Ctrl/Shift

New Directions in Textile Art

A project by the 62 Group of Textile Artists

Saturday 21 July – Sunday 9 September 2018

Open Tuesday – Sunday and bank holiday | 11am – 5pm
This is an exhibition about the power and subtlety of textile and fibre arts, and more importantly about the artistic process: how artists conceive of and create work, how their ideas flourish and change, and how the very way that they work will alter over time, in reaction to new ideas, techniques, processes and materials; challenges and opportunities; changes in circumstance, location and ability.

What brings the exhibiting artists together is being part of The 62 Group of Textile Artists, a leading network based in the UK but international in remit and membership. The 62 Group was formed, unsurprisingly, in 1962 by a small group of artists who were individually and collectively inspired and excited by the new uses of textile in art. The ambitions of the Group are serious: it exists to create regular exhibition and development opportunities for members and is formally constituted and rigorously run. The Group’s objectives include commitments to promote textile art; to create opportunities for the growth and exchange of ideas, and exploration of new directions. They also encourage links with international textile groups and promote and encourage greater awareness of textile art through education.

This exhibition came out of discussions over a long period of time between curator Liz Cooper and members of the Group about a different kind of exhibition. Everyone was eager to push textile practice forward, and to find a wide yet challenging theme for members to explore. The range of submissions was impressive, with each artist looking at many aspects of their work: materials both new and found, techniques in hand and technology-driven processes, a wide variety of subject matter, scale, and collaborative working.

The exhibition is grouped into four main thematic areas but could equally have been split many other ways. There is also a Project Space in which samples, tools, photos, short films and other materials will shed some light on the making process. We hope that the works will delight, provoke, entertain and educate; and inspire others to explore this most powerful of media, textiles.
Visit the CTRL/Shift project space. Here you can find out more about the process of being an artist, and perhaps be inspired yourself to make something.

Working with textiles and other applied arts requires a meeting of many things: some interesting ideas in your head, learning skills with your hands (and maybe also the rest of your body), exploring and satisfying the desire in your heart to create, mastering intricate processes and techniques, and gaining knowledge of an array of materials to use.

The 62 Group describe themselves as textile artists: this may suggest someone sewing fabric with a needle and thread. But there is much more to being a textile artist than sewing: drawing, making models, taking photos, researching, looking, listening, touching, experimenting with strange materials and different colours and how to achieve them, thinking about language and communication, knitting, weaving, lacemaking, embroidering, printing, painting, molding, building, embellishing, arranging... the list is endless.

In the Project Space you will find images and objects that are used by these artists to make the finished artworks: sketches, tools, photos, inspirational objects, and works in progress. There are also short films and animations about how the artists work.

And you can join in with our Design a Statement Jacket project, based on Nigel Cheney’s work.

The 62 Group use a wide array of techniques you might not associate with textiles. Can you identify them all in the exhibition?

Applique, aquatint, assemblage, cut, decal print, digital photography and printing, discharge, drawing, dyeing, embossing, embroidery, etching, felting, fixed-knot netting, glazing, hand stitch, heat press, laser cutting, machine embroidery and stitching, machine tailor tacking, manipulating, monoprint, nailed, paint, painting with ink, pattern cutting, piecing, pleat, print, quilting, recycled zinc plates, resist with flower paste, rip, sea-washing, silkscreen printing, slipcast, steaming, stitch on soluble paper, thermochromic printing, threading, weave, wood working, wrapping.

Lights Out (detail) by Nigel Cheney
Most artists rarely confine themselves to one technique or a small set of materials. Making art is a constant process of learning and exploring; artists and craftspeople are often keen to experiment and try new things. Shuna Rendel remarks of the vetch seed pods and grape stems she uses, “I have never used these materials before but they enabled me to respond to my source as I wanted.” This is echoed by Ann Goddard: “Wood, concrete, wire, linen thread, scrim, paper, plaster, wax, Indian ink, acrylic paint, rubber cord and rusted metal: I am drawn to these materials for their aesthetic qualities.”

Sometimes the new material is a direct link to the ideas to be explored: Lucy Brown says, “I have had a long fascination with elastic, girdles, hair and make-up objects…. All these materials are associated with the feminine.” In Debbie Lyddon’s three works, the materials used to colour each one are directly related to the environment she is trying to portray. Debbie’s colours are “…finely hand-ground chalk, yellow ochre and sea-coal. These pigments are the colours of the land and the colours of my work – without the materials there would be no work.”

Remarkably no less than three artists here are using ceramics, earthenware clay for Imogen Aust, who also use photos printed on aluminium to evoke the factory-like conditions she is intrigued by, and porcelain for Caroline Bartlett and Heather Belcher. Caroline is drawn to the final quality of clay and how it take imprints from other matter, while Heather likes the contrast between the robustness of her usual felt and the fragile porcelain, noting a certain transience in the clay.

**Other themes in these works:** activism, landscape, the power of the repeat, the workplace.

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**Theme One**

**Materials: beyond cloth and yarn**

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*Fugitive Cloth (detail) by Heather Belcher*

*Imprint (detail) by Caroline Bartlett*
Theme Two
Captured Images: Digital and Other New Technologies

In its time the textile industry has been a leader in new technologies: the cotton and wool mills revolutionised making and gave rise to production lines; the jacquard loom was the direct inspiration for the nineteenth century counting machines that lead to the computer age. The sewing and knitting machines also transformed industrial and domestic production of clothes and household linens.

The technology most apparent in the work on display here is digital photography, followed closely by digital printing. Nigel Cheney has employed both: “I shifted my practice by working with digital prints of photographic and Photoshop-manipulated images rather than my own drawings…. Incorporating text and digital layers of dots and spots also allowed me to allude to the tensions of hard and soft memory.” Nigel built up many layers in Photoshop, using the imagery as a visual metaphor for the loss expressed in the poem that inspired the work.

Catherine Dormer also uses layers of digital imagery in her work, while Sue Stone says, “I constantly use my own digital photographs to inform my work…. The digital images are an integral part of my thinking process and are a means of problem solving before I start the making process using my more traditional techniques. Both are of equal importance to the outcome.”

In contrast, Joanna Kinnersly-Taylor creates abstracted works, carefully planned and composed with laser-cut cloth. She says, “I like the precision and crispness… and the fact that it is possible to make such a small-scale pattern without the fabric falling apart…. The cut-out areas… add depth as well as negative space, whilst also perhaps alluding to domestic textiles.”

Thermochromic inks, which change with heat, are used in Sumi Perera’s prints to allude to “the aesthetics & final result of the colour changing phenomenon, reflecting the control & shift that occur with ageing of buildings. It depicts the natural patina formation, the weathered look that exteriors of built spaces bear with time.”

Other themes in these works: history, loss, landscape and the built environment, materials, portraiture, the power of the repeat, self-reflective practice.
Theme Three
Landscape: the Stuff that Surround Us

From earliest times humans have observed and recorded our surroundings, and the widest interpretation of landscape is unlikely to ever vanish. Textile artists use a diversity of materials and techniques to examine the natural and built environment, both as a physical presence in their lives and for the ideas and issues that it represents.

Some respond to the technical challenge of representation: Isobel Currie alludes to English landscapes such as the hills of Derbyshire, exploring the construction of traditional embroidery stitches, presented on perspex forms. She says, “I am constantly inspired by the diversity and depth of colour in natural landscapes, the subtle shifts in tones and hues... and hope that my work encourages viewers to look at embroidery stitches in a new way, as three-dimensional objects.” By contrast Penny Burnfield takes completely contemporary materials and sees the land forms as “a powerful effect on the emotions, inspiring sensations of awe, terror, and beauty. I am interested in the concept of ‘the mountain’ as a metaphor of challenge, and of exploring new territory.”

Eszter Bornemisza’s cityscapes are more intimate, showing “our own patterns of movements, with layers of experiences and bits of individual and collective memory.” This resonates with Vanessa Rolf’s work, which explores her response to loss. She is “aiming to capture emotions that are hard to articulate despite their universal nature... referencing cartographic imagery, extending [my] exploration into landscape and reflecting human experiences.”

By contrast Sîan Martin has taken an international theme, making explicit links between the “Great Green Wall” tree-planting project in sub-Saharan Africa, and her own explorations with scientists at Steart Marshes on the Somerset Levels, close to where she lives. The landscape itself shapes the final work: “I work with local materials and aim to transform them by placing them in the environment. Fabric pieces, cane and willow were placed in different areas of Steart Marshes during last winter and then collected to use within my work.... Chosen materials have been dyed and embellished with wrapped threads and fabric fragments, sometimes also coated with mud and gold.”

Other themes in these works: activism, history, loss, materials, the power of the repeat, self-reflective practice.
The human condition is a wide ranging topic that encompasses many concerns, around wellbeing and disease, loss, faith, how we live, how we work and how we organize and make sense, or not, of our view of the world.

Wellbeing and disease are Caren Garfen’s focus in a hand-stitched assemblage looking at treatment of eating disorders. Caren’s is an ideas-led practice and she says her starting point is always, “The research. There is no artwork without exploratory work.” Daisy Collingridge is also looking at body image, creating her works in a less structured way in terms of pre-planning: “I go to my big cupboard of samples: there is usually something that sparks a new investigation. I am driven first by fabric manipulation and sampling: mostly I like to develop how I can change the fabric itself through stitch.”

Jane McKeating and Dawn Dupree are interested in mental health and ageing. Jane’s piece is a response to found handkerchiefs of elderly people. She says, “I make work in a very intuitive way, so the most important thing is that I don’t feel restricted, that I can let the work ‘speak’, responding to what I see and feel as I go along.” Dawn also works intuitively, but outcomes are informed by recent training as a psychotherapist: “I attempt to integrate new ideas; collaging drawing and cloth, and became aware of a shift in practice, where methods used seemed to echo some of my new therapeutic processes - reflecting, reclaiming, re-connecting and repairing.”

Elsewhere in the working world Emily Jo Gibbs is making a series of portraits of fellow craftspeople as expressed through studies of their tools. “I’m really keen to make work about communities that I have affinity with.” Hannah Lamb takes on the persona of a cataloguer, inspired by a visit to a fabric archive: “I was limited by time at the Tissutheque archive… and I chose to take a lot of photographs as a quick way of capturing visual information. Later I spent time in my studio creating drawings with brush and ink, as a way of exploring the aesthetic rather than creating a set design to work from.”

Flox den Hartog Jager has used her monoprints and free hand stitching to imagine a scenario of 21st century apocalypse, as seen through a filter of computerese. She says, “Stories are the most important thing - not stories about events in the world here and now… or maybe they are, but on a different level. They are symbolic and mythological rather than religious.”

Other themes in these works: activism, materials, portraiture, the power of the repeat.
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