

Press-kit

The Hands

"The Hands" is an animated celebration of working lives, honouring the people whose hands carry memory, craft and belonging across generations.

Drawn from the archives and workers of John Smedley's historic Lea Mills, The Hands was commissioned by Animate Projects as part of WORK Records, a creative heritage programme exploring historic working lives across the East Midlands. The film was made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund, thanks to National Lottery players, and supported using public funding by Arts Council England.



Synopsis

30 words

A poetic celebration of working lives where memory, care and resilience pass from one generation to the next, reminding us that what we inherit is not only what is made, but also what is remembered and passed on.

50 words

A poetic celebration of working lives across generations. Through the enduring motif of the hand, stories shaped by craft, resilience, and belonging become part of a shared human history, revealing that what we inherit is not only what is made, but also what is remembered and passed on.

100 words

A poetic celebration of the people whose lives are woven through work. Moving between past and present, The Hands reflects on craft, resilience, migration and belonging through the recurring image of the human hand. As stories pass from one generation to another, work becomes memory, care and connection. Echoing the refrain "We are the hands", the film honours the people behind what is made and the traces they leave behind. It reminds us that labour is not carried by wool, machines or industry alone, but by human lives, shared experience and the hands that shape, hold and pass things on.

Links

[Presspack](#)

- [Vimeo](#)
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Credits

The Hands

A paeon to historic working lives

A film by Kim Noce

Music and Sound by Hutch Demouilpied

Dubbing Mixer by Christopher Swain

Mix Amylo, spoken words and vocals

Andrea Artz, spoken words

Tullis Rennie, spoken words and trombone

Otti Albietz, vocals and drums

Mark Greenwood, guitar

Hutch Demouilpied, vocals, baritone horn and trumpet

Barnaby Templer, Sound Supervisor

Stephen Maxwell, Sound Assistant

Christopher Swaine, Dubbing Mixer

Fonic, Mix

Jane Middleton Smith, Archive Manager, John Smedley

John Smedley Archive Volunteers:

Margaret Maddocks

Sandra Maycock

Iris Smedley

Ann Thompson

Maggie Hay

Tony Wetton

Roland Edwards

Thanks to the workers at John Smedley

Commissioned by Animate Projects for WORK Records

Stefan Ramsden, Historian

Vicky Washington, Project Manager

Christine Thomas, Engagement Manager

Gary Thomas, Executive Producer

Abigail Addison, Executive Producer

In partnership with

Fermynwoods Contemporary Art

Junction Arts

Derbyshire Record Office

Corby Heritage

John Smedley Archive

University of Derby

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Thanks to National Lottery players

Supported using public funding by Arts Council England

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www.kimnoce.com

www.workprojects.org

[Www. animateprojects.org](http://www.animateprojects.org)

Bio

Director/ Artist Kim Noce

Kim Noce is an Italian artist filmmaker and animator resident in UK. Her work has been screened in major international film festivals, displayed in art galleries, broadcasted in major TV channels, on streaming platforms and won several prizes around the world.

[Website](#)
[Full Biography](#)
[Filmography](#)
[Awards](#)
[Social](#)

Composer/ Sound Designer Hutch Demouilpied

Hutch is a composer and sound designer for film and animation based in the UK. Her recent work includes composing and sound design for internationally recognised projects such as *Daughters of the Late Colonel* (selected for Quinzaine des Cinéastes at Cannes 2026), *Visible Mending* (BAFTA nominated 2024), *The Debutante* (Best British Short Animation 2024) feature film- *Limbo* (Cannes 2020) amongst others.

[Website](#)
[imdb](#)
[Social @hutchdemouilpied](#)

Director Statement Short (232 words)

"The Hands" is an animated celebration of working lives, honouring the people whose hands carry memory, craft and belonging across generations.

The film grew from an extended period of research within the John Smedley Archive and the historic Lea Mills, where conversations with workers, volunteers, archivists and historians gradually revealed stories spanning more than 240 years. The Hands embraces the archive as a form of collective memory, bringing together stories of migration, protest, craftsmanship, music and everyday life through a series of animated vignettes.

The title refers to the historical term once used for factory workers, transforming "the hands" from a description of labour into a celebration of the people whose lives, knowledge and care continue to shape communities across generations. Reading Ursula K. Le Guin's Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction during the research also influenced the film's structure, encouraging a form of storytelling that gathers many voices rather than following a single heroic narrative.

Every drawing was created by hand with ink and watercolour in sketchbooks while, allowing the research process to remain visible within the finished film. Through hand-drawn animation, archive imagery, pixilation and an original celebratory song, The Hands becomes both an animated documentary and a reflection on making itself, celebrating the enduring value of craftsmanship, collective memory and the human traces carried through every act of creation.

Director Statement (1413 words)

"The Hands" is an animated celebration of working lives, honouring the people whose hands carry memory, craft and belonging across generations.

For more than 240 years, generations of workers have shaped the story of John Smedley's historic Lea Mills, Britain's oldest continuously operating knitwear manufacturer. Drawing on the John Smedley Archive, the research of the volunteers; alongside the memories and experiences of former and current workers, The Hands brings these lives into conversation through a series of interconnected animated vignettes that reveal the people, relationships and everyday moments woven into the history of the mill. Stories of migration, protest, music, innovation, craftsmanship and community emerge from photographs, company records, handwritten notes, oral testimonies and personal objects, connecting individual memories into a shared narrative that continues to resonate today.

The title, The Hands, comes from the historical term once used to describe factory workers. While the phrase referred to labour, it also evokes something far richer: the hands that make, repair, comfort, protest, create and remember. Hands become a universal language through which knowledge, care and identity are carried across generations. They hold the traces of everyday lives and reveal history as something lived, embodied and continually passed from one person to another. The film embraces this idea by celebrating the people whose hands have shaped not only garments, but communities, families and collective memory.

The Hands emerged through a process of listening before making. The first eight months were devoted to research, spending time within the John Smedley Archive, returning regularly to Lea Mills, and meeting current and former workers, volunteers, archivists and historians whose knowledge and generosity shaped the project. Many of the film's vignettes began with a conversation, an object, a photograph or an anecdote shared during these encounters, each leading to further archival research that gradually revealed wider connections across the history of the mill. The archive became more than a collection of documents. It revealed itself as a living collective memory, held equally in photographs, ledgers and objects as in the memories, gestures and voices of the people who continue to care for its stories. This process naturally shaped the structure of the film. Rather than following a single protagonist, The Hands unfolds through interconnected vignettes, where individual lives, memories and histories weave together into a shared portrait

of Lea Mills. Each story becomes another thread, revealing that history is created not through one extraordinary life, but through the accumulated experiences, relationships and everyday acts of countless hands.

The Hands also became a reflection on the nature of storytelling itself. Reading Ursula K. Le Guin's *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction* during the research profoundly shaped my thinking about the structure of the film. Instead of searching for a single heroic narrative, I became interested in stories as containers, capable of holding many voices, memories and experiences simultaneously. This resonated with the John Smedley Archive, where history does not belong to one individual but emerges through the accumulation of countless ordinary lives. The vignette structure of the film reflects this understanding, allowing the archive and the collective memory of the mill to unfold through many interconnected stories. In this sense, *The Hands* is both an animated documentary and an exploration of storytelling itself, where meaning is created through gathering, carrying and sharing, much like the hands that remain at the heart of the film

Animation became a way of bringing the archive into the present. Drawings emerge from historical photographs, contemporary workers inhabit the same visual space as their predecessors, and archival documents become active elements within the moving image. Hand-drawn ink animation, monochrome washes, archive photography, documentary recordings and stop motion pixilation weave together to create a visual language where past and present coexist. Gestures repeat across time, transforming work into rhythm and memory into movement, while contemporary performances reconnect historical events with the lives that continue to unfold within the mill today.

Each vignette reveals a different chapter in this shared history. The River reflects on the landscape that gave birth to Lea Mills and the enduring relationship between water, place and industry. The Lea Mills Band recalls the award-winning brass band whose support for the 1911 strike became an act of solidarity still preserved within the archive. Swimwear follows the journey of a young woman who began as a John Smedley model before becoming a fashion designer for children, illustrating the unexpected paths that emerge from working lives. The German Ladies remembers the women who arrived through the Ministry of Labour programme during the 1950s, bringing new cultures, languages and experiences into the community. The final vignette returns to today's workers, whose movements and gestures become part of the animation through pixilation, completing a conversation that spans more than two centuries.

The visual language of *The Hands* grew directly from the research process itself. Rather than separating research from animation, every drawing was created by hand in sketchbooks while studying the John Smedley Archive, allowing the film to retain the immediacy and openness of working notes. The rough ink lines, visible brush marks and unfinished qualities remain intentionally present, preserving the feeling of discovery that accompanied each archival encounter. My own hands frequently enter the frame, turning pages, drawing, holding documents and moving through the archive. They become another pair of working hands within the film, acknowledging that animation is itself a form of labour, one that studies, interprets and keeps histories alive. Throughout the film, footage recorded during the research process inside Lea Mills, from weathered walls and machinery to archive books, ledgers, photographs and the workers' own hands, forms the living background upon which the drawn animation unfolds. Together they create a visual dialogue in which the archive is not simply represented, but continually handled, observed, animated and reimaged through the act of making.

Many of the processes at John Smedley's Lea Mills continue to be carried out by hand, where craftsmanship is defined through patience, precision, repetition and attention to the smallest details. The making of *The Hands* embraced these same principles. Every drawing, gesture and movement was created through thousands of repeated actions, each requiring care and sustained attention. This process remains visible throughout the film in the filmed sketchbooks, uncomposited pages and the traces of drawing itself, allowing the labour of animation to remain present rather than hidden. The fast paced rhythm of animation gradually became a reflection of the rhythm of the mill, where repetition is production and the foundation of skill, knowledge and quality. In this way, the labour of animation mirrors the labour it celebrates, connecting the meticulous process of preserving history through drawing with the enduring craft of making that continues to define Lea Mills today. At a time when images can increasingly be generated without the presence of a maker, *The Hands* celebrates the unique qualities that emerge through embodied practice. Whether working with textile, paper, ink or machinery, every act of making carries the subtle traces of the body that created it. The film aims to celebrate the human craftsmanship, recognising that knowledge, memory and care are not only preserved in what we make, but in the gestures through which we make it.

The Sound and Music by Hutch Demouilpied carries the same spirit of continuity as the image. An original celebratory song, layered with brass instrumentation inspired by the Lea Mills Band and the rhythms and atmosphere of the mill itself, creates a contemporary anthem rooted in the history of its workers. The recurring refrain, "We are the hands", binds each story into a collective voice, echoing through generations until the final reminder that nothing is made by wool alone, but through the lives, relationships and hands of the people behind it. The song was conceived as a celebration of working lives, offering a shared voice that honours solidarity, craftsmanship and belonging, while reminding us that the strength of every community lies in the people who create it together.

Commissioned by Animate Projects as part of WORK Records, an 18-month creative heritage programme exploring historic working lives across the East Midlands, *The Hands* draws directly on the John Smedley Archive and the experiences of its workers to celebrate the resilience, creativity and dignity of working lives. The film was made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund, thanks to National Lottery players, and supported using public funding by Arts Council England. It is an invitation to look beyond objects and industry, and to recognise the people whose hands continue to shape our shared cultural inheritance.

Composer Statement

The score for *The Hands* began with words: text written by director Kim Noce, which we knew from the outset had to be heard — spoken and sung — to carry the narrative of the story. From that decision, a song started to take shape inside the soundtrack itself, unlike anything I'd composed before.

The story and its history gave me my starting point: the brass and drums referenced in the words. Other musical elements built on this foundation; harp, pizzicato strings, guitar and melodica, echoing the rhythms of the factory machinery. Creating layers and recurring refrains that we wanted to be anthemic and uplifting in mood and atmosphere.

I used female and male voices — speaking and singing — alongside sound design evoking the atmosphere of the land, the river by the mill, the factory sounds, with workers whispering and talking together, to create a multilayered soundtrack for the animation.