

Extended text by exhibition curator Dr Nicola Baird

The New Art Gallery Walsall ***Mothers without Hands***

'I would like to empower women who have experienced or are experiencing sexual and domestic violence, this kind of abuse and the invisibility and stigma attached are things that need to be talked about more. My aim with Mothers Without Hands is to offer support and a form of protection through collective making and sharing'.

Tereza Bušková, 2026

Introduction

Mothers without Hands (2025) marks the culmination of an international, multidisciplinary project initiated and orchestrated by Tereza Bušková which encompassed a series of empowering making & baking workshops and participatory processions with/within diverse communities in England and Czechia. Established to raise awareness of violence against women and girls it not only stands symbolically in defiance of all acts of violence against women, but also seeks social justice and, ultimately, change.

Mothers without Hands takes its title from *The Girl Without Hands*, a 1200-year-old fairy tale collected and revised by the Grimm Brothers. Featuring a heroine whose hands are cut off and magically restored, it is a story not only about patriarchal oppression, persecution, violation and trauma, but also about survival, strength and healing. Bušková's own deeply personal experience of sexual assault as a teenager and of a subsequently

emotionally manipulative marriage have undoubtedly informed both her thinking and her work on the project.

Mothers without Hands represents Bušková's belief in art for social change that is not only defiant, but also celebratory and is inspired by folk art and craft practices associated with a Czech ritual, and an ancient custom performed in the Austrian Duchy of Salzburg (1849-1918) still taking place across the Austrian Alpine regions today. More specifically, *Mothers without Hands* reinterprets a religious and pagan ceremony known as *Ježíškovy matičky* (Beloved Mothers of Christ) celebrative of Jesus' rebirth on Easter Sunday and of Springtime dating back to the 17th century which was actively practised in Moravia up until the Second World War before being banned by the Nazis – who viewed it as a form of tacit political protest – and subsequently suppressed by the atheist authorities of Communist Czechoslovakia. The ceremony, traditionally led by two 'Madonnas', is also said to have been employed during the Great Northern War (1700-1721), as a powerful form of protest and a means of protection by local women who had been raped by the men they worked for and their apprentices in nearby villages. *Mothers without Hands* highlights cultural traditions in danger of erasure and – in uncovering an almost forgotten history of patriarchal oppression – craft as form of resistance, repair and remembrance.

This exhibition showcases the breadth of Bušková's socially engaged practice which comprises printmaking, performance, film, patternmaking and sand pouring as well as headdresses, totems and crowns collectively made in collaboration with Arts All Over The Place, Erdington in Birmingham, the Folkestone Women's Forum and MOLO Czechs and Slovaks in Folkestone, Aaina Hub and Caldmore Community Garden in Walsall, Nadace Veronica and Vesna in Brno and Radost Suchdol (Joy for Suchdol) in Prague.

About the Artist

Tereza Bušková (b. 1987, Prague) is a contemporary artist living and working in Birmingham whose multidisciplinary practice is inspired not only by Slavic folklore, but also by British and European as well as global cultural traditions. Over the last decade Bušková has championed folk-inspired art and craft for social change by actively involving diverse communities in Birmingham, Walsall and adjacent Black Country towns in craft, making and baking workshops as part of publicly funded, participatory projects which have focused on themes of identity, belonging and home. Bušková's work demonstrates a profound interest in the handmade and found, in the reinterpretation of cultural and material histories and in investigations into the resilience and revival of ritual. Recently Bušková's work has been exhibited at the Midlands Art Centre, Ikon Gallery and MAC Lyon as part of *Friends in Love and War*, supported by the British Council.

Collaboration and Community Engagement

Mothers without Hands trades on the exchange of stitches, symbols and stories across borders and over time. It highlights the importance of intercultural exchange, enabling the possibility of sharing accessible art for all and strengthening connections within and across diverse communities. International in scope, *Mothers Without Hands* is defined by a number of partnerships and collaborations not only with individual artists and creative practitioners, but also with folk groups, mental health, physical and sexual violence and environmental charities, community groups, not-for-profit organisations and local councils.

Mothers without Hands was initiated in Walsall in November 2023 with a series of creative workshops at Nash Dom CIC to mark 16 Days of Action Against Gender-based Violence supported by Creative Black Country and Walsall Council. In November 2024 a

further series of workshops supported by Walsall and co-led by Tereza Bušková and activist Margaret Murray took place at Aaina Hub during which the first of this exhibition's three featured headdresses was collectively designed and decorated. A musical procession featuring the headdress designed to celebrate 'The Hidden Hands of Walsall' and coinciding with 16 Days of Action took place on Walsall High Street involving the women who had taken part in the workshops along with family and friends.

Having already travelled to Folkestone, Birmingham, Brno and Prague, in the summer of 2025, the *Mothers without Hands* project returned to Walsall for a series of embroidery, stitching and rush weaving workshops co-led by Bušková, textile artist Tina Francis and weaver of natural materials Phi Evans. During the workshops at Aaina Hub the second of the exhibition's diamond-shaped headdresses inspired by the *Perchtentanz*, an ancient custom named in honour of Perchta (the Magnificent One), ancient mother of the gods, originally performed by residents of the Tyrolean Alps in the Duchy of Salzburg (1849-1918), was co-designed and decorated using designs and symbols resonant of the participating women's identity, experiences and culture. In addition, the headdress was imbued with protective properties by incorporating mirrors and sequins, widely believed to ward off evil spirits. Two further workshops at Caldmore Community Garden involved the collective baking of decorative shapes to be attached to the headdress and Bread Woman costume. An inclusive, public procession along Walsall High Street marked the culmination of the project in Walsall and featured the collaboratively made headdress along with a second headdress made as a result of workshops in Erdington, Birmingham. The procession, which concluded outside The New Art Gallery, was led by Bušková's muse, performance artist Zoe Simon, and featured folk singer Karolina Wegryzn, the Birmingham-based community choir Ensemble Bednieri, cellist Bela Emerson and violinist Ann Jones.

Acknowledgements

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Dean Wellings

Karolina Wegrzyn

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