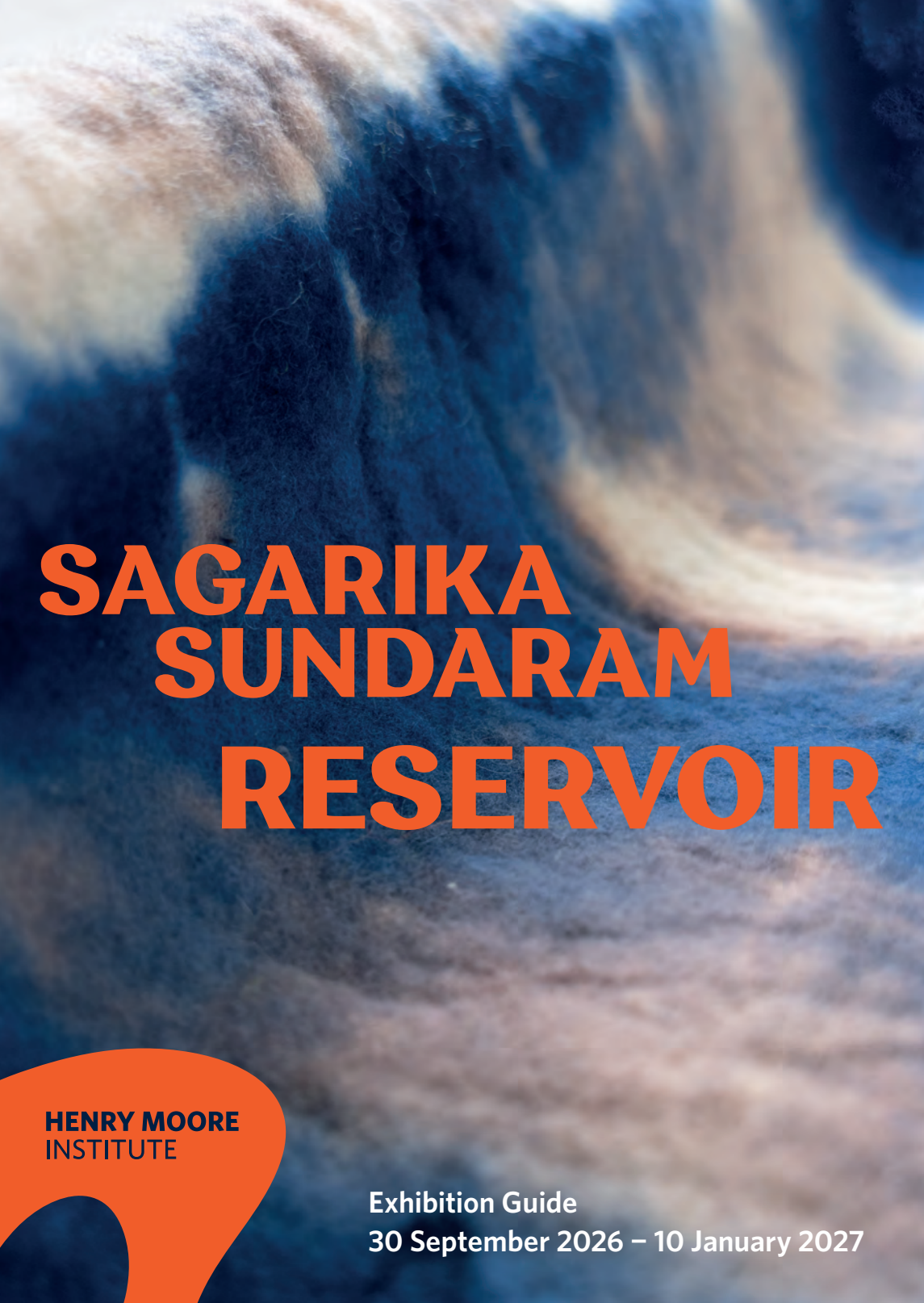




SAGARIKA SUNDARAM RESERVOIR

**HENRY MOORE
INSTITUTE**

**Exhibition Guide
30 September 2026 – 10 January 2027**

SAGARIKA SUNDARAM RESERVOIR

Reservoir brings together an entirely new body of work made for the exhibition. Working with wool, Sagarika Sundaram (born 1986, Kolkata) uses traditional, labour-intensive processes to compress loose fibres into felt. Her approach foregrounds felt-making as a means of sculptural construction, through which dense forms are built using water, pressure and the friction of movement created by hand. While soft, her works engage with fundamental sculptural concerns of volume, void, surface, scale and bodily experience.

Across the exhibition Sundaram's sculptures move between the bodily and the architectural. Their folds can resemble skin or membranes, while their openings reveal chambers that seem capable of holding, protecting or nurturing. A cavity is therefore not simply an absence; it becomes an active interior, suggesting something enclosed, protected or still emerging. Developed through an extended period of research into material, colour and process in Kutch, western India, the exhibition marks a significant moment in Sundaram's practice.

Wool, Sundaram's principal material, has long provided warmth, clothing and shelter. It exists between the bodily, domestic and architectural, from garments and blankets to

the compressed felt of Central Asian yurts. In the nineteenth century, the architect and theorist Gottfried Semper (1803-79) identified textile-making as one of the foundations of architecture, proposing that the enclosing wall had its origins in woven screens and hangings. Felt-making is one of the oldest methods of turning loose fibre into structure. Unlike woven fabric, felt has no warp and weft; instead, fibres bind together in every direction to create a dense, continuous mass. In Sundaram's work this ancient yet everyday technology of protection and enclosure becomes a contemporary sculptural language.

BLUE MOUNTAIN

Blue Mountain 2026 opens out like a book. Two large curves create cavities or chambers, establishing a relationship between form and void. Visitors can walk around the work and approach its openings, experiencing it not as a single image but as a changing sequence of surfaces, spaces and viewpoints.

Sundaram has described her interest in 'clothness': the way cloth hangs, drapes and falls under its own weight. In *Blue Mountain*, the felt appears both soft and monumental. Its coarse, pebbled surface is made from naturally brown and white wools,

over which blue dye moves in an elemental sweep. Sundaram compares its texture to an elephant's knee: organic, leathery and deeply wrinkled.

While the sculpture was laid out on a studio table in Kutch, before it had assumed its final form, a passer-by said that it reminded her of a local mountain said to possess a strong magnetic charge. According to her account, a car climbing the mountain would stall as its controls seemingly surrendered to the mountain's force. Sundaram was fascinated by this response to a work that can appear simultaneously like rock, skin and soft cloth. It drew upon something remembered physically, rather than simply recognised visually.

Underlying the works in this exhibition is Sundaram's constant conversation with

landscape. She frequently travelled by air as a child and became attentive to the ever-changing undulations of the world beneath her: mountains, fields and rivers appearing as shifting patterns of line, colour and form. Her work moves between this elevated view and the experience of being within a landscape, immersed in its scale and exposed to its elemental forces.

The chamber-like spaces within the sculpture also recall the protected inner spaces of temple architecture. Rather than referring to a particular building or tradition, *Blue Mountain* draws upon the broader idea of an enclosed interior set apart from the surrounding world. Its cavities feel at once intimate and monumental, vulnerable and protective. These shifting perspectives are reflected in forms that appear to expand and contract, overlap and unfold.





FROM POINT TO LINE

Dancer and *Rope* (both 2026) each begin with a single element that expands into space. In *Dancer*, one continuous piece of felt is cut along a single spiral line beginning at its centre. In *Rope*, one hand-felted unit is repeated, twisted and accumulated to create a large structure.

As *Dancer* opens, the spiral may appear to curl upwards or downwards, like the skin of an orange peeled in an unbroken movement. Rather than dividing the sculpture, the incision releases the form held within the felt. Sundaram has explored the spiral for several years. Here, its apparent simplicity conceals an exacting process of construction. The felt occupies physical volume, but the spaces framed by its curling form are equally important: 'While I create form, I'm also creating voids', Sundaram says. Textiles, and rope especially, are among humanity's oldest and most enduring technologies. While felt is made by applying water, pressure and friction to loose fibres, rope relies upon an equally

fundamental construction: fibres or strands are placed under tension and twisted together to create a strong linear form. Across different materials, scales and uses, this underlying structure has persisted for thousands of years.

Rope returns to these principles. Loose wool is hand-felted into individual lengths of string before being twisted and entwined. The sculpture is built from its smallest unit upwards, its strength emerging through repetition and accumulation as vulnerable fibres become a single structure. The hand-felted string is also Sundaram's own abstraction of *khadi*, a cloth made in India from hand-spun yarn and woven by hand. *Khadi* became a powerful political symbol during India's independence movement, promoted by Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) as a means of resisting British-made textiles and asserting economic self-reliance. Beginning with the rawest state of the material gives the work its internal logic and integrity. It occupies a space between line, labour, utility and sculpture, extending rope's long history of use into a language of form.

FOLD, TIE, DYE, OPEN UP...

In the final gallery, *Glossolalia* 2026 appears wild and animated. Its title refers to speaking in tongues, while its floral-looking form seems botanical, inviting but slightly menacing. Curling limbs and hanging tassels bring a sense of movement, as though it were gesturing or communicating in a language of its own. Its branching form and shifting colour bring together interests in growth, gesture and transformation that run throughout the exhibition.

In earlier works, Sundaram typically began by dyeing loose tufts of wool before layering and compressing them into felt. For *Reservoir*, she has reversed this sequence, first making the cloth and then introducing colour through resist dyeing. The felt is folded and bundled, tightly bound with lengths of thread and immersed in dye. Colour reaches the exposed areas but cannot penetrate the most compressed sections.

After each dye bath, Sundaram cuts the bindings and opens the fabric to reveal what has happened within. Dyed passages emerge alongside gradients, marks and areas left untouched: the secrets created inside the folds while the cloth was concealed. The felt can then be folded differently and bound again before being immersed in a further colour. With each repetition of this process the pattern becomes more complex and the outcome even less predictable.

Sundaram has studied resist-dyeing traditions from around the world, particularly *bandhani* in Kutch, *leheriya* in Rajasthan, *shibori* in Japan and *ikat* from Central Asia and Indonesia. Rather than recreating traditional patterns, she returns to the basic relationship

between material and dye: how colour travels through cloth and how a fold, tie or point of compression can interrupt its movement. Pattern emerges through a negotiation between the dye and the structure of the felt. In her work, the results are often gestural, suggesting patterns and processes found in nature, such as the irregular growth of a plant, the undulations of land or the movement of water. Her technique also allows the textures and colours of the undyed base felt to remain visible.

Resist-dyeing brings control into contact with chance. The felt can be folded and bound in a particular way, but the movement of dye through it cannot be entirely predicted. Each new colour acts upon everything that came before it, increasing the possibility that earlier patterns will be transformed or lost. 'You increase risk as you go', Sundaram says. 'I think maybe that's what I'm addicted to.'

This balance between planning and discovery continues as Sundaram works at larger scales. For *Reservoir*, she made successive studies to test colour, form, armature, weight and volume. Scaling up changes the balance of each work and the relationship between the cloth and its internal structure. She describes this process as 'walking backwards into the future'. Stored and transported folded, the sculptures assume their full volume only when suspended, as their concealed construction, which Sundaram compares to that of a pop-up book, allows them to open and 'bloom'.

Laurence Sillars
Head of the Henry Moore Institute

Visit the **Sculpture Research Library** on the first floor to find further reading related to the exhibition.

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Whatever your age, we want you to engage with sculpture as learners, thinkers and makers.

FAMILIES

Borrow an **Explorer Basket** filled with objects and activities designed to help younger visitors get more from their visit to *Reservoir*. Use it while you are in the galleries to think about the themes and materials on display, but please remember to return it at the end of your visit.

Visit our alcove area to build soft sculptures from felted shapes inspired by **Sagarika Sundaram: Reservoir**.

Get creative during the school holidays in our artist-led family workshops exploring the themes of the exhibitions. Visit our website and social media channels for full details and booking information

SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

Schools and community groups can book free guided visits to our exhibitions. Visit our website to enquire and book a visit: **henry-moore.org/institute-engagement**

EXHIBITION EVENTS

Join us for a series of free research events which accompany the exhibition.

CURATOR'S TOUR

Sculpture Galleries, Henry Moore Institute
Thursday 22 October 2026, 6–7pm

BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE TOUR AND WORKSHOP

Sculpture Galleries & The Studio,
Henry Moore Institute
Saturday 14 November 2026, 11am–2pm

Book your place at henry-moore.org/hmi
or scan the QR code





HENRY MOORE INSTITUTE

We welcome everyone to visit our Galleries, Research Library and Archive of Sculptors' Papers to experience, study and enjoy sculpture from around the world. Find us in the centre of Leeds, the city where **Henry Moore** (1898-1986) began his training as a sculptor.

Our changing programme of historical, modern and contemporary exhibitions and events encourage thinking about what sculpture is, how it is made and the artists who make it.

As part of the Henry Moore Foundation, we are a hub for sculpture, connecting a global network of artists and scholars, continuing research into the art form and ensuring that sculpture is accessible and celebrated by a wide audience.

henry-moore.org/hmi   @henrymooreinstitute

HOW WAS IT?

We'd love to hear about your experience today. It should take less than ten minutes to complete our survey.

After you've completed the survey you can **enter a prize draw to win £100 of high street vouchers.**



Please scan the QR code below on your phone or ask a member of staff if you'd prefer to complete the survey on our iPad.