. The violin outro is a completely different key and tempo to the rest of the track, but somehow, we felt it worked to create the ambience we wanted for the moving image artwork.*

### What do you hope for the future of Needle Dance? Where would you like to take it?

*I envision Needle Dance as a living, evolving project and one I hope that continues to grow and resonate with new audiences. In the future, I hope to expand its reach through a series of live performances, perhaps integrating more interactive or immersive elements like scent. I would love to see the work engage communities in different cultural contexts, prompting a dialogue about the roles of fate, tradition, and individual choice. Ultimately, I see Needle Dance as a map for the future of my art practice, wherein I develop an experience to support my physical artworks whether that be based in performance, moving, image, or sound.*

**Needle Dance will be on view from February 17th to March 2nd at art'otel London Hoxton.**

For more information, visit: <https://artotellondonhoxton.com/> or

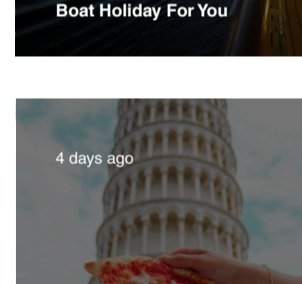
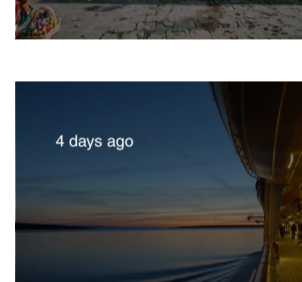
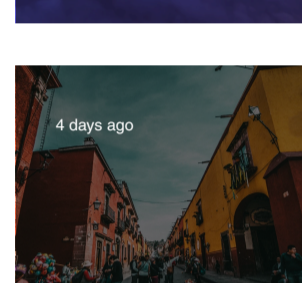
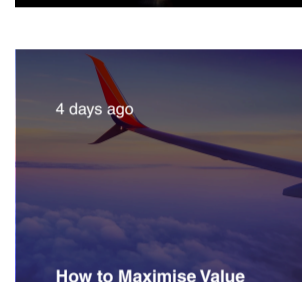
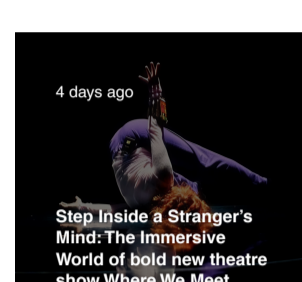
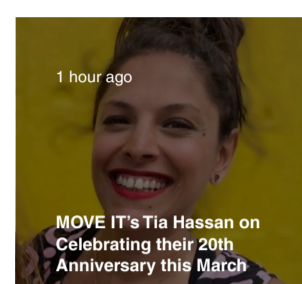
<https://www.makikoharris.com/exhibitions/49-needle-dance-kristin-hjellegerde-gallery-x-artotel/overview/>



Sponsored Ad

Sponsored Ad

## Latest Articles



**More**