

BEAUTIFUL

LOVE ME

MATERIALS

7 FEBRUARY - 11 APRIL 2026 - OPEN EVERY SATURDAY 10 - 4PM

Curated by artist Nicola Atkinson, the **LOVE ME** exhibition is at the Beautiful Materials Gallery, located within the Avenue Shopping Centre. Taking place during and beyond Valentine's Day and Mother's Day, the exhibition invites the artists and public to explore the intersection of emotional connection and material necessity. It challenges viewers to reflect on the desire to be loved, while simultaneously addressing a practical logistical problem: how to balance our love for beautiful things with the need to carry our belongings resourcefully.

The exhibition frames this issue by examining the historical evolution of the carrier bag. The narrative begins in 1870, when American inventor Margaret E. Knight revolutionized packaging by automating the creation of flat, square-bottomed paper bags. This evolution continued into 1962 with Swedish engineer Sten Gustaf Thulin, who invented the plastic carrier bag. Although now often viewed as an environmental scourge, Thulin originally designed the plastic bag as a reusable device intended to save trees. By the 2000s, the organic cotton tote bag became the emblem of sustainability; however, the **LOVE ME** exhibition highlights a startling counterpoint: such a tote must be used daily for 54 years to truly offset its environmental impact.

To address these dilemmas of consumption and sustainability, the **LOVE ME** exhibition presents a solution inspired by the resourcefulness of the World War II "make do and mend" campaigns. The Beautiful Materials Gallery features an installation of bags crafted from a repurposed golden velvet backdrop curtain. This specific fabric was gifted to Atkinson seven years ago by the band Belle & Sebastian, having been rediscovered in her art archive.

The curtain carries a rich history, originally created for the band's 2011 "Write about Love" tour. It served as the backdrop for 22 concerts globally, including performances at the Round House in London and the O2 Academy in Leeds. The exhibition posits that this velvet absorbed the "joyful force" of the audiences it stood before. By transforming this material into functional items, the **LOVE ME** bags act as vessels that carry not only goods but also music, memories, and love, turning a retired stage prop into a cherished, useful object once again.

Beautiful Materials Gallery Open Every Saturday 10-4 Avenue Shopping Centre G77 6AA

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