

“Patchwork and Creativity”

The Art of Fiction Workshop 2

19-20 September

Murray Edwards College and Kettle’s Yard, Cambridge, UK

Organised by Tricia Zakreski and Alex du Plessis

Workshop Day 1: Thursday, 19 September

Venue: Vivien Stewart Room, Murray Edwards College

9.45 Coffee

10.00 Participatory making explainer - Alex du Plessis and Layla Khoo

10.10 Welcome - Tricia Zakreski

10.30 Keynote - Karen Livingstone “Patchwork as Method”

Abstract In this keynote talk, Karen Livingstone will discuss a range of the approaches, experiences and the themes which emerged during the research and writing of her forthcoming book ‘Women Pioneers of the Arts and Crafts Movement’. This new book tells the stories of the long-overlooked contributions made by women to one of the most important and influential artistic movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The Arts and Crafts Movement was one of the most consciously radical movements in art and design history, and the first in which a significant body of women determinedly participated. From the very outset, women were at the heart of the Movement and were innovators on many fronts. They set up their own craft workshops and businesses, sometimes in partnership with a husband or a relative. They found ways to defy expectations and learn their crafts, becoming highly skilled and notable experts while creating opportunities for others along the way. They used their creativity to challenge and to explore the female condition and actively



contributed to the advancement of the cause of women during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Written and edited by Karen Livingstone with contributions from Jasmine Allen, Rowan Bain, Eloise Donnelly, Jennie Lister and Florence Tyler, and with 277 colour images, 'Women Pioneers' is published by Thames and Hudson for the V&A on 24 October 2024 in the UK and 19 November in the USA.

11.30 Panel 1 – Collaboration

Thomas Cooper - "Variation, Collaboration and Agency in Arts and Crafts Embroidery"

Abstract Arts and Crafts scholarship has remained transfixed on the ideal of the designer-maker: an individual, invariably a man, whose dual command of artistic and technical brilliance enabled them produce single-handedly an artwork from graphic conception to fully realised finished product. In the context of Arts and Crafts embroidery production, however, this model of art making invariably did not work. Moreover, scholars' pursuit of this model causes us to ignore women's authorial creativity inherent in embroidery making.

In this paper, through close visual and material analysis, I compare a range of embroideries that began as kits sold by Morris & Co., and which were made by a range of stitchers from the 1880s to the 1910s. These textiles vary in execution, aesthetic programme and composition, and reveal that it was the norm for embroiderers to adapt a provisional graphic design in original and inventive schemes of stitching. I argue that we must acknowledge this dynamic interaction between the design and the embroidery, which has two important consequences in our interpretation of Arts and Crafts embroidery and valuing of women's creative artmaking.

The first is the need for flexibility in defining a design for embroidery. A drawn or painted design can range from prescriptive instruction to suggestive example, subject to change and revision by the stitcher(s). When we compare an embroidery with its design, we should expect variation between the design and the worked textile. The second is that we can problematise the designer-maker construct. Stitchers had critically agentive roles in the creative end of manufacture, which often involved collaboration of multiple hands: family members, employees, colleagues, students and friends. Significantly, these collaborations complicate



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neat conceptions of a singular designer or of assigning single tasks to individuals; the labour of designing and making embroidery was not so much divided as *shared*.

Laura Clarke and Sarah Clarke - “The Unprofessional Bookbinder: Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Stebbing”

Abstract Sylvia Stebbing is footnoted in the famous life of Virginia Woolf as the woman who taught Woolf bookbinding, yet an exploration of Stebbing’s life and work illuminates Woolf’s own unorthodox bookbinding, and their paths as bookbinders and writers offer insights into the ways in which women challenged the labels of amateur or professional at the start of the new century.

Stebbing began bookbinding at a time when it was difficult for women to become professional binders. Women were usually responsible for sewing and forwarding the book, whilst men worked on more creative aspects like design and gold tooling of the cover, known as finishing. This gendered division of labour was reinforced in the nineteenth century because women could not access specialised training at the trade schools. The only option was for women to secure expensive private lessons, often then establishing binderies in their own homes, leading them to be labelled amateurs.

As a middle-class woman of means, Stebbing was able to train with leading bookbinder Douglas Cockerell. She then opened her own bindery, achieving creative autonomy by taking on the aspects of binding typically reserved for men. Stebbing gave Woolf lessons in bookbinding and later had enough confidence in Woolf’s talent to ask her to share a bindery space. Although Woolf declined, she practised bookbinding for the rest of her life. The results have been criticised as ‘slapdash’, but Woolf’s disruptive method of patching up books using ‘scraps’, re-purposing and overlaying materials, cutting up and de-formalising bindings, when contextualised through Stebbing’s work, can be re-appraised as ‘experimental and creative’.

Our talk will consider the different bookbinding and writing paths taken by Woolf and Stebbing. Whilst Stebbing strove to establish herself as a professional binder by achieving the highest standards of leather binding and gold tooling associated with male binders, Woolf deliberately embraced an ‘amateurish’ patchwork aesthetic that rejected masculine and professional methods of bookbinding. We will also explore the influence of Woolf’s feminist experimentalism on Stebbing’s own writing when she stitches ‘fragments’ of her aunts lives into a ‘patchwork quilt’ group biography called *Victorian Sisters*.

Kyriaki Hadjiafxendi - “Co-creating with Spirits: Anna Mary Howitt, Spiritualism and Resistant Creativity”

Abstract The stories we tell about women, their lives and their creative work have been necessarily revisionist. We collect, sort and stitch together existing research material that doesn’t tessellate together, and re-use and rearrange it into new forms like a patchwork to create a whole and tell women’s stories. Exploring the



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figurative value of patchworking as a methodology for recovery work, my paper will look again at the way one nineteenth-century woman writer, Anna Mary Howitt, improvised with different models for artistic collaboration in her quest for spirituality and creative agency. Howitt was born into a literary family that made, according to Linda Peterson, 'collaborative writing as a family practice'. This is evident in her novella *The Sisters in Art* (1852), which gives an idealized account of her friendship and professional collaboration with other women like Barbara Leigh Smith; similarly, her travelogue *An Art Student in Munich* (1853) 'articulates a theory of collaboration as a feminist mode of production' (p. 121). In the late 1850s, however, Howitt abandoned her career as an artist and committed herself to spiritualism. While this is usually seen by scholars as her moving away from her earlier political and artistic collaborations, more recent scholarship has found more continuity than rupture. A closer examination of Howitt's spirit drawings could be argued to be part of the same commitment to collaborative work and resistant forms of creativity. Except, this time, as Howitt pointed out, the collaboration was with other spirits, which 'developed drawing in me [. . .] simultaneously with the faculty to behold symbolical visions and spirit personages, and to hear an internal voice speaking' (p.176). Just like patchwork, her spirit drawings have repeated imagery from nature, religion and science fused together. Studying them in their own right will help to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the complex relations between individual agency in/and active co-creation, which underline women's contribution to our creative history.

13.00 Lunch

14.00 Panel 2 – Patchwork and Practice

Lydia Donohue - "Tactile Archives: quiltmaking in South Manchester"

Abstract My research is conducted in the shadow of the mills and smokestacks of industrialised labour. Within church halls and community centres of South Manchester women congregate to create a stream of material objects and contribute to a textile archive of handwork. The northwest quilting community and the product of their skilled craft is where I have established my long-spanning ethnographic research (2018 onwards).

Central to my anthropological focus is the artistry, complex geometric thinking and creative older age that blossoms within the craft communities. The heterogeneous makers come together with their diverse styles and aesthetics to compliment, compare and admire one another's stitched work, in so doing, materialising a rich visual culture, one that can be read as a testament to women's lives. Hence, if we engage with both the 'domestic/mundane' and the 'artistic' and 'creative' stitched biography, we can begin to understand women's everyday lived experience. I emphasise my positionality as a practice-led researcher and foreground touch as the sense to explore this material culture in which we use our fingers to think back through our grandmothers.



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I am currently piecing together the collection of stories, experiences, skills and materials that have been shared and gifted to me by the women of the quilting community. This patchwork ethnography requires seaming at its selvages to produce writing that celebrates the often-overlooked vibrancy and creativity that the women mirror in their quilts through a tessellation of colours and shapes.

I am extremely excited to read a prompt that reflects the threads within my own work and at a time in my research in which I am assembling the abstract elements of fieldwork to form a pattern. The Patchwork and Creativity workshop symbolises a move from my own participatory practice of ethnography to a future engaging with scholars and practitioners of textiles.

Harriet Truscott - “To translate poetry is to patchwork: a reflection from my own creative practice”

Abstract Translating poetry is a marginal art, at once culturally valued (‘I could never do that...’) and culturally misprised (‘why would anyone do that?’). It is a particular form of making: a taking of the pre-existing, a snipping, an adding, a reshaping into a new form. In short, it is a patchwork art.

In this talk, I consider the use of clothing and fabric metaphors by literary translators from the 17th to the 21st centuries. I draw on my own practice as a translator and a poet to argue that the notion of ‘patchwork’ offers a provocative and valuable metaphor for literary translation. As translator of the late poet and exile Concha Méndez, I am both her unseen assistant – her lady’s maid, as translator Kate Briggs puts it – and her un-stitcher. My translations are created from the material that Méndez leaves me. But, as with a quilt, the beauty of a translation may very well result from the maker’s willingness to be less literal, more daring in their cutting, reshaping and reimagining of the original fabrics.

Having argued for the value of patchwork rather than dressmaking as a metaphor for literary translation, I ask why translators might feel the need of a metaphor, exploring its use both as justification of an approach and as a tool in the creative process itself. In a period where translation, even literary translation, is increasingly done by machine, the wish for metaphor, and the homely metaphor of patchwork, take on a new dimension: as a marker of the translator’s imperfect, laborious, imaginative humanity.



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Clare Daněk - “Process and document: a ‘stitch journal’ as a creative tool during doctoral study”

Abstract How might engaging with processes of patchworking enable a doctoral researcher to make materially visible the experience of undertaking a PhD? And how might this process also reflect the location of the PhD within a wider life? In this presentation I unpick how an embroidered, appliqued, textile ‘stitch journal’, created through two years of daily practice, functioned as both document and reflexive tool.

The stitch journal began as an opportunity to do some making every day, and developed into a practice that offered a productive method for thinking and expressing myself visually and materially; it also offered space to experiment, free from the constraints of engagement with more traditional complexities of academic knowledge production. The fragments (of data, experience, and ideas), captured in 5cm square daily stitched journal ‘entries’, juxtaposed over time to explore larger narratives about everyday life and doctoral study. Using processes of both concealing (via more oblique entries) and revealing, via daily entries shared on social media, I was also able to draw out Gauntlett’s (2018) observation that ‘making is connecting’ – in this case both materially and socially.

If patchwork can be considered as a way of telling a life, in which something new is created from disparate parts, this work reflects this both as an example of a material way of knowing, and, in the processes of its production, both the experience and the evidence of *coming* to know.

15.30 Comfort break

15.45 Conversation

16.30 Finish

17.30 [Participatory Textile Practices \(A Roundtable\)](#) (Buckingham House, Murray Edwards College)

18.30 Drinks reception

19.15 Dinner (SCR, Murray Edwards College)



Workshop Day 2: Friday, 20 September

Venue: Ede Room, Kettle's Yard

9.45 Coffee

10.00 Panel 3 – Women Pioneers

Rachel Carroll - ““The gold sleeves lay gleaming””: clothing economies, social investigation and women’s voices in Nell Dunn’s *Up the Junction* (1963)”

Abstract From Beatrice Webb’s 1888 “Pages From a Work-Girl’s Diary,” a fictionalised account of the author’s undercover experiences as a trouser-hand in the sweated garment industries of the East End, to Nell Dunn’s 1963 *Up the Junction*, a short story sequence centring on the reproduced speech of white working class women in Battersea, the relationship between cross-class identification, social investigation and women’s voices has been a potent one in progressive traditions of British women’s writing, often testing the boundaries between fictional and non-fiction narrative.

In this context, this paper seeks to mobilise critical frameworks grounded in patchwork practice in two ways.

Firstly, patchwork has been described as a “discursive genre,” facilitating “major speech acts” (Mulholland, 1996) in contexts where women’s voices might otherwise go unheard. Exploring texts which foreground the assembly of ‘found’ speech into fictional frames, this paper will consider the extent to which these works replicate or redress the tensions at work – in specific historical and cultural conditions - between collective endeavour and hidden hierarchies in women’s patchwork and publication practices.

Secondly, by interpretatively piecing together textile artefacts which might more routinely be disregarded as incidental or insignificant, this paper will attempt to model a reading strategy informed by patchwork practice. Through a special focus on women’s “clothing survival strategies” (Burman, 1991) in Dunn’s collection, it will map the movement, management and dispersal of dress, from the hire purchase boutique to the public wash-house and the rag-man’s barrow of early 1960s London. By bringing close attention to selected items – a nylon ‘underset’ sealed in cellophane; a Victorian damask blouse – it aims to experimentally apply the principles of object-based enquiry to a nominally ‘object-less’ field of study (literature) as a means of creatively materialising women’s textile labour.

Carolyn Ferguson - “The Genius of Elizabeth Allen (1883 - 1967): patchworker and picture maker extraordinaire.”

Abstract Picture a remote shack in the woods and a little old lady in a green dress reclining on a green sofa in the middle of hundreds of fabric pictures, all mounted on hardboard. This scene was the artist Trevor Bell’s first impression of Elizabeth Allen (1883 -



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1867) in 1965. Through Trevor Bell, Patrick Heron and their contemporaries Elizabeth received acclaim in the art world for a brief moment in the 1960s.

A seamstress by training, she used the medium of fabric to create highly colourful and highly imaginative patchwork pictures with a variety of messages, some religious, some distinctly quirky and some to show her strong views on society. Her works cannot be considered pretty as she used material that she owned or could buy at bargain prices. Elizabeth's world was deprived and difficult as she was disabled but her patchworks must be recognised for their unique artistic feeling. She deserves a greater profile and a greater recognition for her contribution to the world that links patchwork with art and patchwork with society.

Elizabeth can be considered a creative genius and my short paper will focus on her life and work through the pictures that she produced. Elizabeth was no 'naive' artist. She learnt to sew and wanted to be independent; she had cloth and wanted to use it. Her world was drawn through the pictures created by the fabric.

Lottie Whalen and Jade French (Decorating Dissidence) - "Making Something from Modernism': Femmage as Art History Strategy"

Abstract Our project, *Decorating Dissidence*, is a platform that draws connections between twentieth-century crafts and contemporary makers through exhibitions, workshops, research, and writing, with an emphasis on collaborative practice. In this paper, we begin by reflecting on our collaborative collage, 'Making Something From Modernism', made for the digital humanities platform *Navigating the Avant-Garde* in 2019. Taking inspiration from Miriam Schapiro's 'Femmeage' (1977-78) our handmade postcard explores the dialogues between decorative craft and feminist practices as multivocal and non-chronological. The second half of the paper draws on theories of the 'en dehors garde' (turning outwards) and Amy Elkins' *Crafting Feminism* (2023) to discuss patchwork as a method with which we can weave new expansive narratives of modern art history. Femmage, collage, patchwork: all these terms help us to open up a new, forgotten lineage of craft-led creativity that challenges the myth of the solo "genius" in modern art; in the process, we can instead map intergenerational, intersectional constellations of makers and practices and, in the process, reclaim, recharge, and repurpose avant-garde artistic strategies. Finally, we reflect on the unfolding nature of a patchwork, drawing attention to the gaps in our femmage – and the unfinished edges – offering these as an invitation to be filled by a continuing critical examination, which we will use as a discussion point to end on.

11.15 Comfort break



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11.30 Collections Exploration: FitzStitch with Sarah Cate Blake

11.45 Panel 4 – The Politics of Patchwork

Dominik Izdebski - “Patchworks of Protest; How Chilean Arpilleristas Inspired Craftivism Around the World”

Abstract Chilean Arpilleras depicted horrors of everyday life in Chile under Augusto Pinochet's 17-year long dictatorship (1973-1990). Arpilleras, pronounced *ar-pee-air-ahs*, meaning burlap in Spanish, are small and colorful three-dimensional patchworks made from scraps of materials. Made predominantly by women from poor Santiago communities, Arpilleras depicted life during the regime. They provided an income to those women who left without any financial security. Depicting human rights violations, arrests, and executions, Arpilleras were often a way for people outside of Chile to see what regular citizens were going through. They were made in workshops organized by the catholic church organizations and distributed discretely abroad by the human rights church group called Vicariate of Solidarity. After the fall of the dictatorship, the Vicariate of Solidarity dissolved, and the need for the Arpilleras declined. Thus, many think that the Arpilleras lost their political sting or that they are just a folk art depicting bucolic images instead of atrocities of the dictatorship to draw tourist attention. Relying on interviews with current textile artists and a visit to the Arpillera exhibition "Embracing Human Rights: Conflict Textiles' journey" in Limavady, Northern Ireland, this paper argues that Arpilleras are used not only in modern-day Chile, depicting protests and police brutality, but also by artists, art therapists, and craftivists worldwide with examples from Argentina, Peru, Mexico, United States, and Italy.

Jonathan Cane - “Anti-apartheid Assemblages: Girls and the People’s Parks”

Abstract This proposal is to engage with the gendered aspects of the ‘People’s Parks’, an anti-apartheid youth movement from 1985 which beautified and cleaned Black townships and informal settlements. Considered ‘struggle’ or ‘resistance’ art, the sculptures, plantings and murals that were fashioned from oddments, rubbish and environmental detritus were recorded by socially committed photographers and journalists at the time and have now been digitized and consolidated by myself and collaborators as the People’s Parks Archive (PPA). The archive is a compelling record of the time because the racist regime’s security forces destroyed all of these community parks. Like many aspects of the aesthetic and political struggle against apartheid, these ‘youth’ who painted, planted and watered have been figured as male and the work of women and girls has been neglected. As part of a broader research project on prefigurative Black compositional



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thought, this workshop paper will address the role of girls in the parks phenomenon. The proposed paper will present a number of the poignant photographs in the PPA— flowerbeds trampled by police; abstract sculptures made of tree trunks, tyres, pinecones and leftover house paint; statues of political heroes deposed by army tanks and gunfire. This proposed paper offers an opportunity to engage the environmental and political aspects of the communal practices of bricolage in the Global South.

Laura Moseley - “Soft Resistance: Mutual Aid Patchwork for Palestine”

Abstract Signature quilts, also known as fundraising, friendship or album quilts, have been a collective creative project since the early 18th century. In 2024, a significant number of mutual aid initiatives are taking place by UK and US quilters to raise awareness and funds for charities working in Gaza. Many of these quilts have raised tens of thousands of pounds/dollars, just by raffling tickets to win the quilt and asking for a small donation to contribute a patch. Whilst the causes have changed from those made in the 18th and 19th century, the methods remain quite unchanged. I would like to submit a paper about the creation of these quilts, the history that they stem from and why the quilting community has been particularly motivated to help. Examples of these initiatives can be found below:

- Quilt for Palestine (Sheffield, UK): <https://www.instagram.com/quiltforpalestine/>
- Eddie Rose (Norwich, UK): https://www.instagram.com/p/C0e9Xq2opMO/?img_index=1
- Tenille Fatimah (USA): https://www.instagram.com/p/C2JXGCKrBU5/?img_index=1

13.00 Break (workshop participants are welcome to visit the [Megan Rooney: Echoes & Hours](#) exhibition in the Kettle’s Yard galleries)

13.15 Lunch (Ede Room)

14.10 Walk to chosen collections’ venue

14.15 Either

A self-guided tour of the Kettle’s Yard House

or

“Finding community through patchwork in the Museum of Cambridge’s textile collection” with Beau Brannick

15.30 Conversation (Ede Room) over tea and coffee

16.30 Finish

