Articulating Stitch:

skilful hand-stitching as personal, social and cultural experience

Emma Shercliff

Volume Two: Appendices

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The Royal College of Art

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Appendix I: methods table

	Activity	Research method	Location / setting	Task: individual or collective?	My role as researcher	Researcher's involvement in the activity / tasks	Regularity of sessions and duration of project	Duration of session(s)	Format / group type	Number of participants in group	Participants' gender and age	Nature of conversation or observation	Method of documentation / recording	Focus of analysis	Key themes / questions
Stitched Diaries	Hand-embroidered personal diary pages	Making	Various	Individual	Reflective practitioner	Own making	Over 10 months	Varied	Solo activity	-	-	Personal motivations to stitch	Made pieces and journal notes	Made pieces	Explicit and implicit forms of knowledge
Marking Time	Hand embroidered pieces recording actual time spent stitching	Making	Various	Individual	Reflective practitioner	Own making	Daily over 9 days	From 1 hour 30 minutes to 3 hours 25 minutes	Solo activity	-	-	Tracking when and for how long I manage to find time to stitch	Made pieces and journal notes	Made pieces	Time and resources available to stitch
Part of a Piece	Making patchwork	Making	Researcher's home	Individual	Reflective practitioner	Own making	Daily over 2 months	Varied	Solo activity	-	-	The precision, patterns and repetitions of hand-stitching skills	Photography, video, made piece and journal notes	Physical actions, words written and made piece	Repetition of gestures, patterns of crafting
Monologue	Plain sewing	Making	Researcher's home	Individual	Reflective practitioner	Own making	Sporadic over 3 years	Typically 2 and a half hours	Solo activity	-	-	The physical sensations, mental states and thought processes associated with hand-stitching alone.	Audio recording of thoughts spoken aloud whilst stitching	Words spoken	Repetitions of gestures, introspection
Camden Arts Centre craft evening	Making burlesque-style knickers	Participation & observation	Museum / gallery	Individual	Participant & reflective practitioner	Participation in making	One-off	3 hours	Drop-in workshop	5 including researcher	Women - early 20s	Joining in, knowing what to do	Journal notes	Physical sensations	Embodied knowledge
Stitch 'n Tell at the Women's Library	Conversation whilst making hand embroidered patchwork pieces	Participation & observation	Museum / gallery	Individual contributing to collective	Participant	Participation in making	One-off event in parallel to 'Hand Made Tales' exhibition held at venue	3 hours	Drop-in workshop	8 including researcher	Women - mixed age group (exact ages not recorded)	Joining in	Photography and journal notes	-	-
Sknitch with Craftspace at the Clothes Show Live	Trying out basic hand embroidery, making small samples to display	Participation & observation	Large public event	Individual contributing to collective	Facilitator and instructor	Overseeing open activity	One-off event running for 2 days	9.5 hours	Drop-in workshop	Roughly 40	Girls and boys aged 9-15	One-to-one instructions - learning a new hand skill	Photography and journal notes	Physical actions	Embodied knowledge: learning
Stone-carving	Learning to carve stone	Making	Purpose-built studio	Individual	Reflective practitioner	Making & learning	Weekly for 2 ten week terms + 3 6 hour day sessions	2.5 hours	Evening class	-	-	Learning a new hand skill	Photography and journal notes	Physical actions	Embodied knowledge: learning
Taking a Thread For a Walk - RCA	Hand-stitching small samples for researcher in response to set tasks	Observation & group discussion	Art school	Individual	Facilitator and observer	Specific tasks set by researcher	1st of 2 one-off sessions	2 hours	Practical workshop + conversation	5	Students – women and one man aged 25-52	Focused discussion of researcher's open questions about perceptions of hand-stitching	Audio recording and pieces made	Words spoken and pieces made	Embodied knowledge
Taking a Thread For a Walk - AUB	Hand-stitching small samples for researcher in response to set tasks	Observation & group discussion	Art school	Individual	Facilitator and observer	Specific tasks set by researcher	2nd of 2 one-off sessions	2 hours	Practical workshop + conversation	4	Students – women in early 20s	Focused discussion of researcher's open questions about what it feels like when hand-stitching	Audio recording and pieces made	Words spoken and pieces made	Embodied knowledge
The patchwork quilting group	Making patchwork quilts	Observation & interviews	Quilters' homes	Individual	Observer	Observing	4 group meetings and 6 one-to-one interviews over a period of 11 months	1 ½ - 2 ½ hours	Practical workshops + conversation	25 group members in total - I met 13	Women aged late-30s to late 80s	Open conversation about making	Photo, video and audio recording	Physical actions and words spoken	Tacit knowledge held in hands Physical, psychological and emotional satisfactions of making
The embroidery group	Hand-stitching large embroidered panels for village church	Participation, observation & conversation	Village church community hall	Collective	Participant-observer	Joining in set tasks	Weekly meetings over 2.5 years – researcher attended monthly	3 hours	Community embroidery group	14 with 7 regular members	Women aged mid-40s to late 80s	Informal conversation about general topics and making tasks	Photo, audio recording and journal notes	Physical actions and words spoken	Joining in Embodied knowledge

Appendix II: works

Stitched Diaries (2006-07)

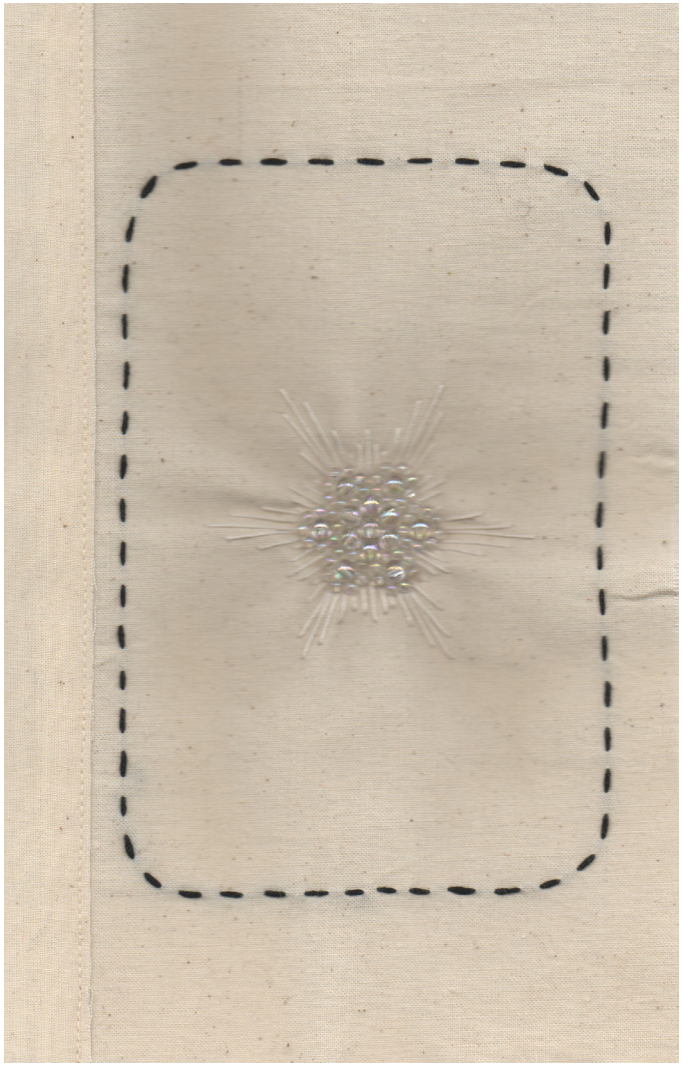
A series of hand-stitched personal diary pages using decorative free-hand embroidery to record my thoughts visually over a period of ten months. The pages consist of collections of marks and motifs that attempt to represent my thoughts through considered choices of thread, colour, motif and technique. Plain calico pages imitate the pages of a notebook. Notes made alongside the embroideries record the time and place made, and my mood regarding the events concerning me at the time. Excerpts from the notes are reproduced here.

Photos: the author.

Reference is made in the thesis text:

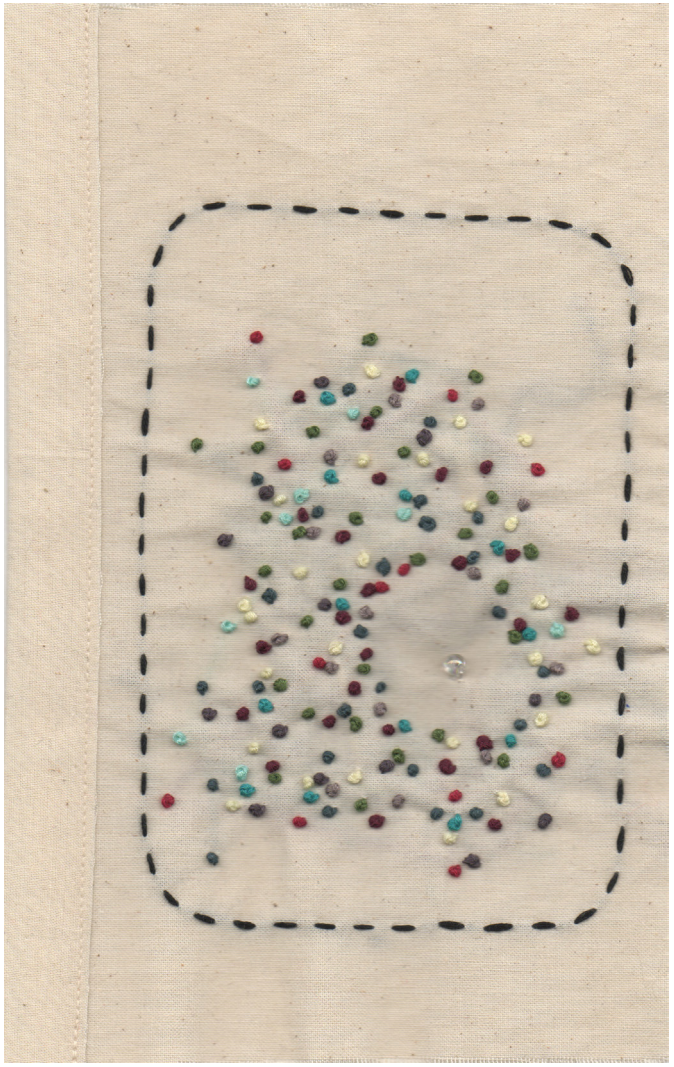
Chapter One, pp. 49-53.

Chapter Two, pp. 78-80 & 84-87.



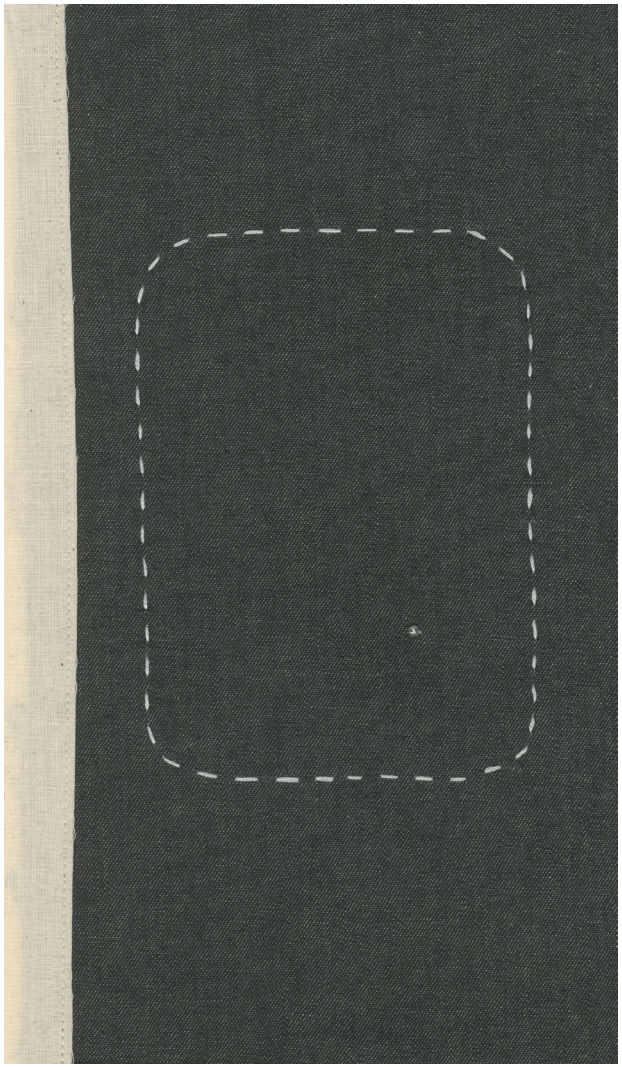
21 October 2006. Plastic beads and silk thread on calico.

Densely packed iridescent beads in celebration of a new start, a fresh start.



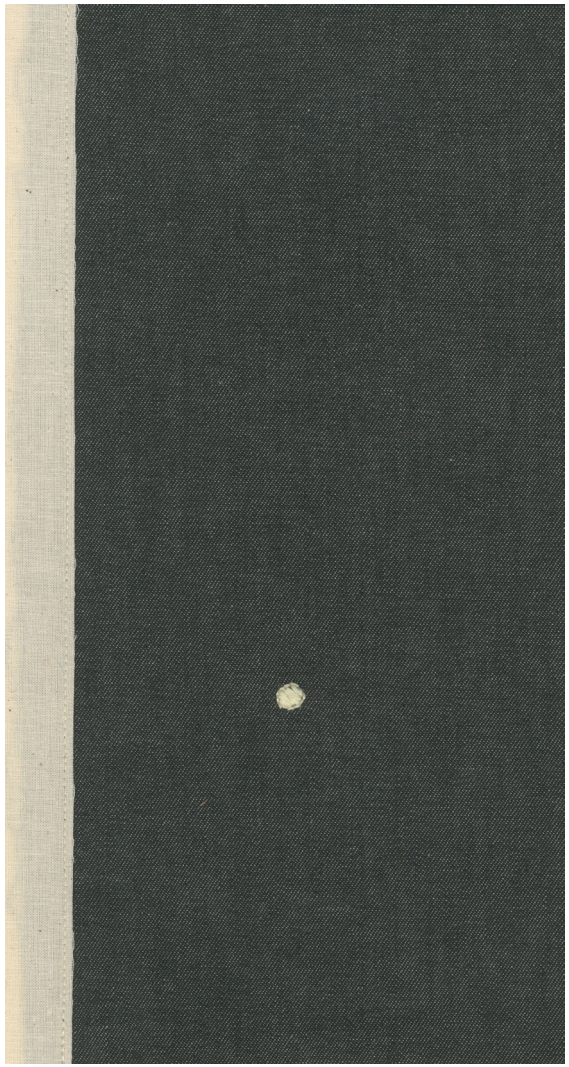
22 October 2006. French knots on calico, cotton and silk thread, bead.

In this new environment, I am surrounded by different people, who seem to mix easily and get on well. I don't know any of them yet.



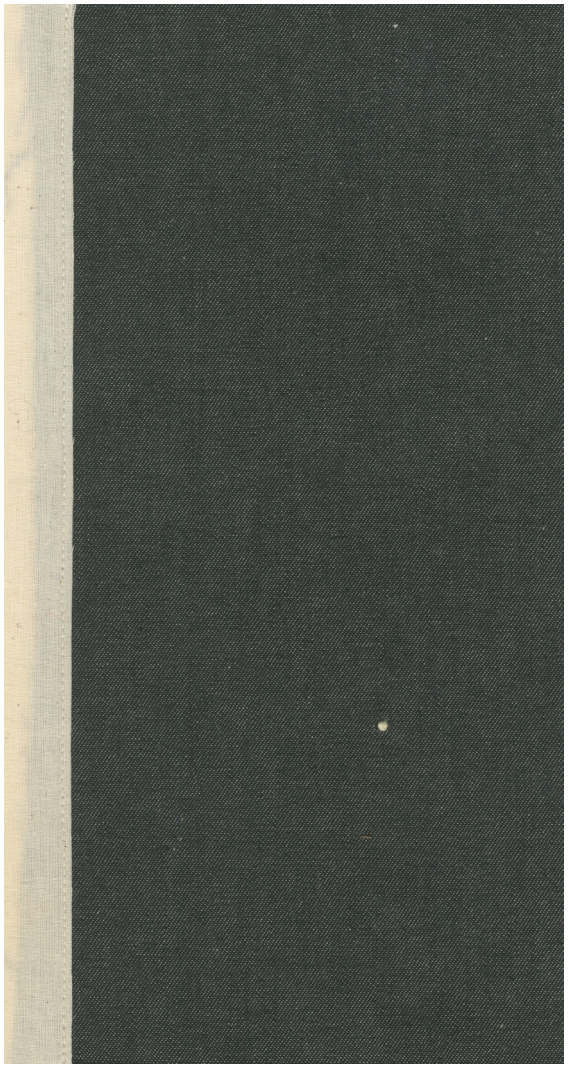
26 October 2006. Bead on denim.

Feeling small and lost in this smudgy darkness of loneliness. The frame is inappropriate - there's no edge to this.



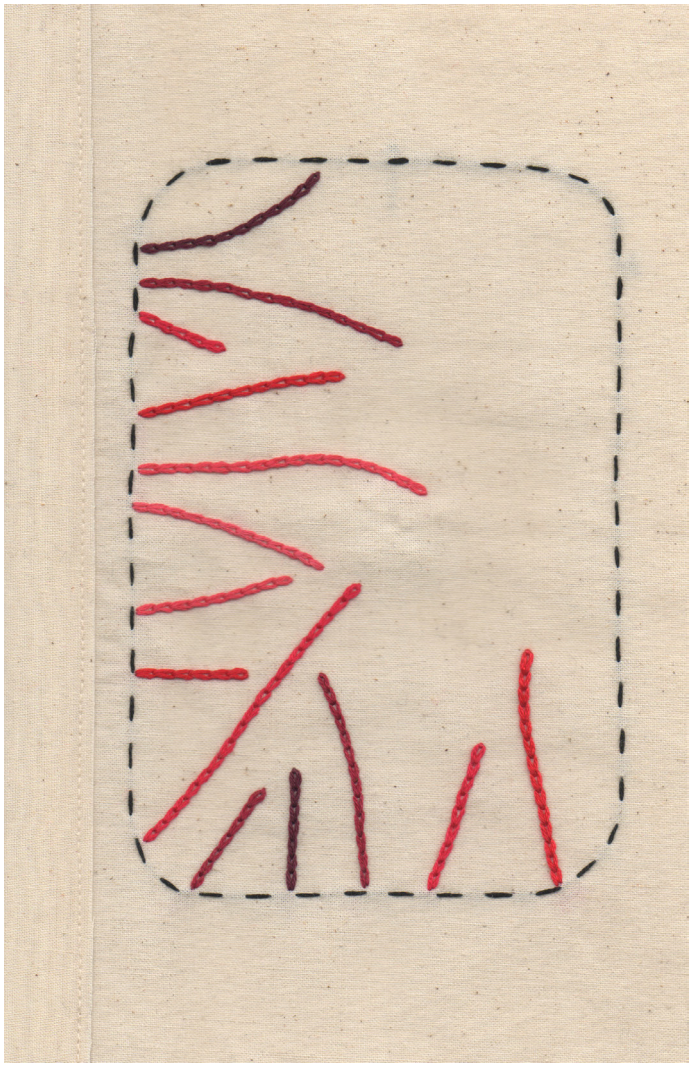
end October 2006. Cotton thread on denim.

Trying to replicate a sense of scale, but this doesn't feel small enough.



end October 2006. French knot on denim.

This feels like feeling small and lost, overwhelmed by it all.

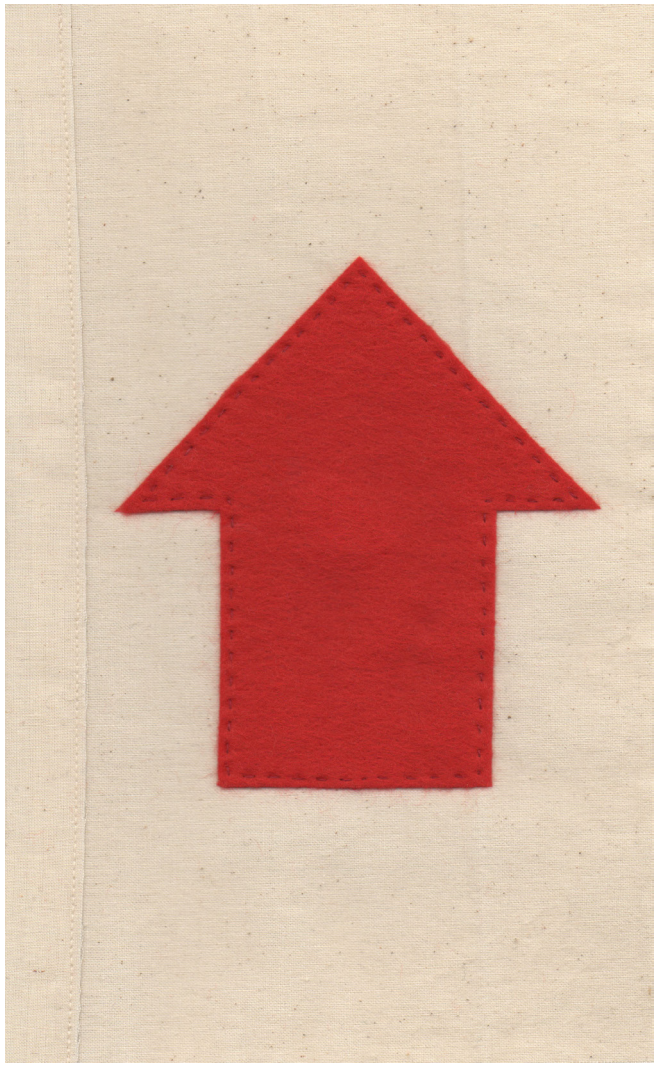


3 November 2006. Cotton thread on calico.

I am beginning to make inroads into the project. I keep stopping and starting, down different pathways, following up different ideas. Going forwards, things are looking up. Still fragile - like the chain stitch, one pull and it could all come undone.

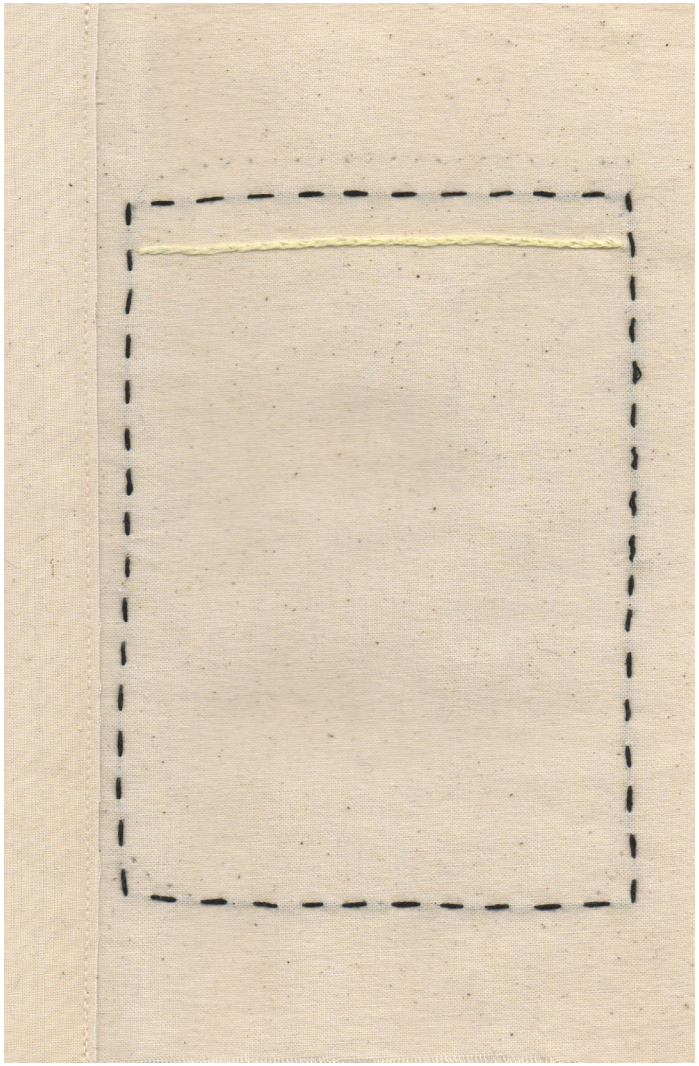
11 November 2006. Appliquéd shapes on calico.

Looking up, and looking forward. Not exactly sure where, but feeling like this is the right place to be now. Several positive steps.



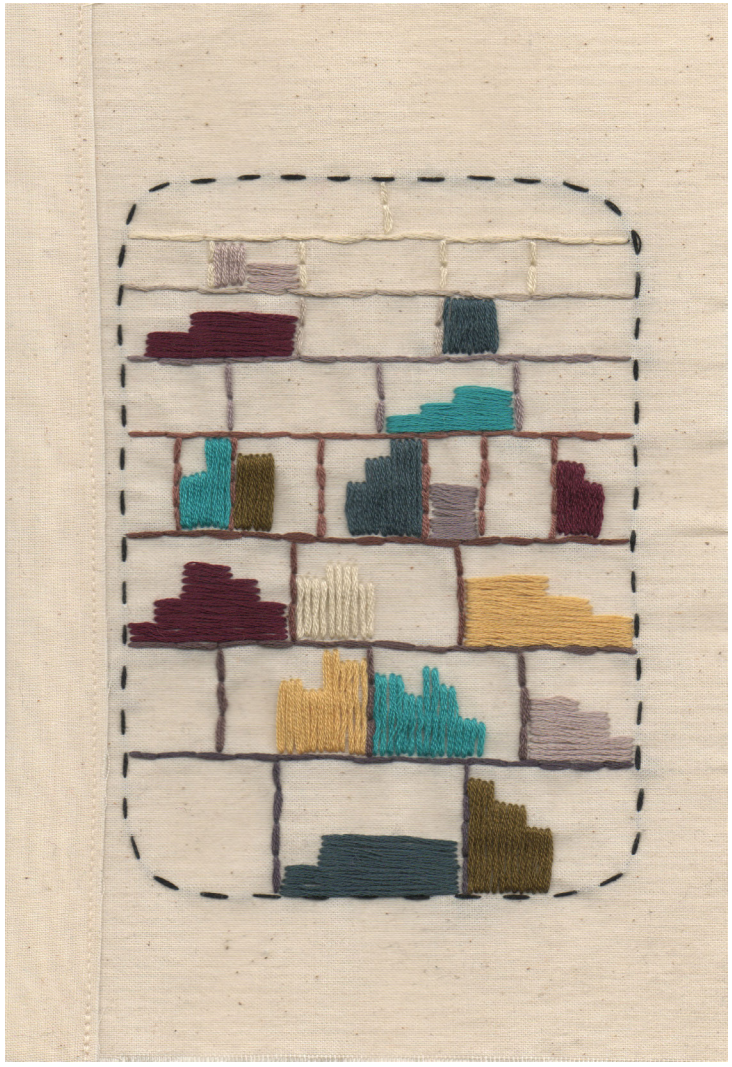
11 November 2006. Appliquéd shape on calico.

Looking up, and looking forward. This feels very forceful and dynamic - I think that's overstating it.



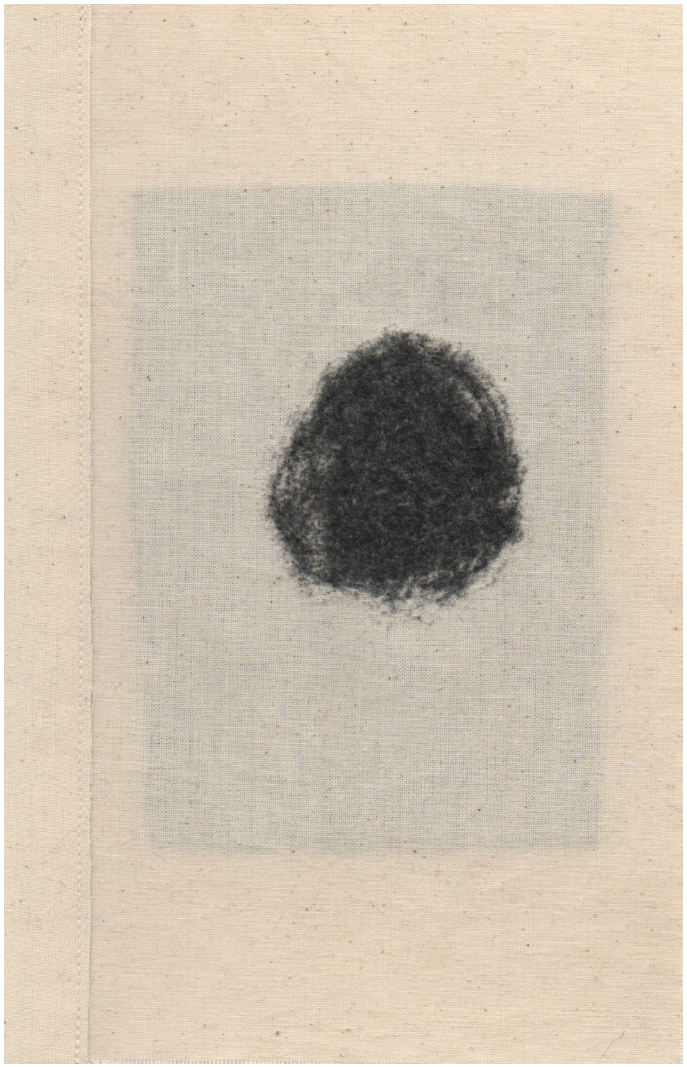
November 2006. Split stitch, cotton thread on calico.

On a high - euphoric, but precarious, like tight rope walking. I tried this several times before accepting this version. These moments repeat themselves.



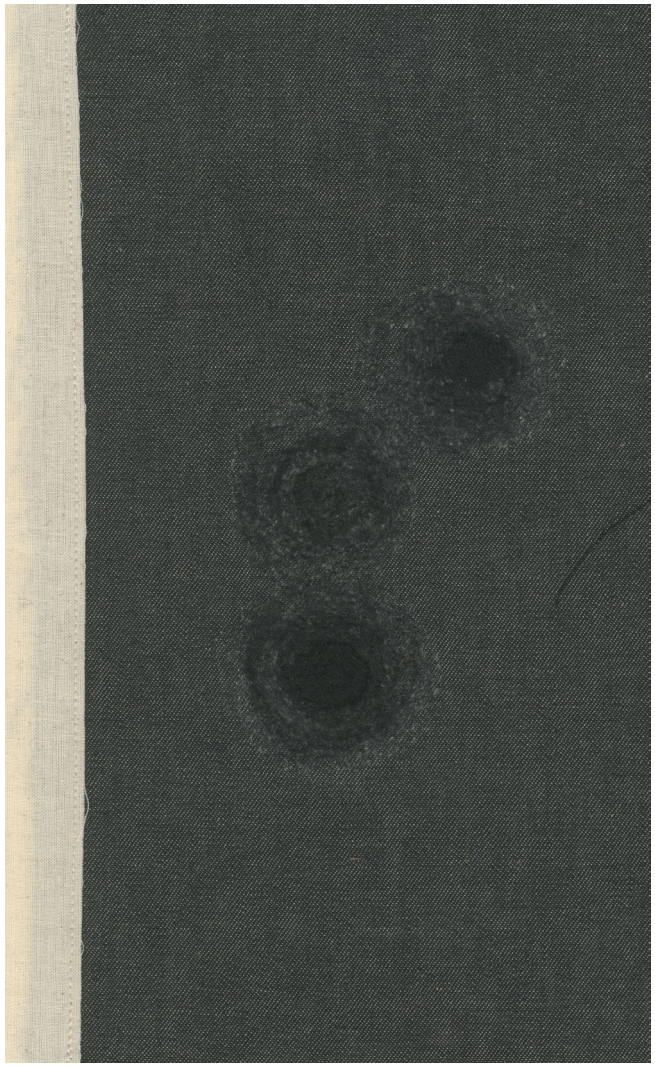
18 November 2006. Satin stitch, cotton thread on calico.

Neither my satin stitching nor my filing are slick and neat. I don't mind the drudgery of it - organising research themes, documents into files. Managing the material I'm collecting and finding a system of organisation is a constant concern.



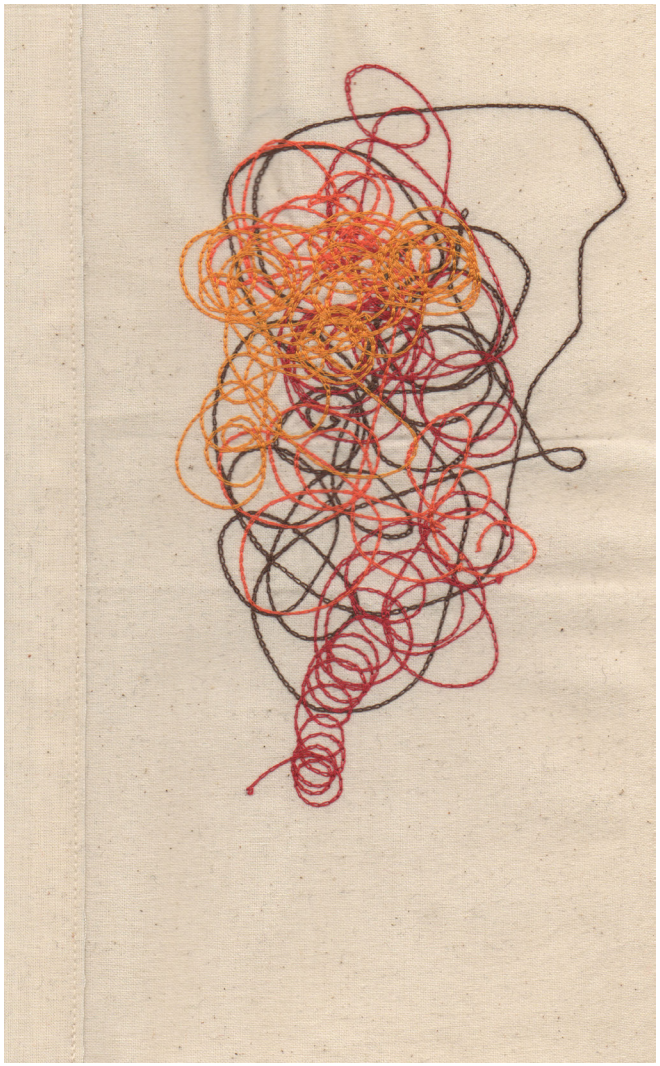
Beginning December 2006. Wool needle punched through calico.

A black hole, a dead end, inertia. Likely to re-occur. This fuzzy black hole is effective at swallowing me up making it difficult to see clearly. The needle punching is vicious, clawing up fibres from below, like a persistent headache.



Beginning December 2006. Wool needle punched through denim.

As before but the black fuzz on a smokey black ground is a more subdued fogginess: a confusion and inability to see clearly. Going over and over the same ground, mesmerizing to the point of distraction, distortion - and almost destroying the surface.

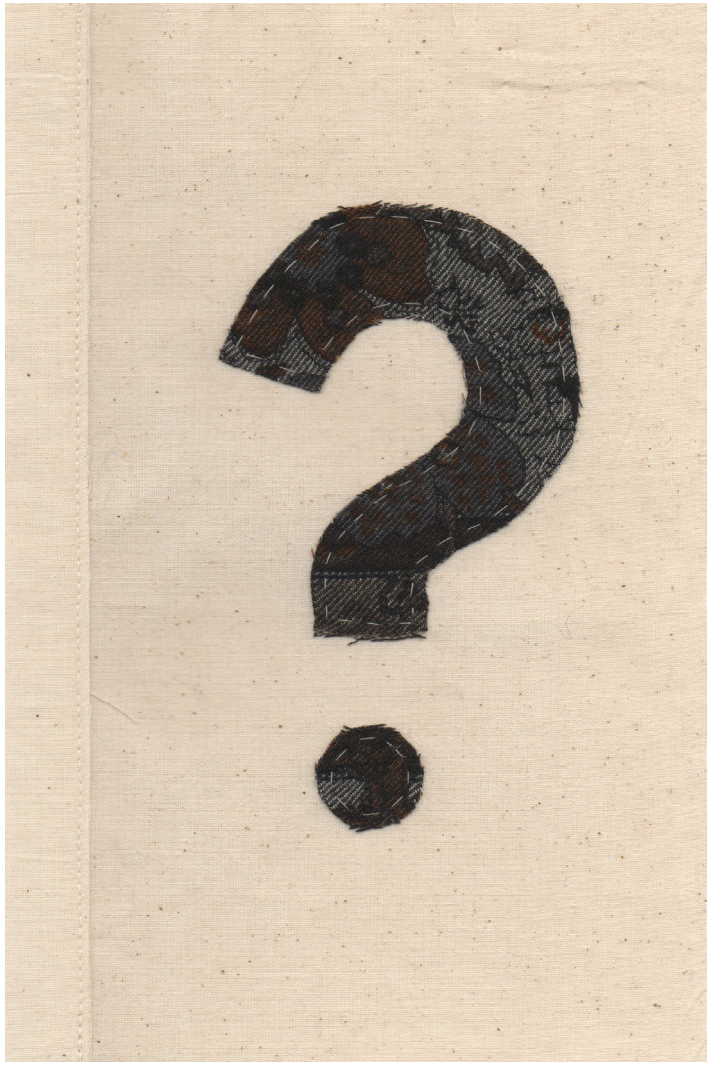


Beginning December 2006. Cornely embroidery on calico.

Going round and round in circles, tighter and faster in frustration and lack of control. A heated anxiety. No clear direction, an aimless wandering and wondering. Unsecured chain stitch - one hitch and all falls out.

23 December 2006. Various appliquéd fabrics on calico.

Things pile up precariously on top of me, unwieldy. I am snowed under, feeling unable to prevent the piles from slipping away or falling off.

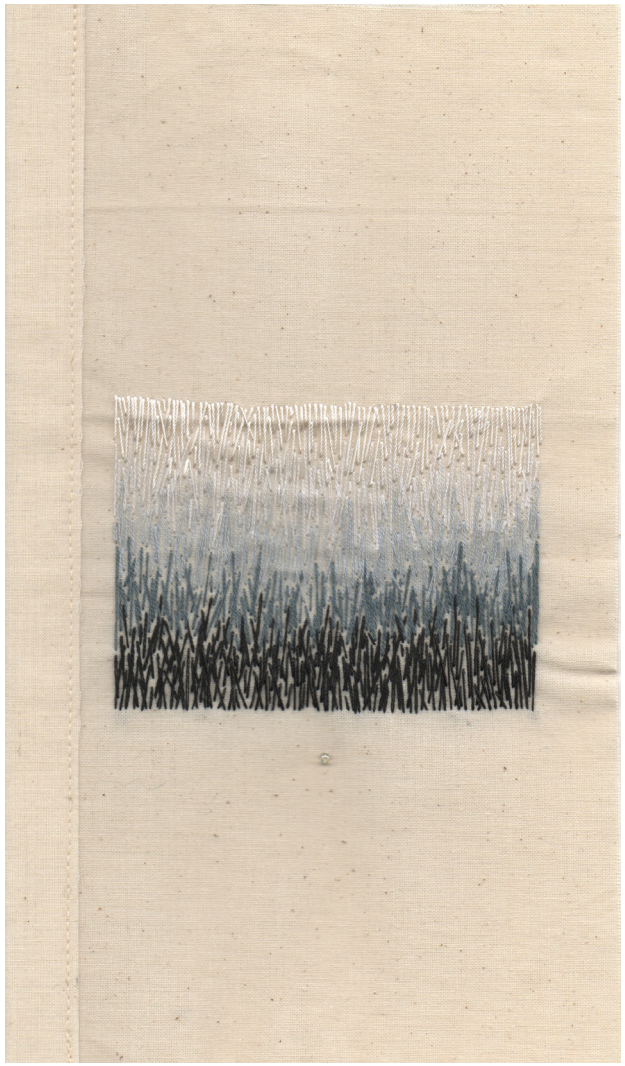


24 December 2006. Appliquéd fabrics on calico.

What am I trying to do?

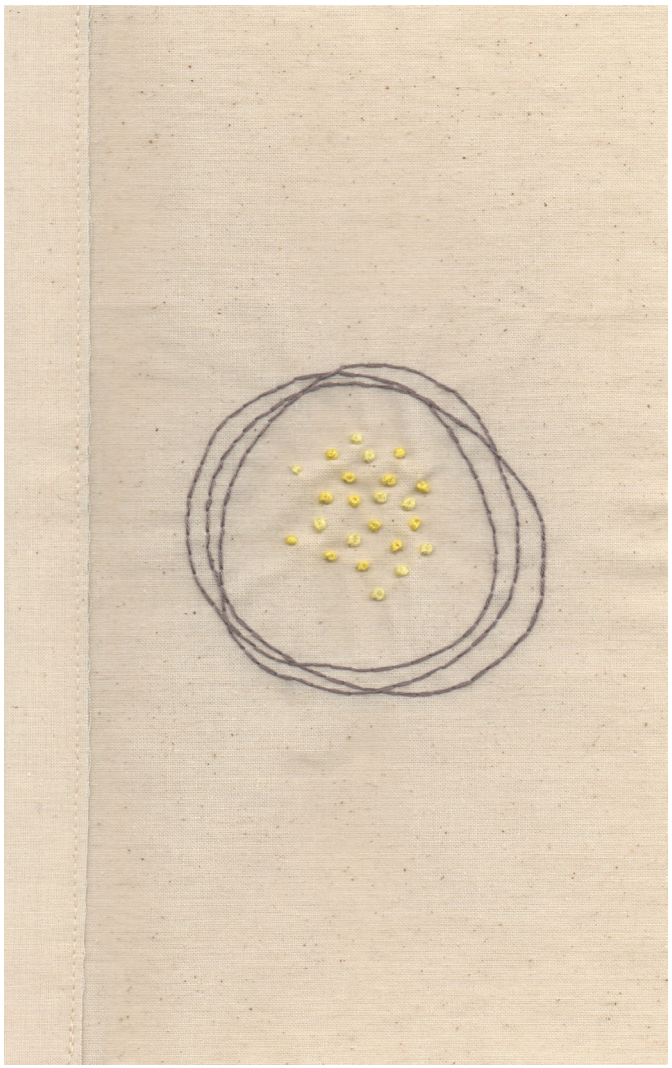
26 December 2006. Mixed cotton threads on calico.

Humbling piles, and layers and layers of stuff to sort. It frustrates me and I feel I need to find or impose some sort of order. Yet don't manage to. Each step leads to more, and so it piles on.



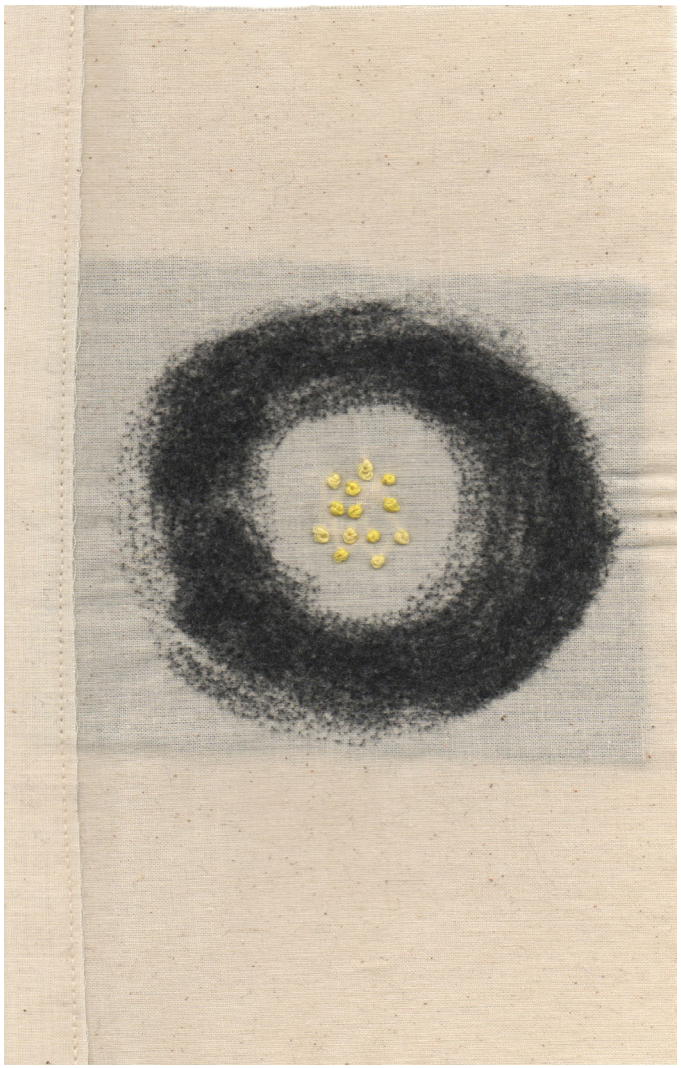
27 December 2006. Graded long and short stitch, silk thread on calico.

The slow process of graded long and short stitch, neatly executed feels like it achieves the same sensations of order and calm control as sorting through notes, papers and documents. The load gets lighter as you work through it. The overall vision grows clearer.



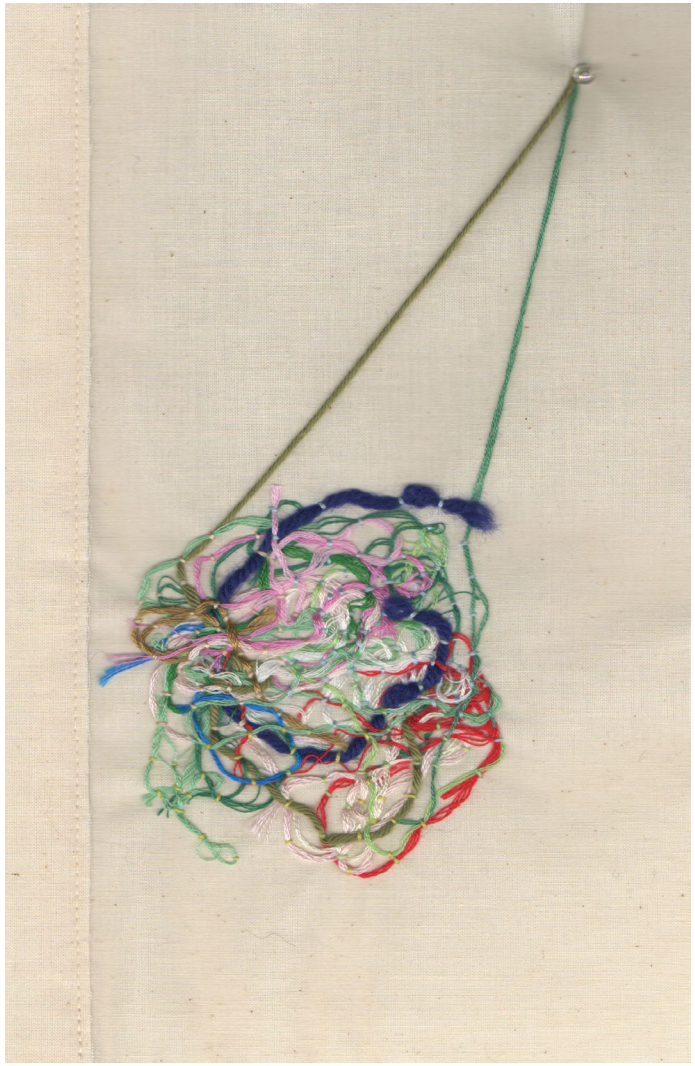
22 January 2007. French knots and back stitch on calico.

I'm skirting around the main topics. Unsure, reluctant to commit, engage or challenge them perhaps. For now.



22 January 2007. French knots and wool cloth needle punched on calico.

Skirting around, but muddying the waters as I do so, creating confusion for myself, avoiding opportunities. I know it and can see myself doing it.

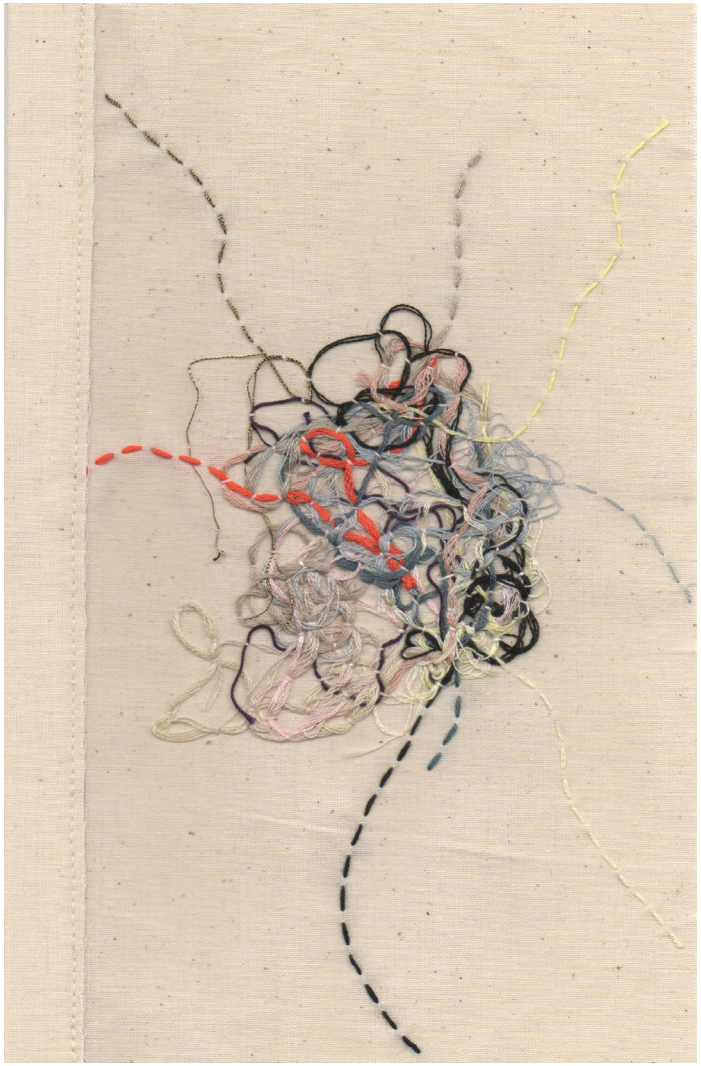


30 January 2007. Various threads couched on calico.

Dragging the whole thing with me everywhere I go - all these thoughts a burden I make little sense of.

2 February 2007. Cotton threads on calico.

A dark, scratchy cloud is hanging over me, here again. It can't remain.

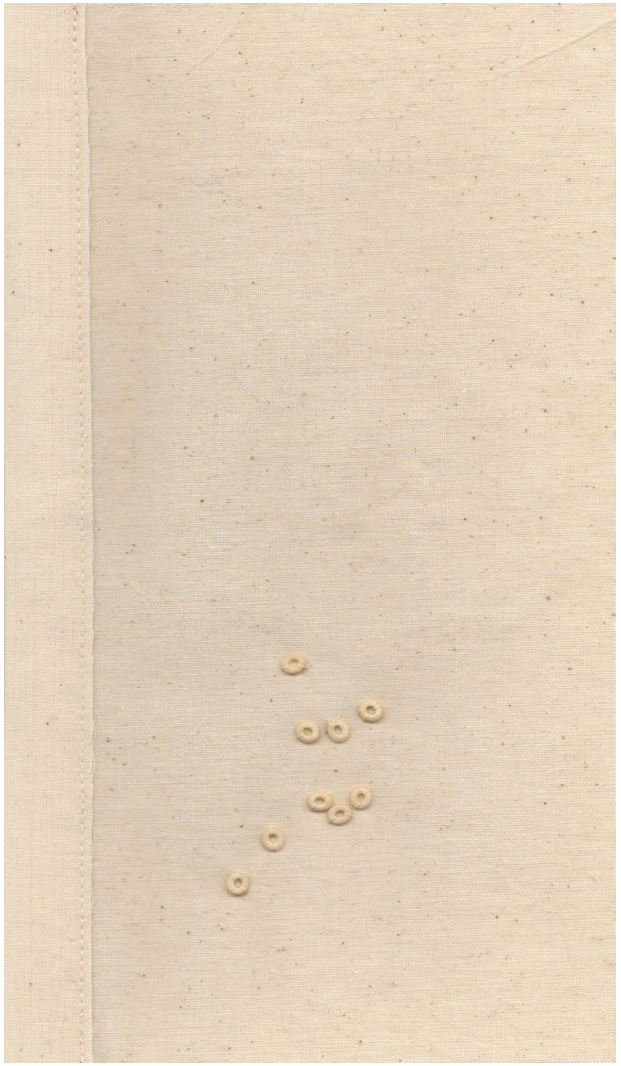


4 February 2007. Various threads on calico.

Thoughts are easily tangled up, here couched down to avoid losing control, getting caught up, or even lost. A few coherent threads emerge to work on.

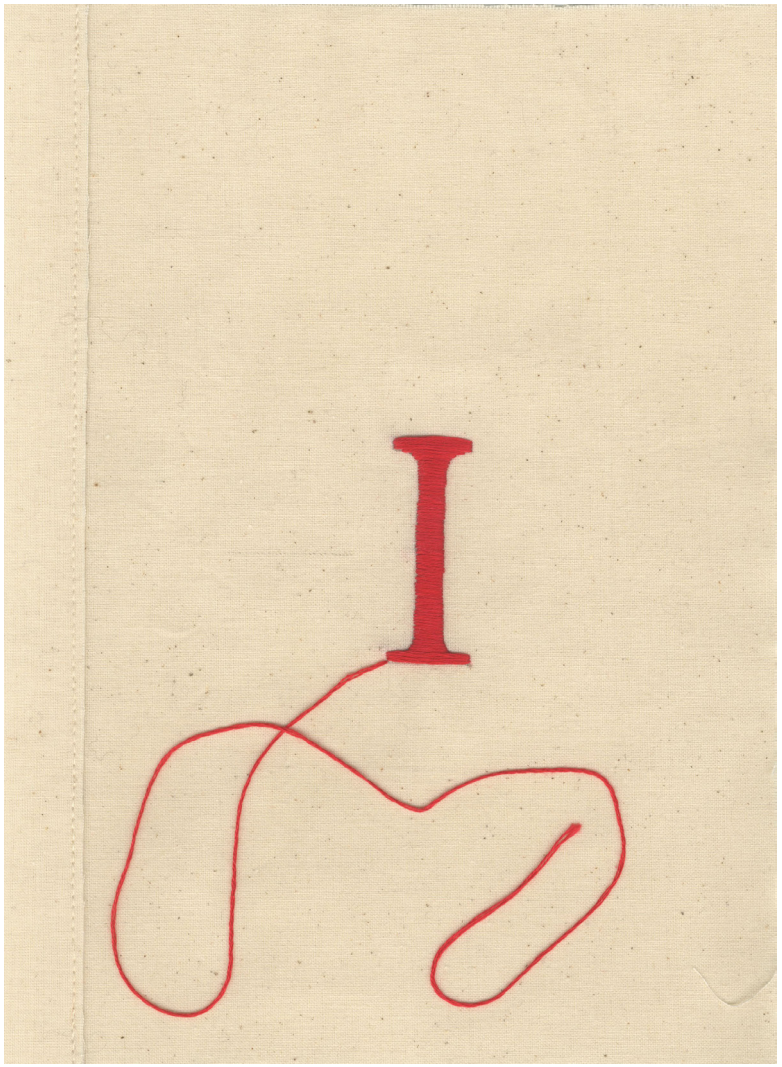
7 February 2007. Beads on calico.

Sowing seeds. New thoughts. New ideas.



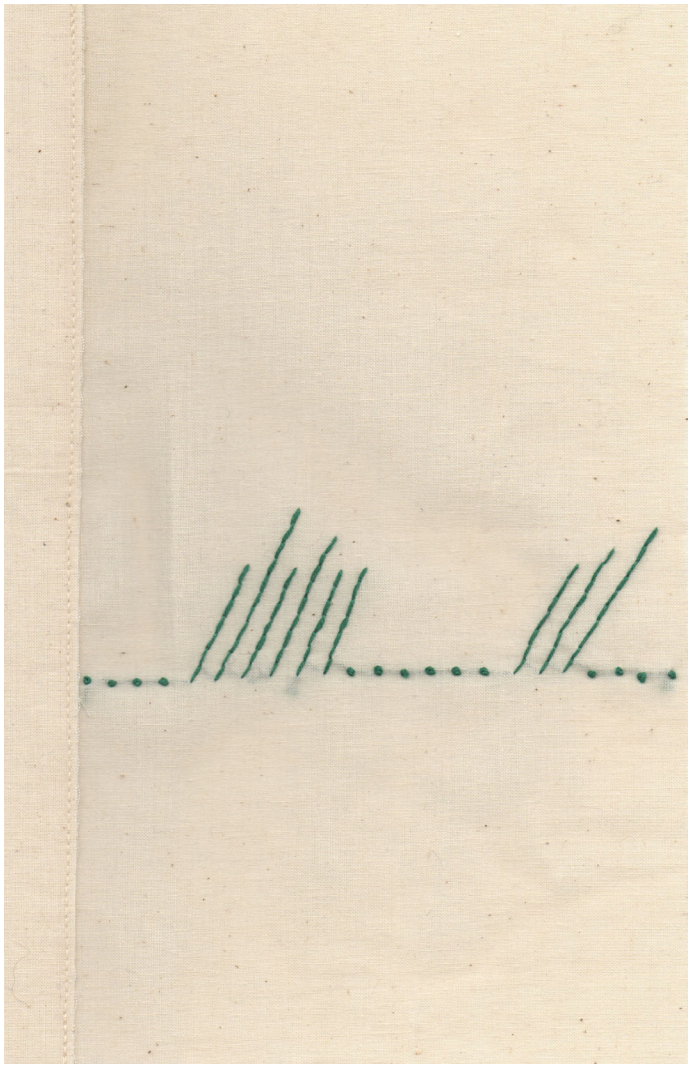
7 February 2007. Beads on calico.

Sowing seeds. New thoughts. New ideas. Don't sow them too densely, allow them to grow.



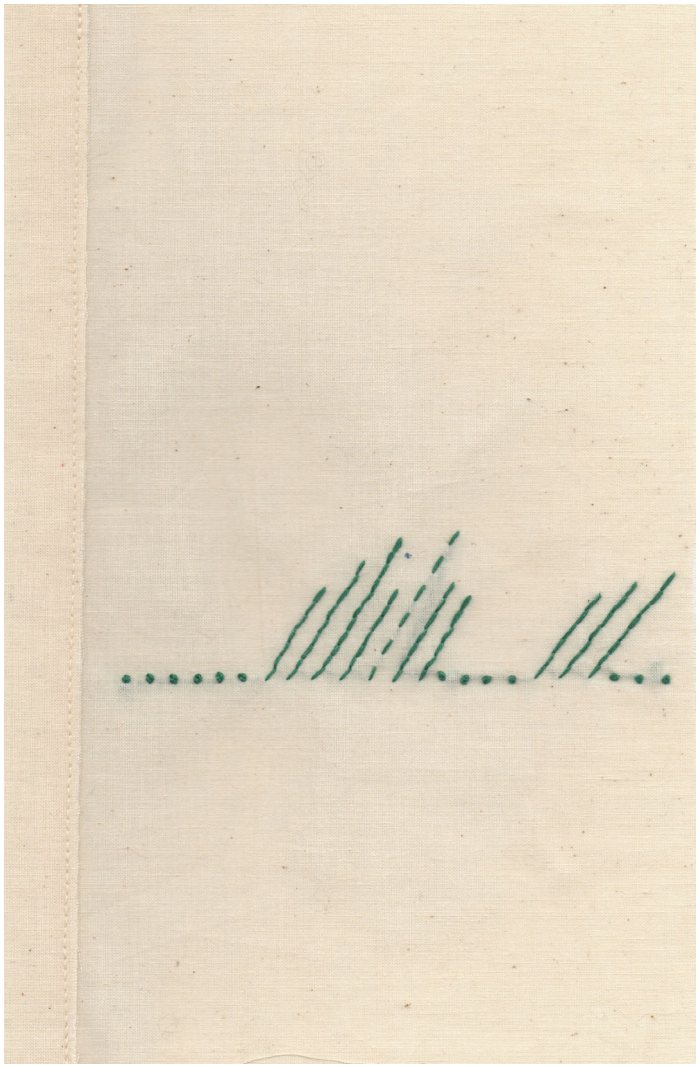
12 February 2007. Satin stitch in cotton thread on calico.

The autobiographical 'I', 'I' the subject, the eye for looking, the eye of the needle. My way of looking at the subject is to note. I am looking through a lens. And what I see also reflects back something of me. I didn't intend for it to be about me.



22 February 2007. Back stitch and french knots in cotton thread on calico.

Lurching forward, making progress in fits and starts.



22 February 2007. Back stitch and french knots in cotton thread on calico.

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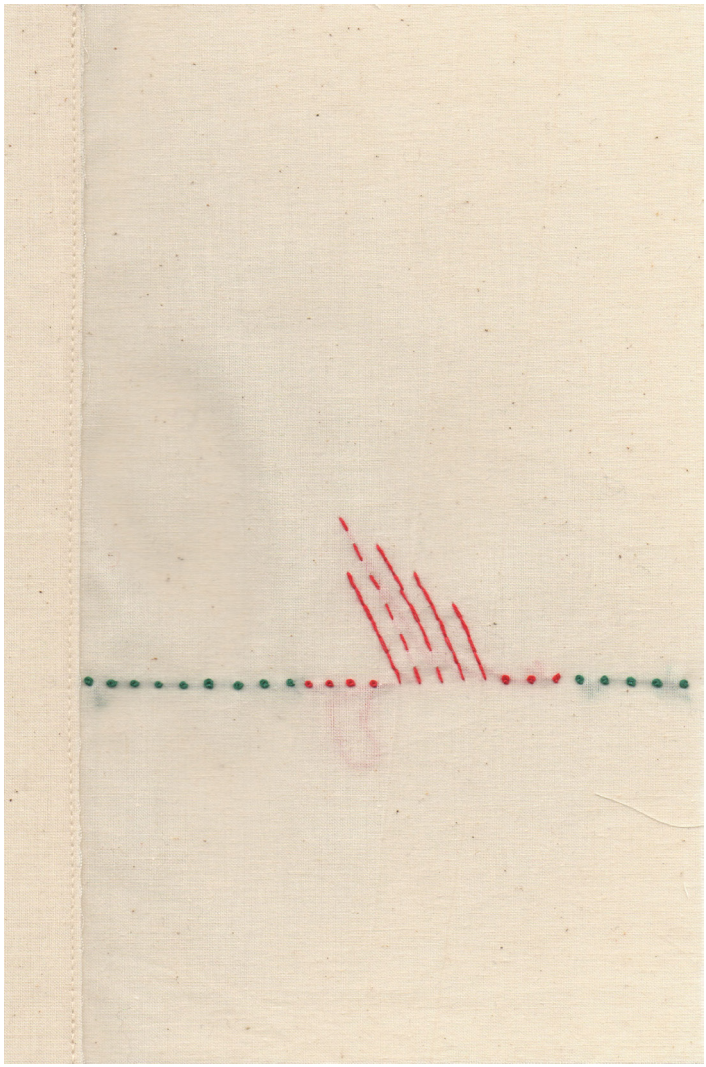
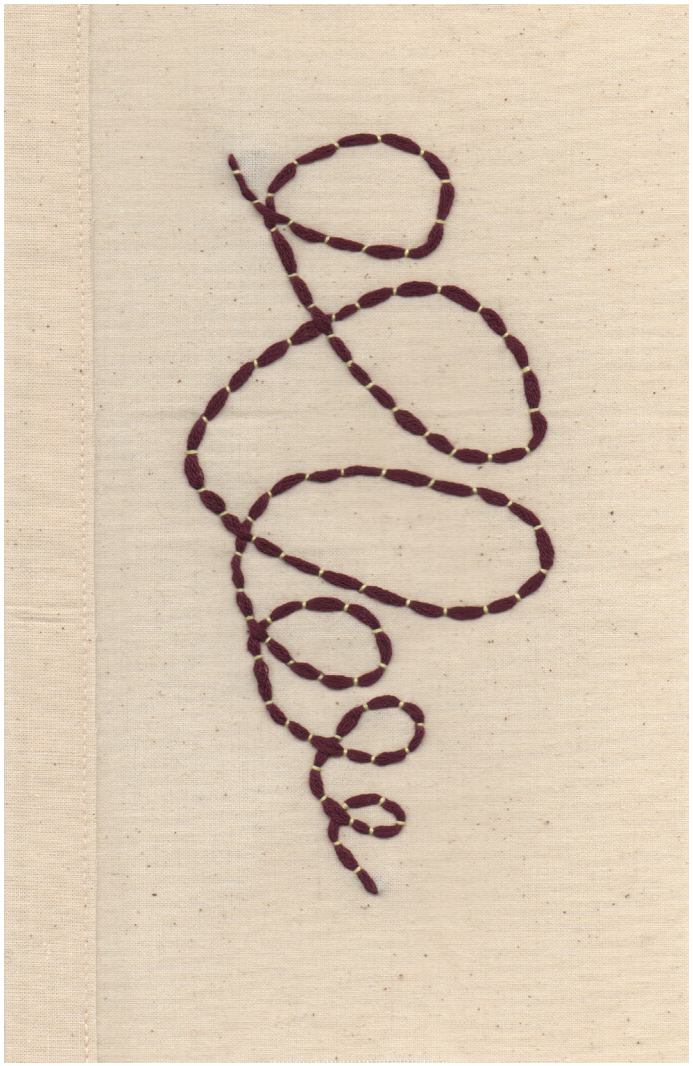


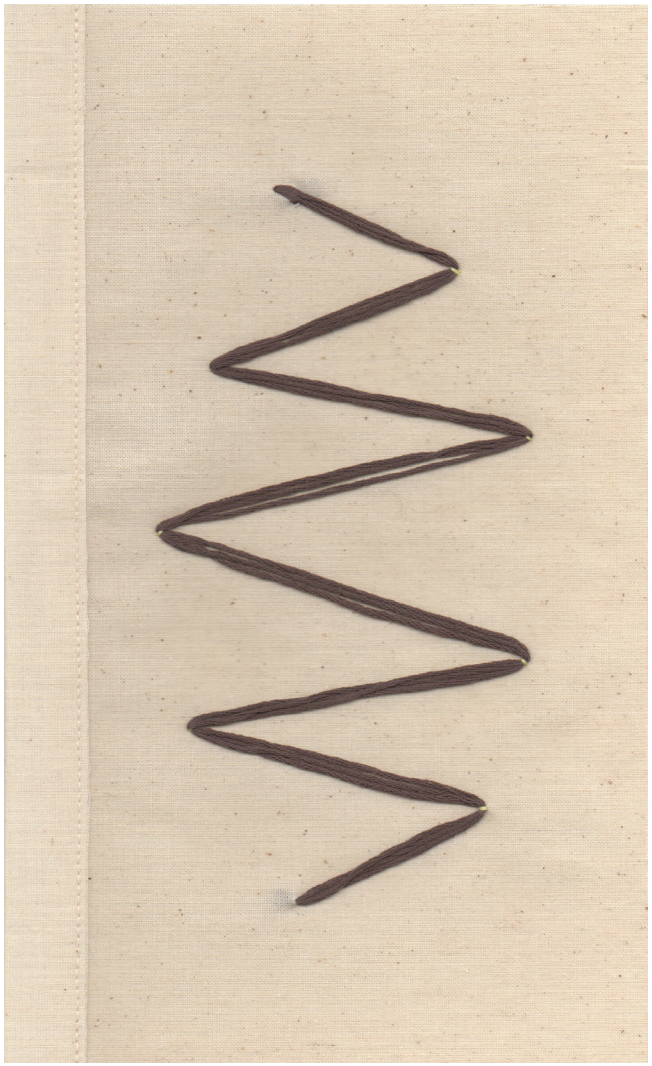
22 February 2007. Back stitch and french knots in cotton thread on calico.

..... *and sometimes grinding to a halt and looking back.*



21 March 2007. Cotton threads on calico.

Ways of doing this work me round a theme, then back to where I started, and then off again in another direction. A wandering path and I keep crossing myself, coming back to key points.



March 2007. Cotton threads on calico.

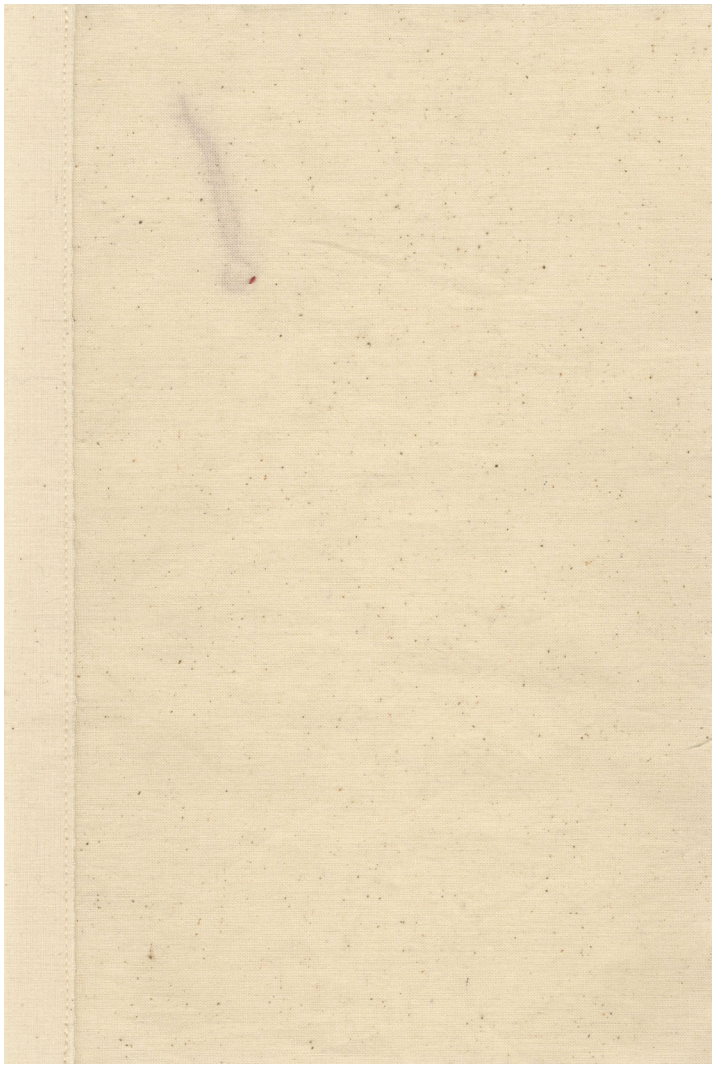
Or on a path zig-zagging up, like a mountain path. Circuitous, but climbing. Or descending. I don't know yet.

March 2007. Cotton threads on calico.

Finding things on the way.

March 2007. Cotton threads on calico.

Joining up seemingly unrelated or separate threads.

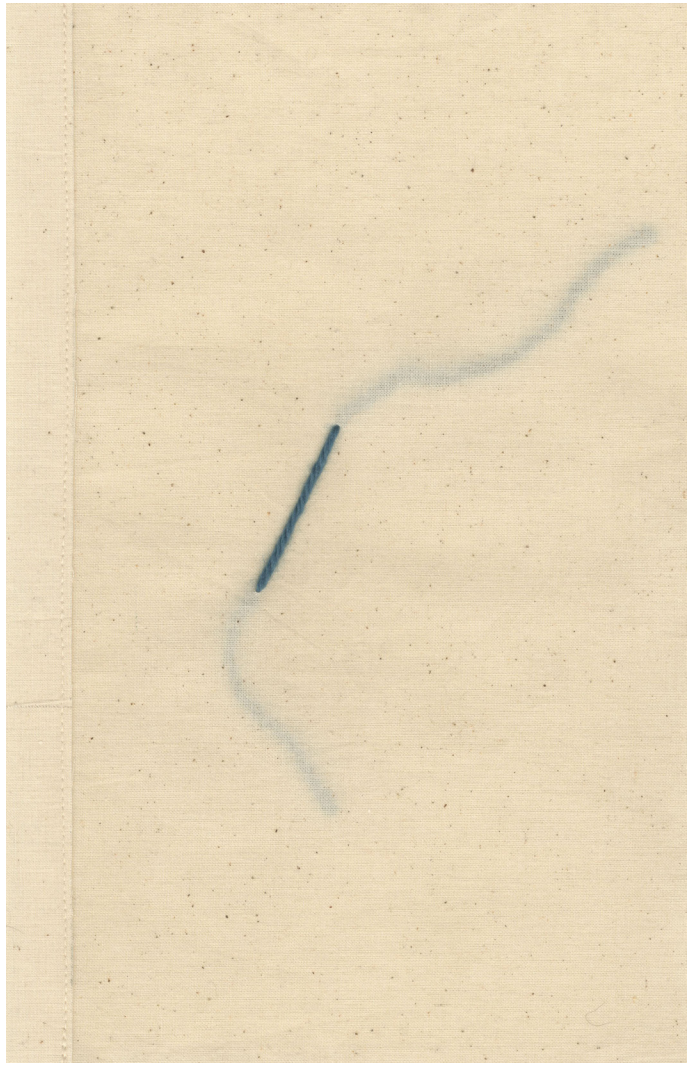


25 March 2007. Wool yarn on calico.

A small thought.

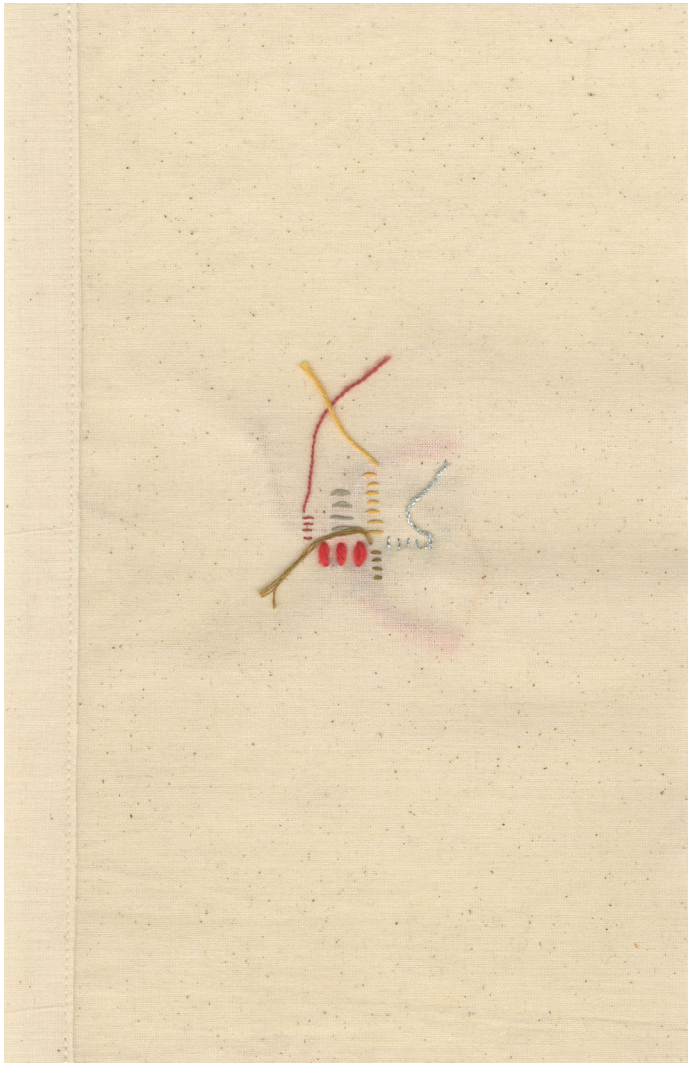
March 2007. Mixed yarns on calico.

Several thoughts.



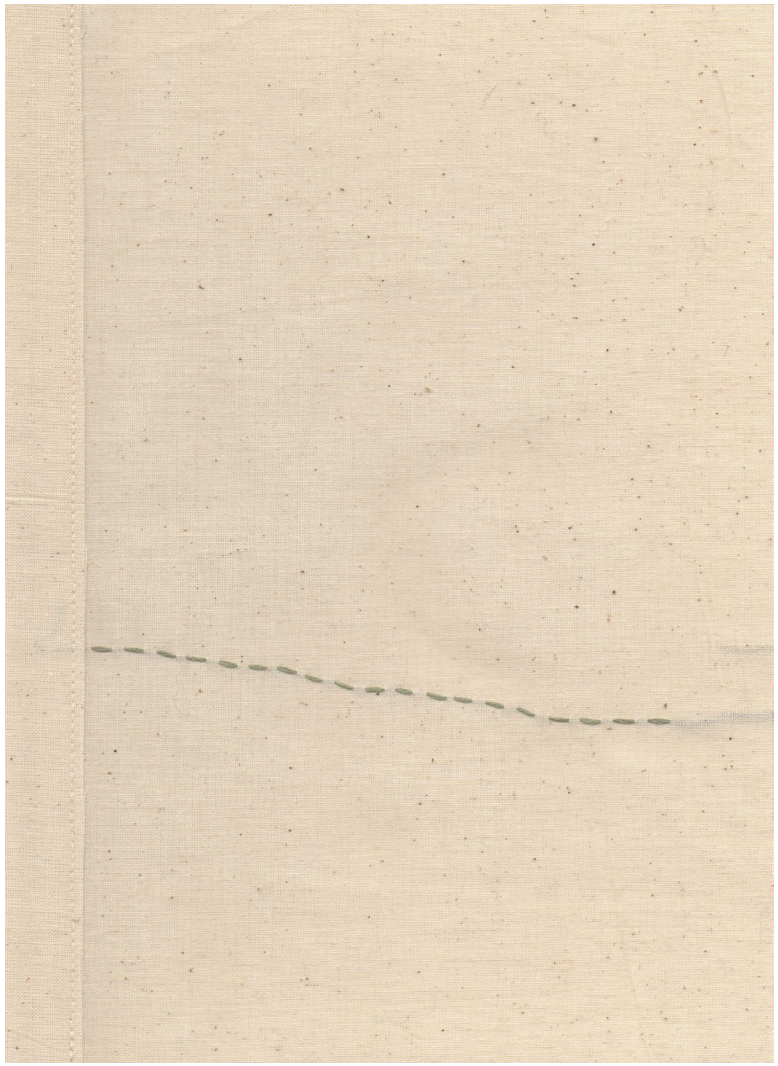
March 2007. Wool yarn on calico.

A big thought.



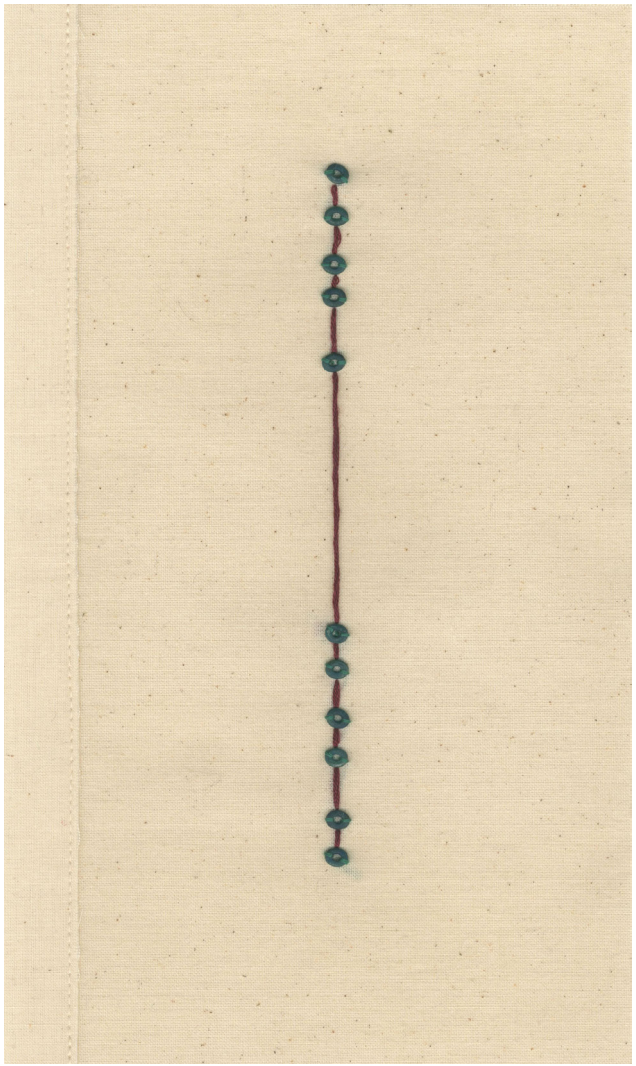
March 2007. Mixed yarns on calico.

Organising my thoughts.



March 2007. Linen thread on calico.

Following a train of thought.



23 March 2007. Wool yarn on calico.

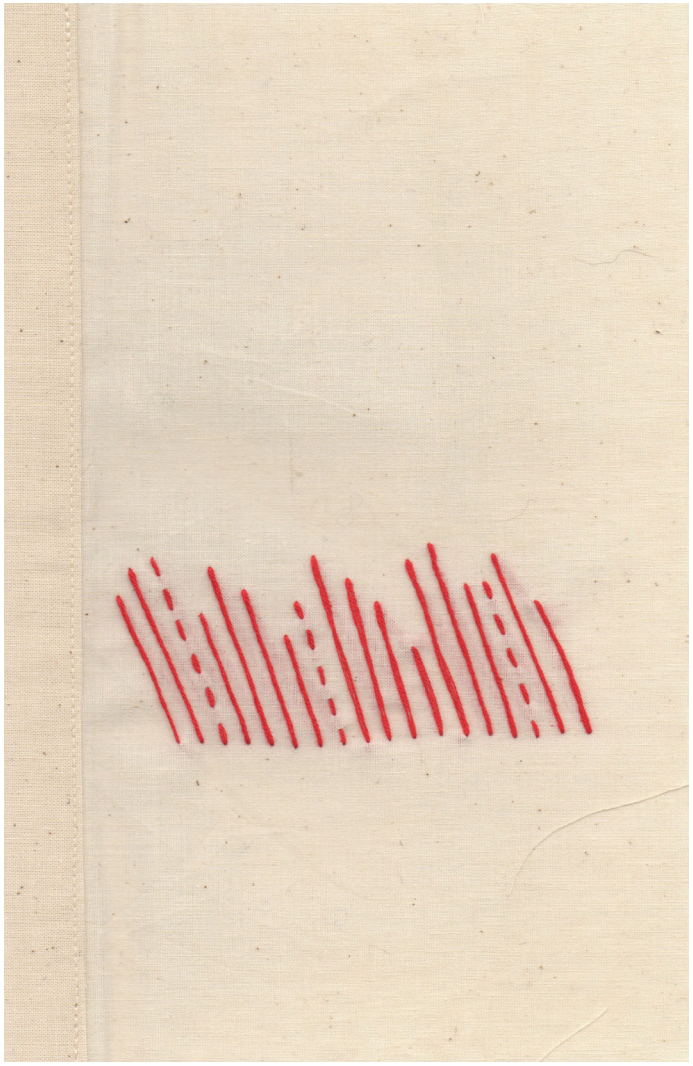
Connecting thoughts.

10 April 2007. Appliquéd fabrics and stem stitch on calico.

Tips of icebergs emerging and becoming clearer. Themes I am just touching on, that could become more important.

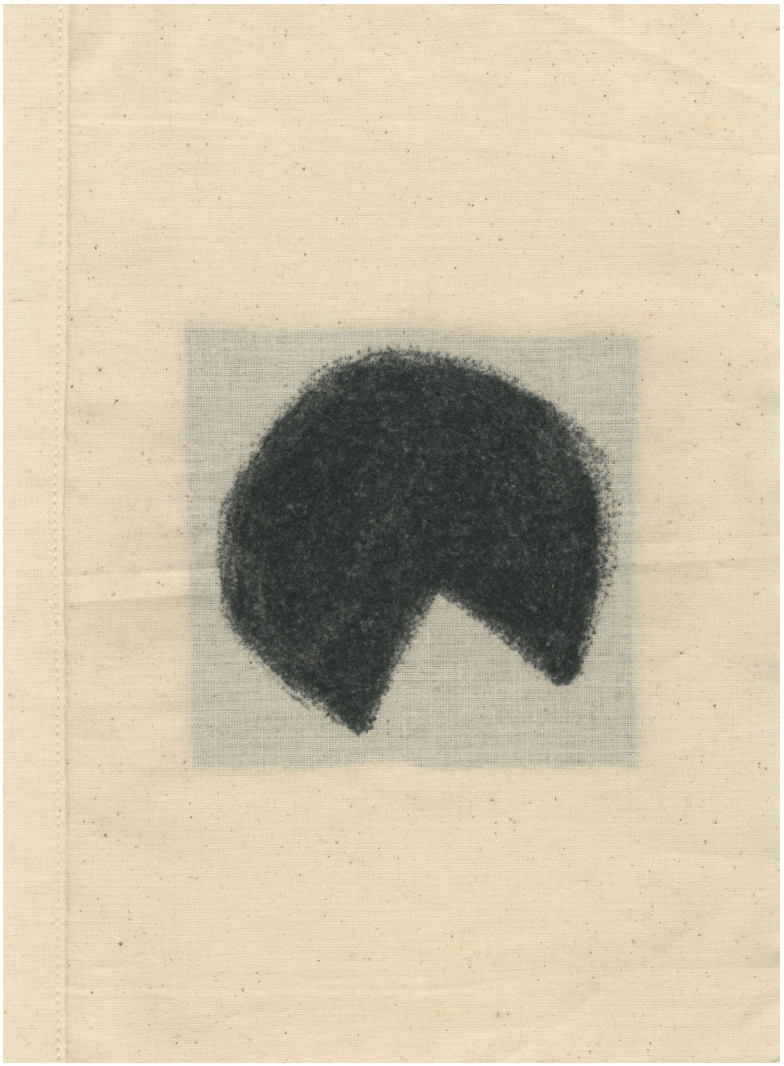
12 April 2007. Cotton thread on calico.

Moving fast, lots going on.



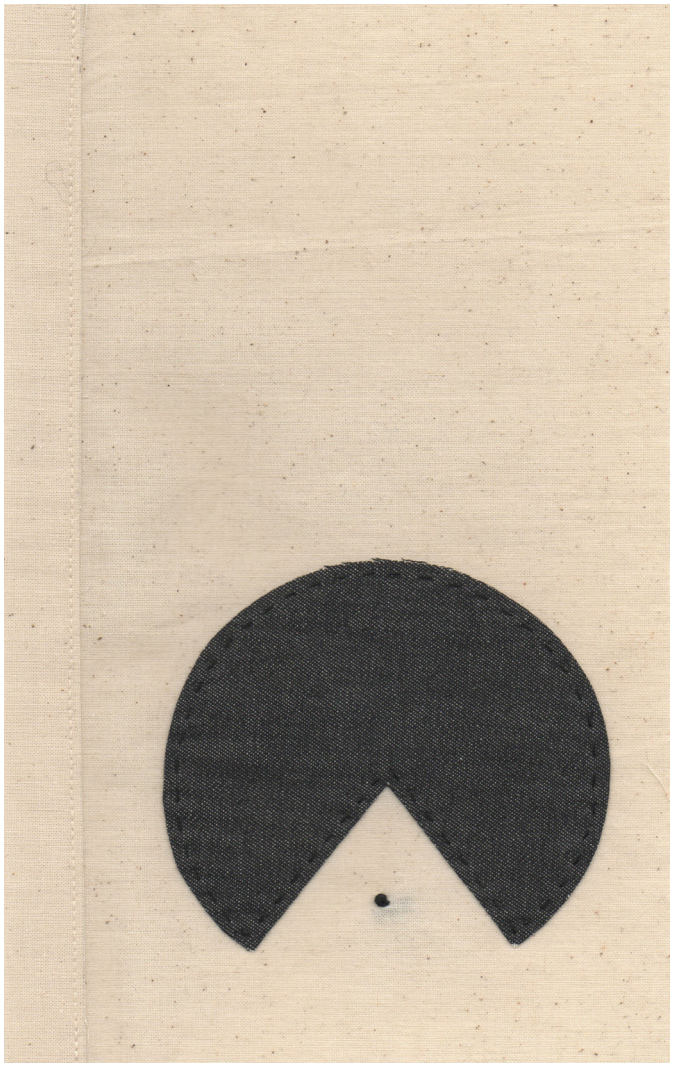
12 April 2007. Cotton thread on calico.

Sometimes there is alot in the way.



28 April 2007. Wool cloth needle punched on calico.

Too much becomes all-consuming.

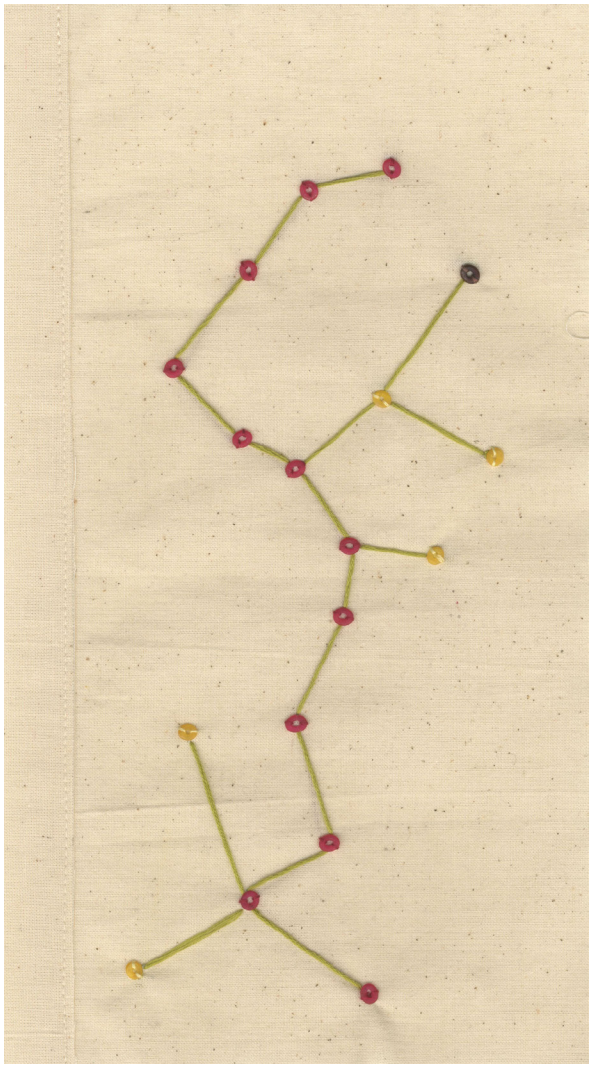


28 April 2007. Denim appliquéd on calico.

Dense and all-consuming.

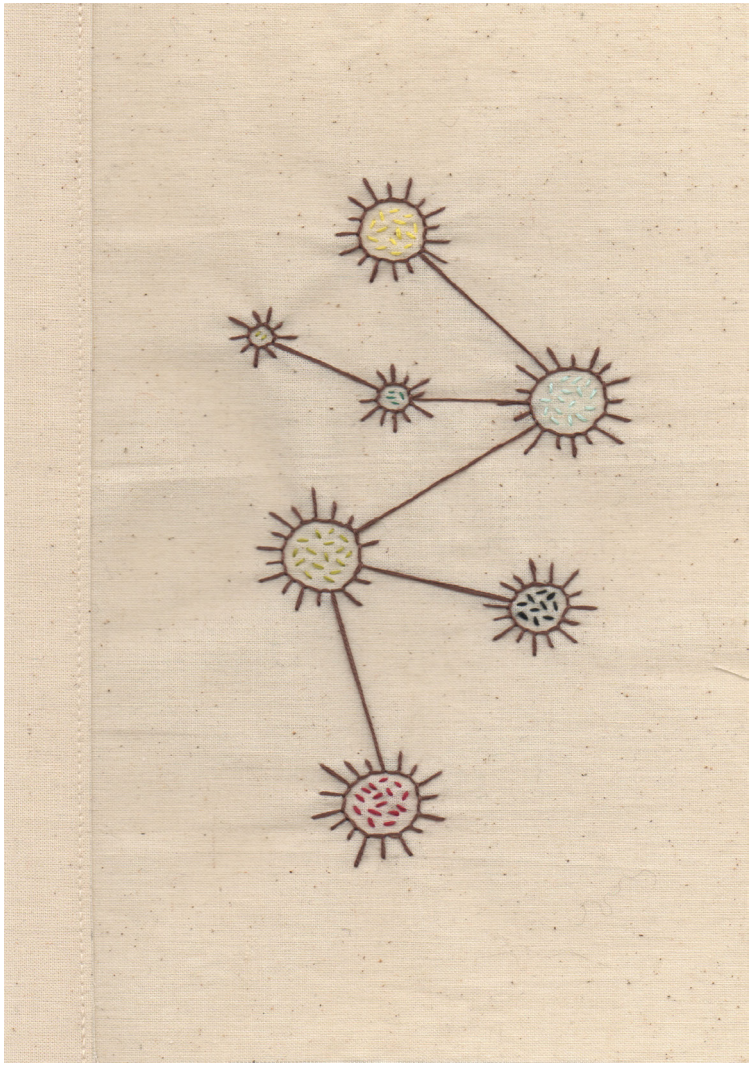
28 April 2007. Printed cotton appliquéd on calico.

Trying to turn things around to think favourably. It's good to be busy, to have so much to do, to be on the move, and have so much to choose from.



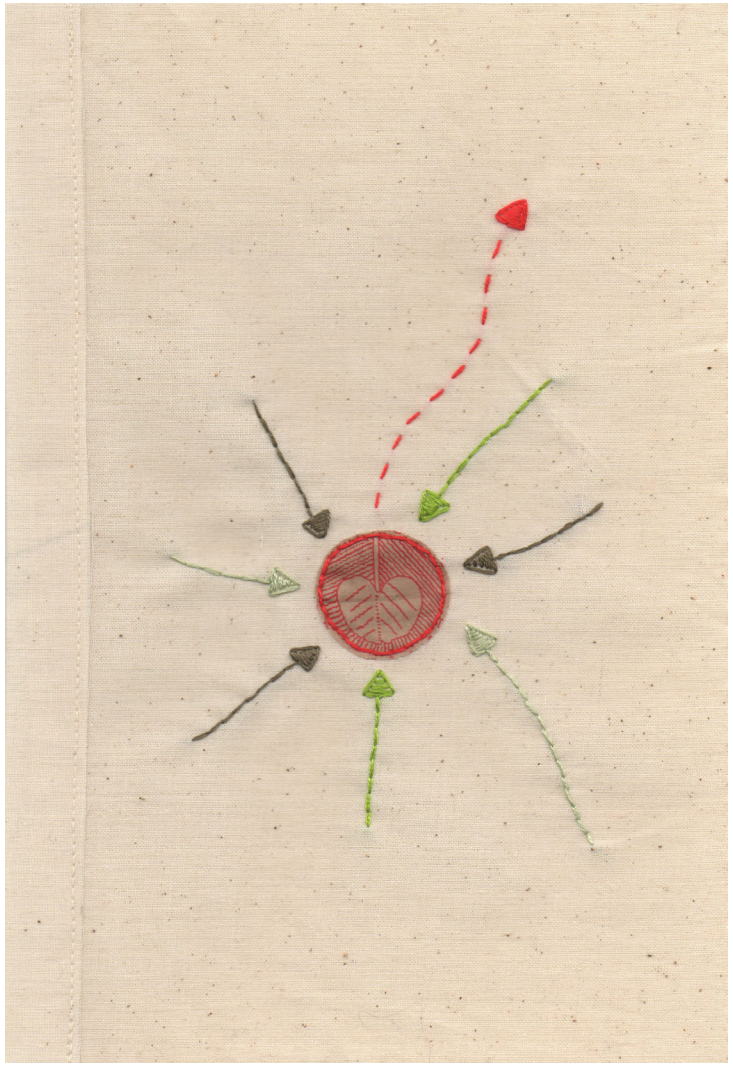
end April 2007. Beads and cotton yarn on calico.

Making connections, trying to anchor them before they disappear.



end April 2007. Cotton thread on calico.

Looking closely at these connections. Make something of them.



3 May 2007. Appliqué and embroidery in cotton thread on calico.

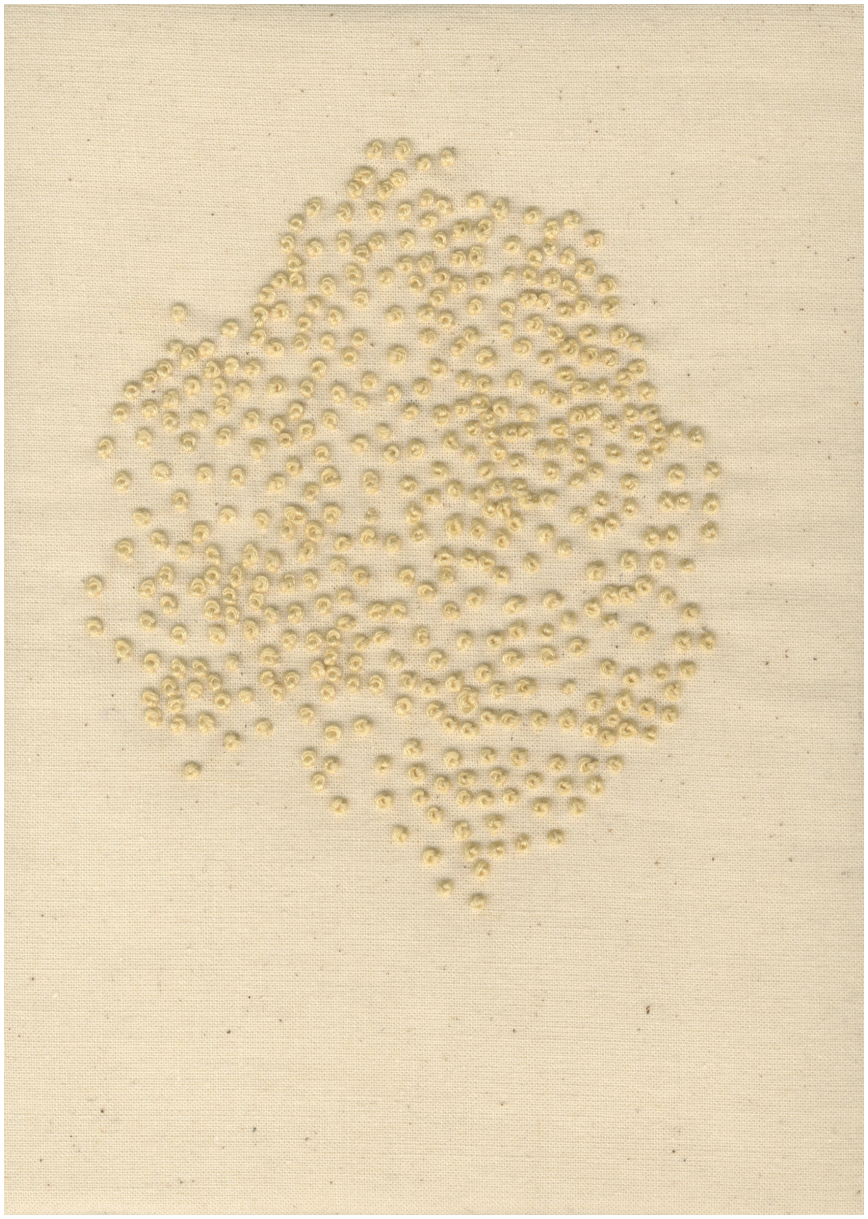
Appendix III: works

Marking Time (2007)

A series of embroideries made over a period of nine days reflecting on my conversations with the patchwork quilters. Some quilters spoke of how they sought time for their sewing activities, fitting it in around their other commitments. I recorded, through these embroideries, the time I managed to find opportunities to stitch, and for how long, discovering that I too was quickly interrupted. I found myself trying to fit my stitching in around other demands made on my time. Reflecting on my own use of time enabled me to better understand their practices. The use of a quiet colour palette is deliberate. The stitches almost disappear into the cloth, emphasizing the invisibility of stitching work, often so easily overlooked.
Photos: the author.

Reference is made in the thesis text:

Chapter One, p. 59.



MONDAY (2007) French knots, cotton thread on calico.

2 hours 50 minutes

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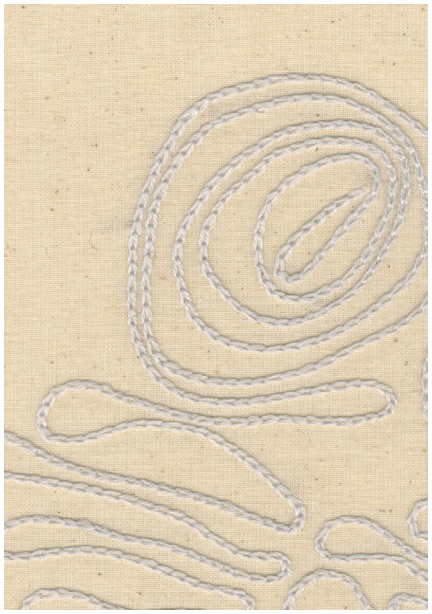

3 hours 5 minutes

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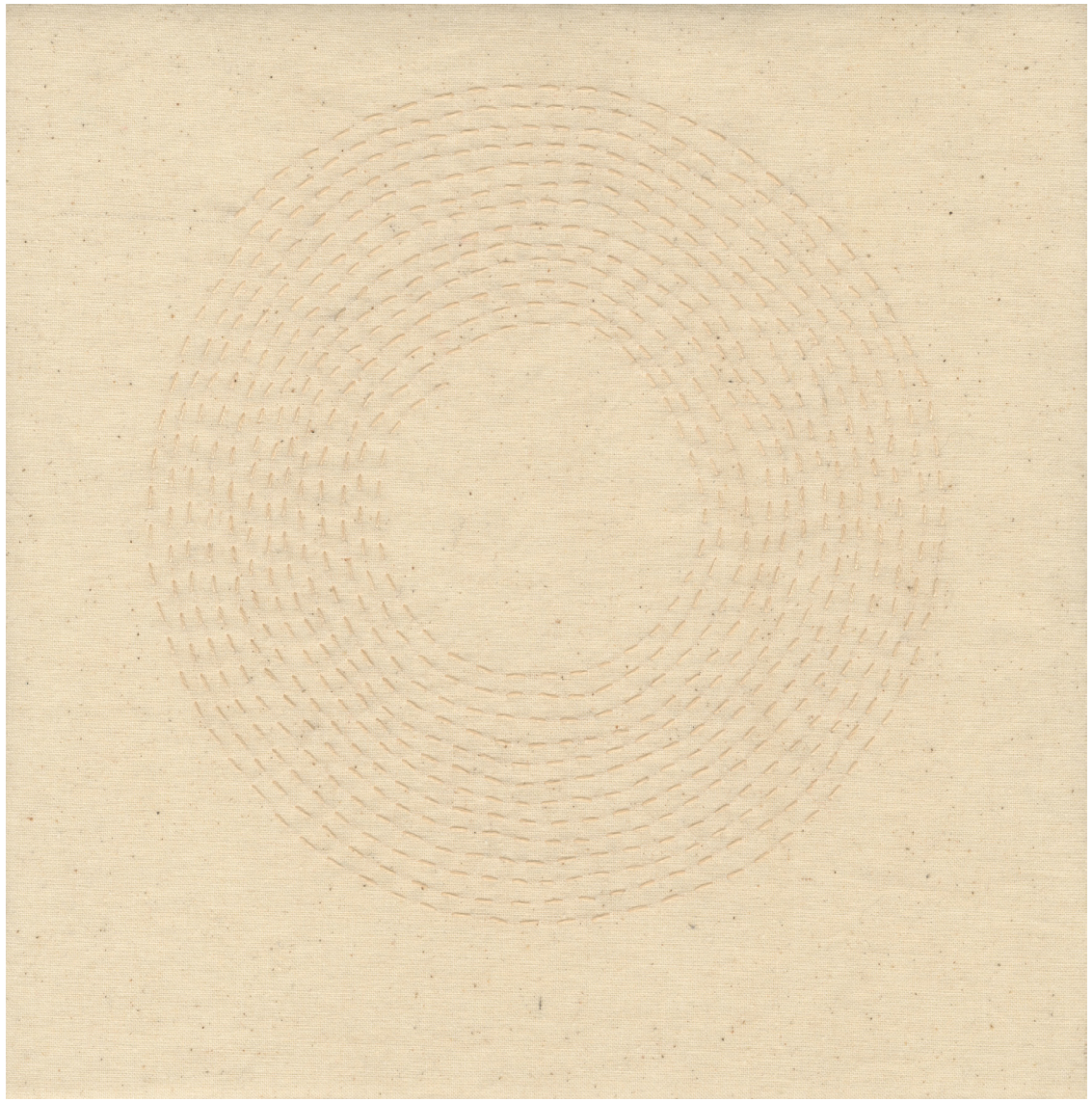
TUESDAY (2007) Chain stitch, cotton thread on calico.



1 hour 35 minutes

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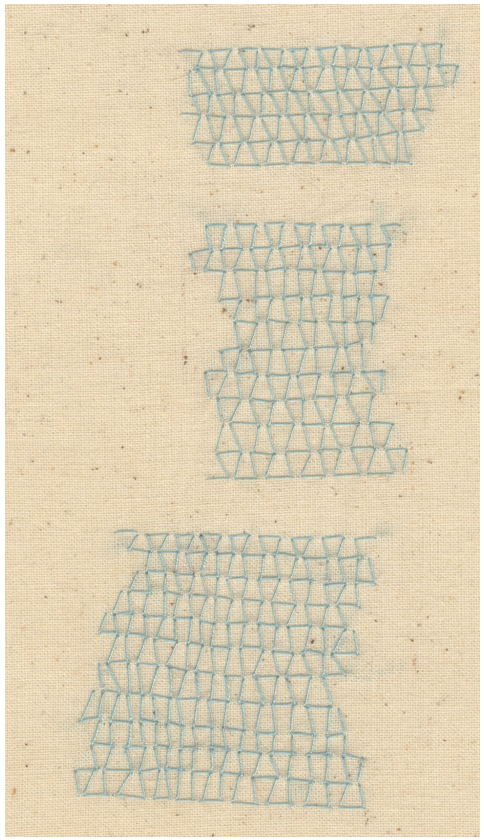
WEDNESDAY (2007) Running stitch, cotton perle on calico.



3 hours 25 minutes

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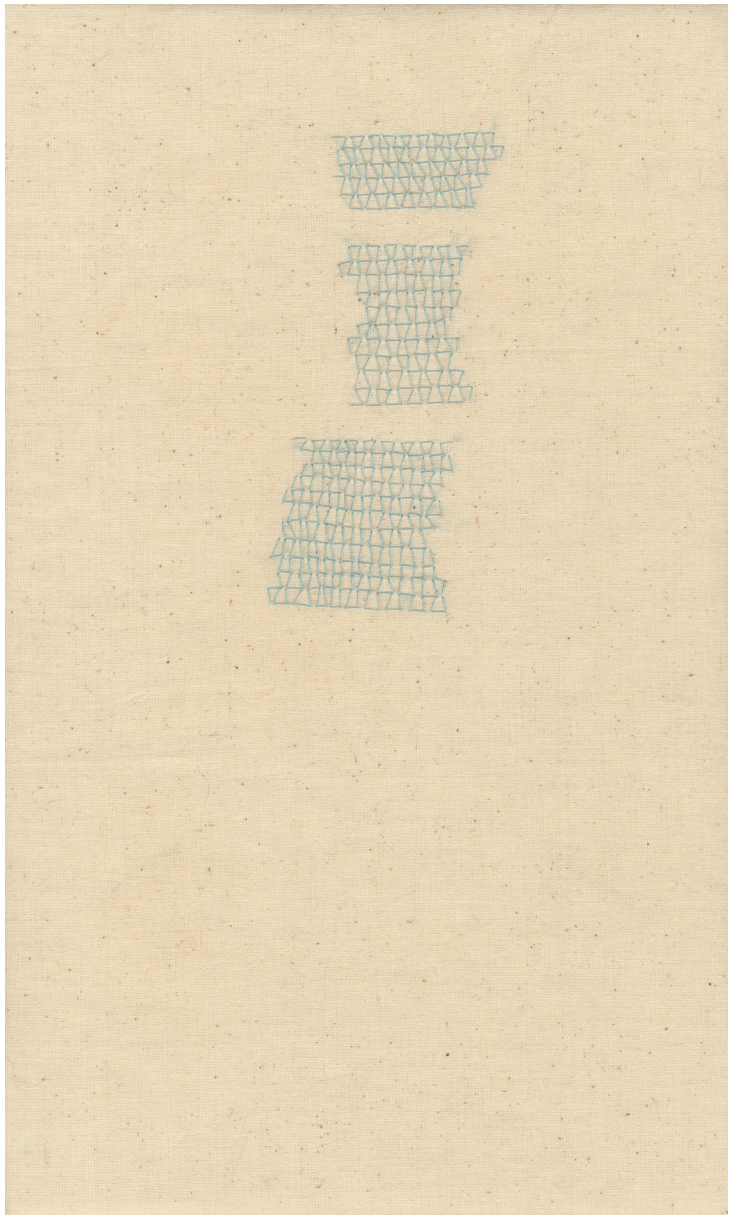

THURSDAY (2007) Japanese darning stitch, silk thread on calico.

1 hour 30 minutes

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3 hours 20 minutes

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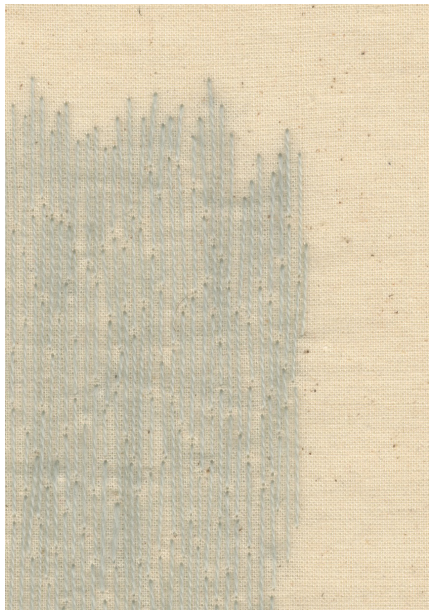
SATURDAY (2007) Seed stitch, cotton thread on calico.



1 hours 40 minutes

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SUNDAY (2007) Long and short stitch, wool thread on calico.

3 hours 20 minutes

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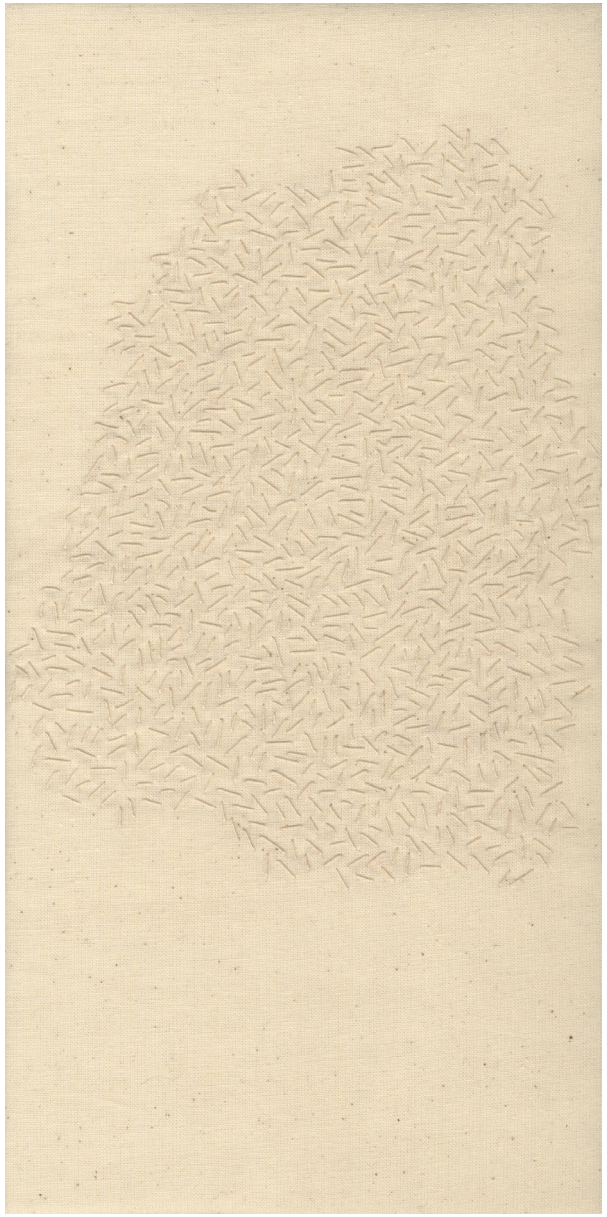


TUESDAY (2007) Seed stitch, cotton perle on calico.

Appendix IV: works

Inspired by the pains taken and the pride in workmanship expressed by the quilters I had met, and to demonstrate that I had the dexterity and precision to match their sewing skills, I began work on a piece of patchwork. This reminded me of the exacting precision expected by the geometric shapes. In the patchwork piecing method I chose – 'over papers' – hand-stitching is used to attach the fabric to the paper templates and join the shapes together. The stitches are normally small and tight and usually remain invisible so that the geometric pattern and the properties of the cloth are emphasized. In my example I chose to reverse the typical combination of decorative, coloured fabric shapes and invisibly stitched joins with plain calico fabric and coloured stitching to deliberately highlight the stitching and draw attention to the pains I had taken. This photo-essay charts the inherent rhythms and repetitions of the process, and importantly, drew me to understand that the process comprises a whole series of inter-connected gestural patterns.
Photos: author & Robin Shercliff.

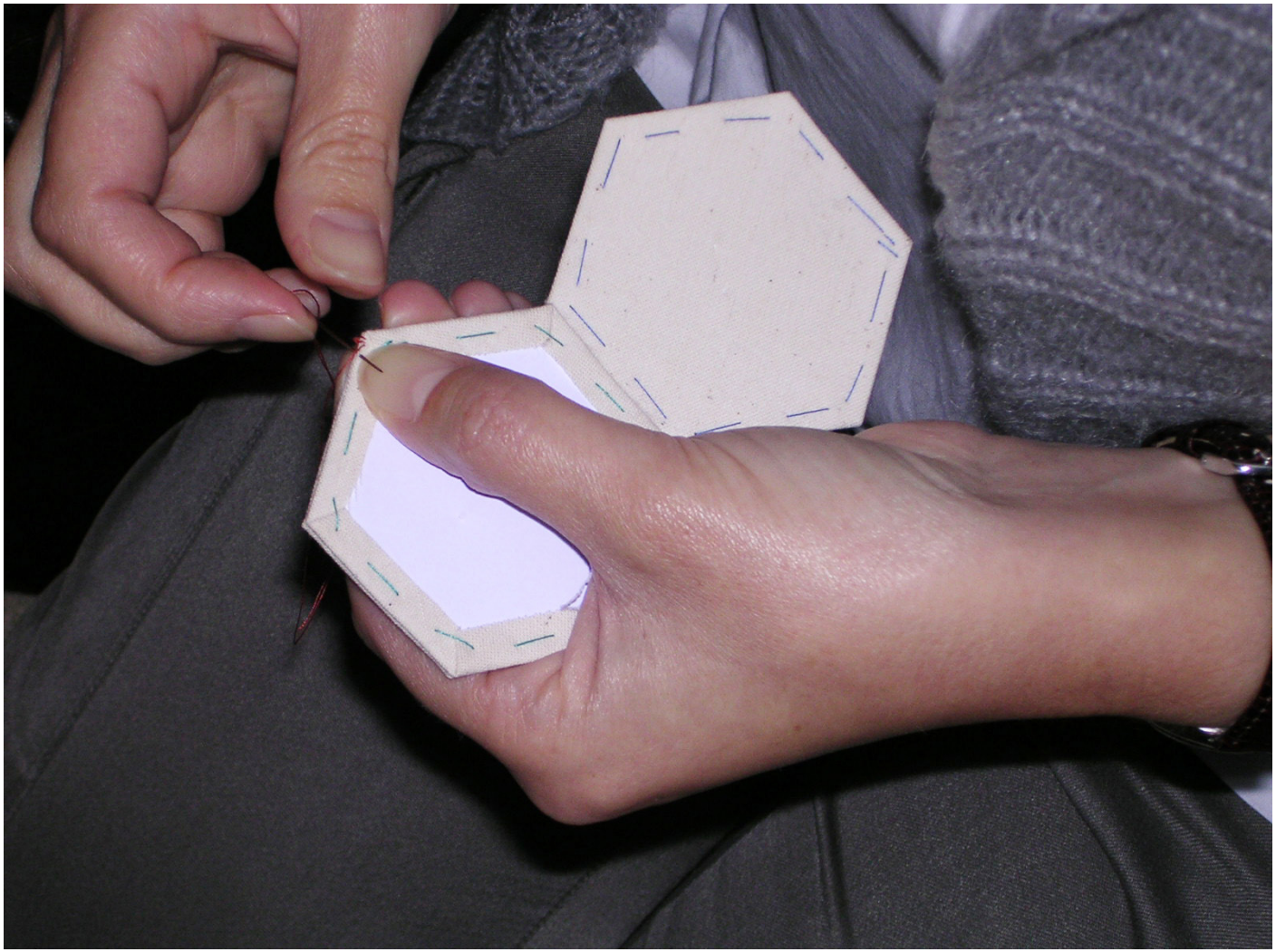
Reference is made in the thesis text:

Chapter Two, pp. 101-102.

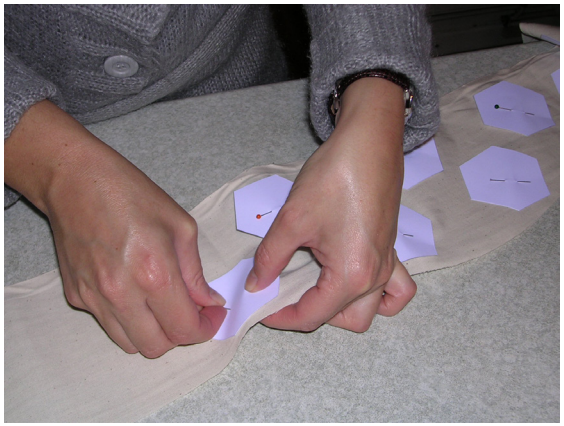
Chapter Three, pp. 119, 120 & 123-125.

See also video * *Part of a Piece*

Part of a Piece (2007) Gestures of making in words and images: photo-essay.

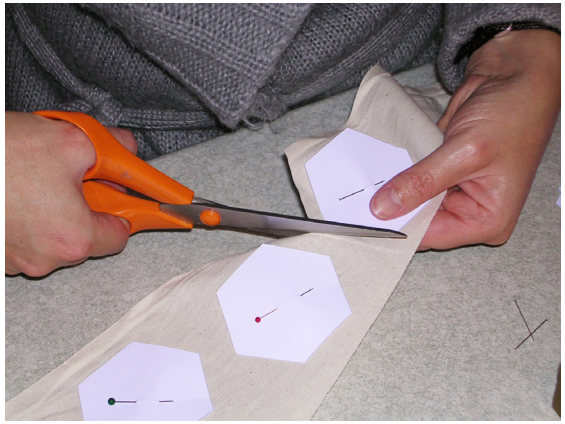


- Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
- Pick up two pieces, face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match up with next piece. Pay attention to the straight grain.
- Face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match up with next piece. Face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match up with next piece (a previously stitched together line of three pieces).
- Face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place. Match up.
- Knot end of thread.



- Match line with flower edges. Face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.

End of thread.

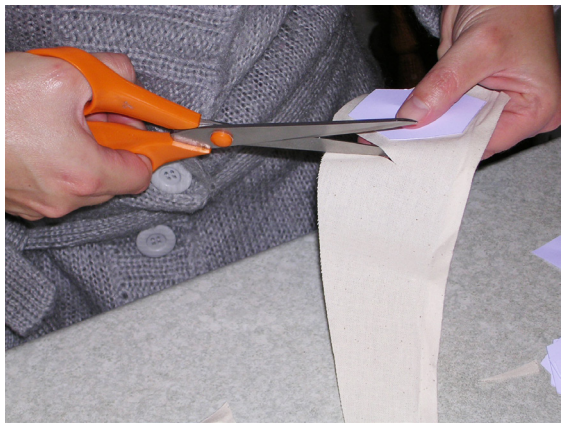


- Finish and cut thread.
- Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.

- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.

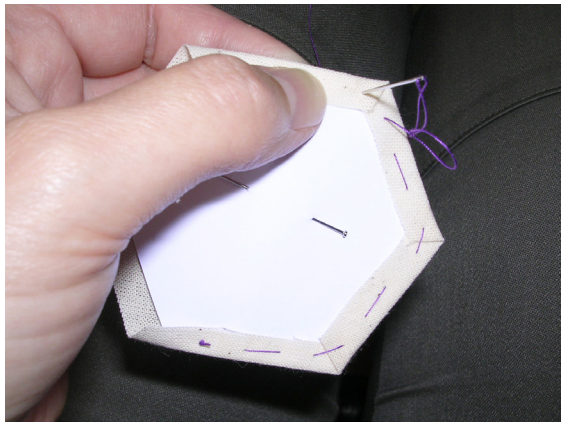
I have already lost count of how many pieces.

- Pick work up and turn over to back side.
- Snip tacking threads on all surrounded pieces, unpick and peel out papers. (4)



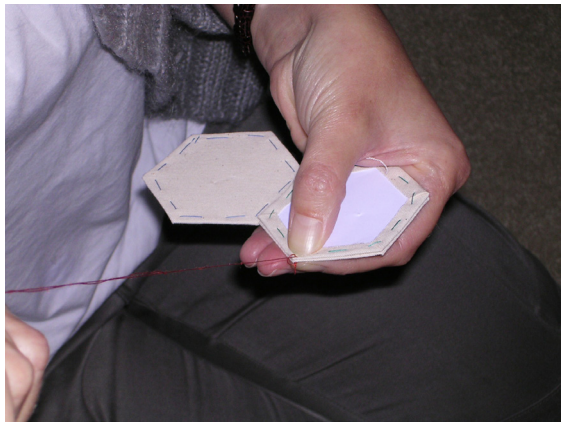
I NEED TO MOVE.

- Place papers on fabric. Pay attention to the straight grain. Pin, and cut out.

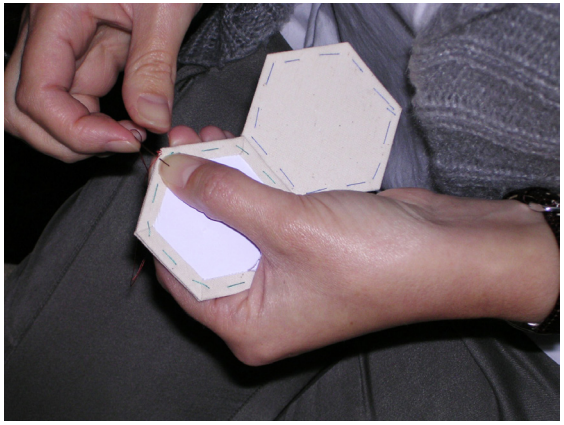


- Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
- Pick up two pieces, face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match up with next piece. Pay attention to the straight grain.
- Face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match line with flower edges. Face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.

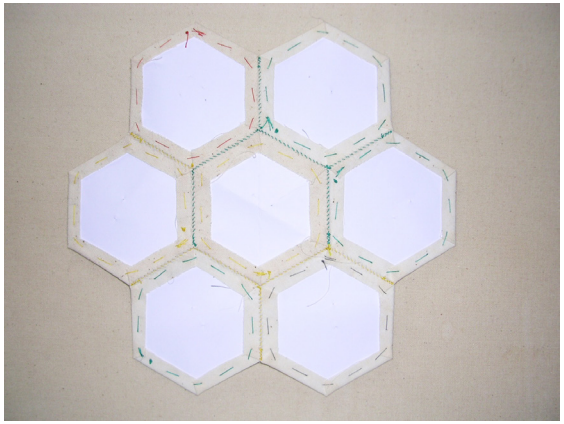
End of thread.



- Finish and cut thread.
- Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.

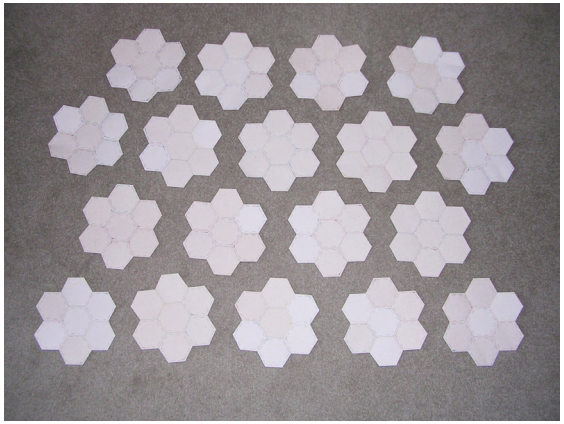


- Pick up two pieces, face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match up with next piece. Pay attention to the straight grain.
- Face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match up with next piece. Pay attention to the straight grain.
- Face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match up with neighbouring two pieces. Pay attention to the straight grain.
- Face right sides together and stitch together.



End of thread.

- Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
- Match up with next piece, pay attention to the straight grain.
- Face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match up with next piece, pay attention to the straight grain.
- Face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match up with next piece, pay attention to the straight grain.
- Face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.



- Match line with flower edges. Face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
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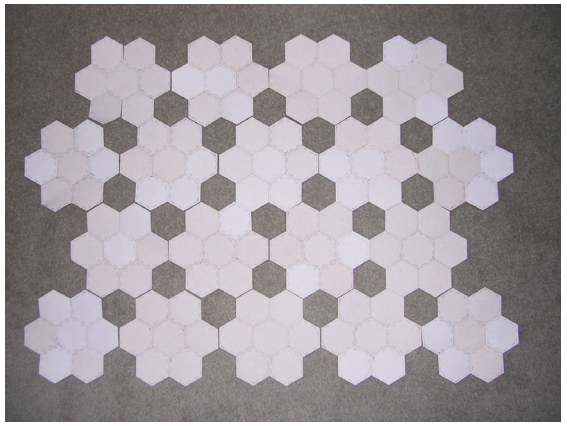
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.

- Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match line with flower edges. Face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.

End of thread.



- Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
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- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
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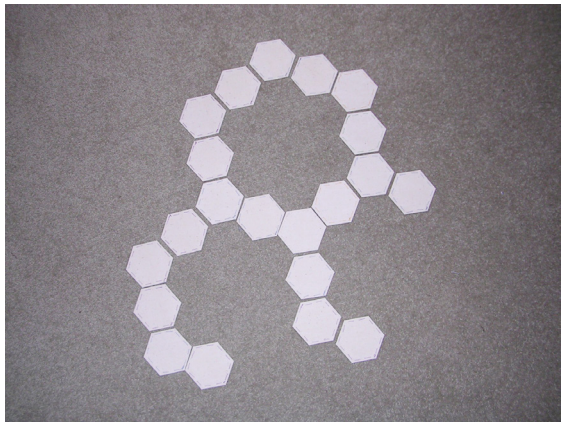
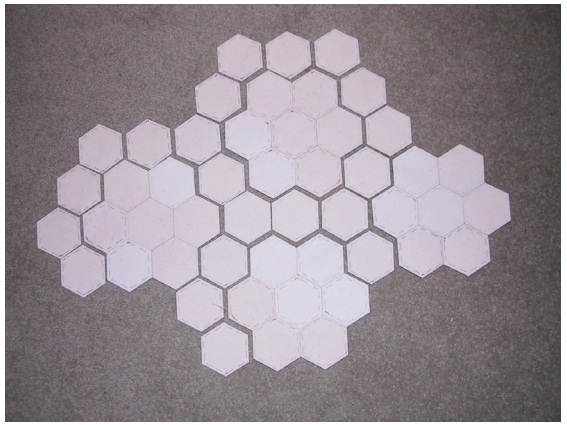
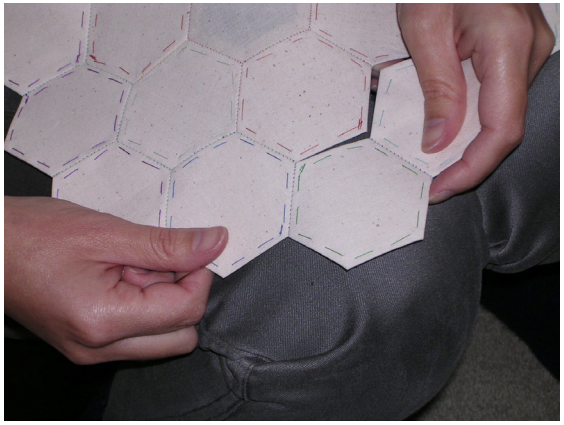
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match line with flower edges. Face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.

End of thread.



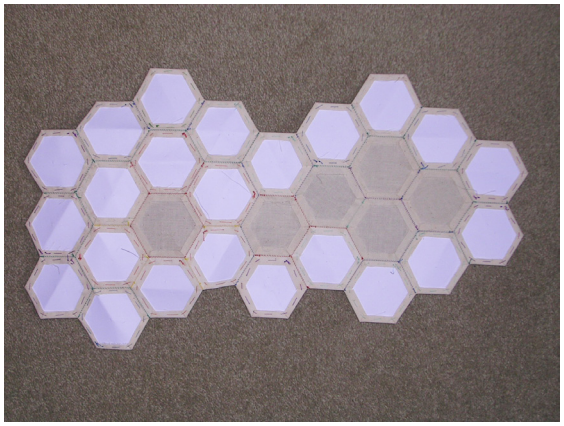
- Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.





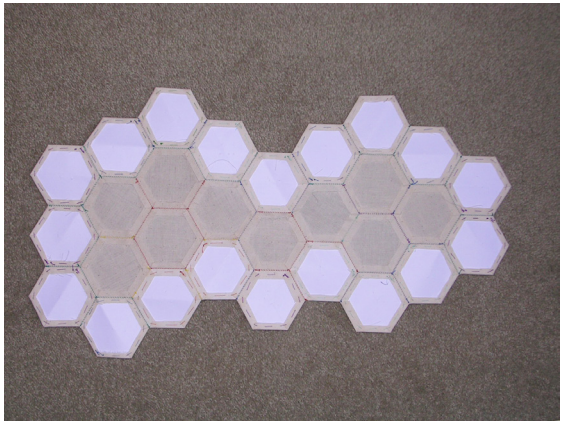
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Pick work up and turn over to back side.
- Snip tacking threads on all surrounded pieces, unpick and peel out papers. (5)

- Put work down in place. Match up.
- Knot end of thread.
- Match with neighbouring block of stitched together pieces. Face right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.



End of thread.

- Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Match with neighbouring block of stitched together pieces. Face right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
- Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.



End of thread.

- Finish and cut thread.
- Unfold and put down in place.
- Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
- Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.

• Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
• Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
• Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
• Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
• Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
• Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
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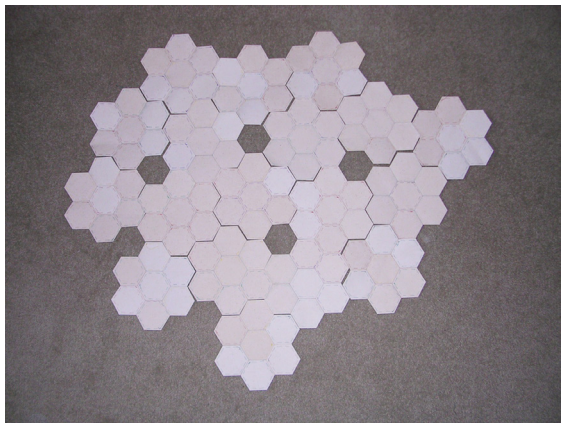
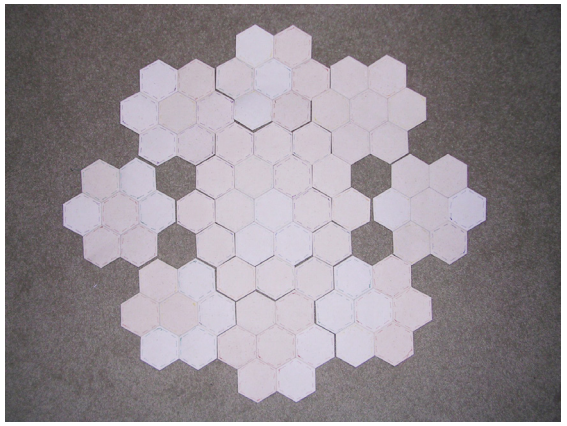
• Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
• Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
• Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
• Unfold, rotate and move on to next piece in the line, without cutting thread.
• Fold over to face neighbouring piece, right sides together and stitch together.
• Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Pick work up and turn over to back side.
• Snip tacking threads on all surrounded pieces, unpick and peel out papers. (13)
• Put work down in place. Match up.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Line up single piece into V space of flower edge. Match with neighbour, face right sides together and stitch together.
• Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.



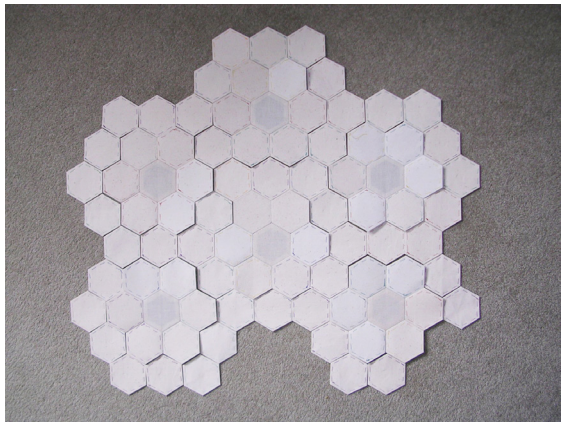


I can sew and sew, and think and think, and wander and invent, and remember and forget – all in a constant stream. I am only interrupted – when I sew – by counting. How many have I cut? How many left to cut?
I'll just finish this one and then I'll stop.

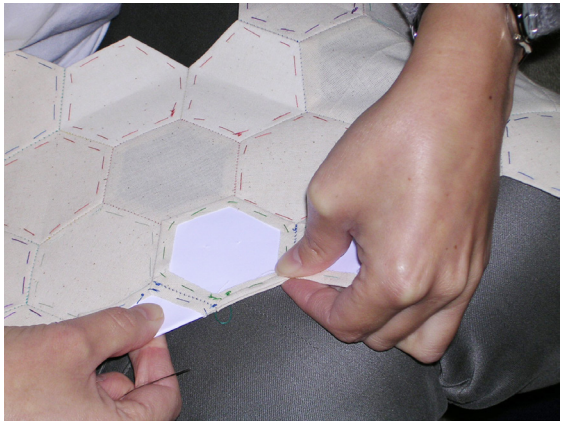
And so on. And so on.

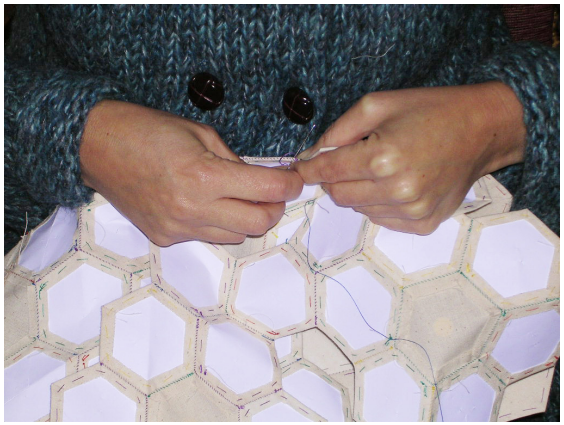
Still I stitch.
But I must stop after this one.
I'll just add one more here. And here.

Then I'll stop.



• Line up single piece into V space of flower edge. Match with neighbour, face right sides together and stitch together.
• Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.



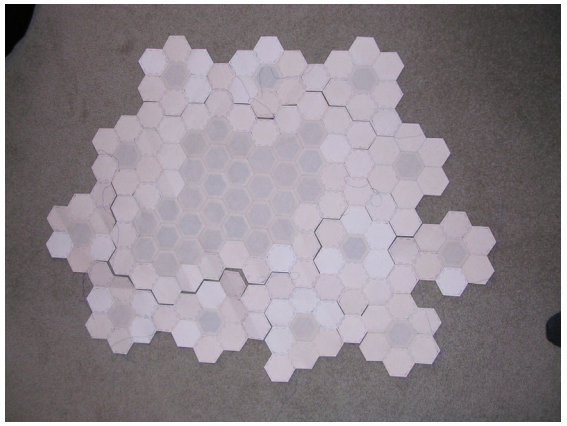


• Line up single piece into V space of flower edge. Match with neighbour, face right sides together and stitch together.
• Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.
• Line up single piece into V space of flower edge. Match with neighbour, face right sides together and stitch together.
• Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.
• Line up single piece into V space of flower edge. Match with neighbour, face right sides together and stitch together.
• Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.
• Line up single piece into V space of flower edge. Match with neighbour, face right sides together and stitch together.
• Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.
• Line up single piece into V space of flower edge. Match with neighbour, face right sides together and stitch together.
• Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.
• Line up single piece into V space of flower edge. Match with neighbour, face right sides together and stitch together.
• Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.

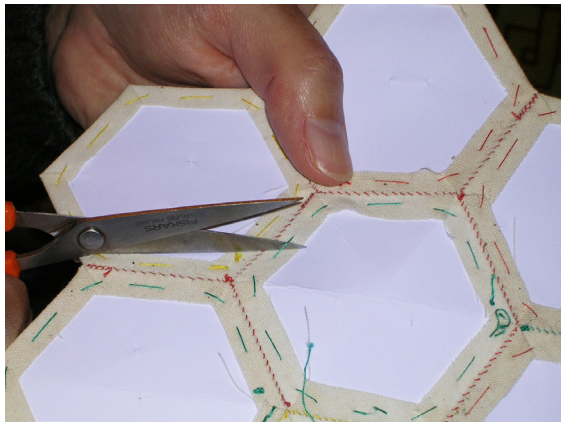
I NEED TO STOP.

• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Line up single piece into V space of flower edge. Match with neighbour, face right sides together and stitch together.
• Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.
• Line up single piece into V space of flower edge. Match with neighbour, face right sides together and stitch together.
• Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.

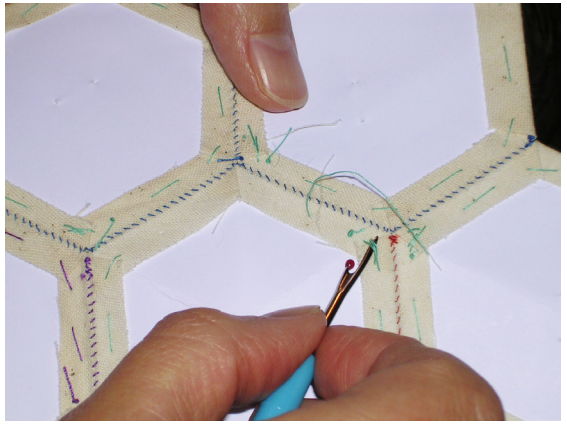
• Pick up two single pieces, face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.
• Pick up two single pieces, face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.
• Pick up two single pieces, face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.

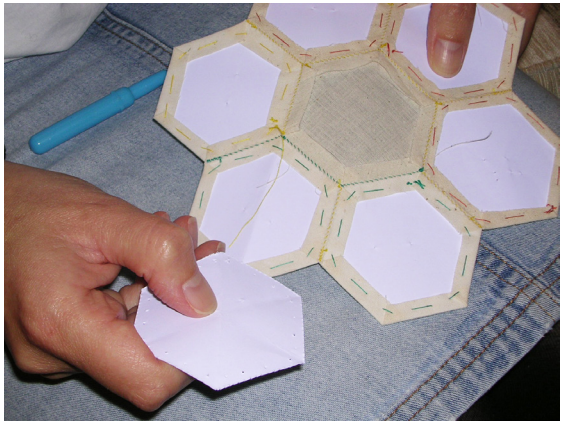


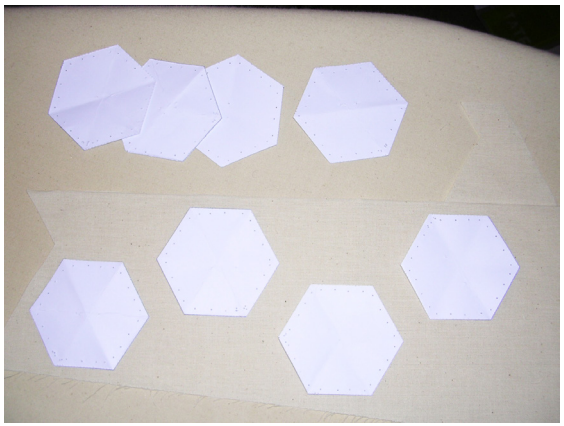
• Knot end of thread.
• Pick up two single pieces, face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Match up with neighbouring two pieces (stitched together).
• Knot end of thread.
• Face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.
• Pick up two single pieces, face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring single piece (to make a line of three).
• Face right sides together and stitch together. Finish and cut thread.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Match up flower edge with neighbouring line of two pieces (stitched together).
• Knot end of thread.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.

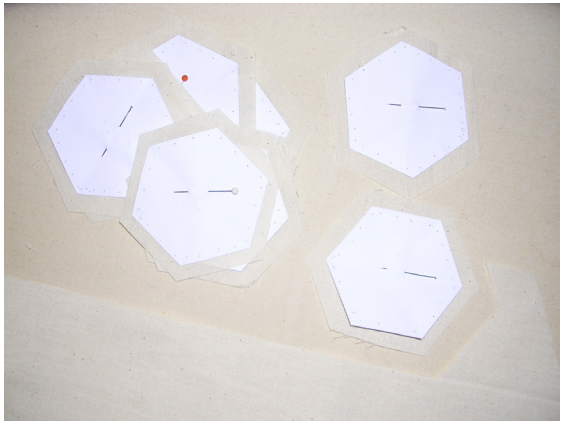


• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.



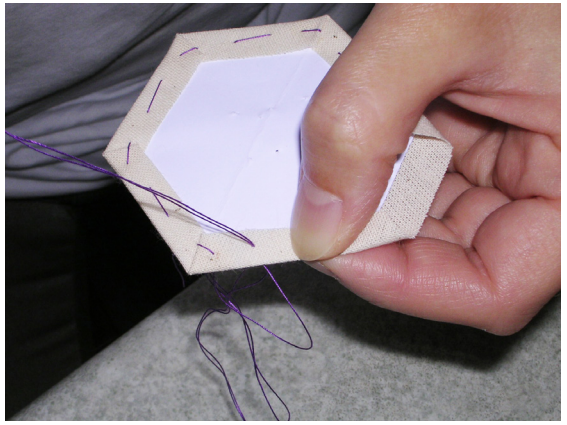


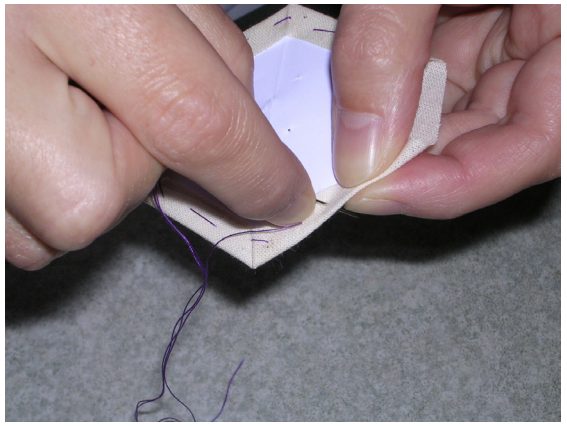


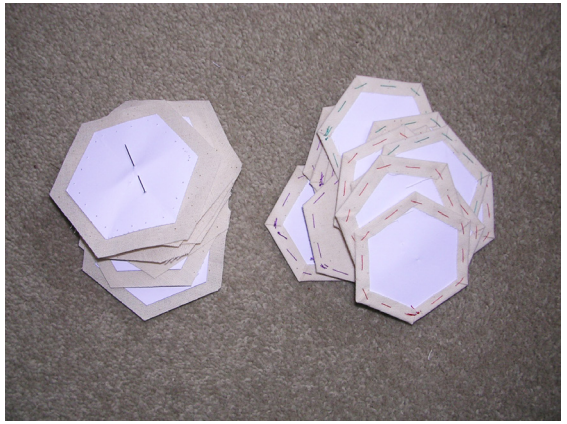


• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.

• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up edges of large pieced together neighbouring blocks.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up edges of large pieced together neighbouring blocks.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Add an extra flower.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Add an extra flower.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up with neighbouring block.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.
• Cut thread, thread needle and knot end of thread.
• Match up edges of large pieced together neighbouring blocks.
• Face right sides together and stitch together along just one of the edges. Secure, but leave thread hanging. Remove needle.
• Unfold and put down in place.



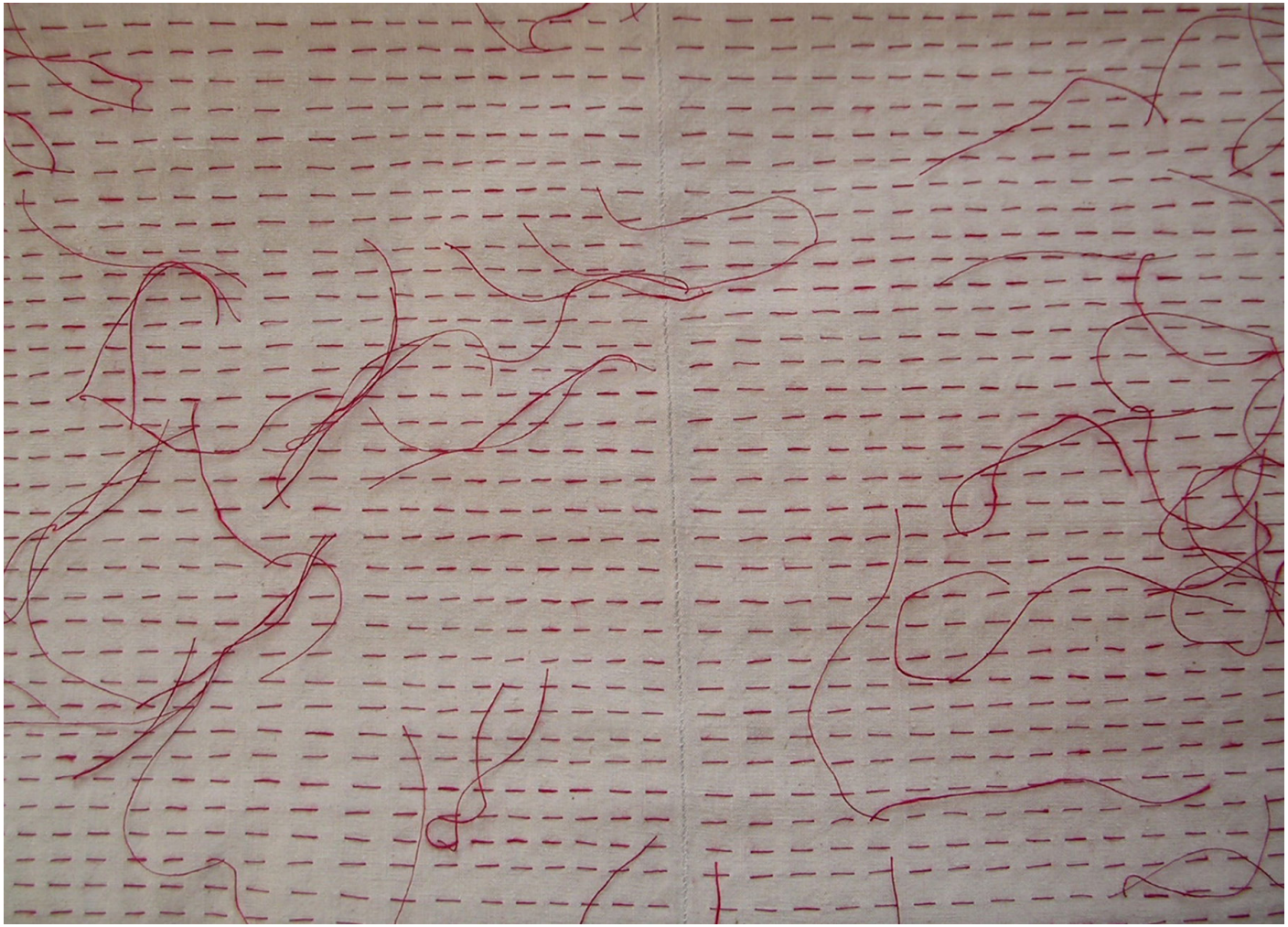




Appendix V: works

Monologue (2007-10)

Plain sewing – running stitch – in red linen thread on a linen sheet, worked from time to time over a period of three years. Thoughts, anecdotes and observations that came to mind during the stitching process were spoken aloud and recorded in my attempt to find words for the physical processes and mental states experienced whilst hand-stitching on my own as a private activity. The commentary resulted in a text, extracts of which are quoted in the main body of the thesis. An edited version of the text is included here and was published in: G. Cook & K. Schoen (2009) MATERIAL, vol. 2, Los Angeles: Material Press, pp. 90-95.
Photo: author.



Reference is made in the thesis text:

Chapter Two, p. 100.

Chapter Three, pp. 122 & 125-126.

Listen also to original recordings
* *Monologue*

MONOLOGUE

(2007-10)

There's something calming about pushing the needle in, pulling it out, and pulling the thread through. Like breathing. A rhythm. Like a beat. It's quite slow. There is comfort in the simplicity of it. The plainness of it. The boringness of it. I'm looking at my stitches. I'm trying to keep them even. All the same length. And straight. All the movement, and the energy, is in the thread. That's what's doing the work. That's what's moving. That's what's marking. I'm tooling it. I'm deciding where to put the needle. But it becomes about the thread. That's the focus of the work, in the sense of the work being done, with the thread, to the sheet. It stops me thinking about me. Like something's vacating. Leaving space. My body is still. Not in movement. All that will be seen, all that will be there, in the passing time I spend doing this, will be the stitches. Marking time. The time is there. And it can be seen. My hands bear the marks of the labour. I usually end up with a hole and a callous on my third finger, my middle finger. And then a sore, red, almost like a blister, on my index finger, from rubbing against the needle, pulling, pulling the needle through. The cloth is tightly woven, but it's not dense. It's certainly not impenetrable. I suppose I should wear a thimble. I don't like wearing a thimble. I like to feel the accuracy of the needle. This thread is waxy, springy. It doesn't knot. Occasionally it kinks. The cloth is not exactly warm, but it's not cold. It's firm and springy. It has a nervousness to it. When I push the needle through, in other parts, like a ripple, it quivers. A little shudder. The needle is sharp and it pierces. But using the needle, working the needle, dulls and numbs.

Not blissful, but not far off. I'm stitching cloth. I am stitching through cloth, on cloth, along cloth, over cloth, all over cloth. I'm going in and out, in and out. Look closely at the thread. It leaves smudges round the holes. Not always, just sometimes. A bit like when you push a pen, when you press down on the paper doing a dot. The ink smudges out if you hold the pen down too firmly. It bleeds out. The thread is behaving like that. Stitching like this

is always the same. The same gesture over and over again. But it feels different each time. By a miniscule amount. Each stitch is pretty much the same. You can engineer difference and interest, but it's basically always the same. You're pushing the needle in and pulling it out. Nothing is ever entirely the same. And that's what counts. It'll be mine. Like a voice. You can get people saying the same thing, in the same way, and in the same language, but each voice will be different. Like handwriting. You can write the same thing as somebody else, but yours will be different. Drawn in by the rhythm, I forget what I'm doing. I have to stop and think again.

Why am I doing this? Why do I want to cover a large piece of fabric in stitching? All the same plain stitching. It's not holding anything together. Or is it? Not literally anyway. Can I keep the stitches straight, and the lines straight, all the way down? It's like writing on a blank piece of paper, with no lines. I haven't drawn lines to follow. It's like drawing. As if you were to cover a piece of paper with lines quite closely placed next to each other, drawing them neatly and straightly, without using a ruler, with the same amount of pressure on the line so as not to have fine lines and thick lines. If you look closely, there are two pieces of woven cloth joined together down the middle. There's a seam down the centre. It's hand-stitched. I can feel the ridge underneath where the two edges meet. They're held together by stitches. By somebody else's stitches. By somebody else whose work has gone before mine. It's like a kind of skeleton. A tiny, tiny skeleton. Very neat, very tiny stitches. Very strong. So much of what it is, what it contains, is hidden. But always there. It's constantly manipulated. I don't just stitch it. Each time, I unroll it, I fix it in the frame, I take it off, and I roll it back up. When I take it out, I will fold it. Then unfold it. And re-fold it. Somebody else might unfold it. Then re-fold it. The thread makes a noise as I pull it through the cloth. It doesn't slip through easily. It scrapes and grates through. There is resistance. You have to force it through. Exercising control. Every time you put the needle in, and pull it out. And if it's not right, it will be unpicked and done again. Think of sewing, think of seaming, as holding things together. If it's not done correctly, if it's not in the right position, it won't hold together. It will fall apart.

The rhythm of the stitches punctuates the evening, or the afternoon. The sheet is there. There is complicity. It lends itself to being stitched. The weave is close, but not tight. It's softened. It's given in. It's not resisting. It has a past life. It belonged elsewhere, to somebody else. A piece of cloth invariably has other lives. It keeps on living. This was made a first time in France. And is made a second time in England. The second making of the sheet is making over the first making. My existence on top of the previous one. The stitches bind us together. Neatly, tightly.

I'm still doing my stitching. I still want to do it. You can't make stitched work without stitching. Nothing has replaced it. It's like writing. It's the making of a mark. Leaving a trace. But stitching passes through the surface. It attaches both sides. You pass the needle through. You draw the thread through. It's like speaking. The spoken voice becomes sound, and it passes through the air, through space. The cloth becomes the space between. And the voice, like the thread, is joining within that space. Stitching is joining. Yet every time a stitch is made, so too is an act of violence. Piercing with the needle. Piercing in an exacting way. Pulling through the thread, straining it, I feel the resistance of the cloth. There's nothing gentle about piercing with a needle. And done so deliberately. Repeatedly. You can never get rid of the traces. The traces of stitches become more visible than the stitches themselves were before they were unpicked. In undoing the work, you reveal the work that was done. I'm paying attention to the rhythm of the stitches, and the gap between the rows. The banality of it. I have to think about it. I have to work to merge with the piece. I find my way into the piece by paying attention to what I'm doing. My plying my needle is the means by which I find my way in to the piece. There is a moment of wrestling with it, of having to draw up from somewhere the knowledge I have that enables me to ply my needle, that enables me to find my way back into the piece. The sound of the thread changes as I use it up. When I start, the sound is long and deep. As I get towards the end of the thread, it becomes shorter, and sharper, and slightly higher pitched. All these little sounds we make. I think of punctuation, and phrasing. The snip of the scissors marks a beginning. There is the long drawing out, pulling the thread through to make the stitches. It's a long pull, like a big heaving a sigh. But the result is just a small mark. The effort needed is far greater than what is left in its wake. It is reduced as I use up the length

of thread. The heaving of the sigh becomes shorter and sharper. More like a quick intake of breath.

I'm going quite fast. Because I know what I'm doing. I don't need to figure out what to do. Time goes by. And the work gets done. Your hands know what to do. You half switch off and you just do it. It can drive you mad. There's a limit to how much you can do, of this kind of work, a day, continuously. It would hurt. Stitching on a piece this size, which is quite big, I'm always more or less in the same spot. There is always only one edge, the front edge, visible. You can only stitch close to you, where you're sitting, close to your body. So I'm always on the edge. Yet at the same time I know it's not the edge. I'm moving towards the centre. But it always looks like it's on the edge. Like I'm not moving forward, I'm not making progress. Like running on the spot. Every stitch that I make, my hands, and my eyes are focussed on that tiny piece of the cloth. I'm always in this big sea of fabric, completely absorbed on a tiny piece of it. And even though it moves, it always looks the same. There is little to distinguish one centimetre square of cloth from another centimetre square of cloth. I keep making a tiny little dance step. On the same spot. Like a ballerina, en pointe, making tiny little shuffling movements with her toes. On the same spot. All that intense energy and weight is concentrated in that one little spot. That tininess, that precision. That small, repetitive, gesture. That tiny little mark. That tiny movement. On the periphery, in the corner of my eye, I can see the sheet spreading out. I can see the scale of the whole.

April 2009

Appendix VI: workshops

Taking a Thread For a Walk / Royal College of Art, London, 24 February 2011.

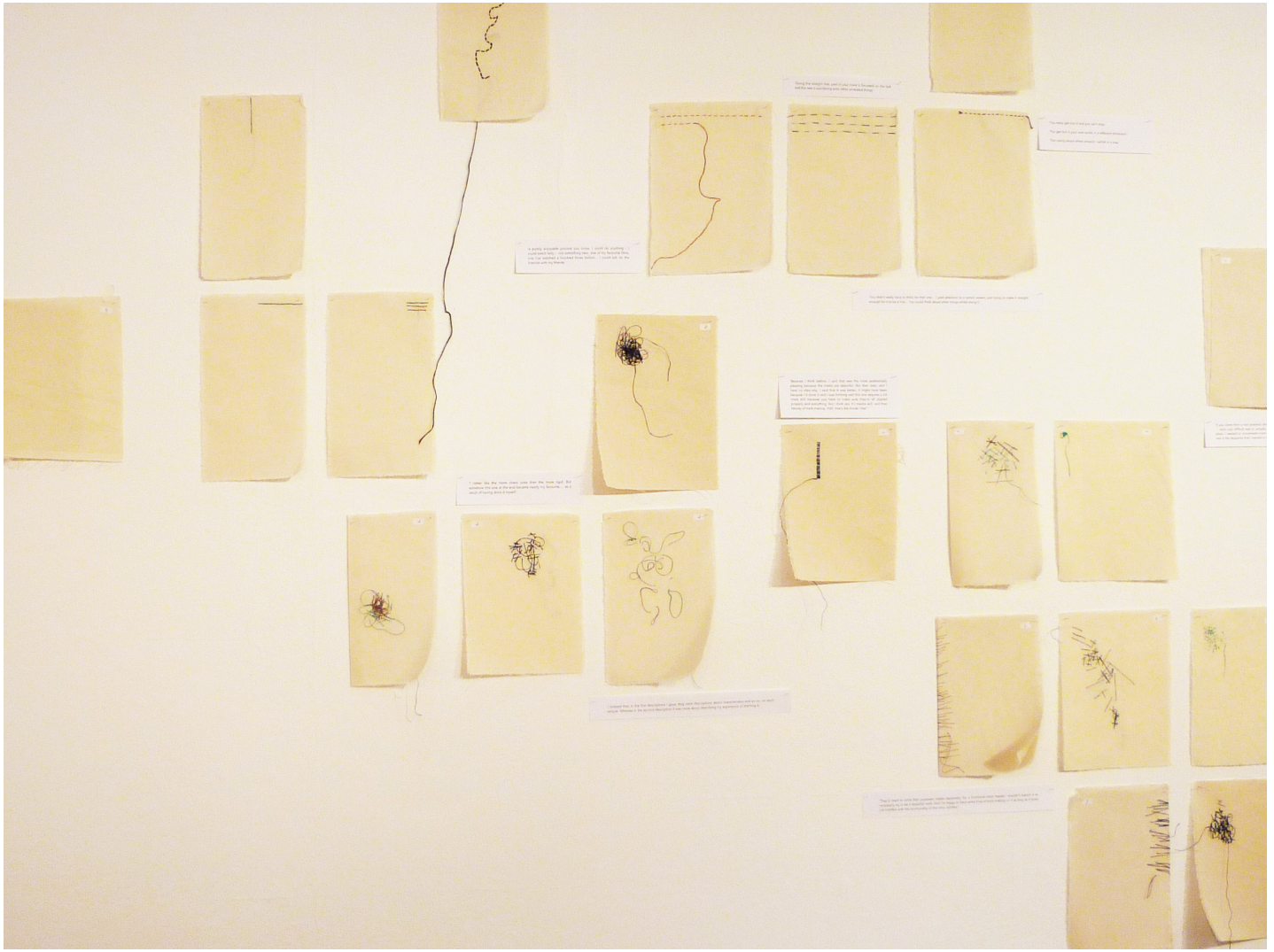
This workshop was devised to explore perceptions of hand-stitching. It was undertaken with five fellow research students from the Fashion and Textile research group at the Royal College of Art. Participants' ages ranged from mid-20s to mid-50s; they had mixed stitching abilities and varied experiences of textile crafts, although all were familiar with experiences of making things by hand. Participants completed a questionnaire (see here pp. 53-54), which asked them to make aesthetic and functional judgements about samples of hand-stitching I had prepared in advance: firstly, based on their visual impact and secondly, after having executed their own samples following the same set of instructions. The questionnaire served only as a prompt for the ensuing rich discussion The workshop lasted for a duration of one and a half hours including discussion.

Photos: author

Reference is made in the thesis text:

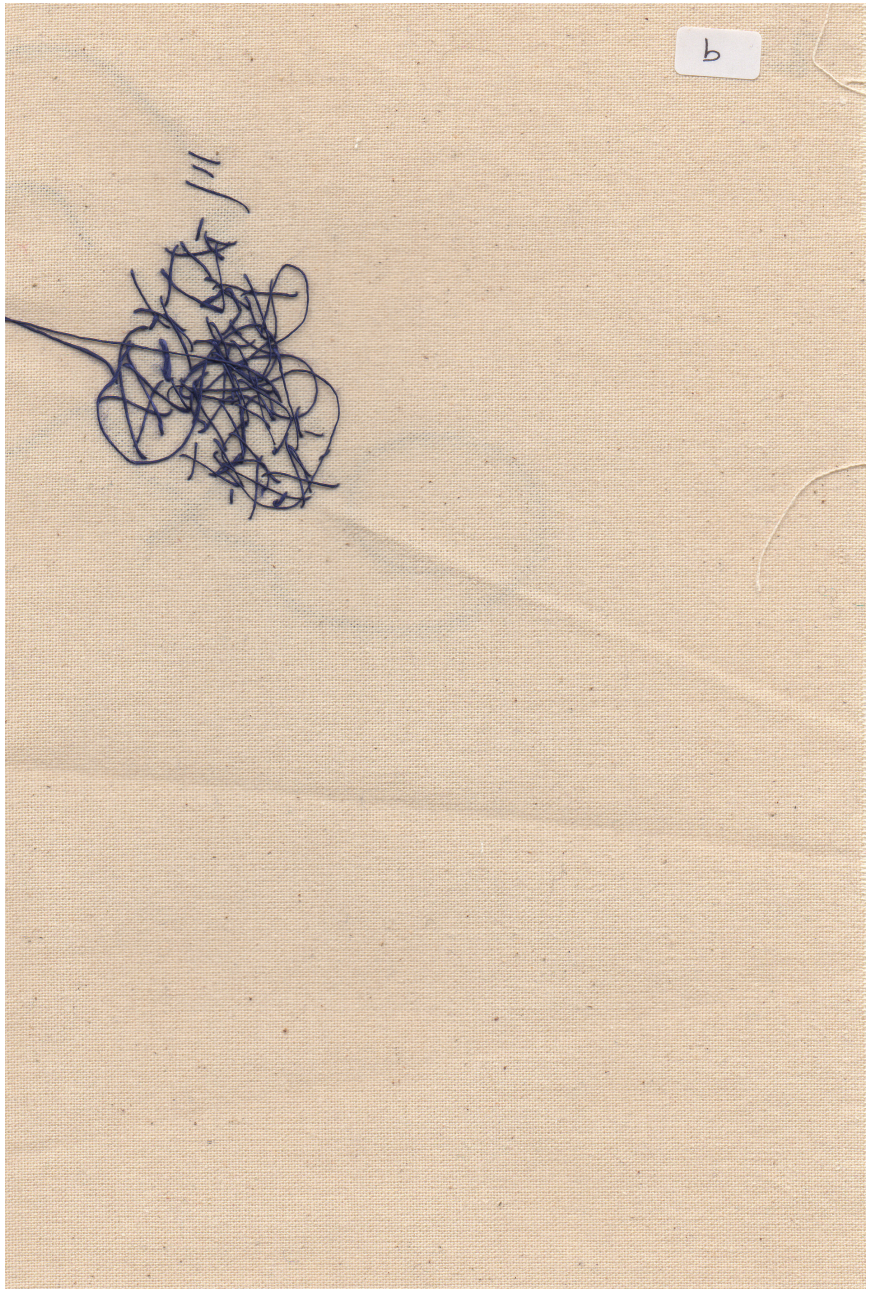
Chapter Two, pp. 92-94 & 97.

Workshop samples on display at the Royal College of Art Textiles 'Work in Progress' show, January 2012. Photo: Dominic Tschudin.

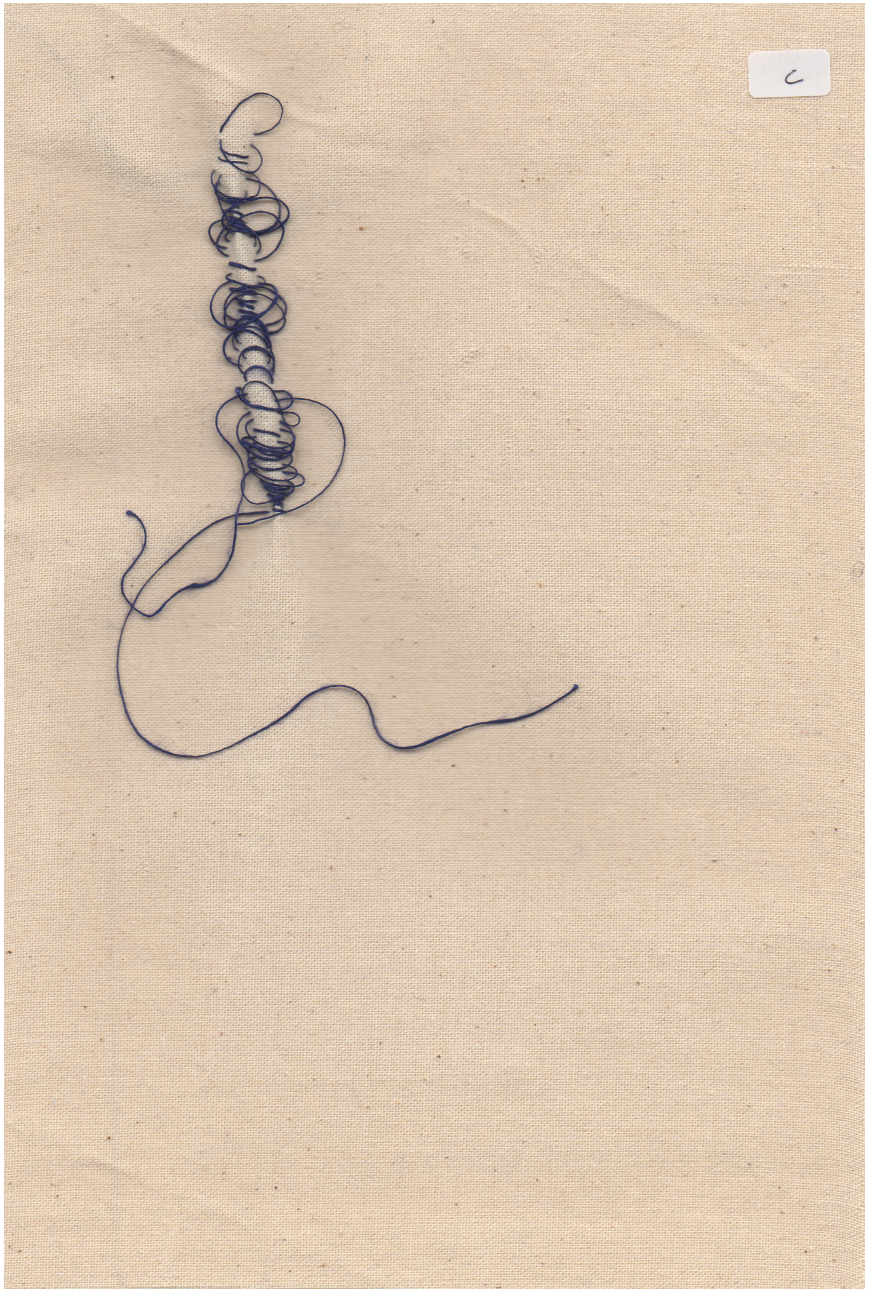


Workshop samples on display at the Royal College of Art Textiles 'Work in Progress' show, January 2014.

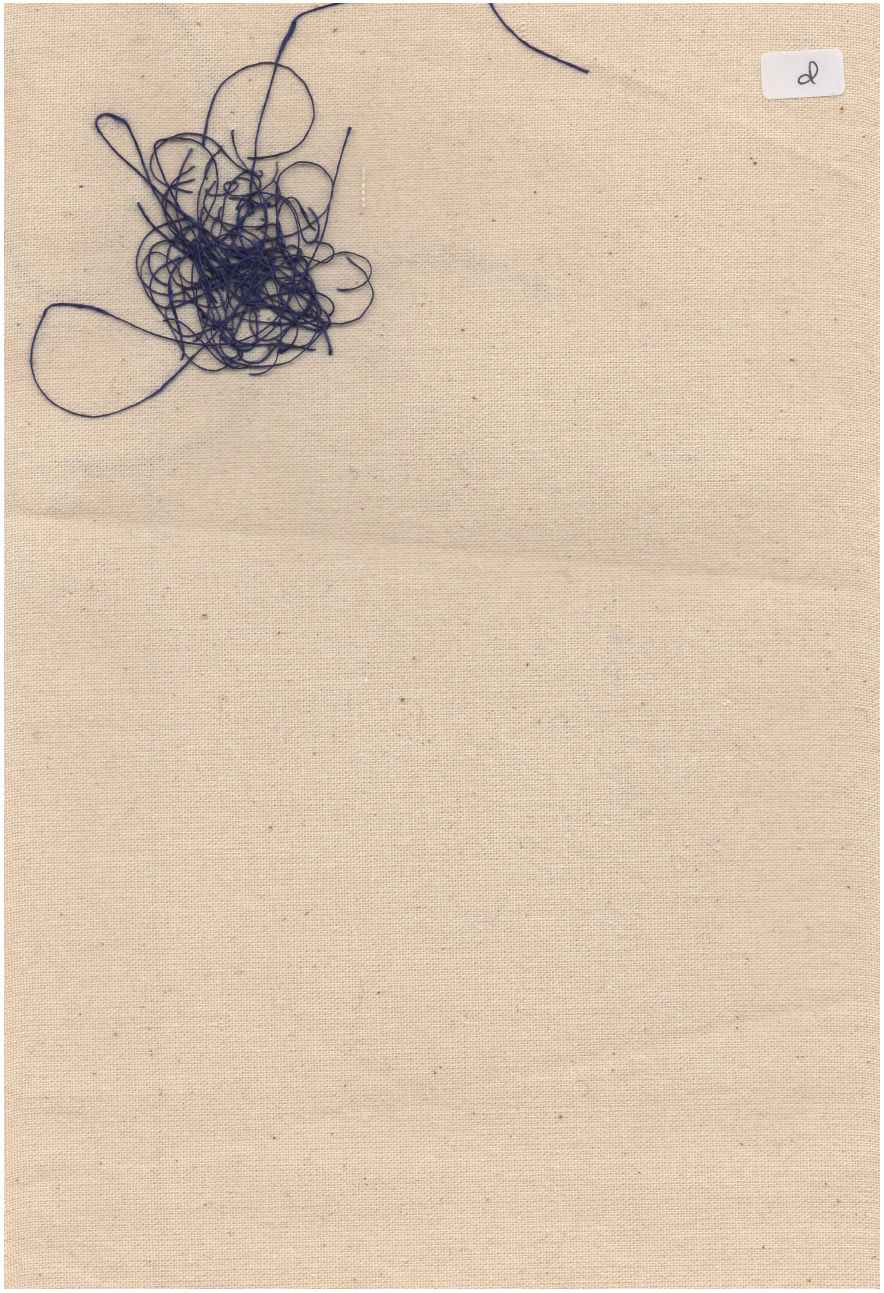
My example Stitching instruction: pay attention to the tension of the thread and the placement of the needle (decorative embroidery on cloth).



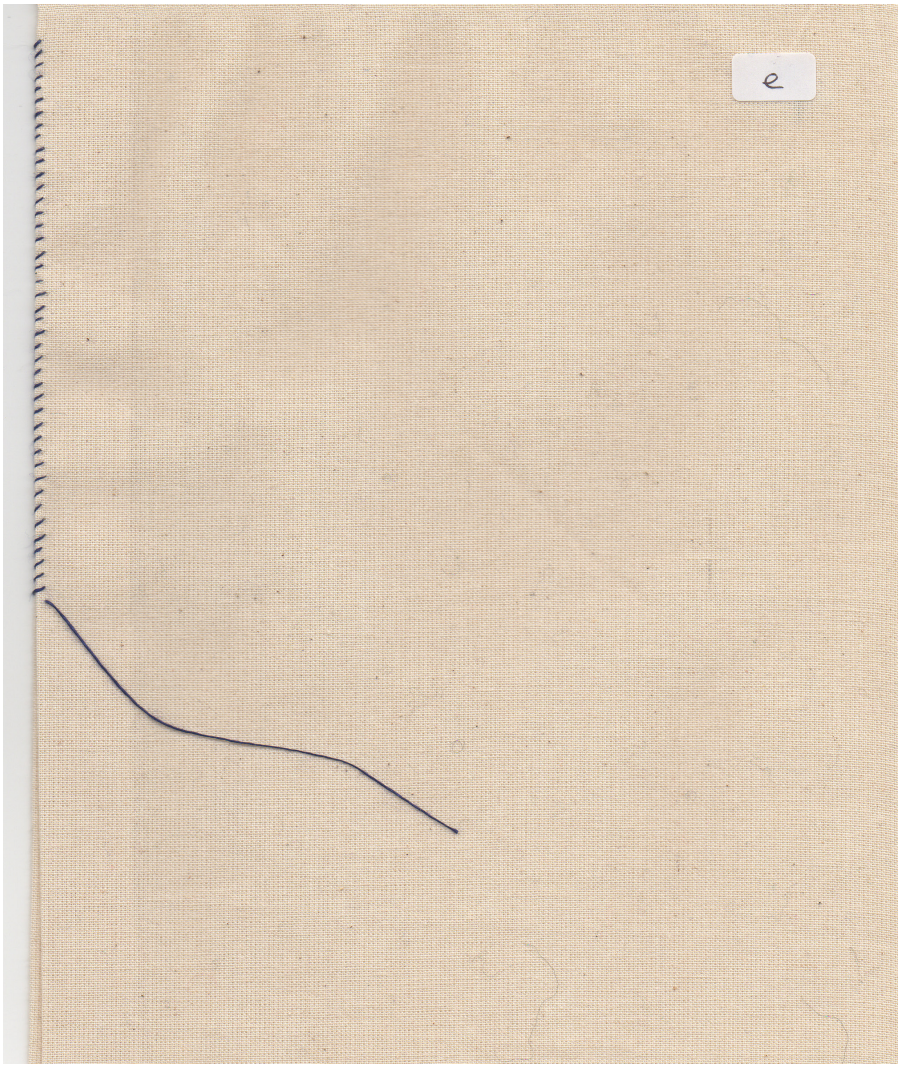
My example Stitching instruction: pay attention to the tension of the thread but not the placement of the needle (decorative embroidery on cloth)..



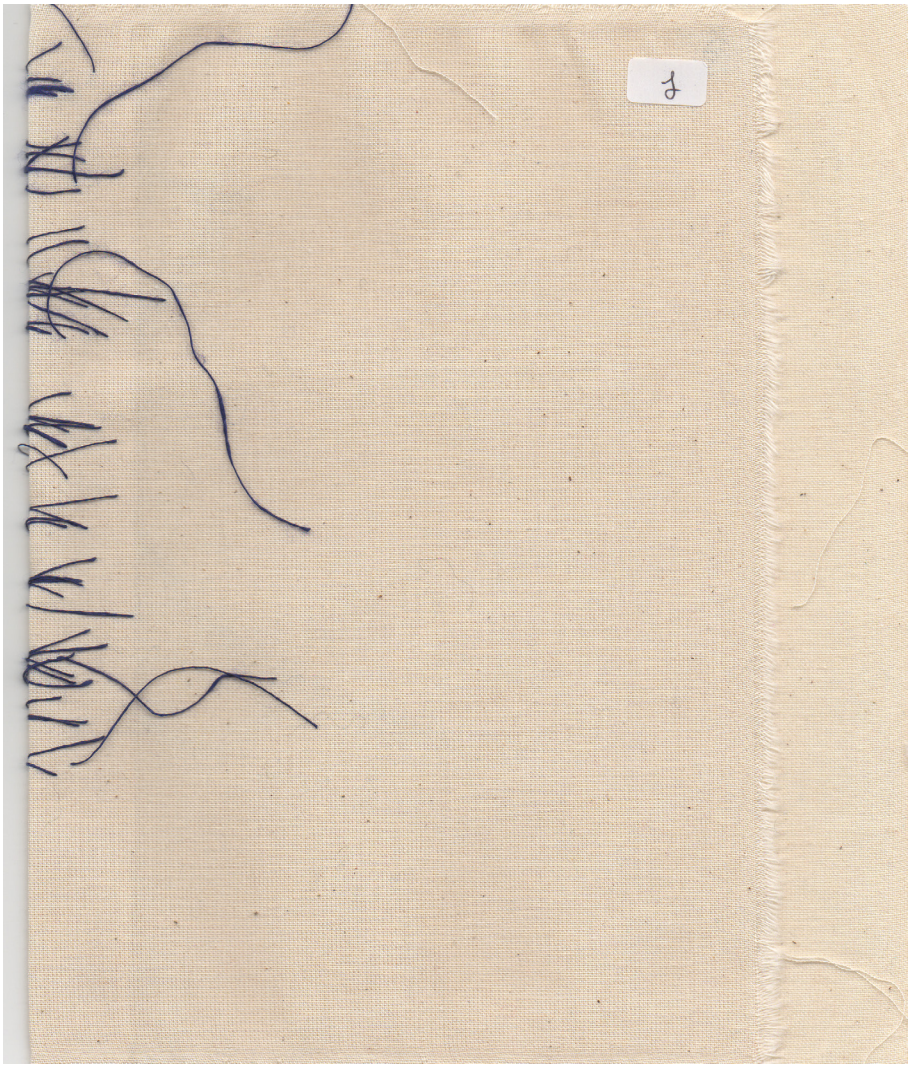
My example Stitching instruction: pay attention to the placement of the needle but not the tension of the thread (decorative embroidery on cloth)..



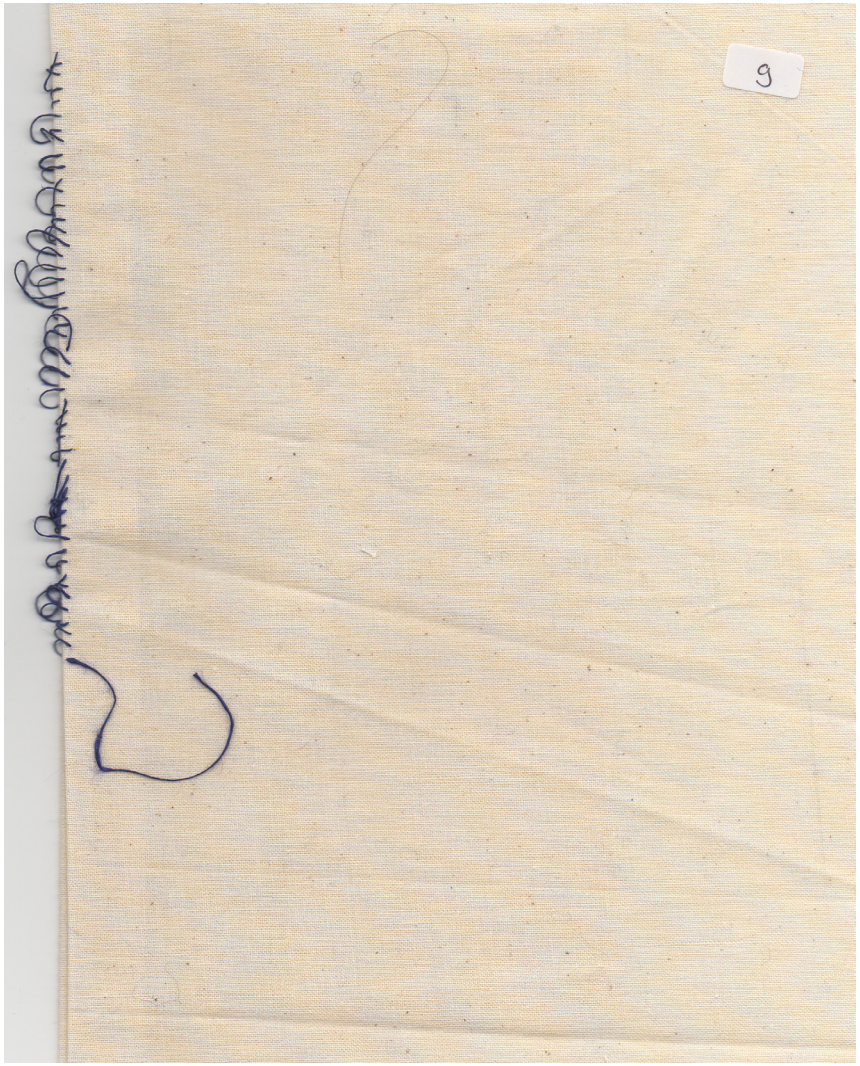
My example Stitching instruction: don't pay attention to the tension of the thread nor the placement of the needle (decorative embroidery on cloth)..



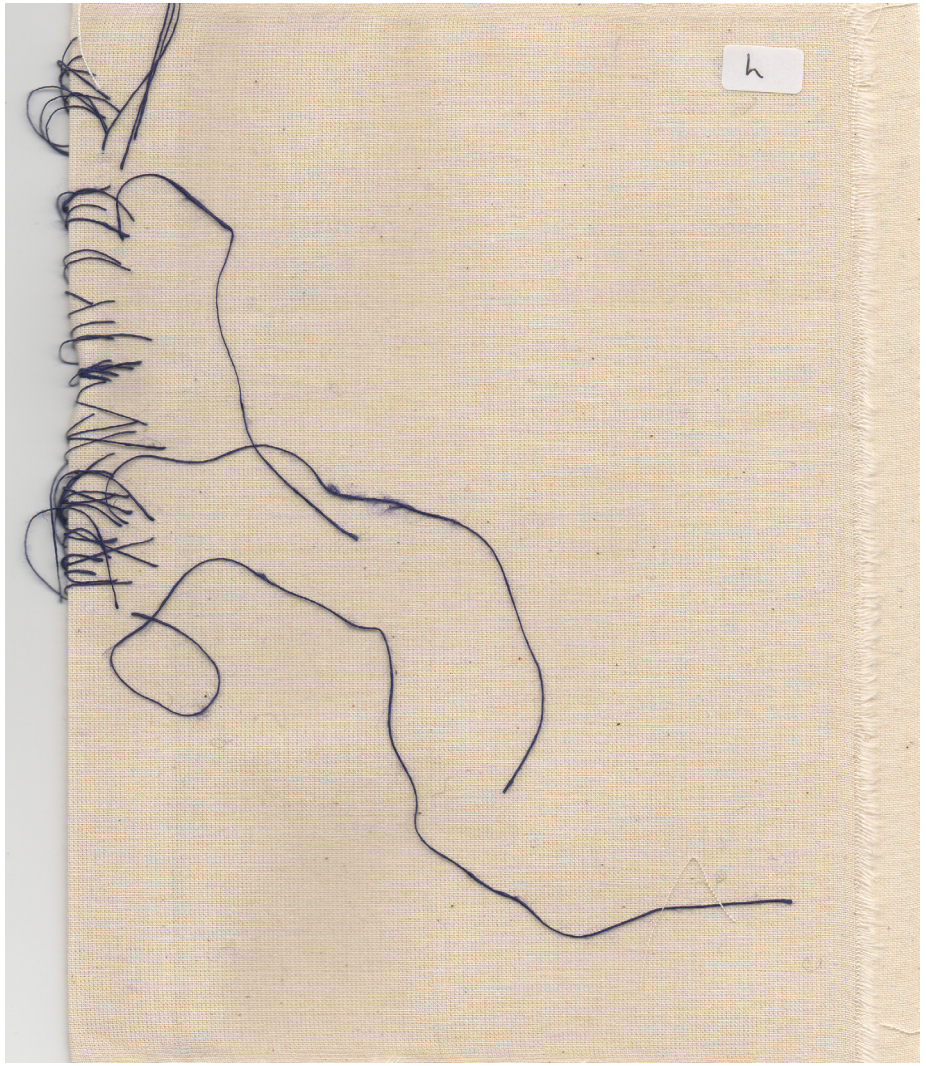
My example Stitching instruction: pay attention to the tension of the thread and the placement of the needle (functional stitching: securing a seam).



My example Stitching instruction: pay attention to the tension of the thread but not the placement of the needle (functional stitching: securing a seam).



My example Stitching instruction: pay attention to the placement of the needle but not the tension of the thread (functional stitching: securing a seam).



My example Stitching instruction: don't pay attention to the tension of the thread nor the placement of the needle (functional stitching: securing a seam).

Taking A Thread For A Walk: questionnaire

Aesthetics, rules and the relationship to skill – valuing traces of the hand.

Exercise A.

Please study these samples of hand-stitching. You have 5 minutes for this exercise. I am asking you to make value judgements of these samples of stitching.

1. First of all, describe each sample of stitching briefly. Write down the adjectives, words or phrases that immediately come to mind.

2. Which do you think is the most aesthetically pleasing? (the most attractive looking)

Please rank in order, **1** being the most and **8** being the least.

3. Which do you think is 'best'? (that works / functions the most effectively)

Please rank in order, **1** being the best and **8** being the least best.

Exercise B.

I would like you to stitch your own versions of these samples, replicating the instructions used, which will be explained to you. You will have 5 minutes for each sample.

(To be made on separate sheets of fabric each time so they can be easily moved around for comparison and analysis)

Exercise C.

Please study again the original samples of hand-stitching. You have 5 minutes for this exercise. I am asking you to make the same value judgements of them.

1. First of all, describe each sample of stitching briefly. Write down the adjectives, words or phrases that immediately come to mind.

2. Which do you think is the most aesthetically pleasing? (the most attractive looking)

Please rank in order, **1** being the most and **8** being the least.

3. Which do you think is 'best'? (that works / functions the most effectively)

Please rank in order, **1** being the best and **8** being the least best.

Exercise D.

Discuss the experience as a group. Has the act of doing the stitching yourself changed your value judgement in any way? How has it changed, if indeed it has? Why do you think this is?

We have 30 minutes for this. With your permission the discussion will be tape-recorded.

Finally, please could you write down your:

Age ……

Gender ……

Education – Highest level attained ……..

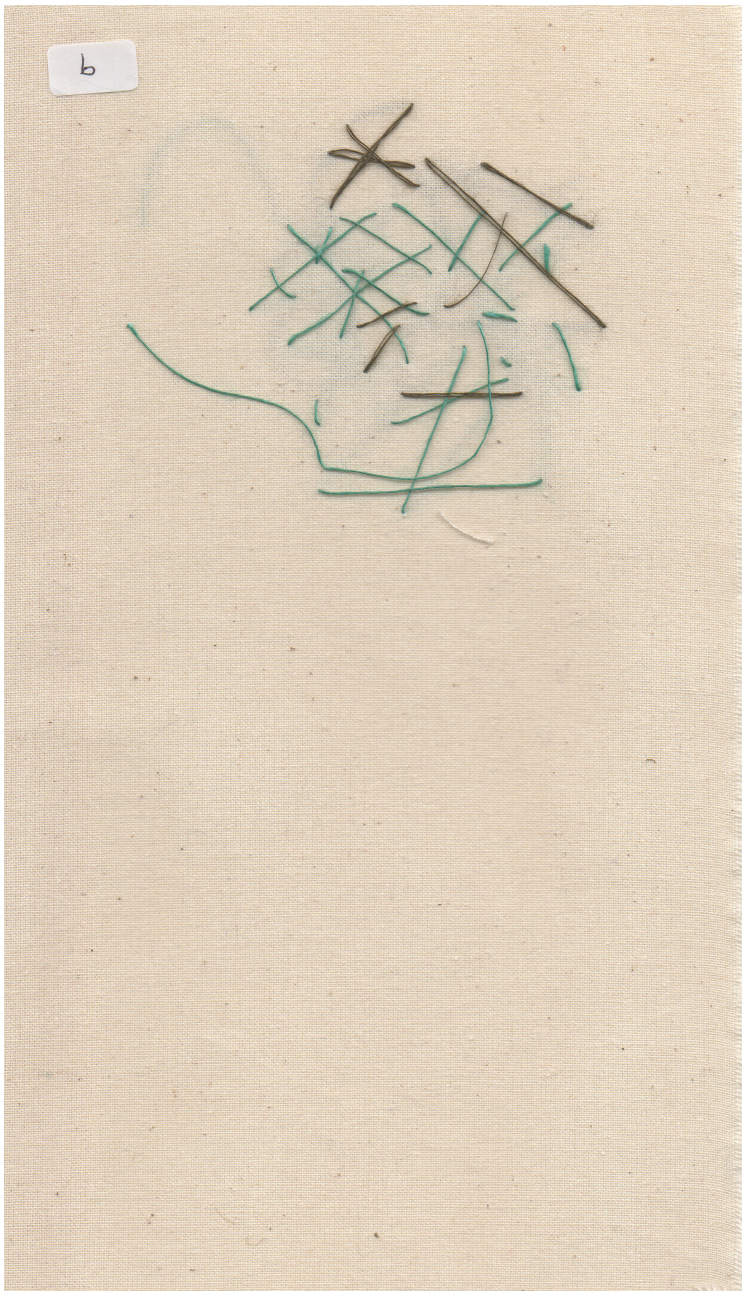
Subjects studied ……..

Current occupation ……..

Any hobbies ……..

Thank you very much for taking part.

Vanessa Stitching instruction: pay attention to the tension of the thread and the placement of the needle (decorative embroidery on cloth).



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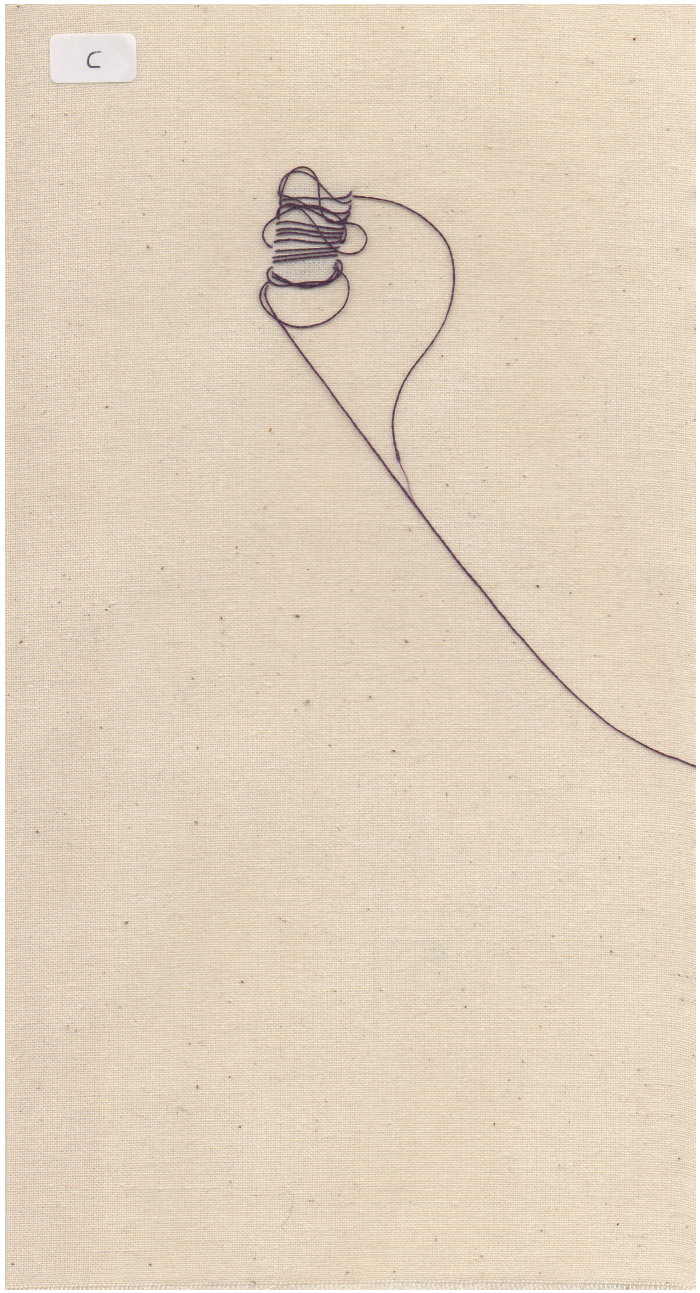

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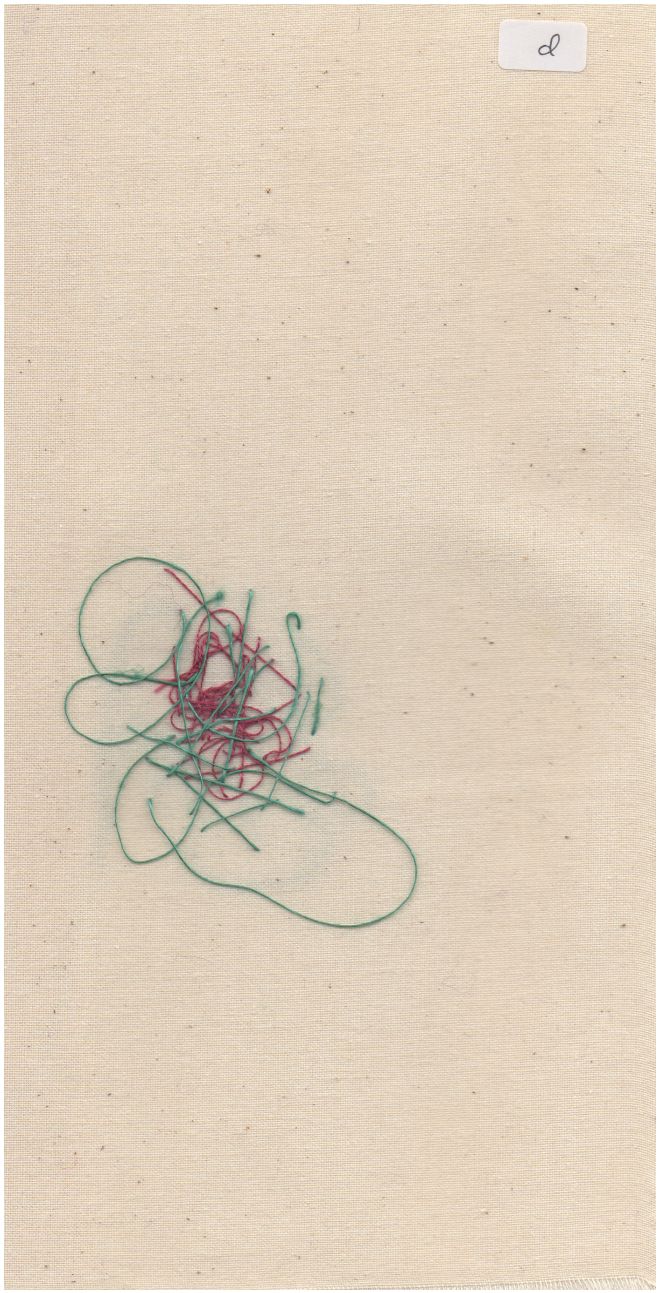

Vanessa Stitching instruction: don't pay attention to the tension of the thread nor the placement of the needle (decorative embroidery on cloth).

Vanessa Stitching instruction: pay attention to the tension of the thread and the placement of the needle (functional stitching: securing a seam).

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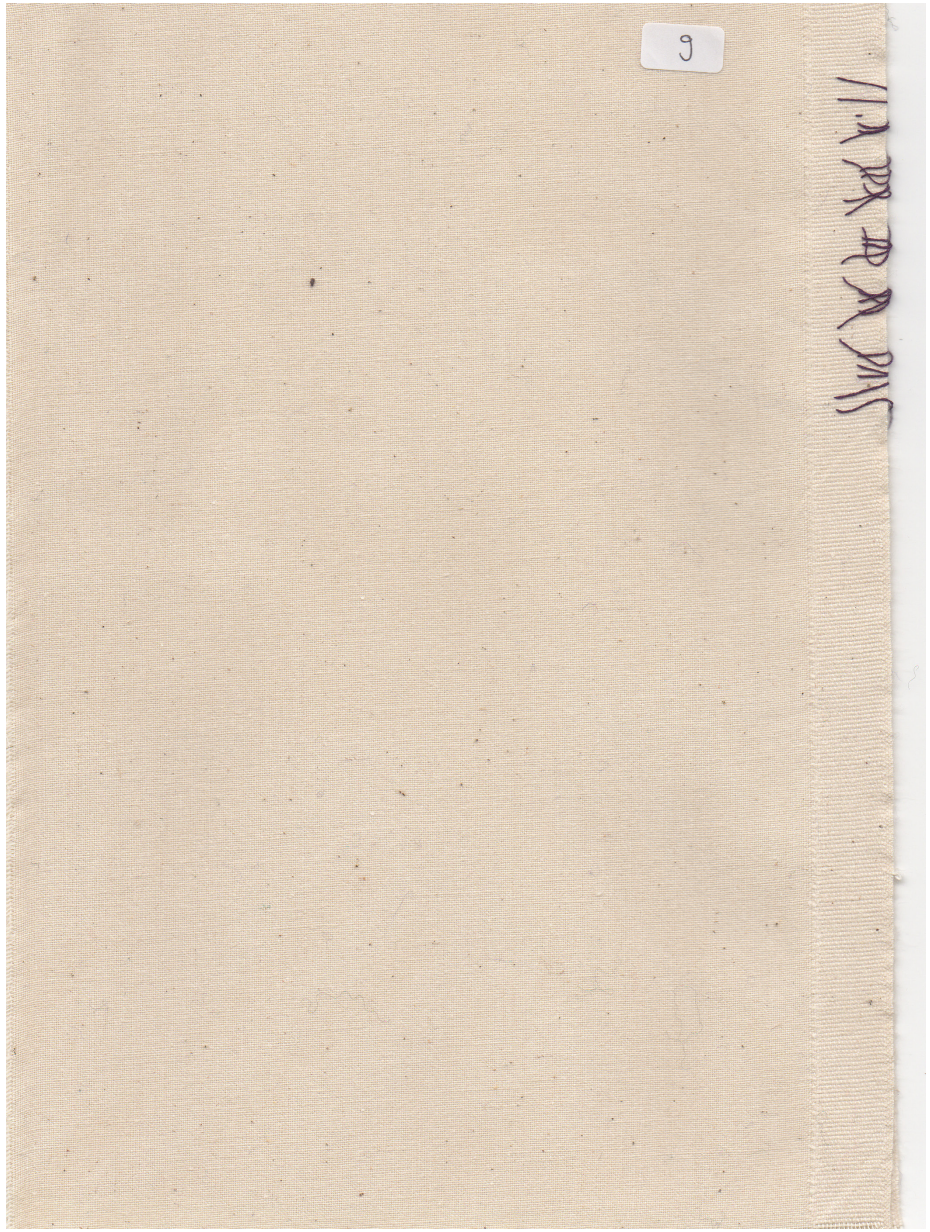

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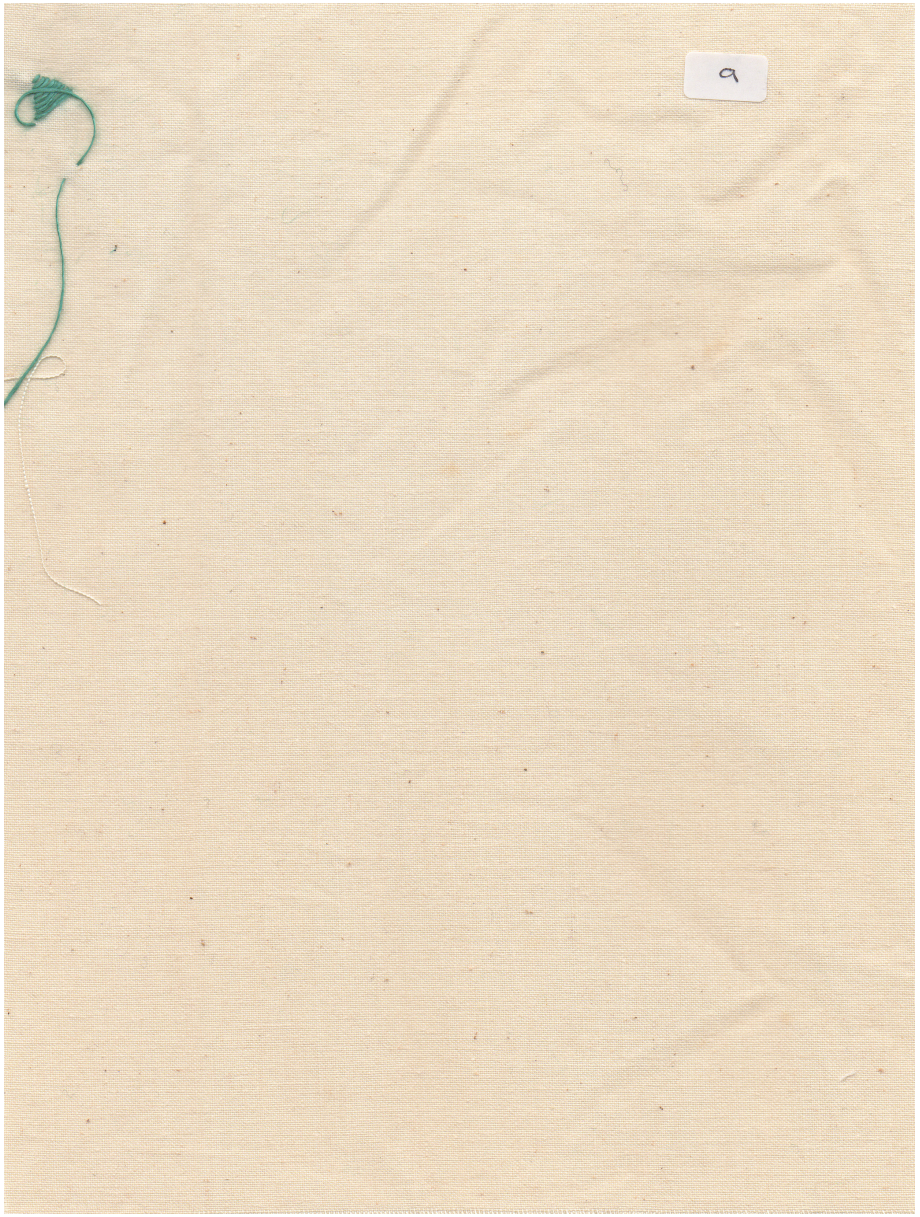

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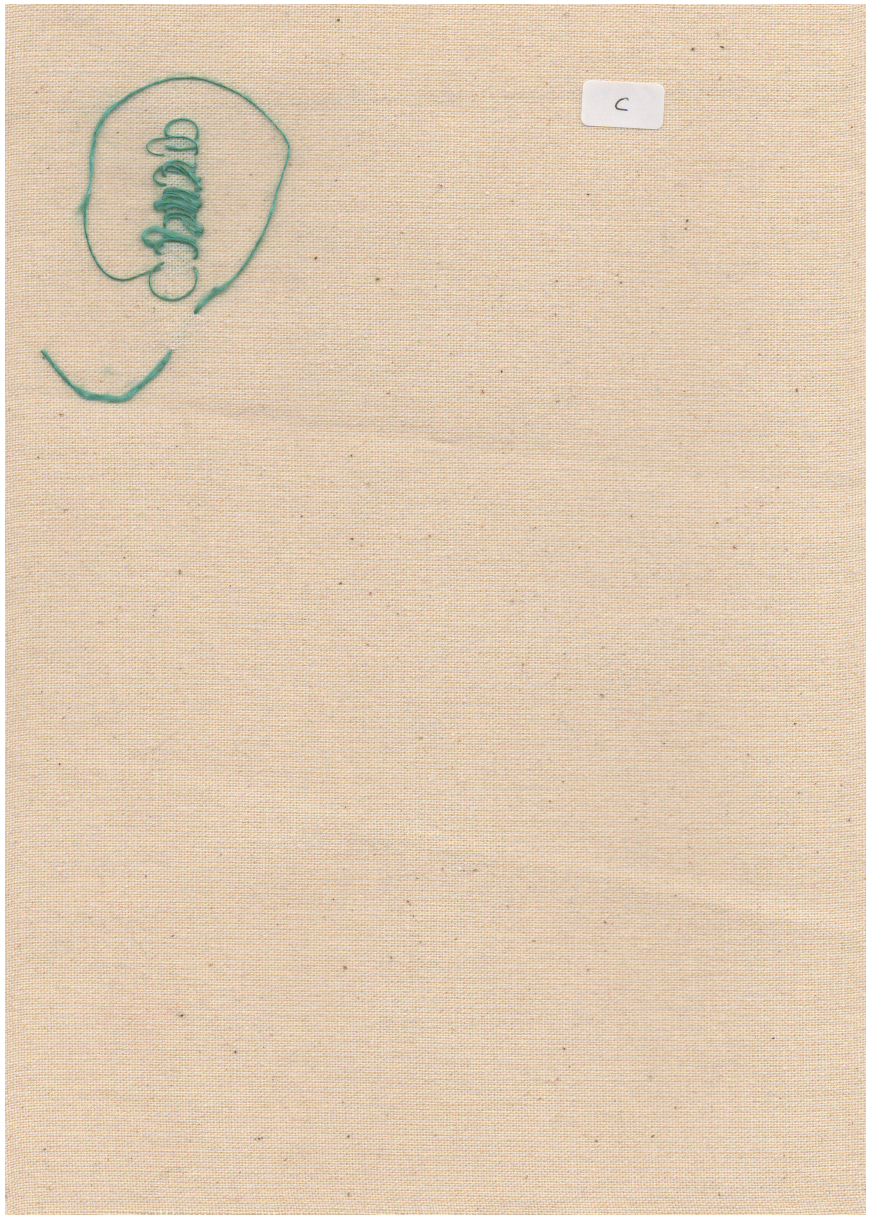

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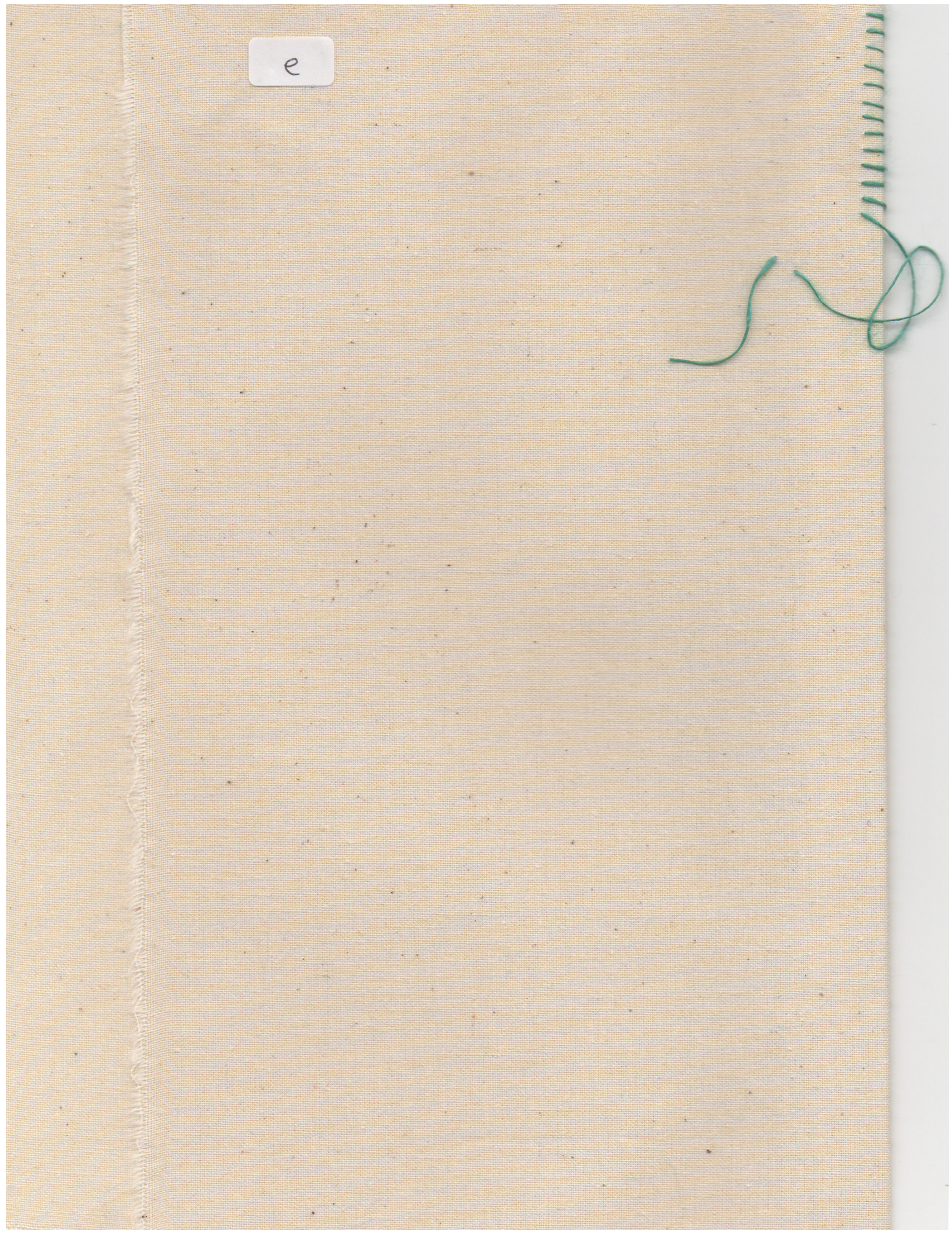

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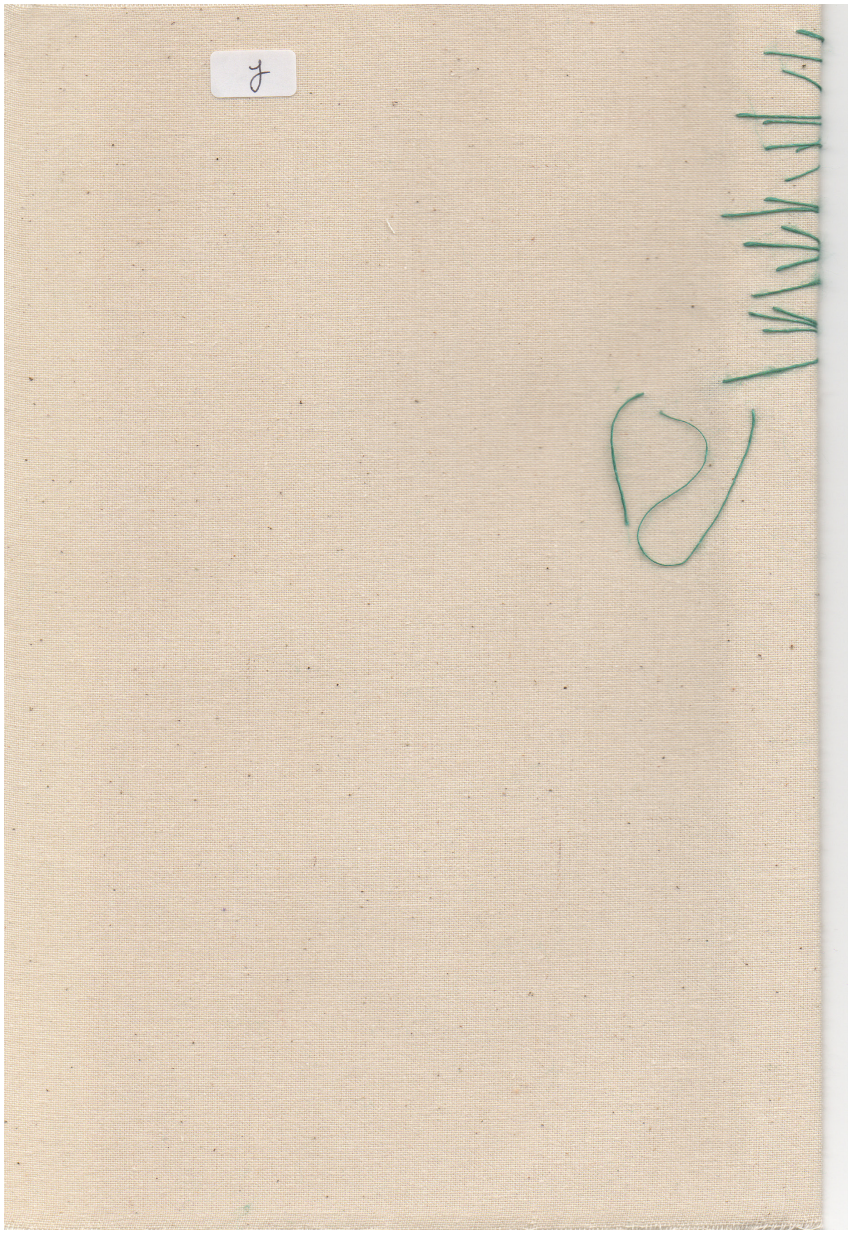

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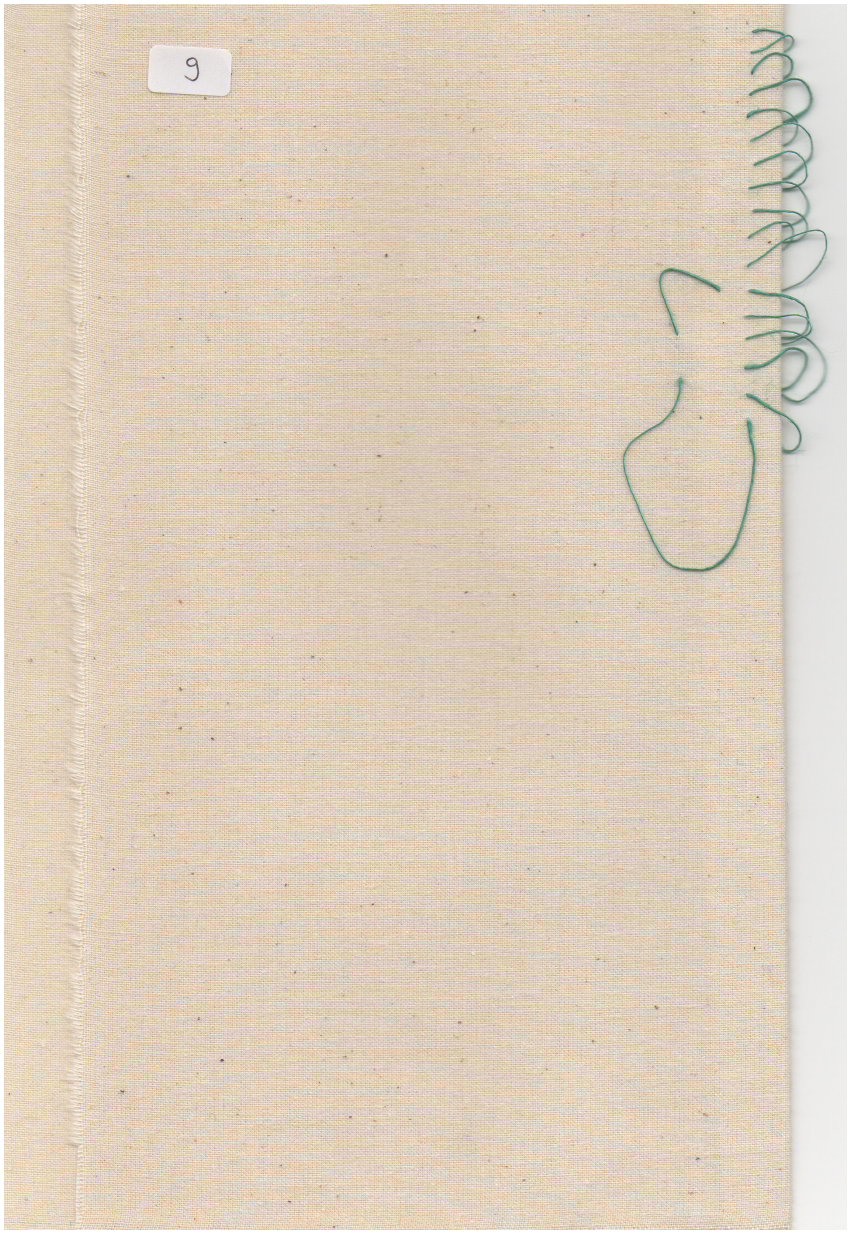

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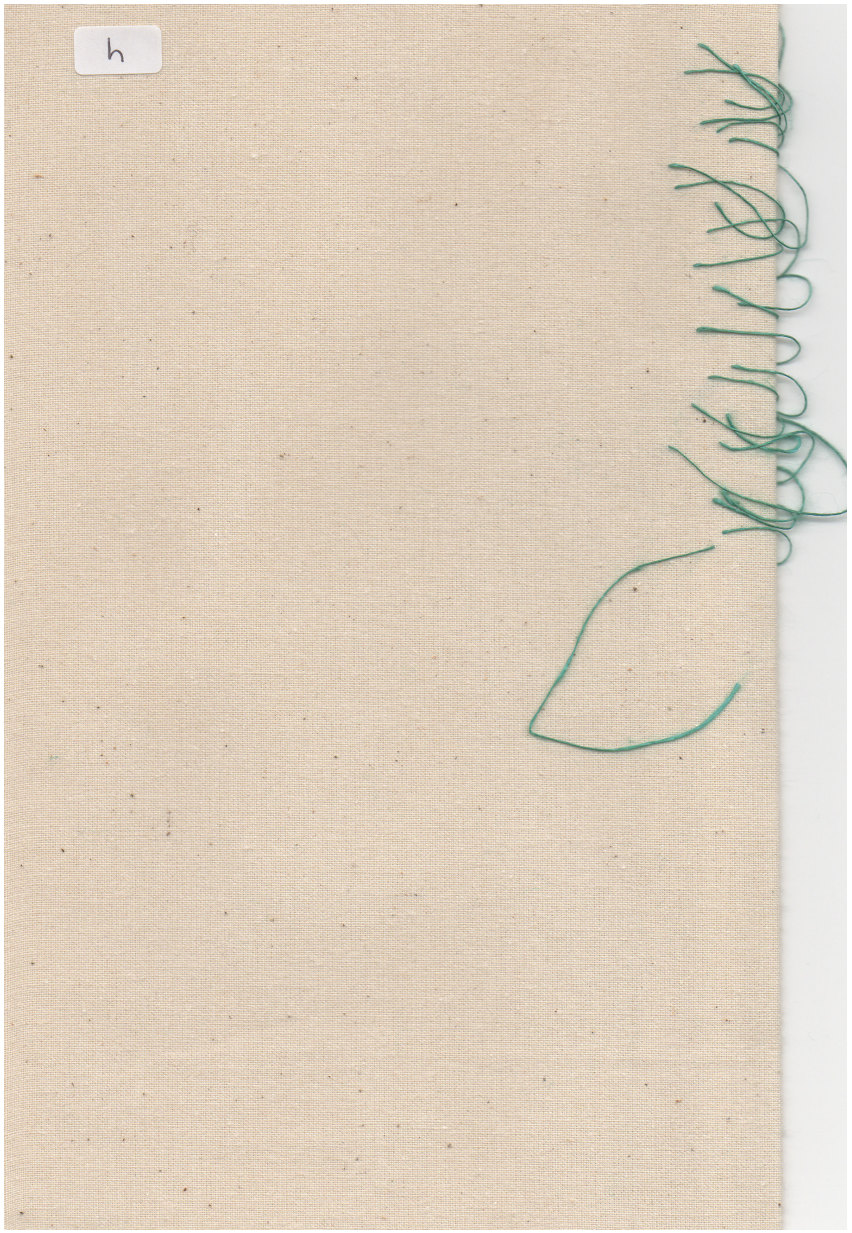

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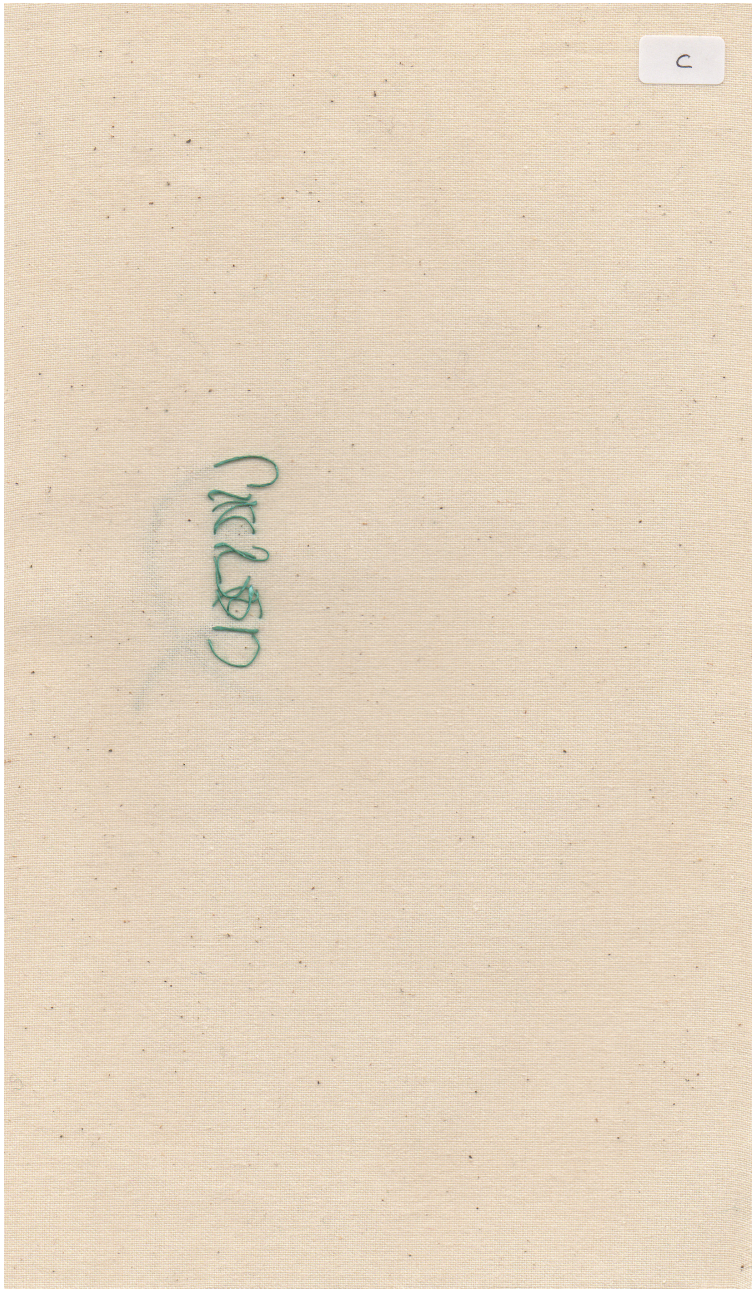

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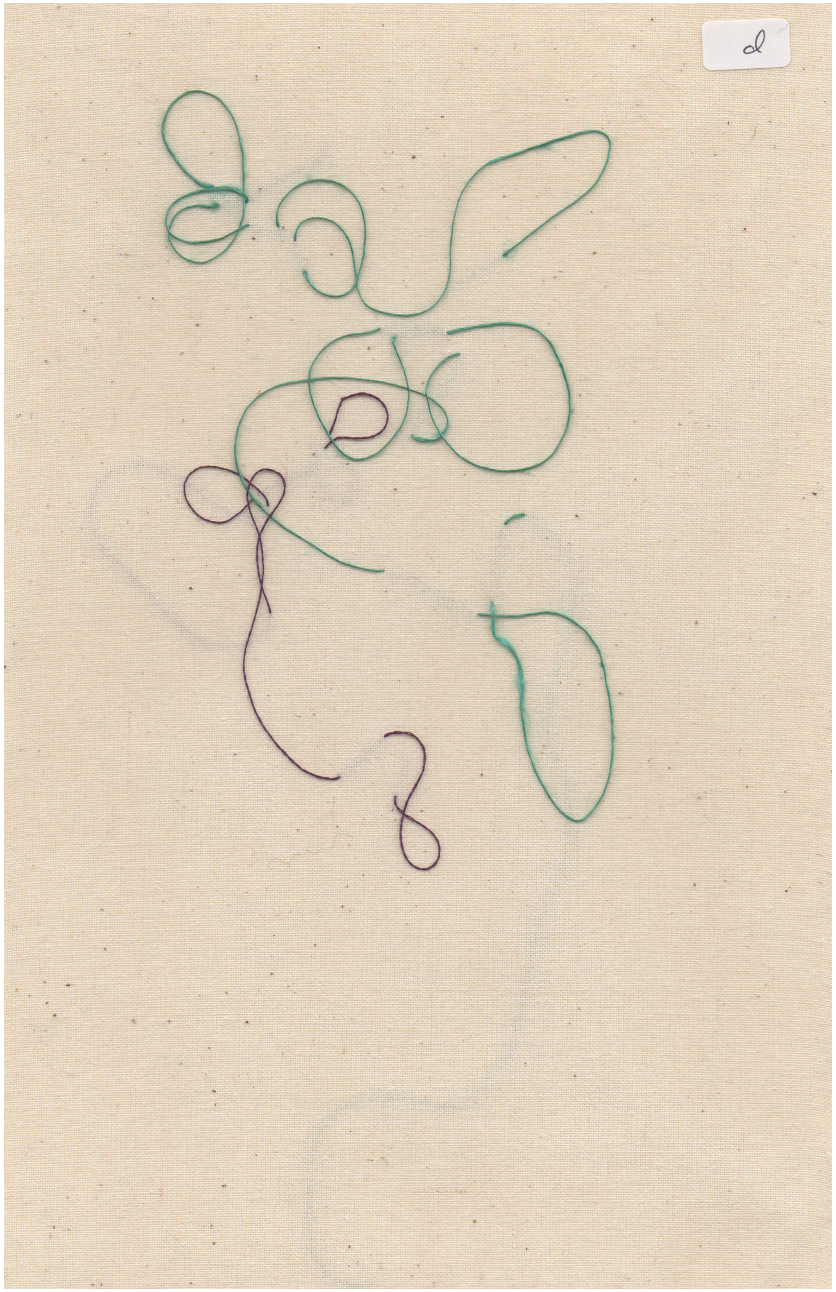

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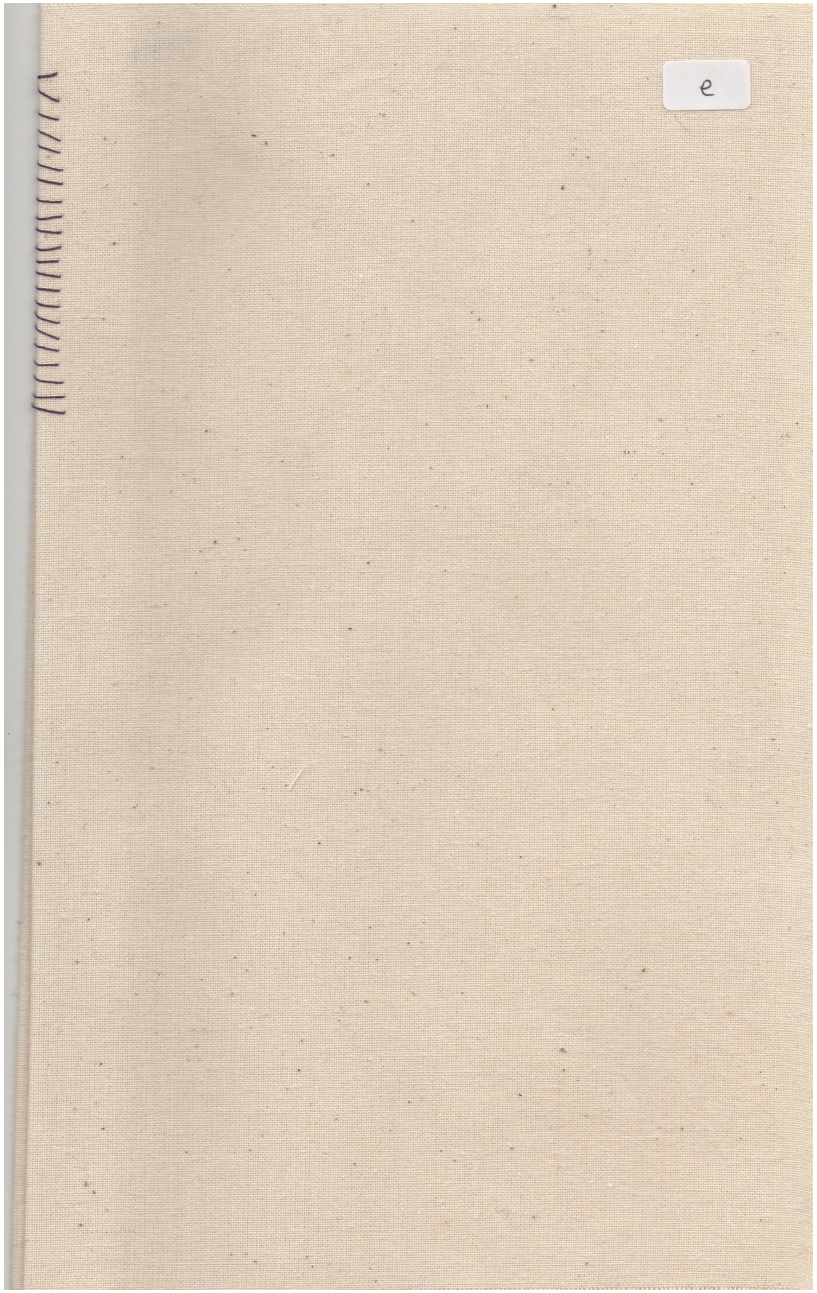

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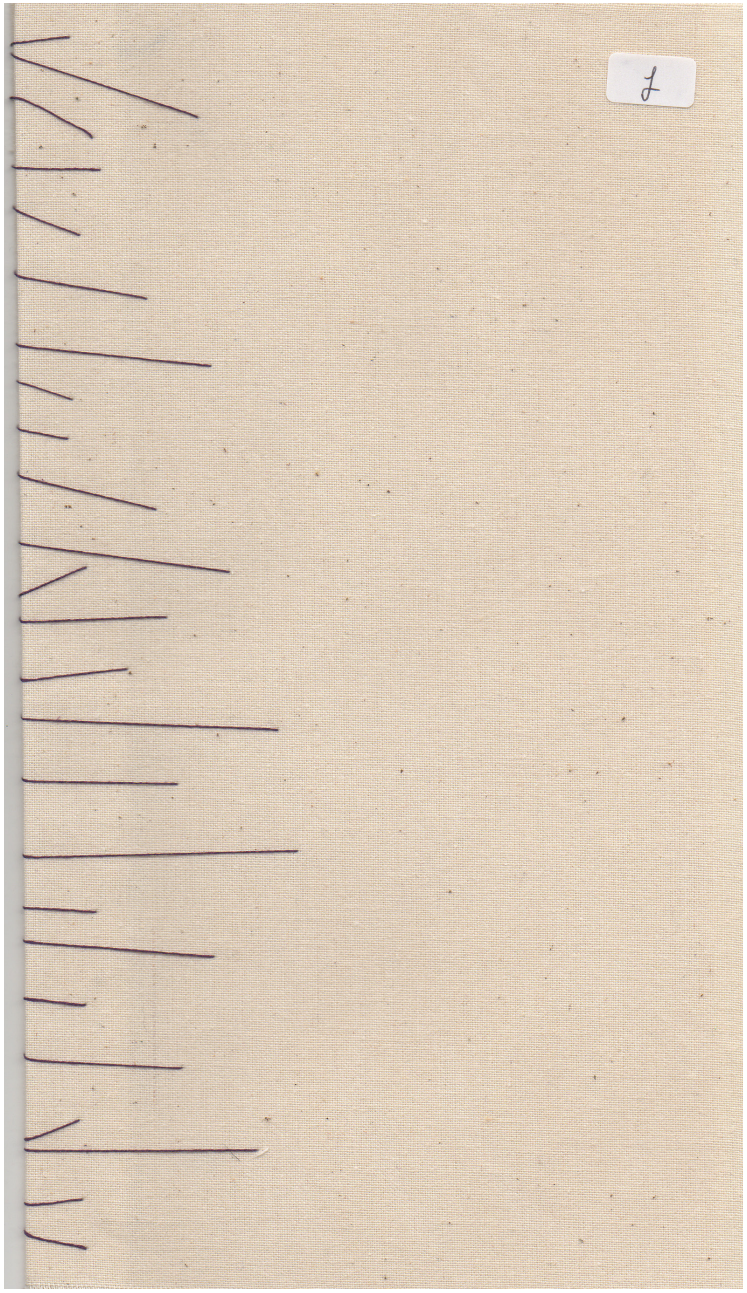

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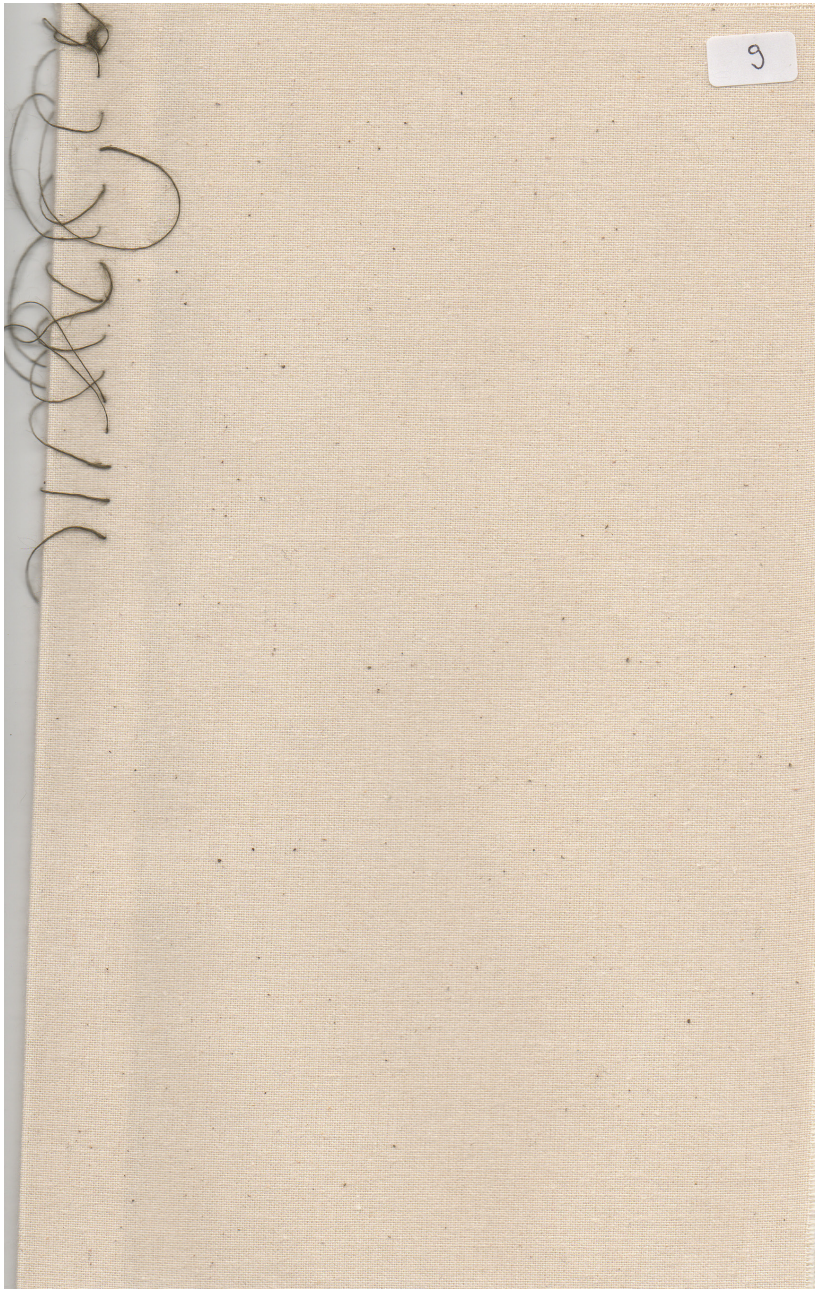

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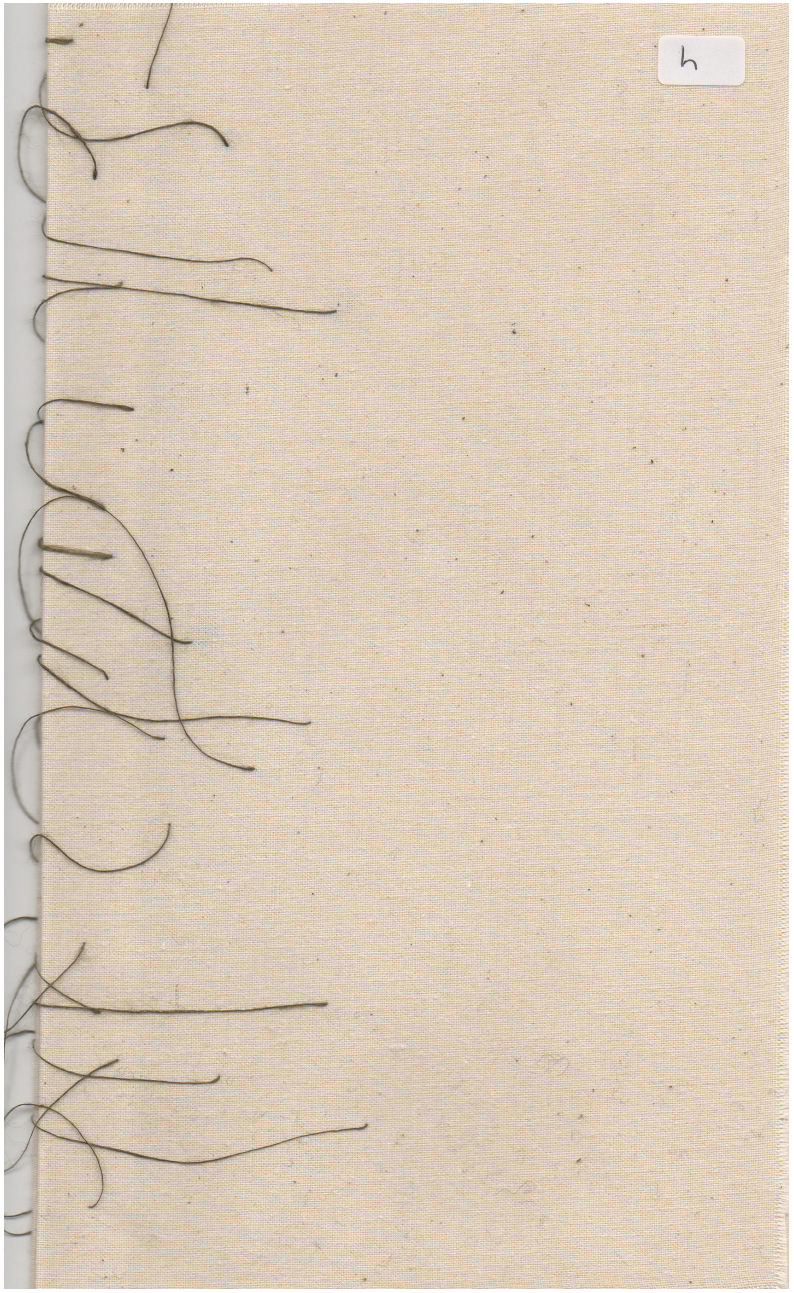

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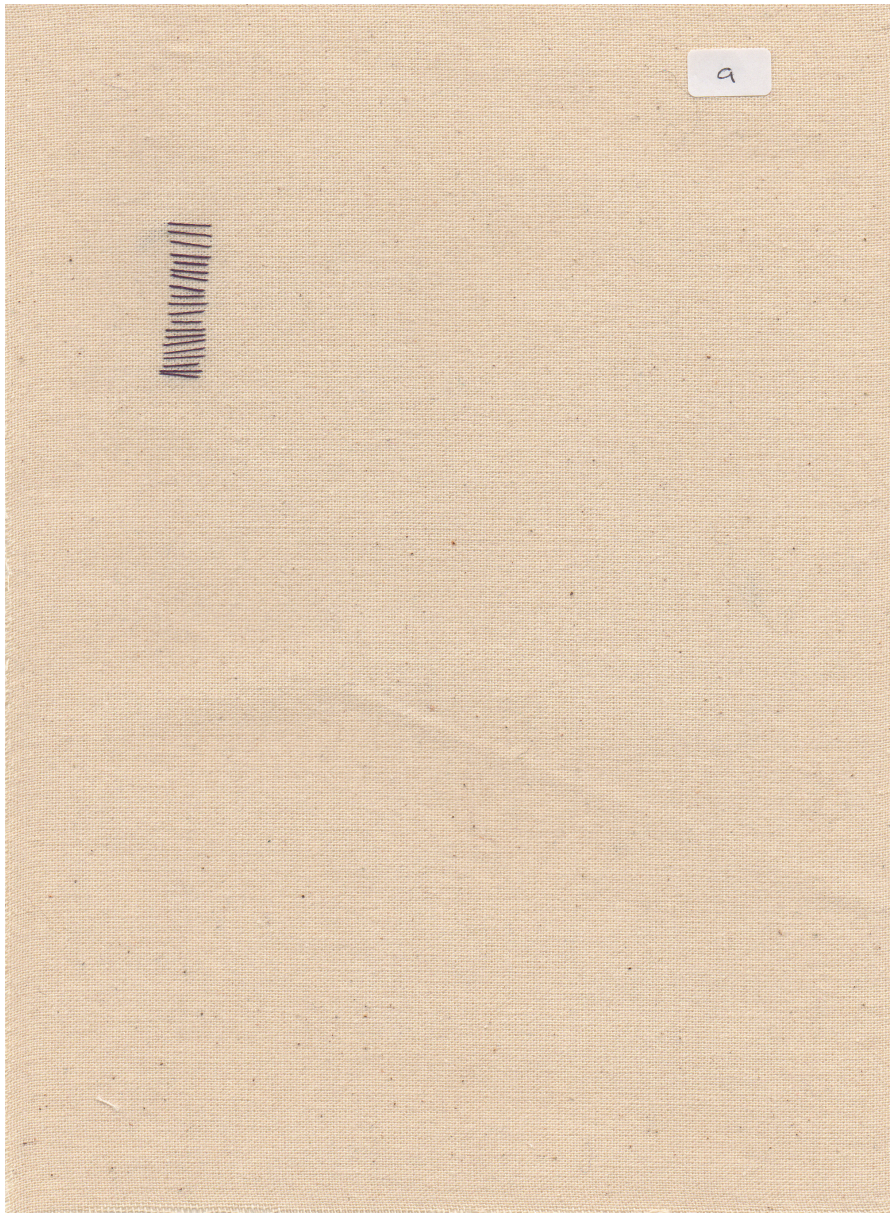

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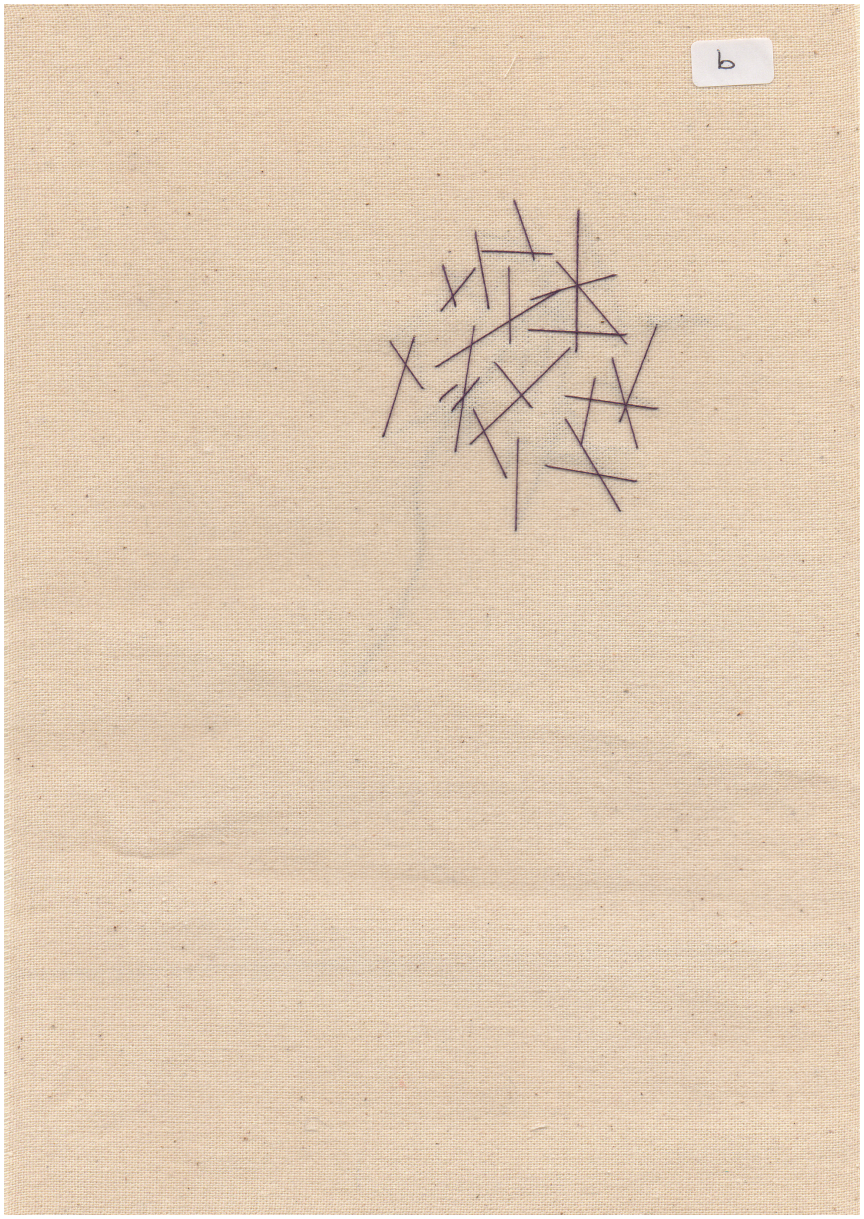

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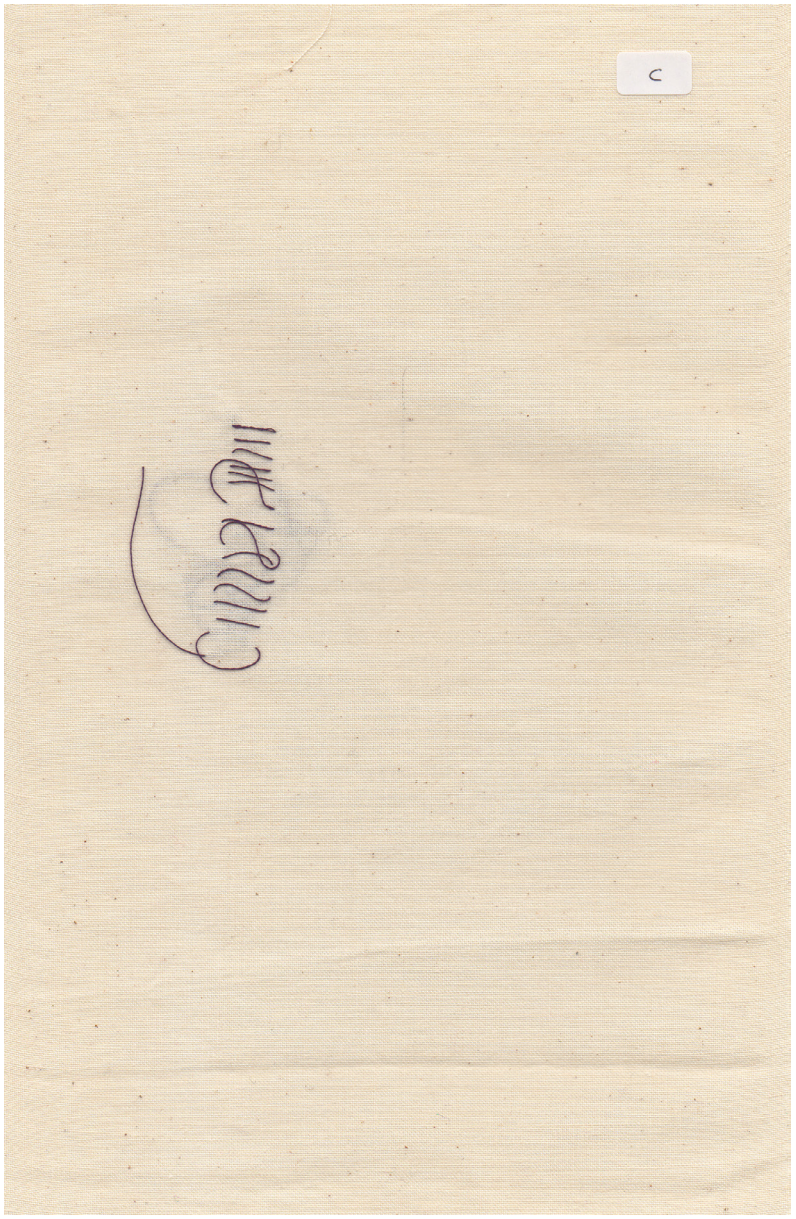

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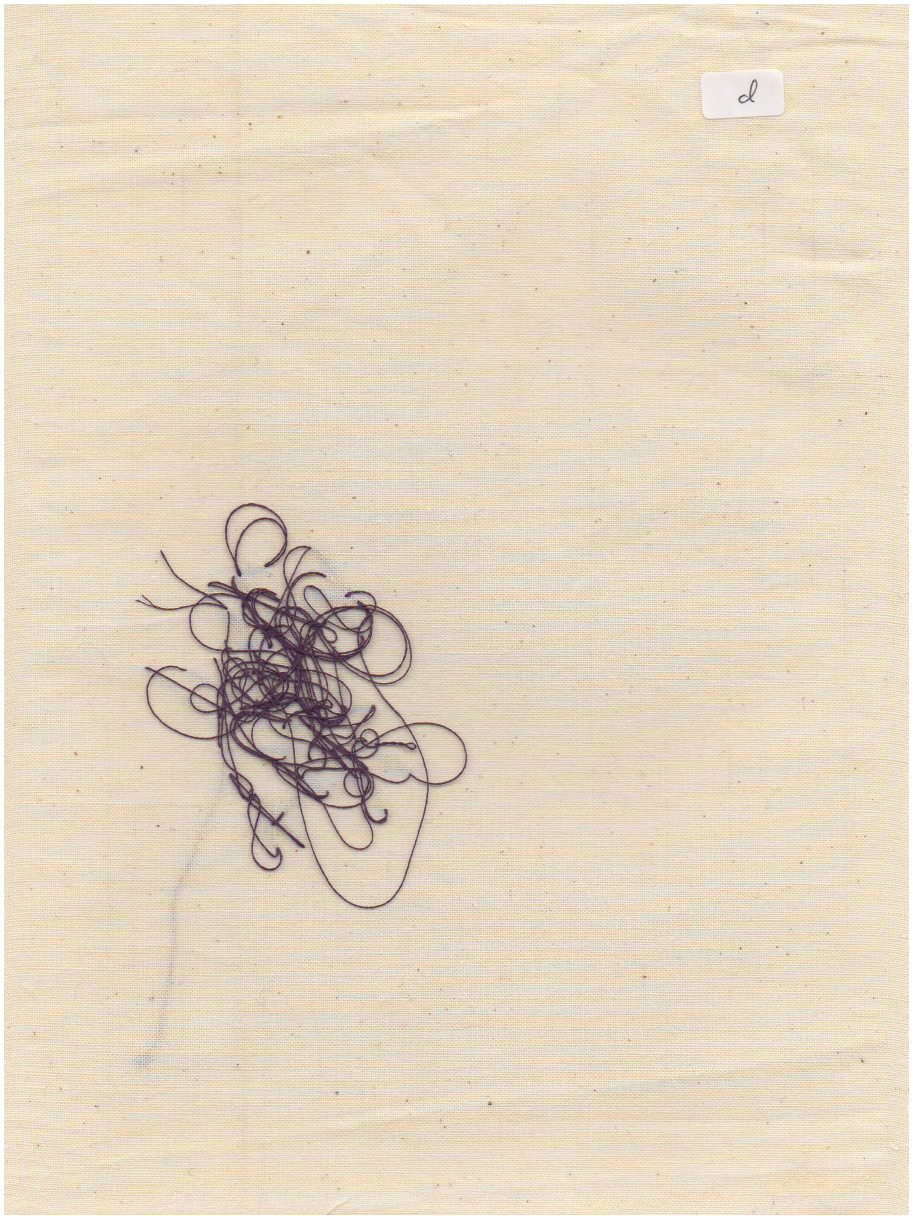

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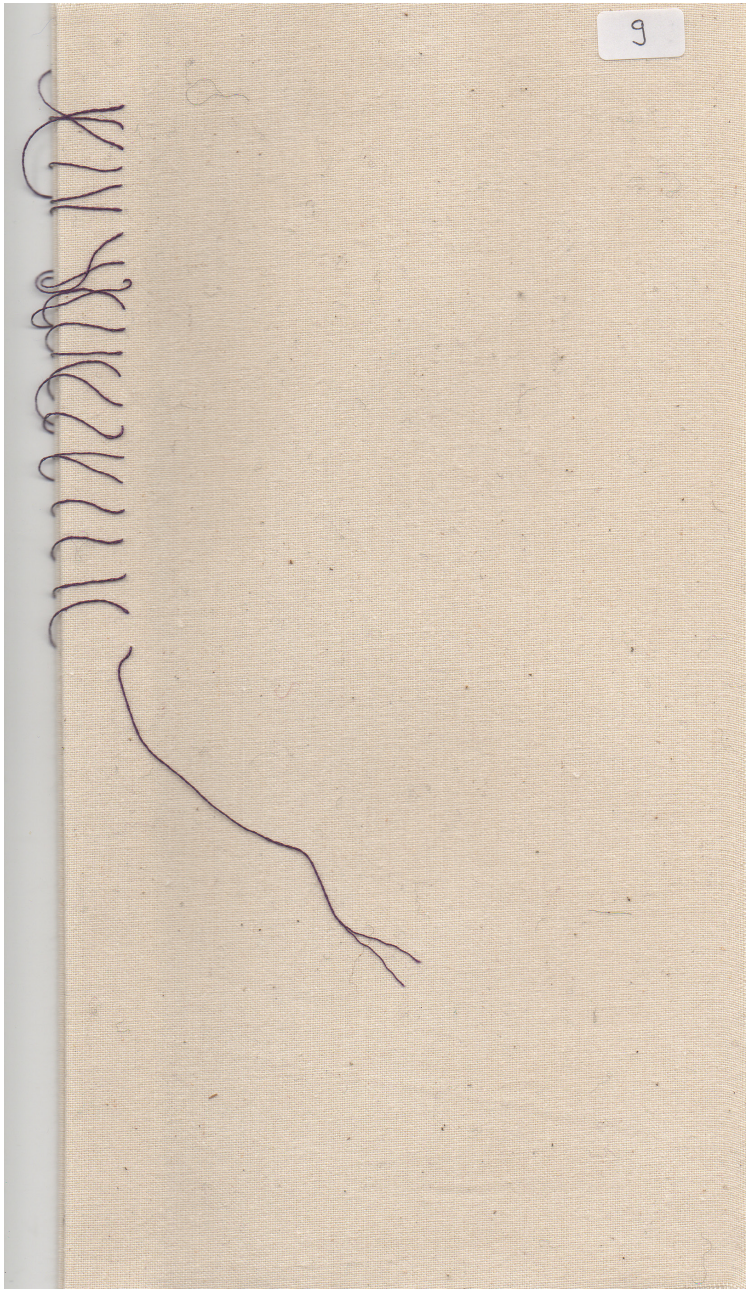

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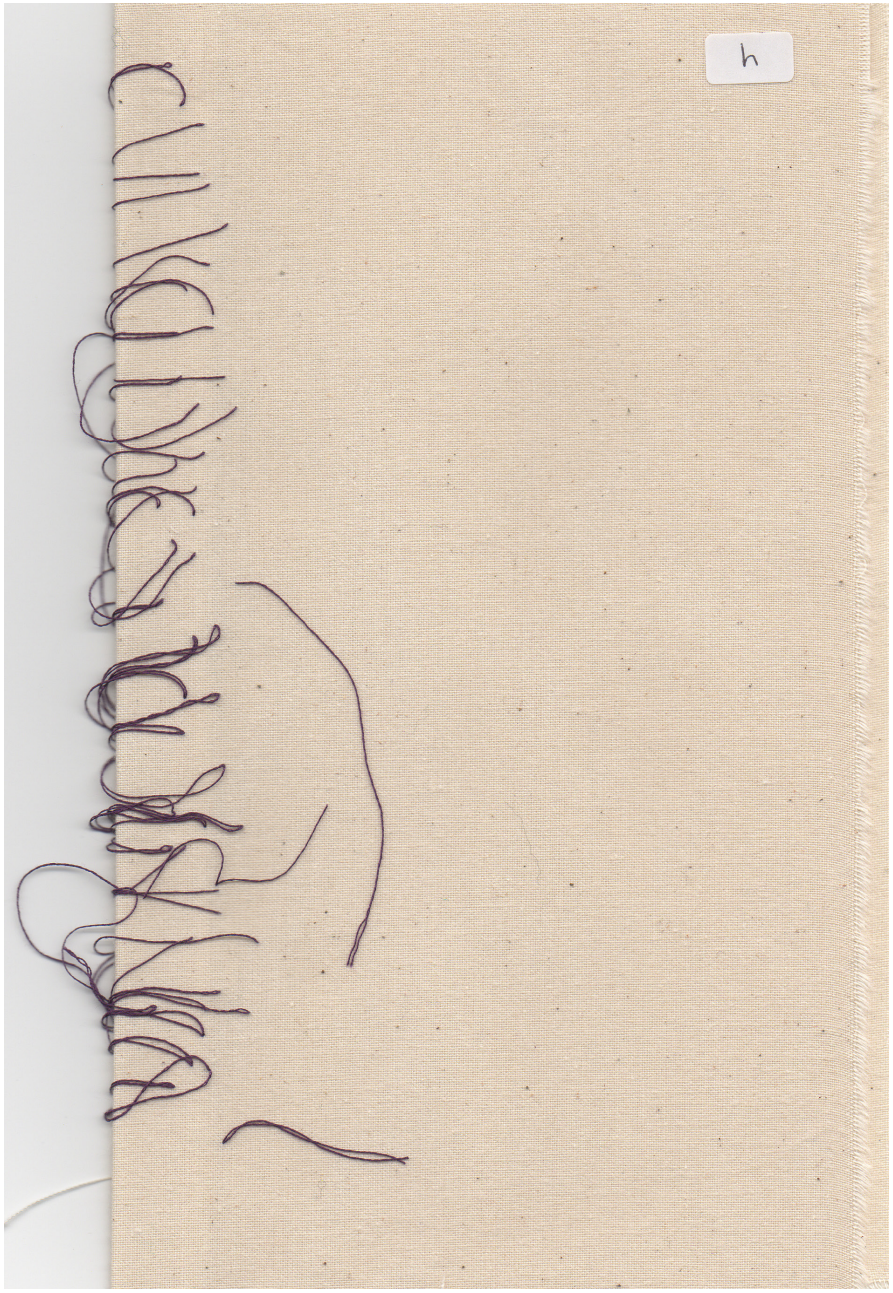

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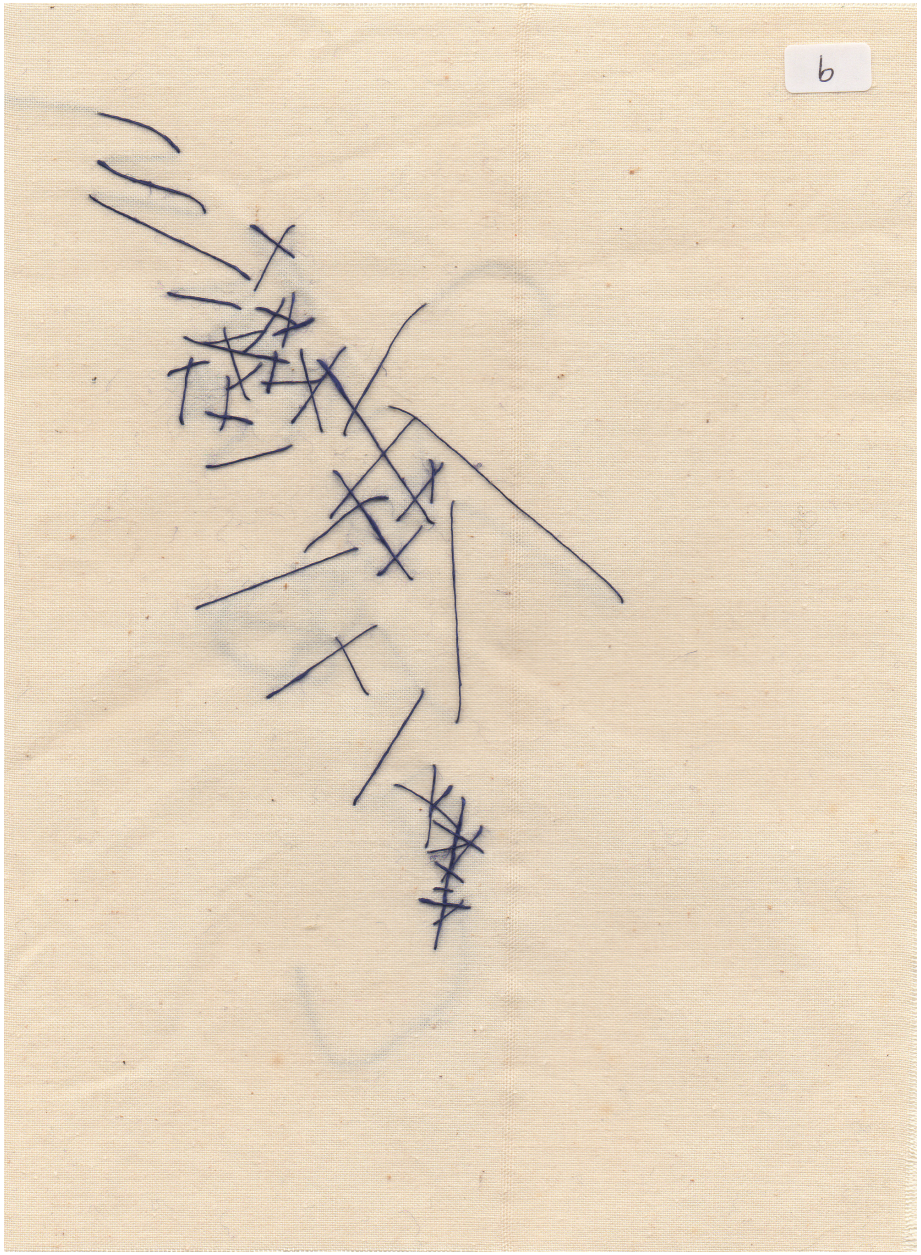

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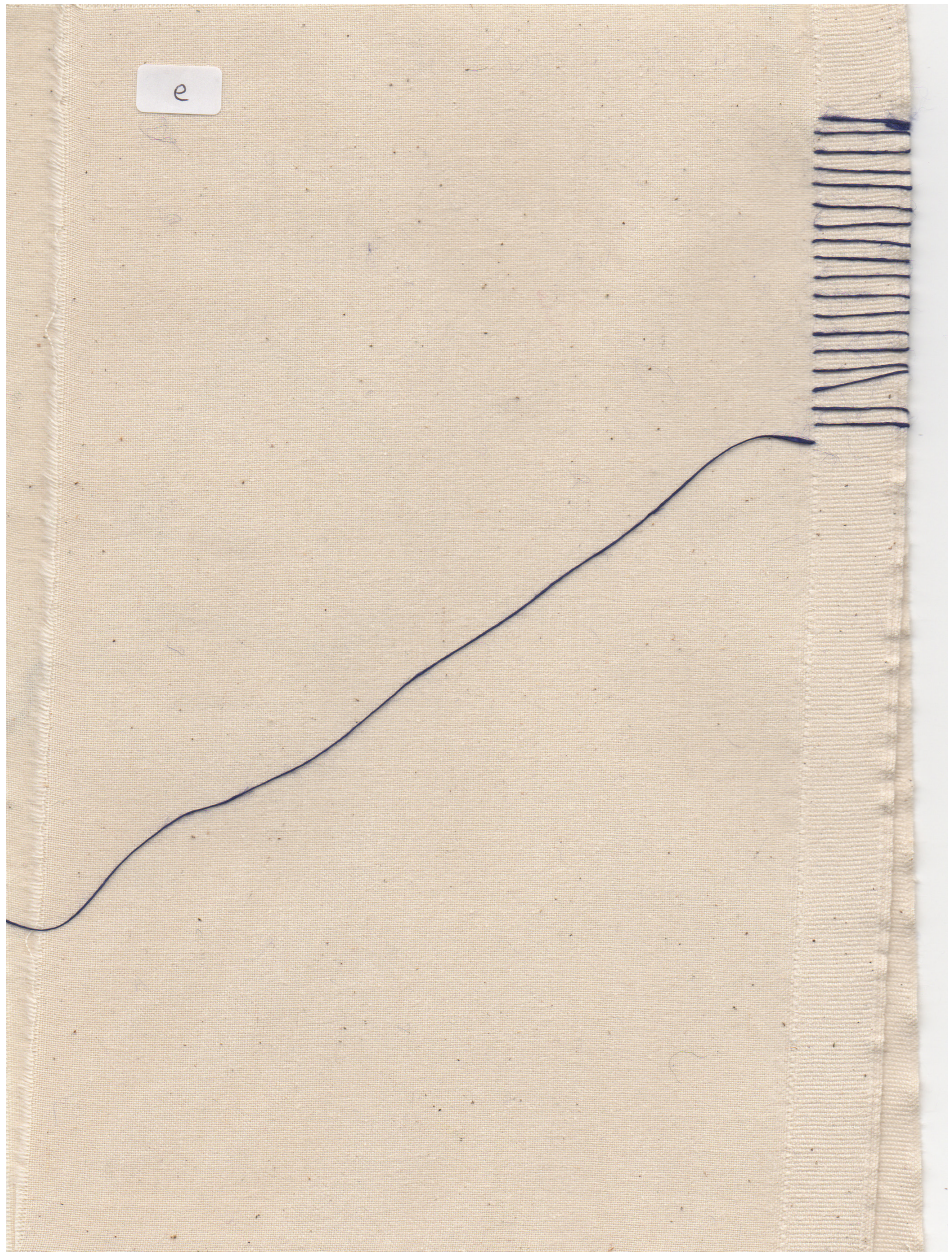

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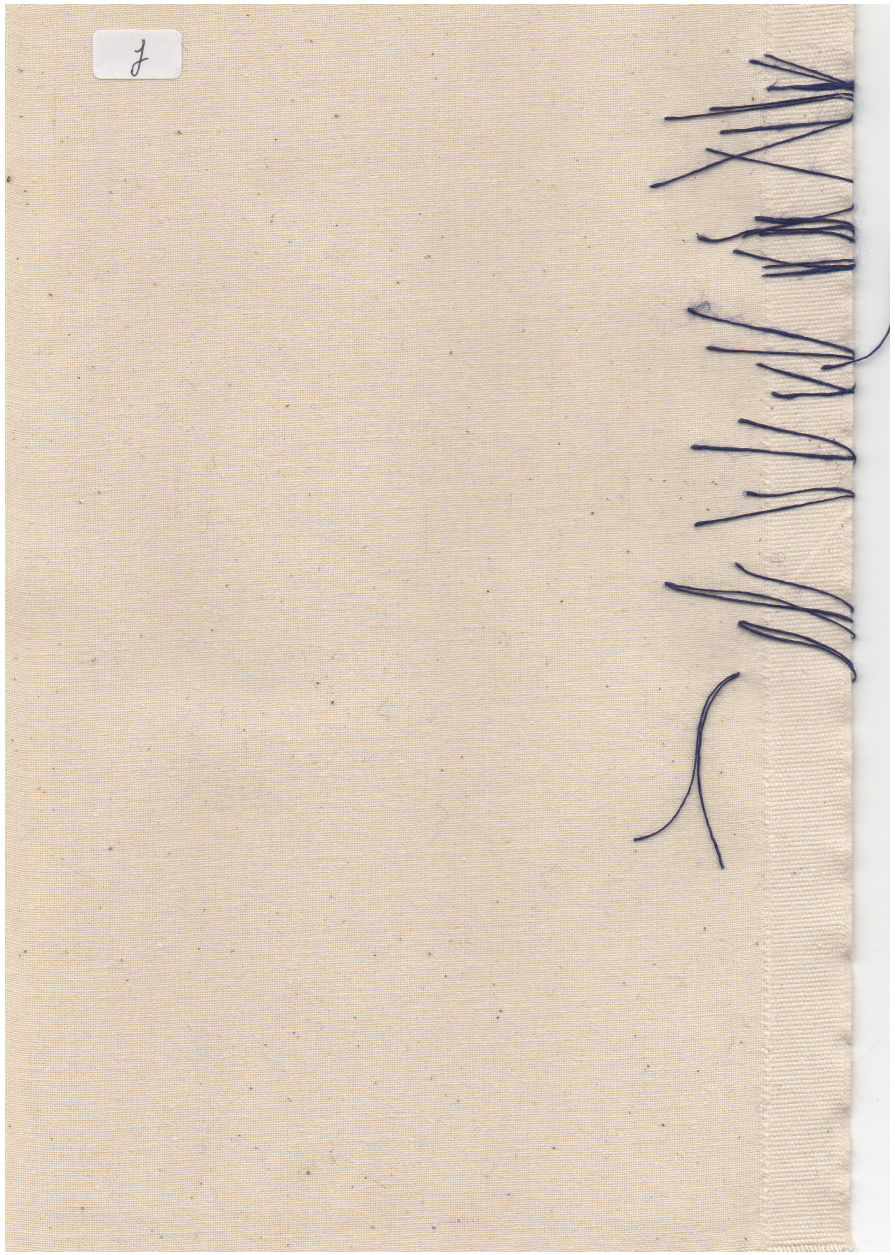

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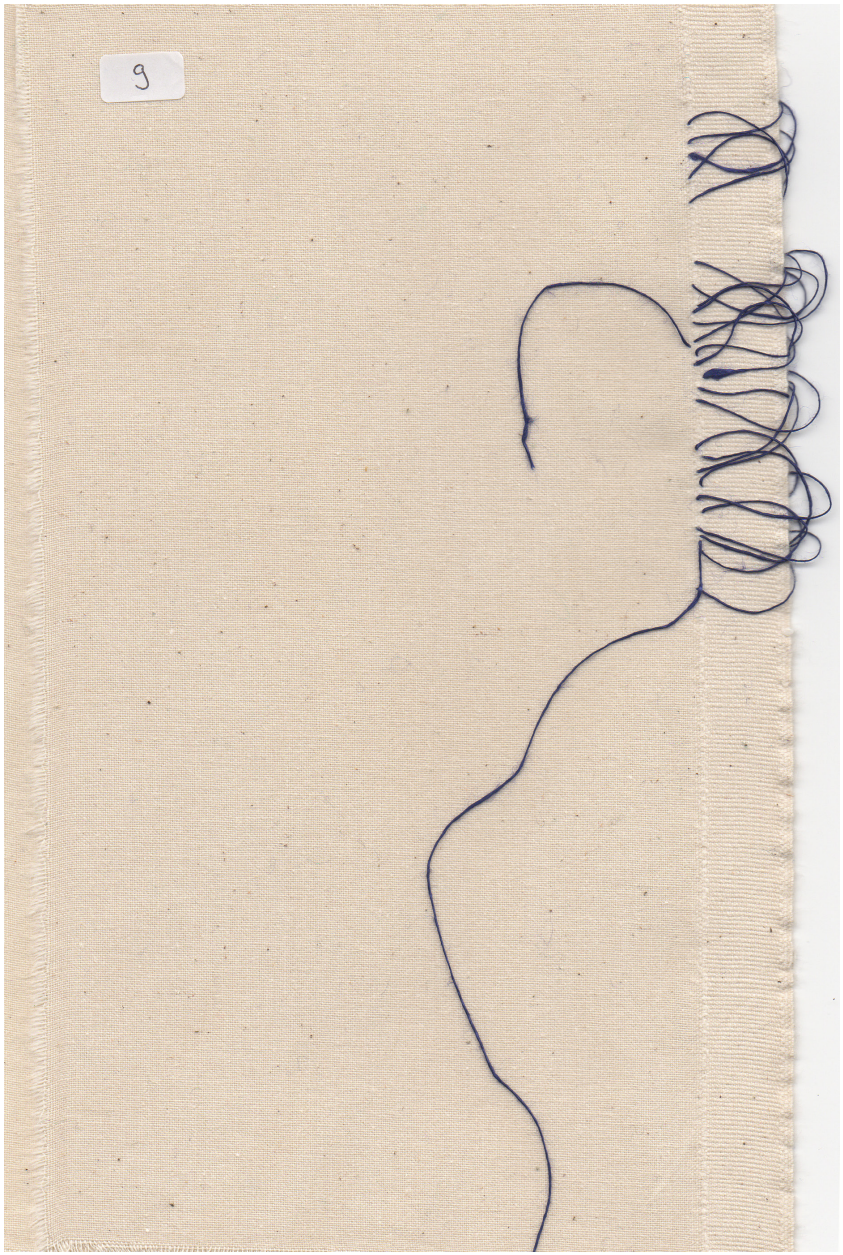

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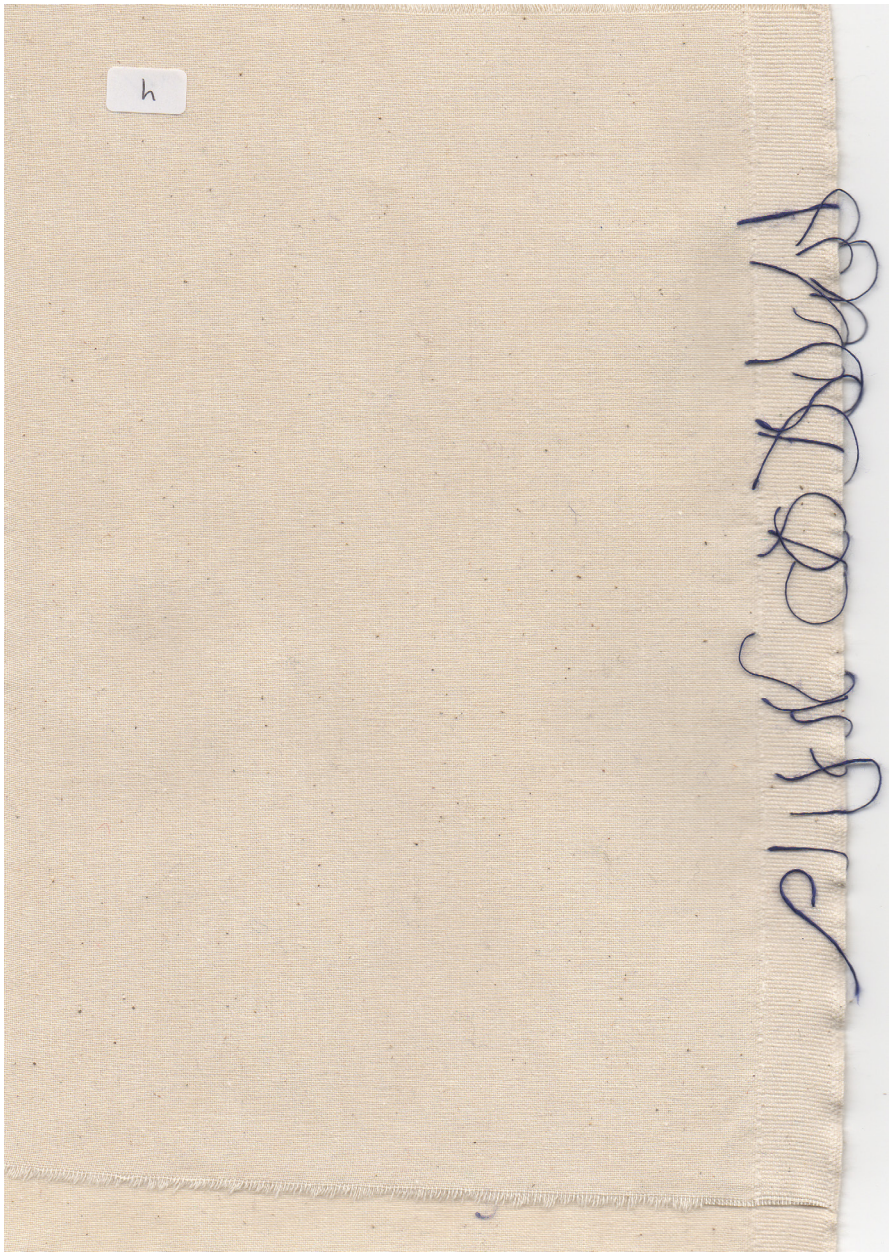

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Workshop: Taking a Thread For a Walk: discussion

Fashion & Textiles Research group

Royal College of Art, London

24 Feb 2011

Group discussion arising from having executed the tasks, supported by additional question prompts:

How did you feel about doing the exercises? Comfortable? Unexpected? Awkward? Did you think you would feel differently?
Was it hard? Or easy? Why was this? Which was the easiest? Why?

With the skills you have, which task did you find demanded the least attention? Which the most? Why?

What do you think skill looks like? What does skill feel like?

In what ways do you imagine having a hand skill to be important?

Does skilled work matter to you? If not, why not? If so, why? Is it attractive?

How might skill be useful?

Do rules governing skill have to be specific to the skill practised?

What matters most? That it looks good, or that it is well executed by someone who knows what they are doing?

Transcript of discussion with participants

Joy: skilled and experienced

Priya: basic skills

Lisa: skilled

Vanessa: unskilled

Rob: basic skills

Emma (researcher): skilled and experienced

Emma OK. Do any of you have anything immediately that comes to mind from having made your judgments the first time around, and then having done the exercise, has that changed your mind in any way about the stitching pieces? And about what particular aspects?

Joy Visually looking at the pieces before we started the exercise, I immediately looked at the one that I found more visually the best, and it's the one that I enjoyed actually doing.

Emma Right, which one was that?

Joy It was this one.

Emma C.

Joy Yeah.

Emma That was the one you enjoyed doing.

Joy Actually enjoyed stitching. That's the one that you said was difficult, and…

Lisa I think I found it harder to not make it taught, the thread, because I was automatically pulling it to make sure that the tension was right. And even if I was, I had to consciously pull the thread out again so that I was not controlling the tension. That's what I found. I found the ones without tension much harder than placement.

Emma Did you find you had to concentrate more to do that?

Lisa Er… yes. I had to concentrate more to make sure the tension was not too tense, was, like not the opposite…

Emma Not like “normal”.

Lisa Yeah. Was not “normal”, yeah. It was a bit like, I was like, oh, this is too loose. Yeah.

Joy Mine was being sensitive to the actual action. Not so much the sewing, about it being loose or not, but sensitive to the fact that I wanted to do it loose.

Lisa Because, as far as the placement is concerned, I think, I didn’t have to pay attention to it too much, because er… in a way, um, I don’t know how much my hand is used to it, but it kind of did it on its own. I didn’t have to pay attention to the placement whatever. But it knows the tension it has to have when you’re putting thread into a fabric.

Joy Yeah.

Lisa So, to not do that I had to make sure I paid attention to the hand.

Emma Mm. Yes. And you have stitching experience?

Lisa Yes, I do. I mean I’m not I don’t think I’m an expert. But I do have experience and I have been doing a lot more of it because of my project. And I see skilled stitchcraft producers doing it so, maybe I’m trying to replicate, I don’t know, or try to make my stitch better because they’re so good at it?

Emma Yes. You’ve absorbed the information, either through doing it yourself or by watching others.

Lisa Um, yeah. ‘Cause like, when I, like I was saying before, if I’m trying to work into a piece that they’ve worked into um I try to replicate some of the stitches. Which I feel I can, because I can’t do the really complex ones, but um, then I’d undo it, make sure it looks like their stitch.

Emma Has anybody any more comments about how your value judgments might have changed as a result of doing the stitching?

Vanessa Yes. I think it’s interesting because if you come from a non practical stitching point of view, as I do, in fact I’m quite used to stitching leather, heavy things, but always with machines, and heavy industrial machines, but not really by hand. To me what was difficult was to actually put the needle in the right place, to make sure that the space was in the sequence that I wanted to have it, more than the tension though I can really see the point. It’s easier to leave, to keep the tension taught, in a way, than to let it do whatever. But I think I needed to concentrate more on, you know, the stitching whether it was this one, or this one really. And I think, yeah, that was quite a lesson.

Lisa Can I add, maybe because of my weave background as well, because the threads are meant to be taught…

Emma Yes.

Lisa … the tension on the loom. It might be another reason why I don't like the loose threads. So it's like, it needs to be…

Emma That's interesting.

Lisa That might be…

Emma Yes, there's a culture of taught thread, that somehow we have learnt, taken on board and replicate.

Lisa They must all be in their place, in the order.

Vanessa That's right.

Joy Well, it's like stitching a straight stitch on the machine. I think, it's funny, how do we say it.. that's what the culture is that everything must be straight and taught, and in it's right place. I mean when you come to do it by hand you always feel there's no reason not to. I have that feeling.

Emma Does that matter to you, do you think?

Joy No, no. I, for me I think I probably struggled with being.. one of them, the one I said I had to swap my sticker around…

Emma These two? (pointing to Joy's G and H samples)

Joy Yeah…. Is the rules. I was, I kept breaking the rules, and found it very difficult to get back into line. I don't know why, but I did.

Priya Well, I found that my evaluation in terms of its aesthetic qualities changed a bit after doing it according to which I enjoyed more.

Emma OK. That's very interesting. Which ones? Can you remember? It'll be on your form, won't it.

Priya Yes, for example, by seeing it I liked this one the most.

Emma To start with?

Priya Yes. Actually this one I didn't really like it that much. It's on my last place.

Emma OK.

Priya After doing it, this comes in the first place.

Vanessa That's interesting.

Emma Oh, that's interesting.

Priya This is still quite high, it's in second place, but there is a change in the balance of how I appreciated the patterns and textures after I made it myself.

Emma After having done it.

Priya Yeah.

Emma Has, did that happen for any others amongst you? That you then made value judgments… um, or rather, what you found aesthetically pleasing was being coloured by the experience of having done it, and what you enjoyed doing the most?

Vanessa I think so.

Emma Yeah. Which one was it for you, Vanessa, that changed?

Vanessa You mean ???? out of these ones in here? … Um. This one. At the beginning I didn't really, you know, you float on them all. I rather like the more chaos ones than the more rigid. But somehow this one at the end became nearly my favourite. Um, yeah.

Emma As a result of having done it?

Vanessa Yes, that's right. So as a result of having done it myself.

Joy I felt the same thing about that one as well. That was.. I didn't feel looking at it, it just didn't do anything…

Emma To start with?

Joy … to start with, and then I had to remind myself of what you said about you're not asking us to copy it and the minute I moved away from that then it took on a whole different feeling. To a point, I was stitching with it up in the air as opposed to the table as a sense of enjoyment.

Emma So your feeling about it changed from, how would you describe it? From one of…?

Joy Mess.

Emma To one of…?

Joy Umm….. picturesque. It could form something that didn't look like a mess. Using the same, the same, um… set of rules that you'd set.

Emma Is it this one?

Joy No, that one. Yeah.

Emma And Vanessa, the one you were talking about? It was F wasn't it. Which ones are yours?

Vanessa The second line.

Emma This one?

Vanessa Yes.

(Pause as we look at samples pinned up on wall)

Carmen It's not my favourite from mine, because we were, I was talking about yours, if you know what I mean.

Emma Yes.

Vanessa I'm just looking at yours. If I'm looking at mine, I would probably give you another judgment. But from your point of view, my judgment did change to something else. Yes, of how I did mine, so then I…

Emma Yeah.

Vanessa You get into it. It's like you become it, really, so then you change how you think.

Rob Yeah, I mean, I certainly noticed that doing it you kind of have a, yeah you have a different view point of how you think something looks, how you expect it to be, and then it turns out to be something kind of different. Like, I quite enjoyed doing the ones which were double, which were much more different than I thought it would be, because, you know, you're putting two things together and that would be more complicated, but actually I kind of enjoyed… And another thing I noticed was like, the more, as you go through the process of doing, because I at first I thought 8 that's quite a lot are we going to be able to get this all done. But actually, the more you did, the kind of easier the flow of it kind of got easier.

Emma Yeah. Do you think, um, when you talk about your feeling about doing it changed as a result of having doing it from just looking at these, do you think that has anything to do with the fact that um it's your work, that you have done it? (11.36) Do you think as opposed to… I suppose I'm trying to draw out if there's a difference between the fact that you did it and it's your work, therefore you're more attached to it, or whether as a result of having done it, a sort of trying it out for yourself, um and enjoying it, then changes the way you look at other people's work?

Rob I think it's not so much, well not for me so much, not so much that it's my work, I think it's more a process that now I've done it, it kind of gives me a different insight into the kind of like… actually something I thought about, yeah, sort of putting together the sort of the aesthetic without having actually done something. How that kind of like… you have a different um, yeah, sort of, I don't know, slightly deeper sense of appreciation about what's gone into… now I look at yours again, I kind

of understand. Ok so that's what went into the original one.

Emma OK. Yes.

Vanessa So the value… sorry, I was just thinking… the value changes really because, you know, you look at stitches like that and you think, huh, pff, stitch, what is a stitch? You know, well I would personally not, maybe not quite myself, but in general maybe a bit more when you see some of these things you think Oh God, you know somebody's really missing, or whatever. With little more thinking processes in the head, and then when you do it, you said, I think you, well you ?? really add value to it. So there is a lot of value added to, to what you see, and respect aswell. And you go into it more. You look into it with more detail. I think it's wonderful actually to have done it, really. But I think there is a lot of value in this aswell.

Emma Yeah. And it's interesting how you talk about the way you think about something when you just see it and then the way you think about it having done it. The thinking being attached to the doing – is, how does that differ do you think? What sort of thinking has gone on in your minds? Can you describe that at all? What sort of thinking, when you made the first set of value judgments, and then the thinking… um I'm not that… I'm trying to…

Joy Well, it's like, the first… which were the first ones, yeah, the first one on the end that I did, um, and I remember saying, I mean I looked at it and I thought, ok piece of cake. And then I started to do it, and I'm thinking, I thought I could have made a better job than that, so… I assumed… (laughs) I assumed I would have just gone.. but I didn't. And again, it's that value of appreciation of somebody else's work, if that makes sense.

Emma Yeah, through doing it.

Lisa But um, it's not necessarily obvious when you look at them that there's a method. So, when you described the placement and the tension, it suddenly became like ok so there's a method. And it might be easier to do – or even in your mind – ok, lets apply that and then we might be able to get it done. Because before I started I was like, oh I'm not sure if I can do it, because, you know, I'm thinking how, you know, how am I going to start, and how am I going to do all those things. But because there's this whole idea of placement and tension, of it being there, and not being there, and then… that kind of method to actually be able to do, I think, helped.

Emma And that's a method that applies very much to the doing of it. To the making of a stitch. So, it makes sense only in the doing of it, rather than as an abstract concept. As a, if you were thinking about it purely abstractly, and looking at these visually, I think, I mean, tell me what you think, but I think, unless you have experience of stitching and you do know about

placement of the stitch and the tension, um, it might not be that obvious just through looking at it. I think if you have that experience you would see it, but only an experienced eye would see it, and the experienced eye is experienced because it's done it.

Vanessa That's right.

Emma So, it's a method that almost can't be explained before the task of doing it.

Lisa Because, I mean, when I was looking at them before, I think I almost found the ones where there was more placement better, and I found oh there must be more skill involved because there's like, you know, more controlled placement and tension, and then having done that I was thinking well it's not necessarily, you know, they're not very different, … there's very different things you're applying, but when you look at it, it looks a little bit more chaotic than that, because as it leaves a defined line despite the looser threads. So I think that, in my mind, after the exercise, changed a bit. Because I actually found that easier, but you know, um, before, just looking at it I could see that there was a bit more skill in having the lines straight.

Emma Straight. Yes. So is that an assumption that we're making about straight stitching being representative of…

Lisa Harder to do.

Emma …of a high level of skill and therefore harder to do.

Lisa I, I mean, I think that's what I think. I think it's harder to make a straight line, or keep it consistent.

Joy There's something controlled in that, isn't there…

Lisa Yeah.

Joy … and um…

Vanessa It may not be controlled. Because, again, from my experience of working with weavers – the weavers, what they're trying to do, particularly in the Philippines, they are working with fibres which are not equal – you know fibres are all different because they are not made into a yarn – and to them the most important thing is to make sure that it's, it's perfect and it's equal and it's just you know, so, it's, their value is quite different, if you know what I mean.

Emma Yes. I wonder… yes… that's very interesting I think as well. What is the difference in value then? How might we describe that difference, between the value they're placing on their fibres being straight and equal, and value that's been added, or talked about here, particularly about this one?

Vanessa That's right.

Emma What do you think is influencing that?

Vanessa I think. Sorry, I'll pick it up later. I think the value comes from a very realistic necessity for them, or that's what they think, or they think quite a lot, to make things that they approach what it's being looked at maybe in their minds or in their market place as really high quality, so this cotton because is all even and straight is really seen as high quality. When I went there, one of the things I actually did first, having really no background in textiles, was actually to say ok, we're going to make a thread that is thin and thick. Thin and thick. And that's how I was working with them, and even… so I was going for the uneven and they were horrified, and after they said to me, my other colleagues from the Philippines that they've only done that for me because they knew I was kind of coming from the outside. I didn't know any better, but they would not have broken those rules otherwise. You see, so, and once they'd seen it…

Joy It's a control thing again, isn't it.

Vanessa No, no, it's not a control thing. No. I don't think it's a control thing. It's actually a value thing which is quite different, and it's aesthetic for them.

Joy Yes, mmm.

Vanessa OK, the market says this and for them this is the high value, but they appreciate it and they think aesthetically it's better than the other.

Joy Why think that's better than the other?

Vanessa Better, and even and whatever. So, once they'd seen what we've done with uneven and thin and thick, they quite liked it, but

Joy Oh good.

Vanessa Yes, but that's because it was kind of new, and I think 'cause they saw at the end that the whole concept gelled together, right. But for them it was quite a struggle.

Lisa Because aesthetically their culture is different.

Vanessa Yes, that's what it is.

Lisa They have different views on what's good and what's not.

Joy Yeah.

Emma So what is it about, um, well, the culture we've got here in this room this afternoon, with the stitching, that is

valuing the unevenness over the even stitching? … Any thoughts on that? … And this is as a result of doing it, so with the experience of actually doing it.

Joy I find it very hard to put one over the other, you know.

Priya You have to have a standard according to which you're judging them to put one over the other, so just abstractly it's…

Emma Well, we've all done it, so what is the standard? I mean the standard is maybe an assumption we have, but we have a standard.

Joy Everybody has their own standards. I mean we could call evenness a standard I think we would be lost. I mean we, I don't know.

Emma OK. Yes. No that's very interesting.

Vanessa But the standard would be if it works doesn't it in a way. Because if we're really going to make a pair of jeans with this stitch or this stitch, well we better have this stitch because obviously this is not good enough. So, you know…

Joy But it's not good enough for what?

Vanessa For a pair of jeans.

Lisa Holding together fabric.

Vanessa For holding together something because it's not going to get… it's not going to be neat, and straight.

Joy No well, if you look in the market of jeans, you've got jeans with seams that are coming so, you've got jeans with it twisting round like that.

Vanessa Well, yeah.

Joy Then you'll say but how's it going to sit right because we are accustomed to it being here. The whole idea of it being on a twist, it's, it almost can be disturbing to the…

Lisa Yes, but isn't that a little bit different…

Vanessa No it's different to this I think (meaning the stitching).

Joy No because...

Lisa The actual stitching would be even because it has to hold it together.

Joy Yeah but it could be a design detail. It could be a design detail, still holding the jean together but it performs a

visual effect. That's another thing.

Vanessa Yes, that's true. That's another thing.

Joy You see?

Vanessa You see, because if you talk about a visual effect that's different.

Joy It's, it's… different.

Vanessa But I was thinking from the practical point, you would think that this is going to get caught, and it's going to get probably really…

Joy But that could be part of the whole design aesthetic.

Priya Yeah, but this is the standard we're studying, whether it's an aesthetic effect or if it's a functionality thing.

Joy It's many, you know, there's many facets to it, you know. So, when it comes to standards, that's a tough one, for me anyway, because we all form our own standards, um, in most things I think, within our lives. I mean there's, I always think rules are there to be broken, and we all see things very differently, so I don't know, I'll leave that one there for you to think about.

Vanessa But there is a standard, you know, like if you have to suddenly test some things, like on stitching right, and, ok textile is not so its not so tough on that, but some other fields you really have to go through a lot of tests before you put a product in the market…

Joy Depending on what the product is.

Vanessa … wear and tear, and stretching, and all these things. And that test dictates what is good for the market or not good for the market meaning that if it doesn't pass a thousand pulls like this of these machines, it's not good. And this is what I was saying, you know like, if you've got something like that and something like this, this will probably last (pointing out E) and pass the tests more than this (pointing to G) because of the nature of the tension of the thread, so…

Joy Depending on what it is.

Vanessa No, I'm not into aesthetics, I'm going into the practicality of, we need…

Emma The function.

Joy The functional practicality.

Vanessa The functional factors have to pass these tests. And I think, um…

Joy But it's for a particular thing.

Vanessa Yes, for something that has to go out into the market, this is what I'm saying, you know.

Joy Yeah.

Lisa And a product.

Vanessa And a product. That's right.

Lisa If it's for maybe conceptual, then…

Vanessa Oh yeah

Joy Mmm.

Vanessa For a stitch that doesn't need the tension or whatever.

Lisa Because I think before, I said that was the most aesthetically pleasing because of the mark-making of it (pointing to B), and that the marks are beautiful. But then later, and I have no idea why, I said that A was better. It might have been because I'd done it and I was thinking well this one requires a bit more skill because it has to be very sort of, you have to make sure they're all aligned properly and everything. Um, but I think yes, it's maybe skill, and then beauty of mark-making. And so there's that, kind of… Well, that's the divide I feel.

(Noises of agreement)

Emma Priya, do you have anything, about the standards, do you have, um, er, your standards by which you've made your judgments? Can you describe those?

Priya Not really. I wanted to mention something before.

Emma OK, yeah.

Priya Regarding how my evaluation changed after stitching these samples myself, and I realized that, in the first descriptions I gave, they were descriptions about characteristics and so on, on each sample. Whereas in the second description it was more about describing my experience of stitching it. Which I found interesting. Because when I first saw the questionnaire, to be honest, I was like, so we are doing exercise A, and then it's the same all over. (laughs) But it's completely different.

Vanessa That's right. Yes, that's right.

Priya But in terms of the standards, I don't know, because I…

Joy I think we have kind of expectations as well as standards. I mean, if you was to buy a pair of trousers in say Chanel

and it's like £3,000 for a pair of trousers. What would you expect, standard-wise?

Vanessa Top of the top, to be sure.

Lisa They should last long, is what I'm thinking. They should last me very long.

Joy Many, many years. (laughs)

Lisa … I'm hoping I'm paying for the quality, but not just aesthetically. It's a bit different anyway.

Joy No, the quality?

Lisa And then I'm thinking then the quality of the fabric should feel nice, it should feel lovely. I should, you know, I should be comfortable, should look good, and it should last me. Because, you know…

Emma Is there any room for mark-making, or expressive mark-making in that standard?

Rob I was just thinking, you could do this exercise with drawing. I was just thinking, like, this idea of like, mark-making. I mean, because, I mean, as we all have some sort of like stitching background. I mean, I don't know who else you're planning to do this workshop with, but I think if you've never picked up a needle and thread in your life, which a lot of men, for example, have never done…

Joy That's quite interesting to watch as well.

Rob … although there are a lot of tailors and so forth. But um some people have never, actually even women actually. I can think of my sister. My sister, if a button falls off, she gets me to come and fix it. Or my Mum to come and fix it. She won't do it herself. She's like, "no, I don't know how to do that."

Emma Yes.

Rob She won't even try. She won't even try.

Joy It's too painful.

Emma Yes, so what did you want to say about that?

Rob Um

Emma To do this exercise? Because everybody here has some experience…

Joy I think, with some, as you say, men and, and… and women who have never picked up a needle. Just the sheer picking up the needle is an experience, to be very honest with you. And I know this from my haberdashery shop. Um and what I do – someone used to come in wanting to put, and pay to put a button on – I used to put a little pin cushion and some

needles threaded. And I'd say "you'd really pay me £1.50 to put that button on for you, but I can't put it on. Have a go." And it's amazing to watch.

(noises of agreement)

Joy It's alien.

Emma No, it would certainly be a very different, and, but it is my intention to do that with different groups who have different abilities of skill and different…

Rob I've certainly done like drawing classes, I mean, 'cause I did, yeah, from like my A level, like, what I did for my A level, and basically we were always told, like, it's just a blank piece of paper, don't be afraid of like, you know, making it dirty, making a mark, you can always get another piece of paper, or you can get another piece of paper to put over it. So uh, yeah, it's kind of quite interesting thinking about stitching as a kind of way of mark, yeah of mark-making kind of thing. Like, yeah, expressing, kind of stuff… a quality of like…

Joy There's a, in textiles, there's designers that do that sort of mark-making that's had stitching with it. I don't know any names off the top of my head.

Emma Yes, there are.

Joy Isn't there… very intriguing, drawing…

Priya I think what's very interesting is in your question about rating what we think of best. It would be very interesting if we, instead of doing a one-off workshop we could have a series of let's say 5, 8 workshops, all doing the same thing, but each one responding to a certain standard according to what you mean by 'best'. And doing the same workshop over and over again but according to different…

Emma …different standards.

Priya And this way the 'best' would make much more sense as well, and during the process…

Emma That's interesting.

Vanessa Yes, that's a good point.

Priya … and during the evaluation.

Vanessa Yes, that's right. That's a good point.

Emma That is. Thank you Priya. Just writing this down.

Lisa Going back to your question about if you would buy an expensive pair of jeans, and you'd have how much mark-making, then I think if you did have a bit of both they'd need to serve their purposes maybe separately. So, a functional stitch maybe can't necessarily, well maybe I wouldn't expect it to, you know, necessarily try to be a beautiful mark. And I'm happy to have some kind of mark-making on it as long as it does not interfere with the functionality of the other stitches.

Vanessa You know, it would be quite interesting to have some, let's say Japanese people, Eastern people I think, um…

Priya It's a shame that, we have so many in our department.

Vanessa Yeah, but not in this workshop, because, you know, when you go… (laughter because Seher pulls a face) no, well you know, you're not from that philosophy. You're more into the really good quality, you know, cotton cloth… I'm sorry. Ok, let me finish this. Maybe I haven't been to Pakistan, and I've been to Japan. I was thinking more…

Lisa You're right.

Vanessa I was thinking more about the Japanese, you know, how their conception of beauty and perfection is so different from ours.

Emma Yes.

Vanessa This is what I was saying really. And how they don't value the same things that we do. And when you see their textiles it's not about this perfection that we are talking about. It's actually the imperfection. And the beauty is in this very hidden, non-even or whatever. And we don't have any… Do you understand what I mean Seher?

Lisa No, I know. I was just, yeah.

Vanessa Yes, you know what I mean.

Lisa We don't have that. We like things a certain way.

Vanessa That's what I thought. Because that's kind of more into the, kind of the Arabic culture isn't it. Whereas the more Eastern, Buddhist…

Lisa Symmetric and…

Vanessa Exactly, that's right.

Emma So the standards then are measured against function, or purpose, and also cultural attitudes.

(noises of agreement)

Vanessa Absolutely. Sorry, I don't want to talk too much, but I was just thinking, if we… for you… I was just thinking – you

said, as an expert, stitch expert let's call it something like that. I'm thinking that, well I would be older but I remember in primary school we always had a stitching course anyway, and you know my mother would be better than we would be. But still I don't think, or I and my daughter – I don't think she ever did, but I'm thinking in 20 years time, certainly 30 years time, this is a lost thing. I mean, have you thought if you do this same thing with children in 30 years time, you'll probably be showing them something they've never seen in their lives. This is probably, you know it's quite a, I don't know, that's the thought that came to my mind. Its going to be extraordinary if you really show them something with computers, well they'd know everything, but would they even learn how to…

Joy It's the time, it's the time we're living in. I mean..

Vanessa Yeah, but this is so wonderful in itself that it either it's going to be lost or become a very specialized creative tool for I don't know what. D'you know, I mean I'm only projecting my mind into 30 years from now – how would we see these, because we won't have any…

Emma Yes, I think it's a very interesting comment to make. Its also bound up with the cultural attitudes as a standard – is that yes, I'm doing it here with you at the Royal College of Art, where we have mixed cultural attitudes for starters, so it's difficult to find a standard there. We have differing abilities, although everybody has some experience, and some ability. And um, different experiences as well of function and the market place, and aesthetic qualities of mark-making – 'cause outside of any arts institution you talk about mark-making and nobody has a clue what you're talking about. So we've got, we have, we are perhaps all referring to particular standards, but maybe I haven't made them explicit enough. I need to think about that. It would be a very different exercise, um, with children, and it would be, yes, in time it would probably very different as well. Although I'm not so sure, I mean – this is just a side issue really, but, um, there are, there are more, there are a lot of people who are stitching and who are hand stitching…

Vanessa Really?

Emma … and younger people. But it's not, I mean it's not taught in schools. It's not that common. But at the moment there is a lot of interest again in hand making.

Joy I think there are a lot of little shops that have sort of sprung up, especially in the country. Especially where I live Devon way. You know, there's lots of little sewing shops, which is really quite quaint and where, you know, they do little group sewing activities, which is really lovely to see. But you know, I always ask myself, you know when you have something ripped in

your clothing how many of you pull out a needle and thread?

Vanessa That's right.

Joy And darn it?

Lisa I do.

Joy Or stitch it? You know. And it really is… and it's strange as well because I, one of my very best friends that lives in Devon still darns her tights, still stitches her tights. And I look in amazement.

Lisa But I think in some cultures you could not comprehend not doing it.

Emma Mmm.

Joy Yes.

Lisa Like… what, you don't know how to stitch a button? You must be so incompetent, you know! Or even like mending something like what you don't mend you throw it away, so there's that whole…

Vanessa Yeah. So it could be the opposite, isn't it. Because textiles is going to be, I mean we're just running out of natural resources. We're running out of things so we have to redo more, and we mix, match and you know, take one from here.. So actually it could be the opposite. Ah that's nice!

(Laughs all round)

Vanessa You know, I was just kind of projecting myself into one direction and I think the other direction is just as likely, or maybe the two extremes isn't it.

Emma Quite possibly, and for very different reasons…

Vanessa That's right.

Joy Yes.

Emma …from in the past.

Vanessa That's right. Exactly.

Emma OK. Has anybody got anything else to add, or anything that they really feel they have to say?.... Shall we wind it up?... OK. Well thank you ever so much ….. And then just looking at, before we stop stop, look at all the stitches. What do you think?

End of discussion.

Appendix VII: workshops

Taking a Thread For a Walk / Arts University Bournemouth, 23 June 2011.

This workshop was devised to demonstrate, visualize and discuss the personal dimensions of a tacit knowledge of hand-stitching. It was undertaken with four graduating students from the BA (Hons) Textiles course at the Arts University Bournemouth, all skilled in hand-stitching. I devised a series of tasks to focus participants on the physical sensations, mental states and emotional attributes of stitching cloth, and prompt group discussion. Additional question prompts were also referred to.
Photos: author.

Reference is made in the thesis text:

Chapter Two, pp. 79 & 81-82 and
pp. 88-90.

Taking a Thread For a Walk: workshop tasks:

1. Draw a straight line 0.5cm from the edge of the paper. *(to focus the eye-hand-mind coordination)*

2. Stitch in a straight line 0.5cm from the edge. *(to to set up a frame of mind receptive to instructions, and to instill a sense of controlling hands)*

3. Stitch 3 rows of even stitches, in parallel. *(to repeat a task in a precise, accurate manner, increasing focused concentration)*

4. Draw a leaf. *(to start calling on the imagination and mental store of visual motifs. A leaf is generally recognizable but each individual will choose differently and begin to personalize the work)*

5. Stitch a leaf of any size using any stitch type. *(using stitch to interpret the instructions)*

6. Stitch a motif or pattern of your own choice. *(to author work and make own decisions)*

7. Pass on your sheet to the next person and ask them to stitch the same thing as you. *(to try and decode the work of another, reproduce, imitate or interpret)*

8. Stitch freely onto a fabric of your choice selected from a pile. *(personal expression)*

Taking a Thread For a Walk: discussion

BA (Hons) Textiles students

Arts University Bournemouth

23 June 2011

Group discussion arising from having executed the tasks, supported by additional question prompts:

How did you feel about doing the exercises? Comfortable? Unexpected? Awkward? Did you think you would feel differently? Was it hard? Or easy? Why was this? Which was the easiest? Why?

With the skills you have, which task did you find demanded the least attention? Which the most? Why?

How did you concentrate? What did you have to focus your mind on?

Which did you prefer doing? Why? Which did you least enjoy? Why?

Do you feel you could have done it better? What do you mean by 'better'? Do you feel you might have enjoyed it more if you could have done it better?

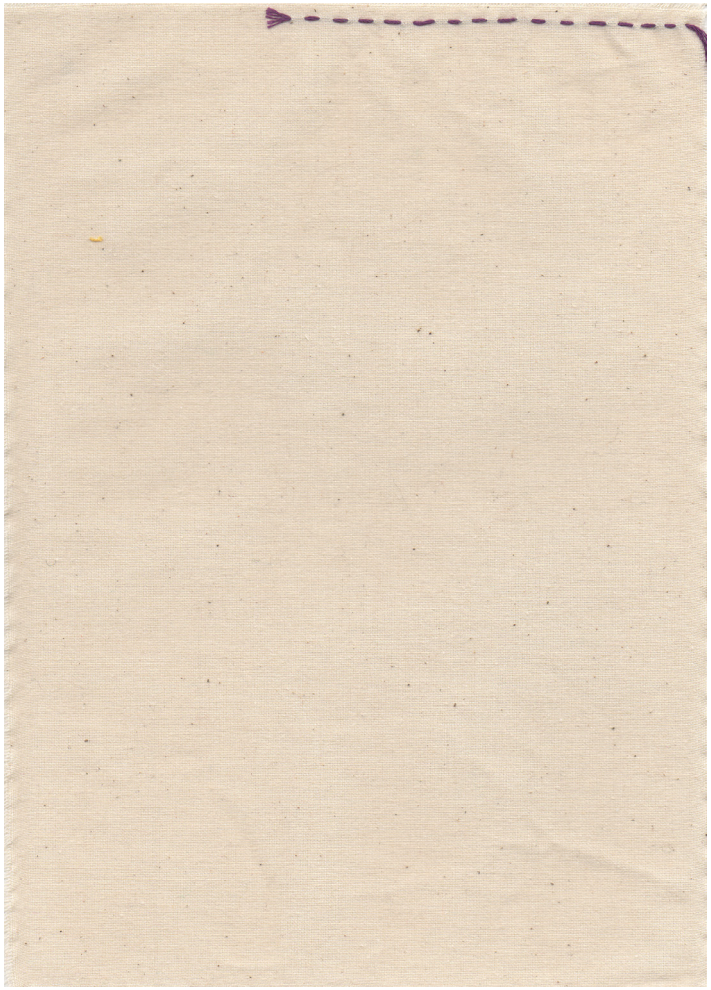
How does that make you feel about yourself and what you can express about yourself?

Do you identify yourself in any way with your stitching? Describe?

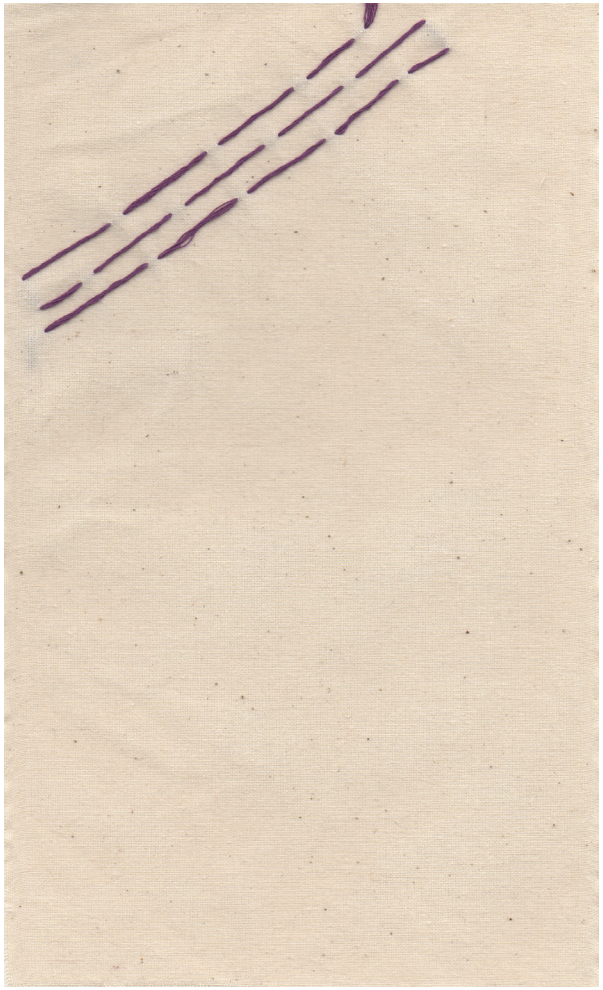
What do your stitching skills enable you to do/think about?

What is your opinion of your skills? How would you say you use your skills? To what end?

What frame of mind does your stitching put you in? How does that help you?



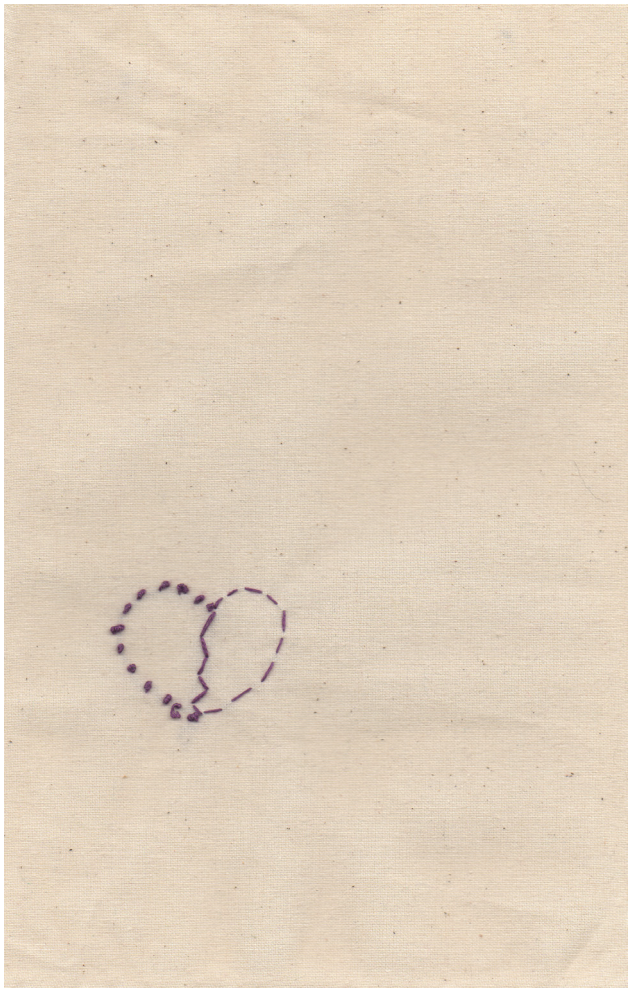
Catherine Stitching in a straight line 0.5cm from the edge.



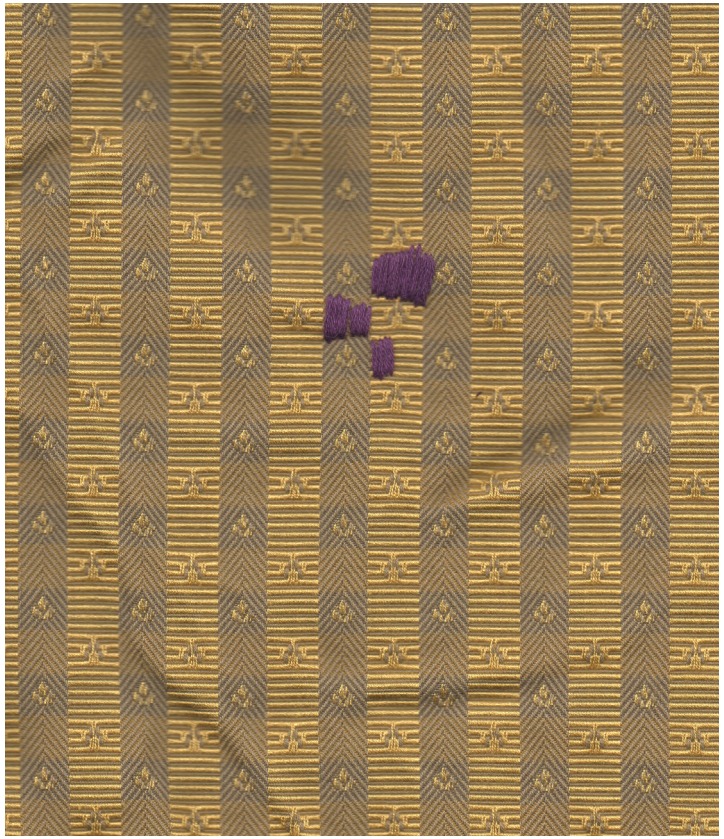
Catherine Three rows of even stitches, in parallel.

Catherine Stitching a leaf of any size using any stitch type.

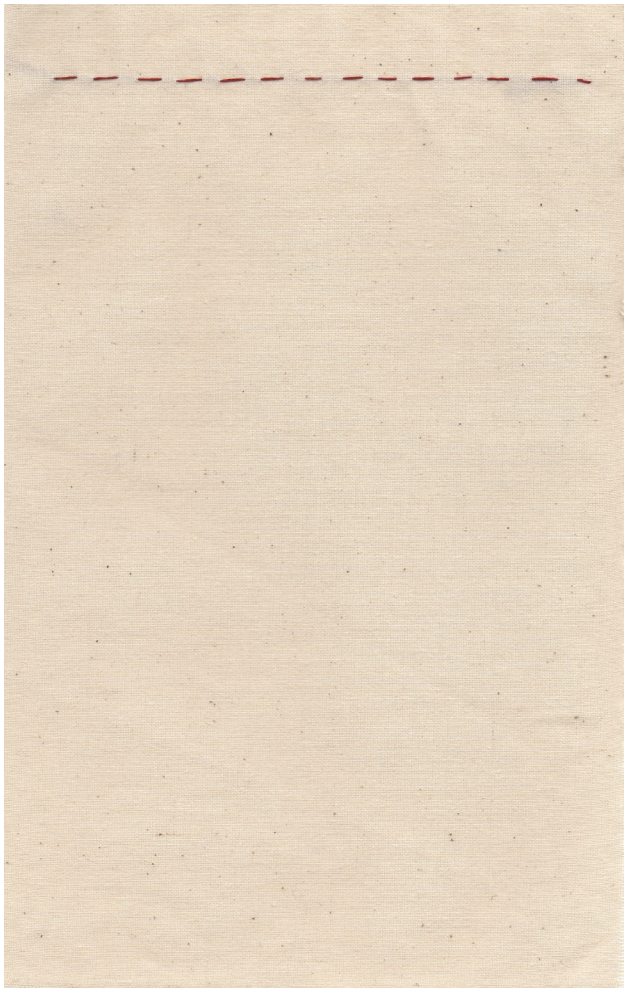
Catherine Stitching a motif or pattern of personal choice.



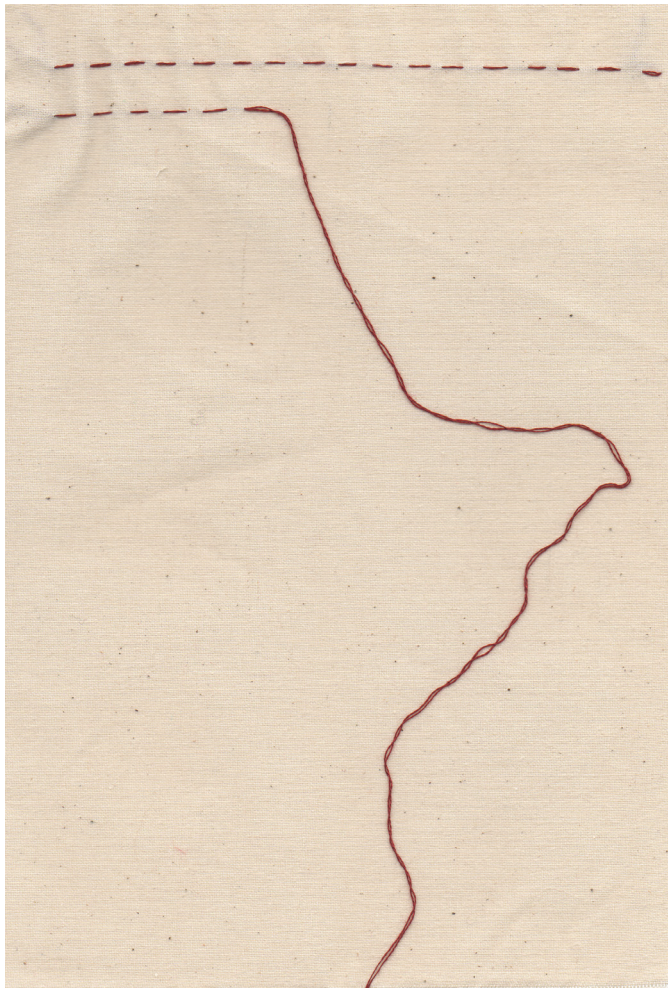
Catherine Reproducing a partner's stitching.



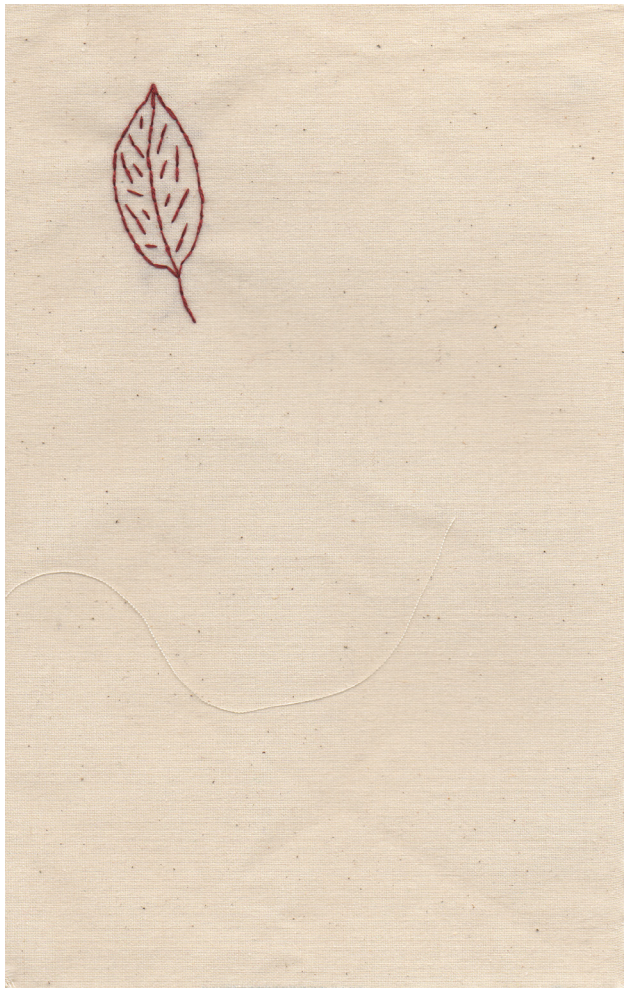
Catherine Stitching freely onto a fabric of personal choice.



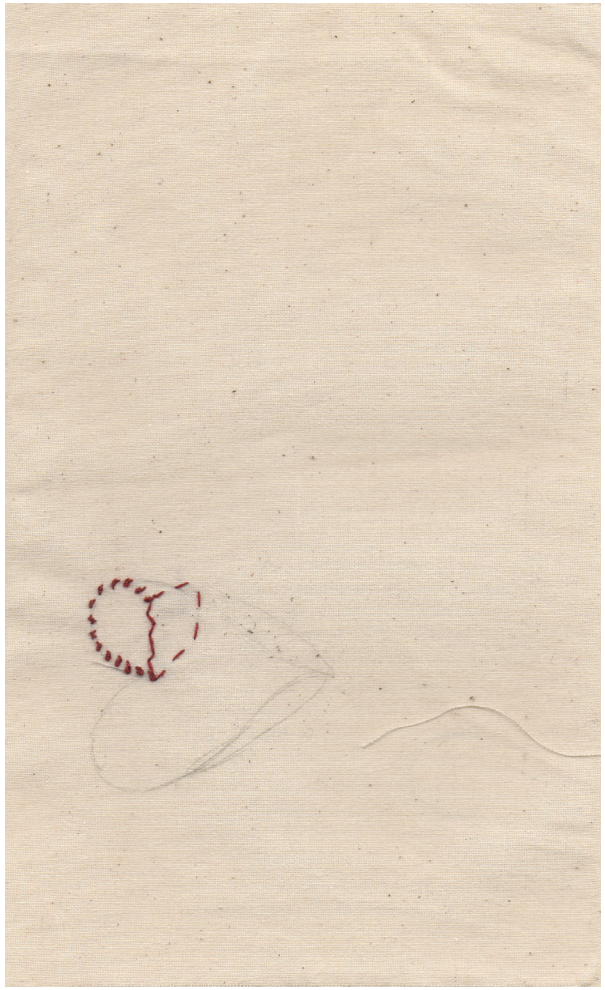
Kelly Stitching in a straight line 0.5cm from the edge.



Kelly Three rows of even stitches, in parallel.

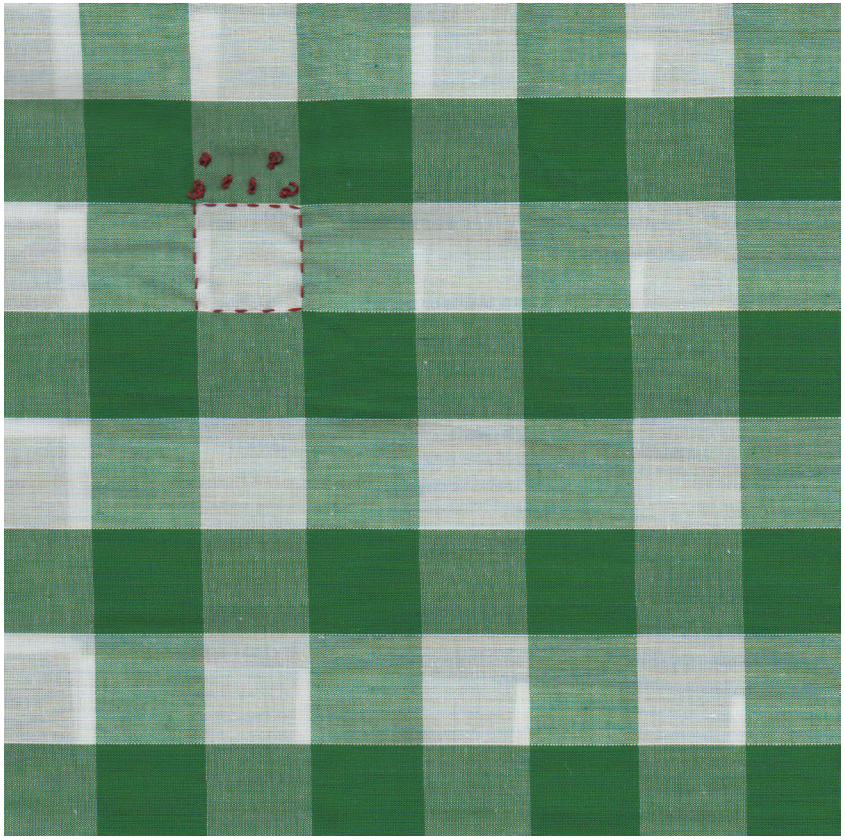


Kelly Stitching a leaf of any size using any stitch type.

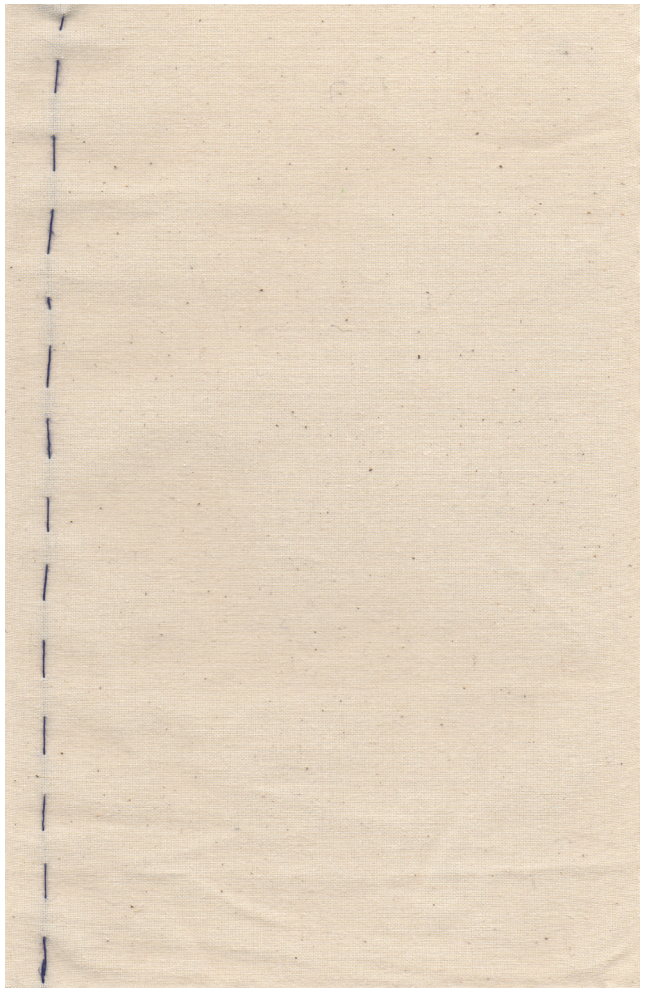


Kelly Stitching a motif or pattern of personal choice.

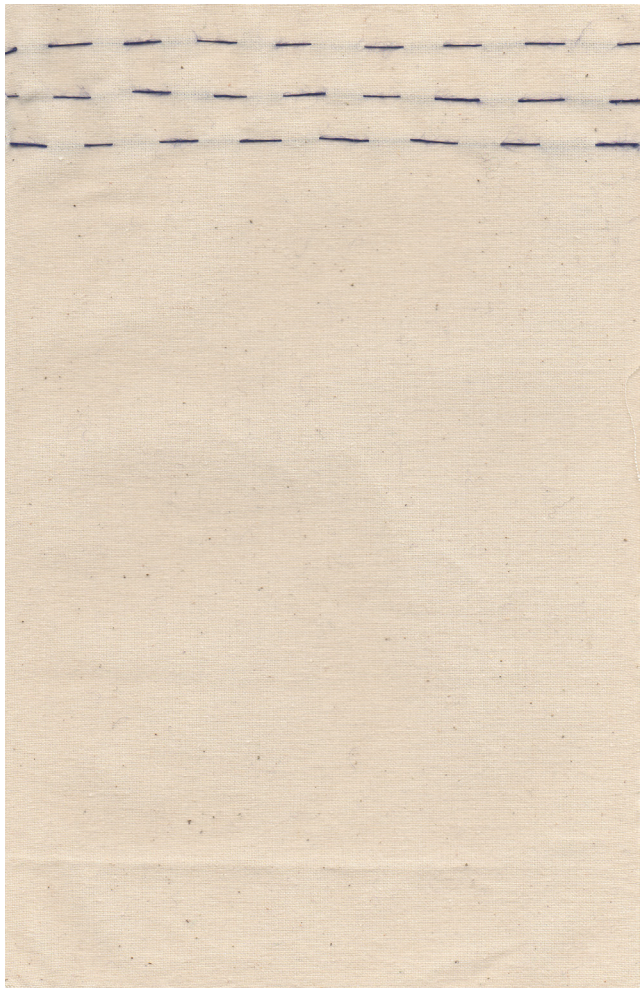
Kelly Reproducing a partner's stitching.



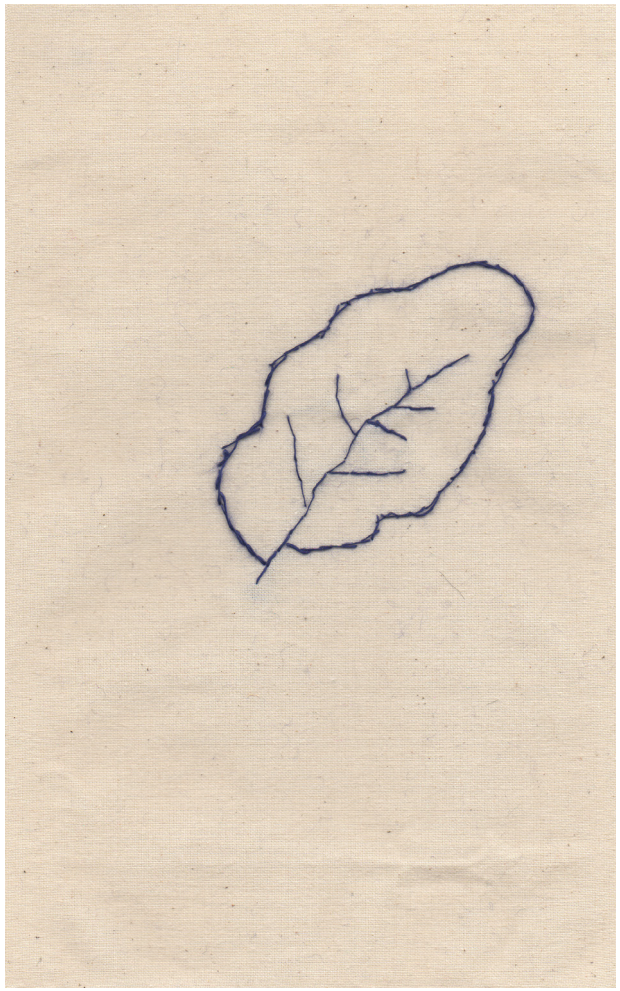
Kelly Stitching freely onto a fabric of personal choice.



Samira Stitching in a straight line 0.5cm from the edge.

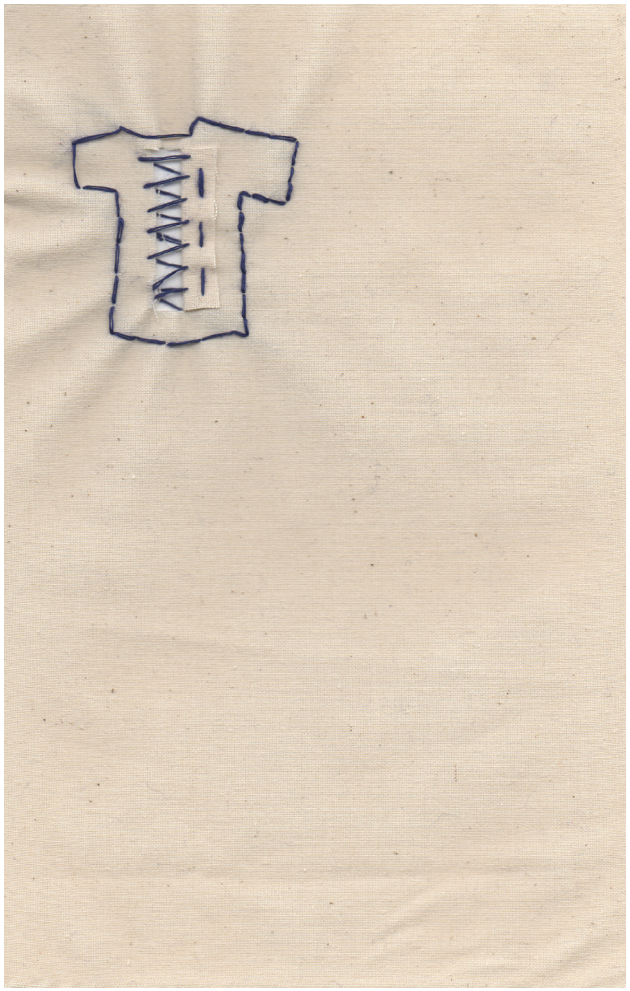


Samira Three rows of even stitches, in parallel.

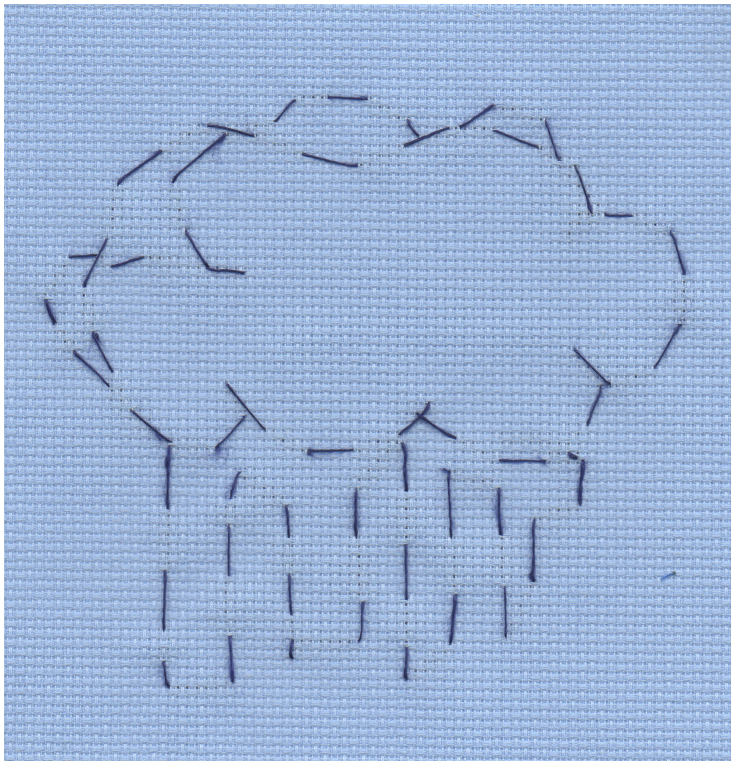


Samira Stitching a leaf of any size using any stitch type.

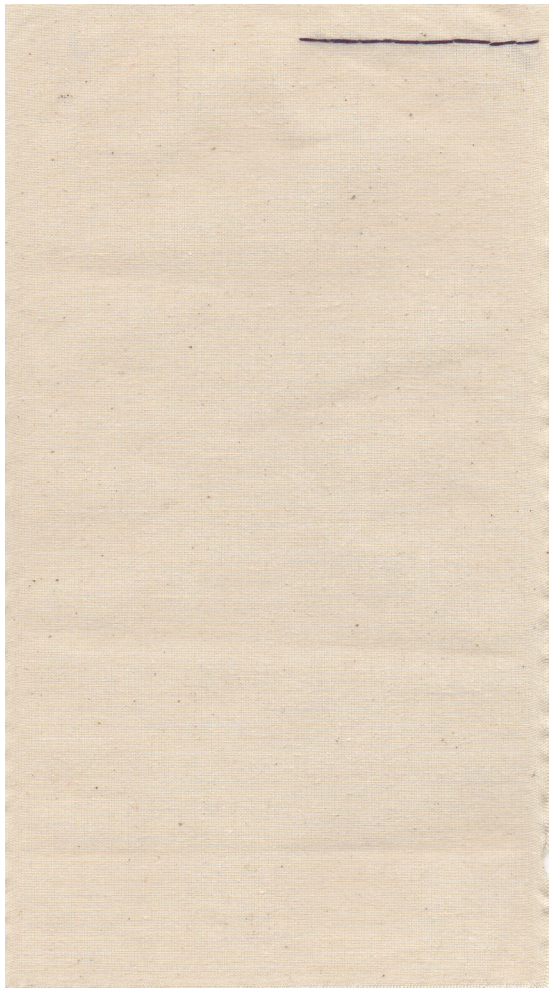
Samira Stitching a motif or pattern of personal choice.



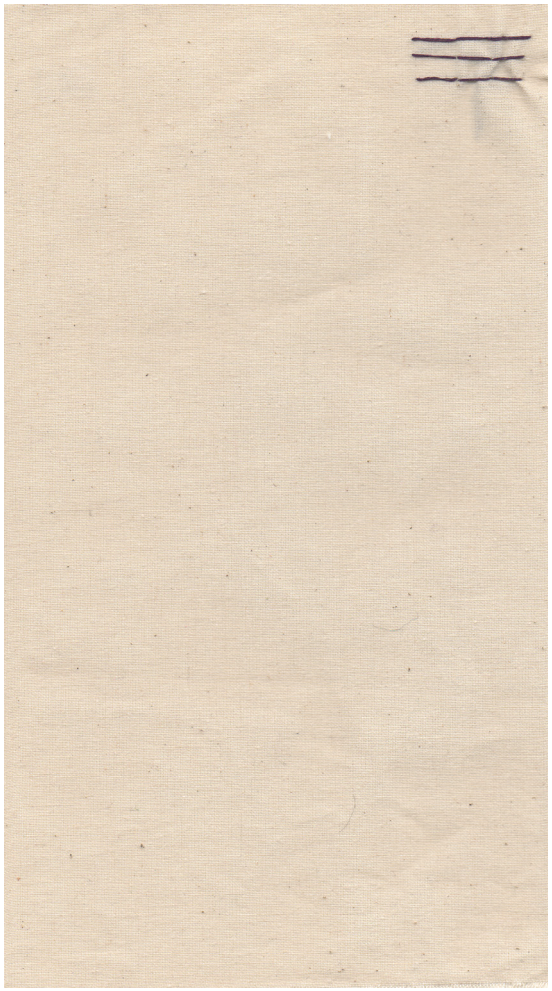
Samira Reproducing a partner's stitching.



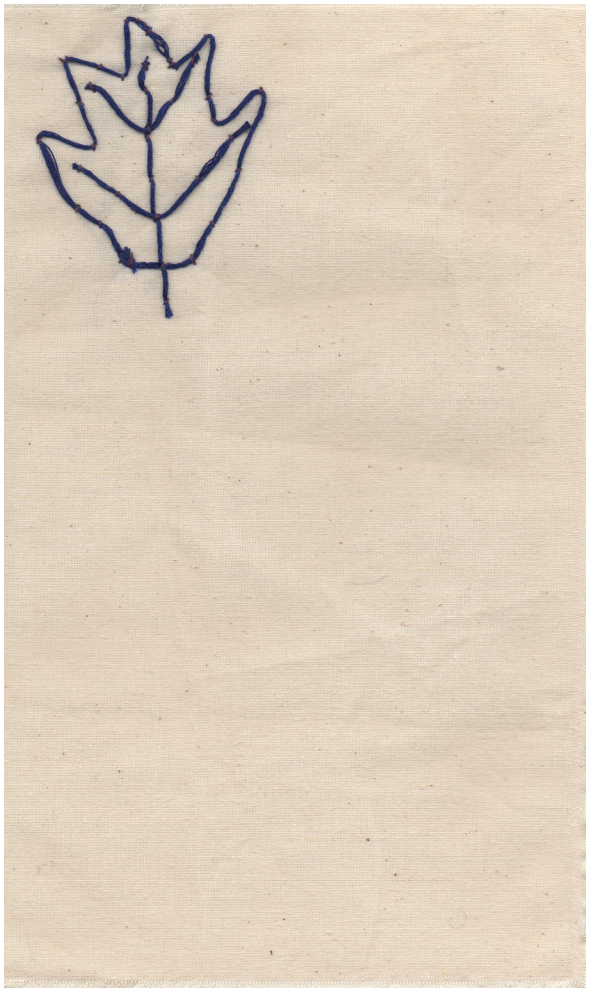
Samira Stitching freely onto a fabric of personal choice.



Jess Stitching in a straight line 0.5cm from the edge.



Jess Three rows of even stitches, in parallel.



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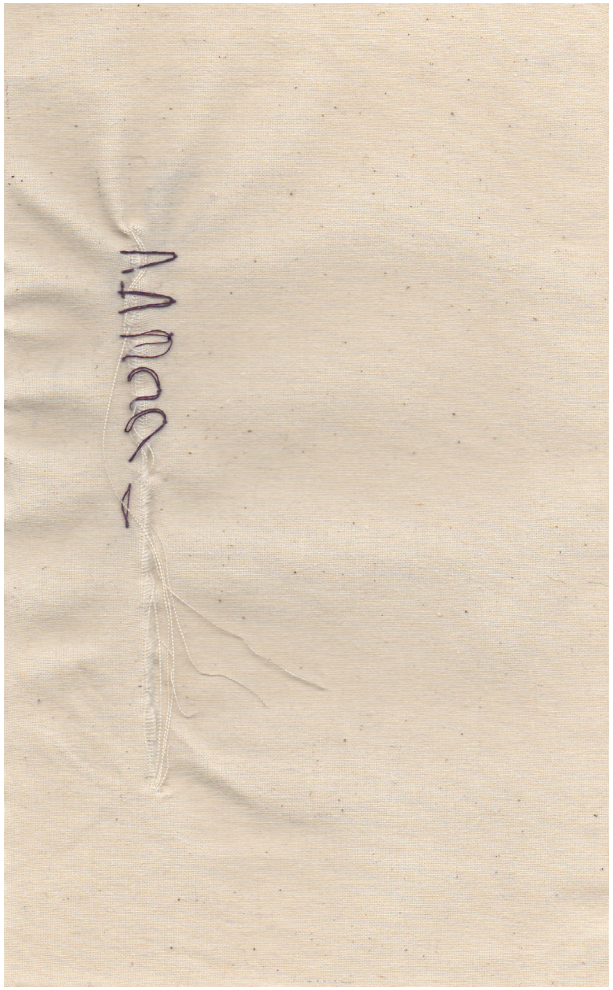

Jess Reproducing a partner's stitching.

Jess Stitching freely onto a fabric of personal choice.

Transcript of discussion with participants

All participants were at the end of their final year of the three-year degree course.

Samira

Jess

Kelly

Catherine

Emma (researcher)

Emma Just to start off, I will say it's Thursday 23rd June and I'm here with students at Bournemouth, on the Textiles course. Ok so just to start off, and just to get you thinking, how did you feel about doing the exercises?

Samira I really get into it, and you can't stop, there's never enough time. You know when you're doing embroidery the time just, I always feel like it's in a completely different dimension, you know, it just goes so much faster.

Emma Did you all feel that a bit?

Kelly Yeah you kind of get lost in your own world, I think, just because you're kind of sat there.

Jess Definitely I agree with that.

Emma Yeah? What sort of a world is that, that you get lost in? Can you think of a way to describe it, even if you can't find the literal words, try and describe that world that you feel you get lost in?

Kelly I suppose, well for me it's quite isolated, I kind of cut myself off and kind of think about things, or sing to myself.

Emma Yeah? Do you sing out loud or do you sing in your head?

Kelly If there's music on I'll sing.

Emma Out loud?

Kelly Yeah, if there's none in my head yeah. It just keeps me going really.

Jess That reminds me, when I used to study drama, and we studied Stanislavski, and we looked at like circles of attention and things like that. Or when you're hand stitching and you're in your own little world, so you've got like this small

little space that you're inside of, and you're not really, you're not really conscious of what is going on outside of that space, you don't really care. You're kind of in your own little world, doing your work. I don't know, when I'm hand stitching I don't really feel like I'm bothered by what other people are doing around me.

Samira Yeah.

Jess And like there's people next to me stitching but I wasn't like looking at them comparing myself to them, I was just like in my own little world, I felt completely free and just like I could do anything, kind of thing.

Catherine You just really want to concentrate on your work.

Kelly Yeah.

Jess Yeah and be completely selfish, have like time to be completely selfish and not have to think about anyone, or anything else.

Emma What sort of concentration is that? Or what sort of attention is it do you think you're giving your work?

Catherine Envision designs and how to, which embroidery is it, how to express my image. I just thought I concentrate on how to organise my design, or which technique should I use?

Emma Ok, yeah, that definitely a part of it I think.

Kelly Like where to put the needle, which bit in the fabric, like where should it come out, where it should go in to make the design.

Emma If you could think of something, say outside of your world of stitching, where you might be applying that sort of attention, that very focussed attention and concentration, what would that be? Just think of similarities with other activities.

Jess Writing, I'd say.

Kelly Driving, I think driving.

Emma Driving?

Kelly Yeah.

Samira I would say model making, you know like planes and stuff.

Emma Like model planes?

Catherine Drawing.

Emma Drawing, yeah.

Jess Yeah.

Emma Do you think it differs from drawing in some way?

Samira It depends on how you work I think, because in the way I work, I usually, once I get it past the design stage, you know on sample stage, it's a really enjoyable process you know. I could do anything, I could watch telly, I could talk on internet with my friends and I really enjoy that stage, so yeah.

Emma Yeah.

Jess I think it's quite similar because when I sew I kind of approach it as I would draw it. I see like stitch is way of laying down thread the same as you would like a mark on paper. So I don't really see it as that different.

Emma Yeah. Ok, what you were saying Natalia, when you get to the stage of making the work so you're doing the stitching without having to think about what the design is going to be, because you've resolved that in some way, and you enjoy that stage, do you, do you notice then that you're concentrating on your work in a different way? Because you mentioned that, you know, you'll talk to your friends or watch TV.

Samira Yeah I mean I can, I have a certain way of doing it, I still have to concentrate, it's not like I don't have to look or anything. But it's just I think because first of all I always use a stand and a hoop, you know so I have both of my hands free when I embroider and that kind of, I think if you had to hold the embroidery hoop and embroider it would be different because you have to concentrate more. But because I have both of my hands free it allows me less concentration when I'm embroidering, so I could do other things, but even though I wouldn't watch something new for example, if I would decide to watch TV it would have to be something I watched before. It wouldn't be something new because I can't, I can't watch it and be in the film and doing embroidery, it would be something, one of my favourite films I've watched a hundred times, I know it by heart.

Kelly Yeah. It's like background.

Emma Is that, you recognise that do you Kelly? You do the same thing?

Kelly Yeah, like I can't really, well I can watch something and embroider but I prefer like music because you're just using your ears, that sense, whereas with embroidery you're using like your touch and your eyes. So if you have like the other senses doing something else, it's, I prefer that way of working I think.

Emma What's it like if you're only using your sense of touch and eyes? To no music.

Kelly I don't like that, it's too quiet. Because if I am on my own and embroidering, like in silence, it's, it almost become a bit

of a chore in a way and I don't like that. I have to, I have to have music really. Or someone there, like when we were quiet just now and embroidering that was fine because.

Emma Because you weren't on your own.

Kelly Yeah, I think when you're on your own it does become quite lonely in a way.

Catherine Not really, when I concentrate to, a special drawing, I can't put on music especially if some local thing I like, because my concentration is just turn to music and then just instrumental is fine.

Jess Classical, yeah.

Kelly Yeah.

Emma No words.

Jess I have to listen to classical if I'm really concentrating.

Catherine But I think when I focus on a drawing, or something like embroidering, I think even though I turn on music, I totally don't listen it.

Emma Ok, did you feel comfortable doing it, doing the exercises I asked you to do? Or did you feel uncomfortable?

Jess No.

Kelly Quite comfy, yeah.

Catherine I think because it's a small group of people as well, it kind of, it don't feel like you have to, like you said it's not a competition you know and you only think you just want to get on with it you and just do what you were asked to do, you know the exercise. You don't distracted really, you know and then you can, it's quite nice.

Emma Were there any tasks that you thought were slightly unexpected or odd or made you slightly ill at ease or that you had to sort of grapple with?

Kelly The one where we had to like almost copy someone else's, I didn't, well I can't say I didn't like that, but it felt a bit strange.

Emma Ok, can you expand on that a little bit Monica, or how did it feel strange? In what ways?

Kelly I guess because I'm not used to like just copying someone's work. I like to just do my own and.

Emma So what did you feel, can you find words to describe? For example, did you feel you were cheating? Or did you feel like you were stealing?

Kelly A little bit, yeah, felt a bit kind of, it was interesting.

Emma Or was it a challenge to see if you could emulate somebody else's work?

Catherine I didn't see it as cheating, my advice was more like to look at the sample and try to work out how a person done it, you know, and I think that why probably it takes you longer than it took the person who done it in the first place. Because you have, they just do it 'oh let's do this let's do that', while you have to work out what they did first. You know you kind of have to make a logic way, how you gonna do it and it takes a bit longer I think.

Jess Yeah I didn't see it like that, obviously it is, I think because I'm quite stubborn, I guess, I didn't like to copy things. Like I like to take inspiration from things, I like to look at things and analyse things and yeah kind of what Natalia said like look and see how they've done it, but then I like to interpret that in my own way. So to like incorporate some of their techniques but do something that's my own because I think otherwise it's kind of, it's a bit futile, it's a bit pointless to just copy other people. I think you should always be thinking, like, an artist or a designer as an individual, like what inspires you and how you can interpret that in your own personal kind of style. You should never be trying to like emulate other people.

Emma So, because this is really interesting I'm just trying to unpick that a little bit more, when you say you would rather, you're sort of more happy to interpret what somebody else has done, how do you go about interpreting what they do? What resources do you think you have to interpret somebody else's work? You mentioned techniques, what else might there be, what else is coming in to play do you think?

Jess Well I think you need to, well I guess I'm really in to the theory side of things, so I like to look at kind of what's below the surface, like why they've done something because where there's like the visible techniques and things like that, and then I take my inspiration from like their ideas, as well as their techniques. And then I just incorporate anything that I find inspiring to kind of express myself artistically.

Emma Ok, do you try and find some kind of way in? How do you go, how do you start interpreting something?

Jess That's a hard question, like I guess well you do need to look at the techniques and if they use a certain stitch that you might like, you then kind of think what does that remind you of? Like does it remind you of like with this piece here this is a print with flowers on, and that kind of reminds me of loads of like threads, like busy threads coming out of it. So I kind of took, like added that in my self, like that's how I interpret the lines of the flowers, kind of like this chaos of like threads coming out. So it's just like taking techniques and then how you interpret that and what it reminds you of and then you tend to come up

with imagery, or a design. To be honest I just go with it, I'm very spontaneous I kind of do, like automatic stitching I guess, like automatic writing. Everything I just kind of, I don't like to plan things out, I like to just go with the flow and see what happens.

Emma Ok, so what, you can do certain things, you have certain skills, don't you, that you're drawing on?

Jess Yeah.

Emma Can you describe them? If we take, take a particular example, just to work out how you might go about it. For example this is the Mika's sample, isn't it? Her stitch that she passed on to you, so talk us through how you approach that.

Jess Ok, well I looked at Catherine's piece and that stitch that she'd used and I noticed it was a flower and I wasn't really, that I didn't relate to that, I didn't think ooh I want to stitch a flower, and because while I'd been stitching I'd been thinking about how, I think the main thing I was thinking about is how, when you kind of add something to, say, a piece of your clothing it makes you kind of respect it more; because there's a piece of you attached to it. So it's like, it means a lot more to you, so I kind of, that made me think about like mending clothes and how people don't do it so much these days but I think we should. We should, I think we would more if we kind of added things or we made things ourselves, we'd care more about it and we'd mend it instead of just throwing it away. So that made me kind of rip the fabric and then use the same stitch that Catherine used to kind of stitch it back up, to like mend it. That's the kind of mind-set that I was in when I was working. So that's how I interpreted it.

Emma Ok, and can you describe the skills that you drew on to do that?

Jess Skills, I don't know, well I'd say lack of skill for this piece because it doesn't look that great, but it was more just, well I guess you have to observe, you have use observational skills to look at the techniques that that person's used and try and kind of emulate it and then I guess you're drawing on your own views and ideas. I don't know how to put it in words really. It's hard to put into words.

Emma It is hard.

Jess It's not something I tend to think about.

Emma No I'm not sort of bashing away at you for any reason, it's because it is hard to put into words and so I'm, you know, trying to draw it out of you or maybe we could think of parallel examples that help to describe it. If there's other situations because, I think if you didn't know, I mean I don't know that you can answer this but maybe it would suggest another situation that you might be able to describe. If you didn't know how to stitch, how would you do what you just did?

Jess I'd probably draw instead.

Emma Ok.

Jess Or, either that or I'd use like collage probably, if I couldn't stitch. Yeah I didn't really think about, yeah there are other ways of interpreting it, I guess. Maybe drawing or even like painting maybe, I don't know that's a really hard question.

Emma But not words?

Jess Words?

Emma Words.

Jess Well I guess, do you mean like write about it?

Emma No just to see, you said just, you know, it's quite difficult to put it into words.

Jess Yeah.

Emma The process you just went through, of responding to Catherine's piece of stitching. So do you feel equipped with other forms of expression that allow you to interpret Catherine's stitching more accurately than words would?

Jess Yeah I guess drawing. I don't know, I guess, I don't really have that many words towards that because I see it as just a stitch. I doesn't like, just that stitch alone doesn't ignite a fire inside me and make me think like wow oh my god I'm so kind inspired. I don't feel like an amazing amount of passion towards that stitch so it's just a stitch, but it's what you do with it, I think.

Emma Ok, no I mean thank you Jess it's a really hard, it's a really hard thing to try and get to. I am aware of that, I know. Have either of you two got any thoughts on that? How you felt about stitching another person's work.

Catherine I thought it was quite interesting to see that one because when, when I stitch, stitch it, I just tried to copy the technique but when I got it I was very interested in what she thought on this stitch. How I imagined how she imagined to make, to design to and then which stitch she imagined to use to piece these design pieces. So quite interesting, because it totally different from mine imagination so I just try to think about what she imagined.

Emma What did you think Kelly imagined?

Catherine Just look like heart so I know, I know how her work and former work from her last project. So oh she like this heart, ok and but I just didn't think about why she just stitch in the centre, just looks like broken heart or why she stitched just straight and then not stitch separately together. Otherwise, otherwise how can I say it, also I have to copy, I try to copy it but I just interesting to imagine her work.

Emma Do you want to shed any light on it Kelly?

Kelly Well I actually drew it in pencil, you can probably see it's quite big but then, because there's a time limit I thought it needs to be smaller so I started off doing the French knots and then I'd got kind of half way and I thought well I could just break it and then do running stitch on the other side.

Catherine Yeah I imagined, oh why is it, why has she changed the technique and the heart; might be the time. So for me this, I think about, thinking about this thing is quite interesting. Yeah, instead of the stitching.

Emma Ok, good. From all of the tasks that you did, did, was it easy? Was it hard? Which was the easiest to do, do you think?

Jess Sewing the lines was very easy.

Kelly Yeah.

Jess Because you don't really have to think about anything.

Kelly Yeah you can just do it.

Jess A line is a line.

Kelly I agree.

Jess I think the hardest one, well I didn't find it hard but obviously the one where it's like sew anything. Like the possibilities are endless so it's like I just sewed the first thing that came into my head really.

Catherine Yeah because this is only a line we have a task that's just a line. That is the task so we don't need to think about design or something.

Jess Yeah a line is a line.

Emma Did you think at all about how to do the line?

Jess Not really because I tend to use backstitch a lot, so I just automatically did it like that. It was kind of second nature really. I didn't really think.

Kelly Because it was quite an instruction, like a parallel line to the edge of the cloth. So you know immediately what to do, you just do it.

Catherine Yeah but when I tried to thread the line, the parallel line I tried to make designs.

Emma To make it, yeah, to give it some character.

Catherine Yeah, to positive or negative or even the task, yeah just a simple line stitch but think about links and position but this one it was easier than making design the other stitching.

Emma So what was difficult, if that's the right word, or hard or more challenging in the other ones?

Kelly I think like, when we drew the leaf and then stitched it, because they were quite separate. When I do, like if I have a design and I want to put it into stitch I normally like use like a pen and draw it on the fabric, like a washable pen. Or use like some tracing paper to like get the exact copy of it, because that's the design I want. Whereas this one we just had to take our drawing which is very separate from the cloth and then copy it; I found that a bit hard because it's not exact.

Emma Can you, yeah, and can you describe that in a little bit more detail? Think about the drawing you did on the paper and the stitching you did on the cloth. How were they similar and how were they different?

Kelly Well obviously the designs, trying to be the same but with the pencil you can get a smooth line just with one stroke. But obviously the needle, the thread it's in kind of bits and you have to add it all up and if it doesn't quite add up then it's not going to be the same. It's not obviously fluid.

Emma Yeah.

Jess I think that's why I like to lay down thread on the cloth and then stitch onto it because I feel like that's almost like you're drawing on, it's like the line that you would draw onto the cloth, because to me I think that's really similar to drawing. That's as close as you can really get and it means that you can cover like large areas in a shorter amount of time. It's more kind of spontaneous like you can get, because I draw quite like chaotically and freely and I feel like if I do coaching I like lose threads and stuff it kind of is a way of like getting that same kind of effect on cloth as on paper. Because I think they shouldn't be like completely separate, it shouldn't be like you draw a certain way and then you stich a completely different way I think they should be linked.

Emma Oh ok, that's interesting, why should they be linked do you think?

Jess Because I think if they're not linked you're almost suggested that like stitch is maybe a lesser art form than drawing. It's maybe, like a separate it's kind of, I guess it's the age old thing that like women do stitching and it's kind of, it's separate, it's a craft, it's not art. Whereas I see it as art so I therefore like to stitch the way that I draw, like they're linked, they're the same. They're not like distinguishable really.

Emma That's an interesting take on that argument. Yeah that's good.

Kelly Yeah I think I agree because I tend to try and draw quite neatly and then like my stitching I try and do quite neat as well.

Jess And I'm the opposite.

Kelly But it kind of links your work together as well; says like this is mine in a way.

Emma Is that important to you?

Kelly Yeah, I think it is.

Emma Why is it important?

Kelly What that it's obvious it's my work? Well, because I want it to be, well it's hard to explain but I want people to be able to look at it and say oh yeah that's so and so's, or oh that's quite good you can tell whose that is. If it's not, you need to put yourself into the work for it to be yours. I think if you don't do that then there's not really any point in doing it.

Jess Yeah I agree. That's why it's important like to take something basic like a stitch and interpret it in your own way. Because otherwise it's not so much art, it's more craft.

Emma Does it matter how that is done? Whether that's well done, whether it's good or bad? What is good and bad stitching? Or well done or not well done?

Kelly I don't think it matters if it's good or bad but if you like mean it to be that way then that's fine. It's, just like, your work, if it's messy then that's your style. If it's neat then you've obviously done it that way for a reason.

Jess As long as it's done for a reason.

Kelly Yeah.

Jess As long as it's not like laziness, like you just can't be bothered then, I mean if everyone stitched the same then it'd be a bit boring wouldn't it? I think you've got to have, like my opinion is that everything you do should have a reasoning behind it. Like if you're gonna do something messy it should be for a, like, for a reason; not just because you're lazy. Because that is what art is about, doing things for a reason not just for the sake of it.

Emma What sort of reason might that be? Have you got an example of a reason for doing a piece of work.

Jess Well when it comes to drawing I find if I'm kind of stuck in a rut and I don’t really know where I'm going or what I'm doing, like I feel a bit tense, I tend to just like get a piece of paper, or I do this on the sewing machine as well, and just kind of go like just kind of empty your mind and just go with the flow and just see what happens. Like just move your arm around, so like free lines, like crazy lines and just see what happens. Like free yourself up, because I think sometimes you sit there and you sew really neatly or you draw really neatly, it kind of, like that makes me feel really tense, I don't feel like I'm open to experimentation or I'm,

that work's gonna get me anywhere. Like I think you need to free yourself up and just kind of go with the flow.

Emma So have you go other ways of freeing yourself up?

Jess Another thing I do quite a lot is I like to like close my eyes and just kind of draw, not sew that is health and safety more like stitch my hand up, but it's more like I think sometimes you need to close your eyes and just create something and just touch and just draw because sometimes constantly looking at something, you're thinking too much about the way it looks that sometimes it can kind of stifles your creativity and it can, also it can kind of maybe result in everything looking the same when you're doing everything a certain way. So I find like just closing your eyes and kind of imagining something in your head and really freeing your mind and just going for it, it makes I don't know closing your eyes it makes me quite fearless like I can just do anything because I'm not conscious where the lines are going. I find that really interesting.

Emma Do you, or would you do anything else, other than drawing or painting or.

Jess Print I like, I like to like paint onto things and then get paper and kind of get like a mirror image, and writing as well.

Emma What about anything else, outside of being a creative person?

Jess Dancing around like an idiot.

Emma Ok, no that's yeah. It's, anything else? Or either of you two?

Kelly Music, just going on YouTube and stuff.

Jess I was going to say something quite rude.

Emma Go on.

Jess I was going to say sex.

Emma Anything else?

Jess Running as well. I like going running because it kind of, you just feel free. Like, you feel like if you keep running and running you're just going to run off the side of the world. That's really an amazing feeling it just completely clears your head; gets rid of stress.

Kelly I think like, well the other night I was running in the rain and like at first I like hated it but then as soon as you get really wet you just like don't care anymore.

Jess It's just fun.

Kelly And I just really got into it because I'm just past caring about being wet and I can just go on and on.

Emma That's really interesting all of that because there seems to be something common running through all of these things. Can you identify what that might be?

Kelly Just letting go.

Jess Freedom.

Emma But where is that freedom coming from?

Jess Up in your head, I think.

Emma Is it?

Jess Yeah I think it is. I mean obviously the actual act, there is a freedom to it but it's the kind of effect that has on you mentally that makes you feel free.

Emma Is it coming from your head?

Kelly I think quite a lot if it probably is.

Emma Drawing with your eyes closed, running in the rain, sex.

Jess Well obviously it's body and mind combined. It's the act that your body has partaken in and how that makes your mind feel. So that you can't do one without the other.

Catherine How can I say, when I try these kind of things I just try to get my satisfaction from my work. You know, how to express my individuality or how to, how can I say, finish quite nice. So I think that including techniques as well so not make me free, I think try to achieve my satisfaction; how to achieve my satisfaction. That is my, I think, my main things to do these kind of things including drawing or, how can I get, I was thinking satisfaction is kind of, for me, is very comfortable to achieve.

Emma How would you describe satisfaction? Have you got an example of what satisfaction for you might be? Can you think of an example of something you've done recently or your work or.

Catherine I'm trying, trying to now is drawing, fashion drawing using my textiles image so I'm struggling to draw now to draw a couple of pieces but I haven't got any satisfaction so I think I already drew, I think, six pieces just on one image but I couldn't get anything so I just dump everything. Because when I draw I just make life drawing on different paper but it is pencil and then just think about position and then try to on a proper paper new rough drawing on it. So I just try to concentrate to make one line so if I didn't got any line, satisfactory line, I...

Emma Start again.

Catherine Yeah.

Emma Ok.

Jess I think that's what creative people do though. I think, as a creative person I don't think you're ever really satisfied. You're always striving for the next thing.

Catherine Yeah because even though I have got imagination or good resources, I need technique to express. So that, this balance is very important for me if I haven't got any good techniques I don't have any imagination or, I can't make any creation. But if I got some, you know, imagination but if I don't have any techniques I can't express. So that, I try to, how can I say, reduce this gap.

Emma Yeah. Do you two recognise that as well?

Jess Yeah.

Kelly Yeah.

Jess Definitely.

Emma So, if we just think about that for a while, and try and relate it to some of the exercises that we've just done, thinking about that, trying to find a way bridging that gap between your imagination and technique. For example, when I asked you to stitch something of your own choice, you know do what you like in your stitching, try to think back to what went through your mind. How did you arrive at the decision you did to do what you did? Can you break down the processes that you went through do you think?

Jess I just thought about it, I thought of it in the sense of drawing, like what I would draw onto the cloth and then you kind of relate it back to the stitches that technically you know. And so then I thought well I'll use this stitch to do that and this stitch to do that. So yeah, like what Catherine was saying about like having imagination, also technique is as important because you have to have the technique to communicate the message that you're trying to convey.

Emma Was it that way around for you Kelly?

Kelly I think so, I think I kind of knew what stitches I wanted to do because I quite like the running stitch, backstitch and like simple ones. But for me it was about the image as well because I didn't want to do anything to complicated because of the time but then I didn't want to just do something really bland like a circle but I ended up with just a shape anyway.

Emma So...

Kelly You kind of want to end up with something that will reflect you enough but then because of the time you don't want to do anything too extravagant. So it's kind of, again, balancing that.

Emma And, because it seemed that for Jess it was, the way she described it, it was quite clear the idea came and then she sought for the technique and I right in thinking for you, Kelly, that is a little bit more blurred?

Kelly Yeah.

Emma That the technique and the stitch is up there inspiring the idea as well?

Kelly Yeah.

Emma Is that an accurate description do you think?

Kelly I think so, yeah. I think the stitch kind of came first and then the image.

Jess You see I see it as the opposite, I see it as the way I tend to work is I have an idea and then if I guess I don't have the technique to achieve that then I then like go into doing loads of research and I find the right technique for that; to convey that message because I think if you think the other way around you're kind of limiting yourself artistically. Because you're putting up boundaries, you're just saying well these are the techniques I know, this is what I can do with it whereas if you think of an idea first and then obviously like today we couldn't go away and research so we had to interpret it and we had to do, do it with what we already know but like out there in the world I would think of an idea and then I'd research it in depth and find techniques that would be the most successfully like convey y message.

Emma But do you not think that's what Kelly would do as well?

Kelly Yeah.

Jess Yeah in the real world but I do think that if you think of the technique before the idea then you are putting up walls.

Emma Do you really think so?

Jess Yeah I do because I think the first thing that should come, it should be about the idea and what makes you tick and what inspires you and then, because I think if you come up with the idea first the idea is limitless, like anything is possible and if you think of the technique first I think it does kind of box in your idea a bit; restrict it.

Kelly I think you can work both ways.

Jess I think you can but I personally, the work I work is I need to think of the idea first.

Kelly Yeah I usually think of the idea first, but obviously this was just a little, little task so it didn't really need too much

thought.

Emma No I think it's very interesting that you think that and I wonder why you think that. I mean, there's no right or wrong to this, they're both right answers but they're different approaches too exploring what is possible and finding a way of bridging that gap because there is an argument that if you really know your techniques then that is your starting point; to see how far can I go with this, to see where it takes me. But it's not restrictive at all, it's just a different way of, a different way of engaging with stuff if you like.

Jess Yeah I guess when you put it like that it doesn't sound quite so restrictive but I guess I see myself more as an artist than a designer I don't like to restrict to using a certain way of working. Whereas I think if you focus on the techniques you're basically saying I'm only ever going to work in print or stitch. So in that respect I think you are limiting yourself.

Emma But there's nothing ever saying that you can only use one technique, you know, you can be inspired by a technique and go an learn that and expand your repertoire. I know what you're saying, I take your point I think it's different ways of coming up the problem, different approaches and it's interesting to hear you vocalise you know making that known; speaking about it.

Kelly Because if you say like oh I'm a printer you can still combine it with like obviously stitch, knit, anything. But you can, not obviously pigeonhole yourself, but if you're quite focused in one area you can then expand outwards from there; you don't have to do just one technique

Jess I guess commercially it's probably better to think of the technique first because there's less risk involved because you're kind of sticking to what you know you're good at whereas if you come up with the idea first and it's limitless possibilities that's more kind of like, I guess in a way maybe I do think more technique first than I like to realise. I think it's more when I'm kind of, I got artist's block as I call it, I probably just think of an idea and then just do anything and go with it and that normally stimulates me to get other ideas and then I guess I would probably go into thinking of right I do stitch with elements of print and then go from there. So I guess I do, I guess maybe the best way to come up with ideas initially is to just free your mind and not think about techniques but when it comes to developing something and getting something to a professional standard you need to think of the techniques that you're capable of, that you're good at and that are commercially viable.

Emma Does it matter what other people think?

Kelly What of your work?

Emma Yeah of your work, of your technique.

Kelly Yeah I think it's important, yeah.

Emma Why do you think it's important?

Kelly Because if you want to sell your work you have to kind obviously know your work and if it is just a bit too, too far out people won't like it. I think, I don't know again it's hard to describe but...

Emma Try to think about it, not in terms of selling your work, think about it...

Kelly Because if you're proud of your work then you'd hope other people would be too, like you can show that.

Jess I think the most important thing is that you like it because if you're trying to sell yourself, or sell your work to other people, if you don't believe in then why would they believe in it?

Kelly Yeah.

Jess So, I think you should, you should consider what other people think and like take input from other people like maybe like constructive criticism but you should never work to please other people. You should work for yourself.

Emma So, let's just try and think about that a little bit more because I think that's quite interesting in that we immediately throw up these obvious reasons for having other input, having recognition or praise or like or dislike of your work. You mentioned that might be for commercial reasons because you want to sell it, or it might be because you want to stand out. Why else might you think, try and think more sort of think less professionally, think less about being a student in an art college and think about just being a person. What, why does it matter what other people think of your work?

Jess That's a deep question.

Kelly Because it's a reflection of you isn't it? At the end of the day, everything you do is a reflection of who you are.

Jess And everyone wants to be liked.

Kelly Yeah.

Jess So, for me it's, my work is my voice and I think if , if people don't kind of praise you or no-one thinks it's any good then you feel like, you feel quite isolated and lonely. Like nobody, nobody understands you, nobody'd listening, nobody cares so I think that's why it's good to have people be like 'oh I like this' because you feel like you’re not so alone in the world and that there are people that think the same way as you do.

Kelly It's the same with like clothes and your tastes as well.

Emma Yeah, keep going.

Kelly It's all a reflection of who you are and like, for me this is quite personal but like I've never just wanted to just slot in and just like be forgotten. So I've always tried to like, not be like really different, but just stand out a bit more because, because I'm quite shy anyway I need something to, something on the outside to push me forward in a way. So, by doing my work and just wearing slightly different clothes and not following any fashion trends or anything, just being me I feel like I'm not going to be so forgotten or that kind of thing.

Emma How instrumental is your stitching in that? What part does that play do you think?

Kelly I think by like not stitching the obvious like obviously, well we had to stitch a leaf for this task but I'd never want to do flowers or leaves, birds because it's so overdone in textiles. I like them but I don't want to do them myself, and that's never a thing I want to be me and just stand out. That's why my last project was all like things you wouldn't think of, like the veins and...

Emma Try and think, try and think beyond the stylistic. Because what I'm trying to sort of draw out is why this activity? Why, because you could be singing, you could be acting, you could be sailing.

Kelly I think, again it comes back to women and stitching because women have always been thought of as stitchers, not men. Well obviously I'm a woman I can't really change that but if I can make a bit more of a message in stitching maybe. I'm not, I don't know again it's really hard.

Jess Can I answer that?

Emma Yes of course.

Jess See I, with the whole stitch thing like I feel really passionately about, especially like fashion and clothing, and the way that like we use it to communicate to the outside world and also it's almost like a bridge between us and the world. Because textiles and, especially like clothes, that's like it's constantly in contact with our body. So for me that's why stitch is like so important because it's almost like a part of us because fabric is like against our body so it's almost like it's at one with us; a part of us and for me yeah, that's what it's all about really.

Emma Where's the stitching I wonder? Try, let's see if we can, we don't have to be literal we can be sort of poetic or try and imagine this. So if you close your eyes and you had a picture of what the stitching looks like in the body or on the body, how would you describe it?

Jess It's like mending, it's to do with mending. When I think of stitching I think of mending, it's why I think of like maybe scars or something and kind of mending it; making something better. That's kind of, like embellishing something or someone.

Emma Is it on the body or coming out of the body? If you were to visualise it in your mind, is it on the body or coming out of the body or is it floating around the body?

Jess Going through the body when I think of it. Like, through the skin like, like from outside going in and then coming out again.

Emma How would you visualise it Kelly, for you?

Kelly I guess almost like tattoos in a way, like all over us. Like, it's almost like the clothing but not in a sense and just all over like messages and images.

Emma So do you think, again poetically, is it something that therefore because it's on your body and in your body and through your body that you have with you all the time?

Kelly I suppose, if it's inside you it would be, yeah.

Emma Are you conscious of that do you think? As you go about your daily lives?

Kelly Do you mean that stitch is always with us?

Emma Yeah, or that you're carrying something whatever that thing may be.

Kelly Yeah.

Emma That is part of what makes you a creative person.

Kelly Yeah definitely. I feel like I'm carrying something a bit different to everyone else. Because obviously all I've ever known is my body and my head, I don't know anyone else's so you kind of sometimes isolate yourself from others by just being in this body. So yeah, I can feel like I'm carrying something different sometimes.

Jess It's like a home, like you're wearing a home almost. But at the same time, when I think about threads like going through the body I kind of see it as threads like go through your body but they then going onto other people. So it's kind of there's a link, you might be you know well everyone's different, everyone's unique but you're all kind of the same as well.

Kelly Yeah.

Jess You're the same but different and I kind of like that.

Emma How, yeah that's really interesting. How do these threads attach? How, if we try and visualise it, how, no this is really interesting but how might you visualise it?

Kelly I've always thought, this is a really, I don't know it's probably from my childhood, I've always thought like a friendship,

just like a bit of rope and when the friendship breaks down it becomes frayed and if you're no longer friends then it's obviously broken but then if you make up you've got the knot that ties you together. And like, depending how many knots you have, is how many times you like broken that friendship and if you have a really strong bond then the rope's like perfect. So it's that kind of connection.

Jess Yeah I like that idea.

Emma Catherine what do you think?

Catherine I think that I, usually we have a thread if you make connections with threads so I think usually people have one thread and if I meet some person to make a friendship so try to make knot to join.

Kelly Yeah.

Catherine But sometimes, when I, I see that knot but the other person want to cut it.

Kelly Yeah, or they might pick at you and fray it and there's a little, it weakens.

Catherine Or sometimes we have a different thread, someone has quite thick, someone has quite thin. If we try to make knot but thin is quite weaker so it's broken down naturally. So I think if we have a thread to make connection with others each person has different colour, different width, different lengths so that is personality and try to make knot. But we can't make knot with other thread which completely different from mine. You know, that is personal, not nationality not, it just on the personality.

Kelly Yeah.

Jess Yeah I like that.

Emma Yeah, do you have similar situations Jess?

Jess Yeah.

Emma Might it apply to other situations other than friendship? Can you think of other situations? What about a place?

Kelly Yeah.

Emma How might you imagine, again sort of visualise yourself, if you in your minds imagine yourself as you were describing with these threads, how would you, how might you illustrate that with a place?

Kelly I, well, I think like say I've been on a good holiday it's almost like a, because like the holiday's only a couple of weeks say, it'd be like a little bundle tied with the string. So you've still got the connection of the string and the people that were with you, they have a connection to that string, but because it was just a little snapshot of your life it's a little bundle and it's all tied

together.

Jess I'd see it as an anchor. Like you kind of anchor yourself to places like you can go somewhere and be there for five minutes and feel more at home than you ever did somewhere you've been for like years and years. So I think when it comes, with regards to places, the thread would kind of be anchored there so that you've always got that tie, you're always, there's always a part of you that's joined to that place, a part of that place.

Emma Do you see it as a joining to a place?

Jess Yeah definitely.

Emma What about you Mika?

Catherine Sorry, I try to understand what they say. The place, linked to a place?

Emma Yes. How might you describe a connection to place.

Catherine Place, think about stitch? No, just place. Quite difficult to answer. Place, I think occasionally there are so many places including I like or I don't like but sometimes I have to belong to the place, which I don't like because of obligations and things like that. But, but I think I can't avoid this situation, try to avoid this situation because there's something to learn, I should learn or even though I don't like it. Because there are reasons why I don't like it so it might be wrong but it might be right so the place is, how can I say? But places, I think everything has meaning to develop my own personality or to get experience or, but yeah. How can I say, if I don't have any experience, I can't judge anything.

Emma Do you see it as Kelly sees a bundle, time spent in a place can be wrapped in a bundle? And Jess was talking about an attachment to a place being like an anchor; like you're anchored. Do you know what an anchor is? An anchor is, you know boats?

Catherine Yeah.

Emma When they come in to harbour?

Catherine Yeah.

Emma You drop the anchor to prevent it from sailing away. So it's a sort of, you're tied to a place.

Catherine I think usually we can choose a place, sometimes we can’t but our life it's just an, I think, steps like, how can I say?

Emma A spiral?

Catherine Spiral steps, so someone's step is like that one, or someone's is just to go you know towards to the top above. So

but so, the two person start at the same level but I think this kind of thing is a totally different and depends on their personality. Someone got steps like that that but someone just goes like this. So their life totally becomes different between their experience or knowledge or personality. So even though try to make friends with this person, they can't because their personal level is totally different so, this person can see that everywhere, from the top because they are, you know, their view is very wide. This person's view is quite wide but this person is quite narrow because they can see just here. So this is life I think in a place.

Emma Ok, let me just see if there's anything else to cover. Let's see with stitching and these different tasks, what, did they make you think in a different way at all? We've talked about the one where I asked you to come up with something of your own choice to stitch, and the straight line stitching, and drawing a leaf you know being told to draw something but it's slightly open to interpretation. These were different types of activities, ranging from quite prescriptive, stitching a line, to quite free and open. Not just to interpretation, but to imagination. Think back over the tasks that you did and can you describe what sort of frame of mind, the stitching work that you did, put you in?

Jess That's a hard question.

Emma You can start with the straight lines, for example.

Kelly Just quite contented because you just knew exactly what to do and you didn't really have to think for that one, you just did it. So it was just kinda, not really a lot of emotion in a way.

Emma Did you pay much attention to what you were doing?

Kelly Yeah to a certain extent, but.

Emma What sort of attention was that?

Kelly Just trying to make it straight enough for it to be a line.

Emma Other than that?

Kelly Not a lot else.

Emma No, what, what other thoughts went through your mind?

Kelly I guess thoughts elsewhere really. Because you didn't need to concentrate too hard on the line. You could think about other things whilst doing it; kind of multitask.

Emma Were you conscious of that as you were doing it?

Kelly Yeah.

Emma You were?

Kelly Yeah.

Jess I felt kind of the opposite I think.

Emma Ok.

Jess Because, the thing is when I'm told like something is regimented and not kind of a straight line, everyone knows what a straight line is, there's only one way you can do a straight line. So my mind wasn't wondering off in like a million different directions thinking of what I could do. Because it was just focussed, it's like right you're doing a straight line. That is that, it's very black and white. Whereas when it's kind of sew whatever you like, I never like, in real life I don't think in a straight line I think in a million different directions at once. So I found my mind wondered more than it did with the straight line one. Because it's a lot less focussed and the possibilities are endless, whilst with a straight line there's only one way you can do a straight line.

Emma Was it, try and think if there are different kinds of thoughts. Was it that, because you were free to come up with an idea, that you had lots of ideas? Or was it more that you had an idea but that made you think of lots of other things that weren't necessarily ideas of what you could stitch? Do you see what I mean?

Kelly Yeah.

Catherine I mean when I tried these, these stitches first I, to draw this line I don't think anything. Ok, and then the next, just a stitch ok, just stitch and think I didn’t think about colour or form or design. but during this I think about design and designing but next task I think about imagination for other, of others and then this one I have to think of a design, colour or I have to think about so many direction; colour, design techniques. Gradually I have to think of that, how can I say, more tasks. A lot of directions.

Emma Are those, all those things you're thinking about, I mean let's think about the last one that I asked you to do. Where you, you were, because this is all plain colour codes like a piece of paper really isn't it? Just blank. Whereas this isn't, so let's just think about the work that you did for this. How might you describe this work? You were saying that suddenly there were all these tasks to think about; the colour, design etc. etc. Can you break down, in more detail, what those tasks were? And let's try and think about what sort of thoughts they were, what sort of interactions, if you like, were going on between your mind and what you had in your hands?

Jess Well I think with, with the straight line one, like when it comes to thinking about work and design, your mind is focussed so in that respect you're just thinking about the straight line, but then the other part of your mind is wondering off

thinking about other things. Whereas with, with the ones where you have to think more about the design you're thinking loads of different thoughts at once but it's generally all about that design. It's all about the creative outlook and not like oh what am I going to eat for tea tonight kind of thing. Whereas when it's like you're just doing a straight line, like part of your mind is focussed on that and the other part's thinking oh what am I doing tonight bla bla bla and stuff like that. Yeah it's easier to get, to think two things, like I think you think, you think different things all at once with both but in different ways. Like one, all your thoughts are in the artist process, and the other one like one of your thoughts is on the artistic process and all your other thoughts are elsewhere really.

Emma And then think about this particular task, this one and the material because there's something else you're dealing with here that you're not dealing with here.

Jess Someone else's work. Like adding to something that's not your own.

Emma Yeah, so I mean if I just, what's going through my mind with this is you are responding at the same time as you are generating and imagining. Does that make sense to you?

Jess Yeah it does.

Kelly Yeah.

Emma So, how might we describe that sort of process? Again, if you try and thing back to doing it and try to deconstruct what went through your mind, what the process was. Like when I said, choose a piece of fabric and then do some stitching inspired by that piece of fabric, can you think back and remember what those processes were?

Kelly It's a very visual, like looking at the fabric you might pick and which, I suppose, you prefer to work with and then...

Emma Was that in terms of colour? Pattern?

Kelly Yeah, everything really.

Emma Scale?

Jess Yeah.

Kelly Yeah, everything, the feel of it, yeah. Colours, yeah.

Emma And so, how did you come up with the idea for doing what you did on it?

Kelly I think just using the shapes that were on the fabric already; you're just adding to it really.

Emma Ok so you were responding to a shape. Sami you were, how was it for you?

Jess Well, well I just saw the colours and they stood out to me. I hate flowers but the lines were really like chaotic so I thought that would work well with my style.

Emma Is that why you chose that fabric?

Jess Yeah that's why I chose that. Because I thought I could do something a bit manic over the top of it. And also I think, when I looked at that fabric, like when I look at flowers sometime I just wanna like scribble all over it or burn it, or rip it. It just annoys me so I kind of, in my head, I like getting a marker pen and like scribbling on it. So that's what drew me to it because I thought I kind of wanted to do the same with the threads and try and create a similar effect through stitch. So that's why I picked that one.

Emma Ok, what about you Catherine?

Catherine I think about how, personally I think about time, because we have no time to, you know, finish quite precisely in detail so I saw my thread in a purple. I like purple and so I chose this one and a very, how can I say, this one is very geometric. So ok I tried to do a geometric pattern but I quite like kind of floral patterns, so I tried to do a certain stitch to make floral. Like floral using geometric, that is why I tried this but.

Emma If you look, all of you, if you look really closely at your stitching and at the fabric, how would you describe, does the stitching blend in? Does it stand out? What do you think you've said by doing that?

Jess Well I think mine stands out, it's quite obvious that like I've added to it. I didn't do it to make it blend in, I did it, for me that was like vandalism. It's like graffiti kind of thing, so I didn't want it to blend in.

Kelly I think I kind of blended a bit but not too much because the colours are a bit more contrasting. So, I think if I did more of it, it would stand out more but because there's only a little bit it does blend in a bit more.

Emma Let's have a, can you show us a bit more clearly? Because you're following the contours of the shape.

Kelly Yeah.

Emma Which is a way of blending in, isn't it? Catherine?

Catherine I quite, how can I say? Embarrassed because when I try this I feel I have total lack of imagination.

Emma No, no, no, not at all.

Catherine So and then when I saw the other, other's work 'oh they have a quite own individuality already' so they tried to, how can I say, try to break this kind of already finished fabric, fabrics and then try to express their individuality while breaking this

fabric.

Emma But perhaps, see let me throw this in, but perhaps it's not about you know it's a choice and, you know, it's not always about making yourself stand out. For Jess it is, it doesn't' always, you know for other people it's not the case and that doesn't mean there's no imagination happening. I just, just in brackets, you know I know we're in an art school here and you're on this course, and you are trained to develop your thinking to be individual and responding creatively to all these different contexts that you find yourself in. So that's, do you think you're conditioned by that thinking and that's why you made that comment?

Catherine How can I say, at the moment we have a kind of limited, you know, thread or time or fabric so, how can I design at the moment, how can I design using this facility and then within the time so.

Emma Maybe it's not about design.

Jess I think you're, the way you kind of work, like you work in a completely opposite way to how I do. Because I just kind of, I kind of just do things and then maybe think about it, like, the process later. I have a reasoning behind what I'm doing. I think about that first but then I kind of just go for it. Whereas you, like you think about the design and kind of, I think maybe if you were to not think so much about the time and like the design you could just like be a bit more free with it and you would have maybe done something that didn't blend in so much. But I think it's because maybe you put, put barriers up by thing oh my god we've only got this amount of time. Whereas I kind of think I'm just gonna do whatever and f*** how much time there is; I'll just see what happens. But I think it's because, maybe you have more respect for textiles whereas I'm a bit more like a vandal.

Emma That's an interesting point.

Catherine I think that is why I feel the others move more freely on their own.

Emma Would you agree with Jess's comment that maybe you have more respect for the textile and you're finding a way in, if you like, to make friends with it without disturbing it? Does that resonate with you? Does that make sense?

Catherine Yeah, how can I say? That's quite, during my coursework I think I quite, I'm not good at making to art like this. This is completely different to work by others or if I make some scraps, fabrics, scrap fabric, I can't manage using these kind of things. But when I design I just try to make from scratch but, so, how do you say, using this or manage scraps, I'm not good at these things. So that makes me very, how do you say, I feel very less imagination.

Emma Less stimulated perhaps.

Catherine Yeah.

Emma What about you Kelly?

Kelly Sorry what do you mean?

Emma It's how we began to talk about perhaps having respect for this as a textile that exists already, and finding a way, I used the expression to make friends with it, or not. I think Jess declared war on it, but as a way of thinking about the intervention, if you like, you 've made. Bearing in mind that you know it's not about great design, it's not about you know that's not what this exercise was about.

Jess I think, it might be a bit of a mixture of both really because there are something's that I really will like. Like this is fine, but then like, like the flowery one I really would not like. So I fully am a bit of both in that respect.

Emma But you chose that one.

Kelly Yeah.

Emma So you chose something that you would be sympathetic with?

Kelly Yeah, I think it's just quite an easy fabric, nothing too much to it. It's quite easy to add to this I think.

Emma No I think it's a very, very interesting topic; it's given me lots of things to think about. Possibly not for this but for, you know, other projects and so on. I think that's an interesting thing.

Kelly Personal taste as well, I think. You see I think this is pretty, not very nice.

Emma But you didn't use that.

Kelly No.

Jess You see I don't really, I think in my opinion I'd rather passionately hate or absolutely love something.

Kelly Yeah.

Jess Like I look at that brown one and I just think, I don't really think anything of that. Whereas that green one I absolutely detest because I absolutely hate green. I absolutely hate it. So like, that makes me angry. I want to stamp on that.

Kelly This one here I think is just horrible, because it's just too bright and...

Jess You see I like that because that's really childish.

Kelly I don't like that one.

Jess But like the brown I generally stay away from because I don't really think anything of brown.

Kelly I hate brown as well.

Jess I can't even say I hate it, I just don't think anything of it.

Emma Did you both make that by just looking at it?

Kelly Yeah, I hate brown.

Emma Touch it.

Jess You see if I hated it I might have chosen it because at least I have some emotion towards it.

Kelly Yeah and that feels pretty horrible as well.

Jess I don't feel anything towards that, and that annoys me more than like absolutely, because if I absolutely hate something then I'll try and put my stamp on it and I'll either like paint over it, stitch over it, cut it open, like destroy it basically and make it into something that I actually like. Whereas if I look at something and I'm just like don't really think anything then I won't even touch it, because I think well what's the point? If I don't have any emotional kind of response towards it then there's no point really.

Emma What about you Catherine?

Catherine I used to make print using my drawing so usually I bought, you know, completely blank fabric. Not like this, so for me using this is not original for me. So actually I hate, I hate using these kind of fabrics because I wanted to create from scratch.

Emma Something blank.

Catherine Something blank yes.

Emma Like this.

Catherine Like this yes, yeah, yeah.

Jess You see I prefer destroying things.

Emma I think this is really interesting, I think we've hit on something here and it's really interesting.

Jess I don't like blank things because I find that clinical. I'd rather take something I absolutely hate and then destroy it and make it my own, or something that I love Blank things to me are clinical, there's no life in it.

Kelly But you can add to them.

Jess Yeah I know but I like destroying things because I like recycling things basically. I like taking something that already exists and then turning it into something else. Like that interests me a hell of a lot more than taking something that is pretty much next to nothing anyway and trying to make something from it. I think that's a lot harder and it doesn't interest me as much. I like

the idea of like one man's trash is another man's treasure. That's kind of, that's what excites me, taking something that someone else might have discarded and then making it something precious for me.

Kelly When I think about designs I just research some of the other things, not textiles or not drawing. Something architecture or natural things which is completely different form this designing things and also why did they do this. I think why did they do this, why did they make this? There is a reason or something method or how can I say, critical thing to make to construct these things.

Emma Do you mean the architecture?

Kelly Yeah architecture or unnatural things why they have veins, why they have you know how can I say, so this is not, I think, resources for me to designing to make something from scratch. So that is for me, that is original, for me.

Emma No, that's very interesting.

Jess Well I think that because I love theory so much and I, I've always believed that like without history there can be like no contemporary. So I like the idea of taking things that already exist and like turning it into something else because I think if you're not aware of what has come before then how can you create anything that is, I don't know, original or interesting.

Emma Is that sense of belonging or continuity or, you know, being a part of something that went before you? Is that, would you describe that as something emotional or would it be something physical or would it be something conceptual?

Jess What do you mean?

Emma This, the way you're describing, you like, you like the idea that something has already existed, if you like. It's already had a life already and that you're then going to make something new from it and you're interested in theory and that there is no, nothing now, nothing contemporary without all the history that's gone before it. That's setting a scene of sort of that everything comes from something, that there's this great sort of rolling continuity of life, if you like, that you sense yourself to be a part of and to reinvent to some degree to make something new out of. But to be a part of that process of taking from what was before and then taking it into the future, that sort of wave action, if you like, of time that unfolds and leaps forward. Is that, for you, is that something that is to do with an emotional sense of yourself, a place? Or is it more to do, is conceptual? Is it abstract? Or is it physical? Is it more about a sense of things being present that you use?

Jess I think it's emotional really, because I think everything I do comes from the heart. Like, I'm very in tune with my emotions and everything, I feel like everything I do in my life is like linked to my work. Like my work is at the heart of everything,

everything that I think everyone does is linked. Like nothing is kind of, like my work is not separate to like play, it's all linked together and I feel like a strong emotional attachment to my work and my past and everything I've, I don't have any regrets. There's nothing I regret, it's all, I kind of take what's happened to me in the past and bring it forward into my work, and I feel like each day I'm trying to make myself a better person and my work kind of helps me to do that.

Emma And do you have a sense that that's part of a larger past? Or is it just your own past?

Jess I do feel like it, yeah it is part of a larger past as well because going back to the whole theory thing, like I really, I'm into art history and I like theory and I like, I kind of, I have people that inspire me and I feel kind of a sense of attachment to them, to a certain degree. So I feel like I'm part of a bigger picture and that's something I feel really strongly about. Like I'm interested in history and there's lots of men and women that I kind of feel a connection to and respect and I admire and I, they're people that I constantly go back to in my work and just in life in general. So, it's definitely a bigger picture, it's not just to do with my life and what I've been through. It's what other people have been through at different times that I can also relate to.

Emma And how do you make that connection? How do you, that relationship that you have, that you construct, how does that manifest itself?

Jess I'm trying to think of an example like recently, well I read like Patti Smith brought an autobiography and I'd never really like listened to her music or anything, like I knew who she was but I'd never really been that interested and I think I read a review about this book and I thought oh that sounds quite interesting. So I bought the book and I read and, I don't know, it really like affected me. I felt like I really could relate to her and it was, you know, the book was about her and her relationship with like this guy that she was with, Robert Mapplethorpe; he was like a photographer and how they were kind of like soul mates. They were like best friends and soul mates and I could, I don't know, I just could really relate to her words and I think if something strikes a raw nerve like that, I kind of, I don't know. That made me then go and listen to her music and like read her poetry and not only that but I kind of I'm so nerdy that like things that she's into, I'm kind of trying to like find out more about.

Emma And how do you respond to that? Do you do something?

Jess Yeah I like, again back to research I guess, I go on like, I read books, I look at magazines all the time, blogs, internet, go to exhibitions.

Emma Do you make work?

Jess Yeah I do, like my work is inspired by like, I think yeah things like that. Anything that makes me go wow.

Emma Does it then feed into your work?

Jess Yeah my theory, like I, all the things that I love that are like theory based, like inspire me creatively. Like they're both linked, they're not separate, I don't see it as like there's the stuff that I research and I'm really like nerdy about it and interested in, and there's my creative work that's completely separate. Like, without, I feel that without the theory my creative side wouldn't be half as strong and I feel like, without the creative outlook for the things that interest me, like, theoretically, I don't know, it wouldn't, I wouldn't feel so passionate about it, I guess, if I didn't have that creative outlet as well to kind of give a bit of myself to, add a bit of myself to maybe the life experiences of other people.

Emma That's an interesting way of saying it. Ok. Does that make sense for you Kelly?

Kelly Yeah, definitely.

Emma How do you make it manifest?

Kelly I think, I don't know, at the moment I'm trying to link my work a bit more to, to things that are like outside of work. If that makes sense? So, like, I don't know how to explain.

Emma Think of an example of a piece of work and unpick it backwards.

Kelly It's really tricky.

Emma It is, it's again this putting into words isn't it?

Kelly Yeah.

Emma Is it something that you do, you feel you do without thinking?

Kelly My work?

Emma No, making those types of connections in your work that you, I suppose what I'm trying to get at is, you imagine yourself, you are in a time, a timeframe which is part of a bigger picture. Whatever that shape that might be, because the shape of time is a very complex thing, but you are connected in some way, which is what we've just talked about, that you make connections through what you're interested in to places, people, inspiring people, works, other work, music, writings, whatever it may be, and then what do you do? You know, you then do something with that you respond, you retaliate, you make some kind of connection, and does that connection manifest itself in what you make, in what you do? Is that something you do consciously? Or?

Kelly Yeah, I think, well I don't think so much consciously, not consciously because I just do what comes really.

Emma And do you realise after the event that you can see a connection, or?

Kelly I don't know, I just, it's hard. I think as you, as you're working through the connections kind of link themselves sometimes.

Emma Ok, no it is hard one. Well shall we stop there because I think we're all feeling a bit tired.

Jess This is like group therapy.

Catherine Sometimes these, I think, how can I say, opinions are really different from mine.

Emma That's absolutely fine.

Catherine Because I think of nationality or age.

Emma And interests and all sorts of reasons, that's why it's good to have a few in the group, but yeah ok well let’s stop there, I'll turn this off.

End of discussion.

Appendix VIII: the patchwork quilting group

Interviews and observation

The patchwork quilting group participating in this research is an independently organized group based in south London. They meet twice a month in their homes, taking it in turns to host group meetings, talks and workshop sessions. At the time of my meetings with them for this research, there were 25 members in total – all women – middle class and of varied nationalities. The youngest member is in her late 30s, and the eldest – the founding member – is in her late 80s. Some of the members work full-time, some work part-time, most are retired. All are committed to improving their craft; of those I met, 6 exhibit their work regularly, 4 have taught related classes, and all make work to give as gifts or commemorate special life events. Although, of those who exhibit their work, some will sell work and take commissions, none describe themselves as 'professional' quilters. Over a period of eleven months from May 2007 - April 2008 I met 13 members during three of their group meetings, which typically lasted for two hours. (4 May 2007, 5 October 2007, 4 April 2008) and visited two of their exhibitions (8 November 2006, 9 November 2008). I observed and documented them at work using photography and video and interviewed 6 of them individually in their homes. Transcripts of the interviews follow.

Photo: author.

Reference is made throughout Chapter Three of the thesis text.

The patchwork quilters: interview topic guide

PERSONAL HISTORIES

Name

Address

Tel

Email

Age

Nationality

Work – full-time, part-time, what sort of job

Children – how many, what ages

Education

Have you ever worked (paid employment) in sewing, crafts, textiles at some point?

PREFERRED STITCH CRAFT TECHNIQUES

What techniques do you use? Why a particular one?

By hand or machine?

WHAT IS BEING MADE?

Do you buy kits or design your own pieces?

What sort of objects or pieces do you like making?

LEARNING

Where and how did you learn the technique and skills? Who from? At home, at school, in an evening class, at college, self-taught, from a friend, or a member of the family? How long ago?

Have you taught others to do it? As a paid teacher? A family member? A volunteer for another organisation? Why volunteer?

WHY DO YOU DO IT?

Why do you make things? Why do you stitch/sew/embroider?

Do you see it as a leisure activity?

What is it that you enjoy? What do you get out of it? (Satisfaction, fulfilment, enjoyment, challenge of mastering a skill, necessity, to make/create, to fill time, occupy themselves, not be idle, worthy cause, feel good, therapeutic, distraction from stress or a problem, to be a part of a group/community)

How does it make you feel? Does it correspond with a certain state of mind?

Does it make you happy to do this work?

WHERE?

Where do you do it? And in what context? What are the conditions in which you do this? Do you do it on your own, with friends, family or in a class?

At home at friends' homes studio community centre educational institution elsewhere

Where do you keep and store your work?

GROUP INVOLVEMENT

What sort of activities are you involved in? Are you a member of a group or guild or exhibition group? Do you meet regularly? Where do you meet? What role do you play in this group? Is this important for you? What impact does it have on your work? Is it beneficial? How does this make you feel?

TIME SPENT

How long have you been doing it for?

How much time in a week do you spend on your craft? Less than 4 hrs 4-8hrs 8-12hrs 12-18hrs 18-24hrs more than 24hrs

What time of day do you usually work at your craft?

Would you like to do more if you could?

What kind of things prevent you from doing more?

SKILL

What do you think you are good at? What are you not good at?

What are your criteria for interesting projects, or things worth making? (Time it takes, technique used, level of difficulty, price of kit and/or material)

What do you find difficult? What skills have you mastered? How do you approach these "challenges"? How do you practise? Is "doing it properly" important to you? Do you follow the "rules"? And if so, why do you think this is important? Do you unpick and redo work if it is not well done? Do you check the back of your work? What does it look like? What should it look like?

What has been your most challenging piece to work on? Why? What were the challenges? And how did you overcome them? Is this satisfying or a bore?

If using a kit, do you follow the instructions? Or do you adapt them to suit your own tastes? How and why adapt?

Do you experiment? In what way? What excites you about experimenting?

WHO ARE YOU MAKING FOR?

Who, or for what reason are you making things for? Privately for yourself, or for a potential viewer? Or for gifts?

Yourself Members of the family friends to sell to exhibit

FINISHED PIECES

What do you do with your work when it is finished? Do you like it? Are you pleased with it? Is it special?

Is your work used in anyway? (bedcovers, rugs, cuhions …) Do you like your work to be used? Either by yourself or by those you give it to? Does this give you pleasure? Does it make the making worthwhile?

RECEPTION OF WORK

How is your sewing/stitching perceived by others? According to response – why do you think that is?

What sort of reception do you get for your work? What do members of your family think? Friends? Fellow stitchers? What sort

of encouragement do you get? Or do people make jokes? If given as a gift, is it accepted politely but not displayed or used? According to response – why do you think that is?

DESCRIBE YOUR WORK

How would you describe your work? Do you consider it to be a creative activity? Do you consider your work to be valuable? In what way? Do you consider yourself to be an artist? A craftsperson? A maker? A sewing lady? Or none of these? What definition would you give to yourself and your work?

(Try to get to expand on this, to get their opinions on the art/craft/design debate – are they a part of it? Is it a question they ask? Is this status important to them)

At conception is the work thought of as an artwork? Is it intended to be a work of art? What makes a piece art? If not, what is it thought of as?

Do you reflect on your work? Do you have a framework within which you work? What are you trying to achieve in your work? Is this important to you?

MEANING

What do you "say" through this work? What is being expressed? Does your work have meaning for you? Can you tell me about a piece of work – why you did it, in what circumstances? What does it mean (if it does have meaning)? What does it represent?

INSPIRATION/INFLUENCES/IDEAS

Where do you get your ideas from? Do you come up with ideas of your own, make your own designs? Or do you work from kits?

Do you copy drawings or pictures?

What books and/or magazines do you read/look at for inspiration?

What kind of stitch work do you like and why?

Do you go to exhibitions of textile work? What influential exhibitions have you seen?

Whose work do you admire? And why?

What do you think of textile work shown in a gallery space? Is it different to what you may have at home? What makes it different?

DISPLAY/SALE OF WORK

Do you exhibit or display your work – at home in private, or in public exhibitions? Do you enjoy showing your work? Where have you exhibited – what sort of places?

Do you sell your work?

Do you make things for raffles, or charity? Why?

RECORDING/DOCUMENTING OF WORK

Do you keep a record of your work? – photos, drawings, designs, swatches of fabric or colour samples? If so why? And where do you keep them? Do you show people?

EXPENDITURE

Do you buy material specifically for a project, or do you use what you have to hand? Where do you store materials? How much do you have? Do you dye fabrics or yarns for a project?

How much do you spend a year on materials, kits, courses, workshops, books, magazines, exhibitions, visits?

Notes[1] of meeting with Sally

Date: 3 June 2007

Location: Sally's home.

Duration of meeting: 1 hour 45 minutes

Sally is Canadian and retired.

1) Amish inspired quilt. (Photo)

2) Quilt made for 50th wedding anniversary. (Photo)

Based on a trip to India: quilt inspired by Rangoli sand drawings made by women. Lay out a grid of dots and a line is drawn round them (Rangoli technique). Sally made copies of these Rangolis in her sketchbook. From Gujarat, motifs of birds, flowers and butterflies. But she liked the abstracts better. They probably have meanings but she doesn't know them.

She did not design it on paper beforehand. She started in the centre of the quilt and it grew outwards. The quilted squares are a grid. The small motifs she added in afterwards. They are not symmetrical.

It has not been used because the cat would damage it.

How do you mark up the patterns?

She draws them out on to the fabric with pencil. It doesn't show after the quilting is done but some people are funny about this.

It took her 6 months to do (the quilt).

3) Celtic knot design. Made of fine thread and is fine, intricate quilting. Used Chinese and African fabrics – blue and white batik/ resist. Took her 1 year to make. (Photo)

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1 Sally requested I took notes as she did not want our conversation to be recorded.

Where do your ideas come from?

“Don’t know. They just do”.

She used to make jewellery. Got the Celtic knot design from a book.

The first quilt she made, she learnt from a friend who teaches embroidery.

For a long time she only used plain colours.

Less is more.

Hand quilted work.

Design process: she will photocopy fabric to work out what goes well, especially when there is not much fabric to play with.

4) Quilt made with fabric from India – a simple nine patch. (Photo)

5) Another earlier one, made of squares. (Photo)

She uses the quilts on beds. And gives to children and grandchildren. But will give no more to one particular child and their partner as they ruined one she gave them.

Also gives them to Linus groups or hospitals (Linus is a USA charity for disadvantaged children).

She doesn’t want her quilts to be raffled.

She looks for fabric with images of toys and animals to use for children’s quilts.

2 x 2 m is the maximum size she makes.

She usually works out the design of the quilt on the bed or on the floor. Now she can also do it on the wall as she has a “sticky” fabric that you can place pieces on a bit like a vertical fuzzy felt/cork board. You can use it a bit like an easel and compose your work then stand back from it and view.

Her mother taught her to dressmake when she was a teenager.

She (Sally) couldn't bear to throw away scraps. She started making things with it but not necessarily patchwork.

In 1975 she started making patchwork when was in the States and got some fabric. But she never managed to do a whole quilt.

6) She made clothes (quilted coats and jackets). (Photo)

Her fabric stash is sorted by colour in baskets in her bedroom.

Some come from John Gillow, who has stands at exhibitions selling "ethnic" fabrics at affordable prices.

She did the City and Guilds embroidery course in 1985-89.

7) Made a wall hanging and did a beginner patchwork course. It was there that she met a member of the patchwork quilting group who recruited her to join in 1986. (Photo)

8) An appliqué wall panel hangs above her bed – an Islamic mosaic pattern. (Photo)

9 + 10) Other wall hangings are made from patterns inspired by Chester black and white houses, and Venetian tiles. (Photo)

She has exhibited at the Birmingham and Malvern quilt shows, and at the patchwork quilters' biannual exhibition.

What do you think about quilts being shown in an exhibition?

There is thought, care, planning and artistry in quilts to show and put on display. Yes, a good thing to have exhibits of quilts in galleries.

She makes a distinction between quilts for beds and wall hangings. A quilt on a bed has to withstand wear. You need to have enough turnings (of fabric on pieces) to help prevent it falling apart. Use cotton, not silks.

As for wall hangings, the sky's the limit regarding technique, and you can just stick things on top of one another. You don't need to worry so much about it being used.

She gets fabrics from all sorts of places – recycled from old clothes, from patchwork shows and shops, from trips abroad to places like China, India, Nepal.

For children's quilts she uses bold prints of animals, toys, instruments.
She has fabrics piled up in her bedroom.

Do you dye your own fabrics?
It is a big trend at the moment. She has done indigo dyeing and batik, but pretty much stopped now.

She doesn't often go on courses.

11) Prime number hanging. Of prime numbers in 1 – 100. She saw a man on TV had done it in cross-stitch. Copied idea. It was not difficult to work out design but it was to stitch it. (Photo)

She shares fabrics with other members, for example if a particular colour is needed, or small prints, or a certain type of fabric.

She thinks a quilt is not good enough when it is not vertical, or doesn't look right, or the design isn't quite right.

Her most challenging quilt is:
A local Anglo-Indian friend asked her to make a quilt after her parents had died. There were saris, housedresses, ties, stuff she had had made, her daughter's T-shirts, silks, cottons, canvas…. It was to remember her parents by. It was a commission and she (Sally) got paid for it. It was 80" x 80". Made out of squares using exclusively her friend's fabrics. The challenge was that they were all different materials. She enjoyed doing it.

She still does some jewellery too.

Some people might say her execution is not brilliant, but her design is good. She enjoys designing, and feels quite free. Working things out.

She doesn't really like doing joint things but does them all the same. She doesn't like doing other peoples' designs.
She did not learn design on a course. She draws and gets her inspiration from travel.

She is happy to sell small things she has made – bags and small quilts. But would not do that just for the sake of quilting. No one makes a living by just making quilts to sell. People teach as well.

What do you get out of quilting?
The satisfaction of a manifest of something in your mind. She has hardly ever copied something. And only once ever used a kit.
Even in the beginning she was drawing her own patterns.

Quilting is excellent for people with the ambition to do big things.
It's curious how people interested in crafts imitate oil painting: a quilt is like working on a canvas.

Sally shows me her wooden sewing box. Her mother and grandmother used the same sewing box too.

She does some work most days, 4 or 5 days a week, but not a full working day. She doesn't feel she has to work at it all the time.
She prefers to do a bit each day and not stay up half the night to finish something in time for an exhibition.

She doesn't sew abroad, and does not take sewing with her when travelling. She doesn't really make small things and travels light.
She draws instead. You need to concentrate to draw – finds it quite tiring compared to stitching.

Quilting – you just have to get on with it. To sit down and do it is the only way to get it done. It gets tedious after a while (hand quilting). She listens to the radio when sewing, especially when quilting by hand.
She does both hand and machine quilting.

The children's quilts for charity she places in a different category (to her more personal ones).

She made her first bed quilt (double) 25 years ago. Her family and friends associate quilting with her.

She studied English at university.

Sewing was a "thrift" activity when the children were small.

She has done the odd workshop, and did a painting course for a few years. And did the City and Guilds embroidery course. She is self taught, and learnt from her mother. "I know how to sew" so didn't learn patchwork on a course. You pick things up from other people too. She goes to demonstrations of techniques.

Some people are very rigid and don't like doing something new.
You learn new things when working in a group quilt.

There are different ways of doing things, even simple things, always. There's not really a right or a wrong way.
"Using a needle is almost as personal as handwriting."

Would you describe yourself as an art quilter?
She is unsure. She does not belong to an art quilt group.

She is not into dyeing her own fabric, burning or slashing etc. But occasionally does some indigo dyeing.

She thinks that quilting really ought to be about quilting rather than multimedia. Sometimes there is too much on a quilt.
"Everything but the kitchen sink."

She has a fascination for India and Indian decorative art. Her ex-daughter-in-law is Indian (born in the UK) but never been to India. Although she is very Indian in her person.

To begin with she talked about how she and the other quilters are privileged in that they don't have children to care for, or ill family members. Many of them are retired. They have time and energy to devote to their patchwork.

They share knowledge – she mentioned phoning Judith up to ask her about a gadget that makes machine quilting easier.

Sally hand quilts her own work. She mentioned that some people, who can afford to, get their hand quilting done by someone else, and pay them.

The tablecloth had peacocks on it. She bought it in Nepal. She half collects (not really seriously) peacock motifs as her maiden name was Peacock. She likes to cut them out and use as motifs.

There are so many craft things and activities you could do. You'd end up spending all your time making all sorts of things that you have no use for.

End of conversation

Transcript of interview with Ruth

Date: 8 June 2007

Location: Ruth's home.

Duration of meeting: 2 hours 30 minutes

Ruth is British and works part-time.

Emma OK, so today's the 8th of June and I'm with Ruth …. I wasn't sure how you pronounced your last name.

Ruth Nobody knows how to pronounce it. People go, it's Mrs … and then you know that they want to say "cookie" because the "Cs" are hard as in English, but it's Polish and so the Cs are soft.

Emma Right.

Ruth And, so there's this hesitation and I always have to jump in and rescue them because I feel embarrassed for them.

Emma That's very good of you. What's the Polish connection then?

Ruth My husband's parents were from Poland. They came here after the war.

Emma Right.

Ruth Um… It was a deliberate choice. They chose to come and live in England thinking that their children would stand a better chance. And I'm sure that's the case.

Emma Yes.

Ruth Three children, my husband is the eldest, and there's another boy, and a girl. And it's interesting that he considers himself to be English. He was born in London, he's lived here all his life. His brother and his sister, I think, consider themselves to be Polish.

Emma Really?

Ruth I think so.

Emma Gosh, that's interesting.

Ruth Isn't it. But I think that's more a personality thing perhaps, he used to say. So, we're stuck with the name.

Emma No, well that's great.

Ruth I agree that I married him.

Emma Ok. Well, basically what I'd like to talk to you about is how you began to get interested in textiles, how you started to sew, and what sort of things you enjoy doing in particular, and why… really just, you know, we'll see how the convers…

Ruth My sewing history.

Emma Your sewing history. And your sewing actuality as well.

Ruth Ok. I thought you might be interested in that and so I've been thinking about how I started. And I think it was the last year of infant school. You see, this is an educational process that is really quite unknown to young women of your age. I'm sixty. So, last year of infant school, I would probably have been seven-ish, perhaps?

Emma Yes.

Ruth The grades are different now, aren't they. It's before you go from baby school into primary school. And then you're in primary school until eleven, plus, as it was then, and then you go to grammar school. So it was the last year before I went up into the bigger school. And I was taught basic embroidery stitches. As were we all in this class. And so at the age of whatever I was, seven, six or seven, I learnt how to do lazy daisy stitch, and cross stitch, and running stitch, all these stitches, and I have always sewed from then on.

Emma Did the boys learn as well? Were there boys in your class?

Ruth D'you know, there must have been boys in the class, and I can't remember. They must have done, because there wasn't an alternative. There wasn't woodwork for boys, as there probably is nowadays.

Emma Well, when I … 'cause I grew up in the countryside in Somerset, so I have a very rural upbringing, and our village school was…

Ruth Village school.

Emma … tiny. And quite old-fashioned in the sense it was a very old-fashioned building, and it was, you know, it was run still on very old curricula type activities. To a certain degree, I mean relevant to the day obviously, but, a lot of people came from farming communities and so the boys were already working on the farms, and on, I think it was on Wednesday afternoons, the girls did sewing and the boys played football.

Ruth (laughing)

Emma So that's even my generation!

Ruth That's right. What a gender …

Emma I know, so it's, you know, it's been sort of perpetuated in spite of itself almost.

Ruth Yes.

Emma Because I don't know now.

Ruth Does it happen now? Girls don't do sewing in schools now do they?

Emma I don't know. No, I don't know that … I mean I don't know this, I have no confirmation, it's only a hunch 'cause I don't have children and I've got lots of friends with children but they're not in England. As far as I'm aware skills based sewing is not necessarily taught in schools. Perhaps what is taught now is sort of more art education and design with fabric.

Ruth Yes, textile art, rather than how to sew on a button. But from then I found some of the things that date back to my early life. So, that was my introduction to sewing…

Emma Oh, lovely.

Ruth And… And I always did … I started off doing surface embroidery, and this is one of the things that harks back to that time. I suppose I was, oh I don't know, it could've been anything, 10, 11, 12 whatever. And my… we didn't have any money, you know things were… it was after the war, things were tight, and my mother had me and my younger sister, and it was the days when when women married, they stopped working. So she didn't work until long afterwards when she went back to office work as a typist. She used to have a woman's magazine and there would be offers in women's magazines, so …

Emma Can you remember …?

Ruth Woman's Own.

Emma Woman's Own.

Ruth … linen tray cloth, printed with the pattern, and so she sent for the linen tray cloth with the printed pattern, and I embroidered it. And look it's still … I think it got caught somewhere, I think it got put close to a gas flame, look, nevertheless I'm still terribly attached to it. This is my beautiful lazy daisy stitch with a stitch down the middle, and, I can't see, are these French knots? And little bits and pieces. That is still in use on the tray.

Emma So, it lasts.

Ruth It lasts. My mother used to say "There's no point in putting all that work in if it's not linen, you know, this one's only rayon, it won't last." So the rayon ones were shooed. Only the ones, only the offers of linen cloths. And this was another one. (shows me piece) I did this when I was in … I was in hospital when I was fifteen, I had something wrong with my ear and I eventually had a mastoid operation on it. I was in hospital for a fortnight, at fifteen. A fortnight in hospital, it was ghastly. And this was another offer from a magazine, probably the same one, Woman's Own. Linen cheval set. You know, this is for your dressing table. I don't even think women have dressing tables any more. And you have something in the middle like this, and something on either side. And this is cut work. And I did this for my mother while I was in hospital.

Emma Really.

Ruth She had it on her dressing table. I should think almost all of, when she died, I took it off her dressing table and washed it, and because it had been there for such a long time, and she had things on it, and the areas where things were ... beyond, you can see, has been bleached by the sun. I can't get those marks out.

Emma No.

Ruth But she was terribly attached to it. And because of that I rescued it from her effects. I knew my father would not particularly want it, so … So that dates back, what, what's fifteen from sixty? Forty-five years. And as you say, they last, don't they. This is linen, hand embroidered linen with DMC floss. I'm sure DMC would be delighted to know this.

Emma I'm sure they would. It's beautifully done.

Ruth Thank you. My father cut it out, you know, cut the linen out of the holes.

Emma Right. How did he cut them out?

Ruth With very fine scissors.

Emma I was going to say, was it scissors or a knife?

Ruth Swiss scissors. No, scissors. You haven't got the control with a knife. You need a pair of, you need a pair of scissors with a very fine point. Which is sharp at the point.

Emma Yes, yes … Beautiful work.

Ruth And then, that was, it was just surface embroidery. I think that was pretty well all that was around at that time …

Emma Service embroidery?

Ruth Surface.

Emma Surface embroidery.

Ruth Surface embroidery. Embroidery stitches on the surface of the linen, rather than needlepoint, which engages with a grid.

Emma Yes.

Ruth Which I got into much later. And I knitted during my teenage years. And not much more than that. University. O levels, A levels, university… and then, you know, life clicked in and I didn't do any of these things, I think. My father made us clothes when we were young girls. When I left home, um, I bought things. I didn't have the time or the inclination to sew. And I don't suppose I really got interested again into doing anything until I was married and had my own home, and I made curtains, and cushion covers, and then I decided, it must have been in magazines at the time although I don't remember. I became quite interested in learning more about different types of embroidery and I joined a class at, run by … was it the Embroiderers' Guild?

Emma Could be.

Ruth What's the … do you remember, what's the name of the guild that's now at Hampton Court?

Emma The Embroiderers' Guild.

Ruth The Embroiderers' Guild. Because, at that time they had their offices at Princes Gate, just up from the Albert Hall. I worked in London, and I went for an evening class, whenever it was, 7 o'clock until 9 o'clock at these offices at Princes Gate. And I was taught there by a young girl called Ann Robinson who later became the assistant to the principal at the school. Very nice young girl, and, and there I learned all forms of needlepoint … and counted cross-stitch. And counted cross-stitch long before cross-stitch became popular. I suppose, when I say long before, five or six years before counted cross-stitch became popular, and then all of a sudden there was an explosion of counted cross-stitch, and there were magazines … d'you, were you, you were in France weren't you?

Emma When was this?

Ruth I can tell you 'cause I'm … I can tell you because some of this… the counted cross-stitch goes back to this. (looks out a pattern magazine) I'm hoping it's got a date on it. June '91.

Emma Right.

Ruth So it must have been mid-eighties. Mid to late eighties.

Emma That's when you started the classes.

Ruth Yes, yes.

Emma And what were you working as in London? What were you doing?

Ruth I was a PA to a man who had his own printing company, he had 2 or 3 printing shops in London. And, it was a relief to go and do something artistic, rather than typing, and all that other paraphernalia.

Emma What did you study? You said you went to university.

Ruth Yes, I did Maths and English…. Um…. No, I didn't do Maths and English, I did Maths and Physics. Isn't that funny. I was going to be an English teacher when I was a child, and of course I didn't do English at university. I did Maths and Physics, and lasted 2 years … and couldn't stand it any longer (laughs). And went home. My parents had moved out. I was born in Birmingham, on the outskirts of Birmingham. My parents had moved to Somerset.

Ruth I moved on from this kind of work, which was quite stark.

Emma That's right, you'd started …

Ruth Life went on.

Emma You were working in London.

Ruth I was working in London…

Emma And you started doing lessons at the Embroiderers' Guild at Princes Gate.

Ruth That's right. Yes. Where I'd learnt how to do various forms of needlepoint …

Emma And counted cross-stitch.

Ruth … and counted cross-stitch. And I started taking… I started making things. I started taking photographs of the things I had made, because ...

Emma Yes, why?

Ruth Because I gave them away.

Emma Right.

Ruth And the same is true even now that I have very few, I've got a couple of quilts. I've got the very first quilt that I made. I've saved that. And the one that you saw hanging up. And there's another little one downstairs. But most of the work that I have done over the years, I've given away. And …

Emma Who do you give them away to?

Ruth Oh, all sorts of people. All sorts of people. Um… my nephew got one, the children of some other friends. I make the quilt, which is the fun part for me. The fun part for me is making the quilt: creating it, sewing it, putting it together, quilting it, finishing it off. I've had my fun with it. I've totally had my fun with it, and really by that stage I don't necessarily want to see it ever again. So I think, who would like this? Sometimes when I'm making the quilt, the person who it's destined for becomes plain. Ah, I know who this quilt is for. And so then it goes to this person. And, it doesn't really matter whether they like it or not, they get it nonetheless.

Emma Do you know what happens to your quilts once you've given them away? Do people use them? Or …

Ruth Yes.

Emma …what sort of things…

Ruth Yes, I made …um …I made this quilt … Do you want to go on to quilting?

Emma Yes, let's carry on, and you know, we can always come back.

Ruth I did, I did a lot of …um… needlepoint and counted cross-stitch. I made cross-stitch pictures, I've got, um… some samplers … no, they're not called samplers … alphabet samplers. And cross-stitch samplers hanging in the guest room. You can have a look at them later. And I made cross-stitch cards, I made little pictures for people, I sent them all these things, and … right …. here is the connection. Here is the connection. We were on holiday in Yorkshire with my parents: John and I, and my parents. And they'd hired a cottage. John would remember the name of the place. Probably Scroingham. Not far from York. We'd gone into York for the day, and we were mooching around and came across a needlepoint, a needlework shop. Of course I always go into a needlepoint shop, just to have a look around, buy some threads and whatever. And at the time there was starting to be cross-stitch magazines around. And my mother picked one up and bought it for me. And she said, she was looking through it, and she said, "Oh, Ruth. Look what I've found!" And what she'd found was that. (shows me picture in magazine)

Emma Ah. An album quilt.

Ruth The Heirloom quilt. Well, it's, yes, it's an album quilt. Really to… now that I know more about quilting. Based on Baltimore designs, really. It's very sort of Baltimore style. But each block is cross-stitched rather than made: appliqué as it would be, or patch or whatever. And I thought, oh this is fab. This is just absolutely marvellous. And so I had to have the whole… I had to get in touch with these people, I had to subscribe to the magazine so that I could have every one of these patterns … (counting) … 24 blocks with that amount of cross-stitch on them. I think I've done about five.

Emma A lot of work.

Ruth I'd bought the linen. This is on Aida and that, but I use linen. Um… count… you know, fine linen, counted cross. And they take forever. And, but I'm still working on them. But when I eventually stopped working for this man … um … I went working part time for a while. And then I stopped working altogether when I was fifty. And I thought, I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to join a patchwork class. So that when I get to the stage of making my 24 blocks, I'm going to know what to do. So, I joined a patchwork class at Morley College.

Emma Where's that?

Ruth Morley College is in between Elephant & Castle and Borough stations. It's one of the Westminster colleges.

Emma Right.

Ruth There's a gallery there where they often have quilt exhibitions. The contemporary art quilt group will … exhibit there. And it was I think the first year that Carole Hart, who was the tutor, had a class. I joined it. I turned up on the day. And I've virtually learned all I knew from doing I think three terms, and then perhaps another couple of terms with Carole Hart at this class and this is what I made. (gets out quilt to show me) This is my first quilt, and I learned… this is what we did. We made different blocks … using different techniques.

Emma Ah, yes.

Ruth As I say, I learnt how to do curved seams, I learnt how to do needlepointing appliqué, and we made all our own templates. I learnt how to do half-square triangles, Hawaiian, um … tumbling blocks, log cabin …

Emma Crazy.

Ruth Crazy. And I learnt how to sash it, I learnt the importance of the quarter inch seam. I learnt how to put things together. And …

Emma Sash it. What does that mean?

Ruth That's the sashing. (points to it on the quilt)

Emma Oh right.

Ruth (pointing out) That's a sash. That's the post. That's a sash and post … layout. That's the border. There's another border. It was… I was entranced by the whole thing. And of course, I had got scrap material. This bright pink was a shift dress that I'd bought when I was at college in, well you can tell, the summer of whenever, those colours …

Emma Yes, yes.

J That I loved to pieces and couldn't bear to get rid of, but of course I couldn't get into it. But I'd still got the dress, I cut it up. This, this was a Laura Ashley dressing gown that my husband, he wasn't my husband then, bought me when he was going to take me to Paris for my first dirty weekend away with this man, and he bought me this fancy dressing gown, which of course I never wore, and, and I cut it up. This quilt is just filled with memories. This is all scrap material. Of course I had to buy some. I didn't have any plains. I had to buy something that was plain. It's absolutely the wrong blue, but it doesn't really matter.

Emma No, it's lovely.

Ruth This is simply a quilt full of, of memories. That was the material I used for a dressing gown later on. That was another dress. That was another summer dress. And so on, and so on.

Emma It's beautifully, beautifully made.

Ruth Well that's very sweet of you to say that, because if you actually… I was very pleased it all went together as well as it did. And then I had to learn to quilt it. And I found the quilting absolutely terrible. I'm very much improved with the quilting now but I couldn't get the hang of it. It was the most difficult thing in the world for me.

Emma What did you find difficult about it?

Ruth I couldn't get my stitches small enough. If you look at the size of these stitches, they're pretty well like tacking stitches. I'm trying to get them small enough and to go through to the back, I was under the impression at the time that the stitches at the back and the front had to be the same. Actually they're not. If you look at anybody else's quilting, the stitches underneath are much smaller, but nobody told me that. And there was me struggling to get them the same both sides. I remember, it was, this must have been… what … when did I finish it? (reading label on back of quilt) Ruth's first quilt…1997. This is a south facing garden, and I'd set this up as my work room. I had this on the iron… you have the ironing board low down. I was sitting here, and I had this on it, on the ironing board and on me. And it was the summer, and the sun was shining through. I was, I was probably having a hot flush with the menopause, and the sweat was running off my fingers so much that I couldn't hold the needle, and I thought, oh blow this for a game. I don't think I can do this anymore! (laughter)

Emma But you didn't give up?

Ruth But I didn't give up. And I found a milieu in which I was very comfortable. So, that probably explains why you've got five of these, of these cross-stitch squares. Not a sufficient amount to make a quilt because now I sew, and I make quilts. But I

don't just make quilts. I make all sorts of other things as well. So …

Emma What is it do you think that you specially enjoy about making patchwork quilts?

Ruth I just… That was something else I was thinking about knowing you were coming, I was trying to work out, what is the pleasure in it for me. And I like making scrap. So I think, what I'm … what is the satisfying aspect is recycling and using up. I always tell people that my middle name is thrift. I hate waste. And I have, I have a box in my cupboard of scraps … I wonder what I did with those green scraps?... I'm sorting out some ….

Emma Do you buy some fabrics as well?

Ruth I have to buy some.

Emma Some …

Ruth What I, what I need, wait a minute, I can't talk to you can I, when I'm out of the room, otherwise your machine won't pick it up… This is something I'm working on. (Takes out quilt top to show)

Emma Oh that's lovely. Look at that.

Ruth Something I'm working on. Now that is meant to be autumnal. But these are scraps. All of these are scraps. They started out as three and three-quarter inch squares. Now three and three-quarter isn't very much, and I've got a lot of fabric left over from other projects. I don't throw anything away. But I have to purchase this kind of fabric. I have to purchase for the sashing and for the binding, and, well, for the backing I mostly use calico now for backing. But the satisfaction of using the smallest scraps … and, you see, this is something else, the satisfaction I will get. This design is created by using first of all three and three-quarter inch squares made into a square, sewn together as squares. And then it's bordered with some of this fabric. And from that I cut out these smaller squares. It's called a, it's called "tessellated pinwheels", the design. I cut out smaller squares from within that grid and then I turn them and sew them together again to create this tessellation.

Emma I see, yes. It's very mathematical isn't it.

Ruth It is… well it's from a book, so … And then what you get ..

Emma 'Cause you studied Maths and Physics.

Ruth Yes. So this, this is also very satisfying.

Emma Do you think you get some satisfaction out of that?

Ruth Maybe. I don't know, perhaps.

Emma 'Cause, um …

Ruth Because John helps me now with, with the figures. (Gets out paper designs to show) You get this sort of thing … there's me saying, "now look, I want to do this". Then we get sheets of mathematical calculations as to how this is going to work. So having cut out my squares to create this design from the original grid I've got other pieces left. Now I couldn't possibly throw those away you see. Couldn't possibly throw those away.

Emma No, no.

Ruth So, I thought of another design. So, if we trim these down to an inch and a half, I can make nine-patches. And I could make nine-patches as the centre of a block. And then I could border it up like a, like a log cabin, and I would have another block. For another quilt. With all these lovely squares.

Emma Do you find the more scraps you use, the more scraps you create? You don't use things up, they just multiply.

Ruth It never seems to, yes, it never seems to disappear.

Emma Yes, I'm the same.

Ruth So, do you think it grows in the night when we're asleep? I find it astonishing.

Emma I know. I don't know how that happens.

Ruth Me neither.

Emma There must be some mathematical problem, I wonder sometimes, to things like this. Patchwork is, you know, it's geometry. It's very mathematical.

Ruth Yes, oh yes it is. And I get, I think you're right, I probably get satisfaction from that as well as the satisfaction of getting my points to match, and getting things to fit together and, oh look it's all fit together, this is fabulous! And getting … I'm going to do a pieced border. You see, part of these, part of these calculations is working out… I'm going … once I've got this other border on I want to do another border of random …

Emma Yes, I think we are.

Ruth Good.

Emma Right, Sorry about that! Brief interlude. I was going to ask you as well, Ruth, would you mind if I took some photos of your work to remember – um – to put a face and a name to the –

Ruth Yes. That is a scrap quilt, that one.

Emma Gosh, Yeh. It' beautiful.

Ruth I used -

Emma Beautiful!

Ruth I thought I was going to use the whole of my scrap with that and I hardly made a dent in it, and that's a double quilt – double bed quilt – I was amazed. We are talking about this scrap business.

Emma Gosh. This is – isn't? This one's beautiful as well.

Ruth I'm really enjoying it. I love this design. I've used it a lot. It has made some fabulous place mats that I have made for people - sets of four place mats, um, gorgeous. They look lovely – um, and I'm going to give it rest because I think I've slightly overdone it.

Emma Where do you get the ideas for your designs? Do you make your own designs?

Ruth No, this was out of a book that was introduced – I was introduced to when I was doing the class with Carol Hart at Morley. And I think I got on quite quickly. I fell into doing it – it was easy for me to see how things were going to work and I think it was interesting for Carol to push somebody a little faster than some of the other women in the, in the group. And she brought this book in one day and said would I like – and I said I would like to have a go at that! Um.

Emma Were there any men in the class?

Ruth No.

Emma No.

Ruth No. And so we, we just, we just done a whole load of, um, fabric dying and so I had a whole load of dyed fabric and I made this, which is this design but much bigger.

Emma Mmm

Ruth And John scaled that down for me by, um, – that was a very complicated formula. But we've scaled it down to make it small. This - these are quite big. These were 6" squares – and these are 6 "- these were 6" to start and these are 3 3/4 to start and they come down much lower. And that was the start of that. That was, that was a lap quilt for a friend of mine – it was her mother's 80th – his mother's 85th birthday – 81st birthday. And so I inscribed the back of it as – I embroidered it on the reverse. But it was made for her on her 81st birthday and she - 81st birthday and she still has it. Um. Sorry I went out, went out on a limb. Oh yes, my designs. Straying from my book. This design is – the pattern came from a book. The design of making and turning that into

smaller blocks was my idea.

Emma Mmm

Ruth Um. I mostly get my ideas, I think, from other people, or from looking at other quilts, or from looking at books. I always say that I steel designs. I steel ideas and yet even if I think I've pinched a design wholesale from somebody, when I've made it it looks completely different from what I stole. Somehow or other, in the translation it has become my design – it's my personal interpretation – it's not the same.

Emma Of course. Why – when do you think that happens? What - what do you think it's –

Ruth But it must be an individual interpretation. I suppose everybody's work is individual. It's like everybody's handwriting is different. We used to have penmanship classes at school. We were taught to write. We were taught to write the same, but everybody's handwriting was different. We would copy from the board the same thing on lined paper. It was all meant to look the same. But it wasn't.

Emma Mmm

Ruth So, I think this is the – it's simply an individual way of doing things. You can't stop it.

Emma Yes, yes, no I quite agree with you, I quite agree with you.

Ruth Yeh. I think that's the only way I could describe how it happens. Because you see – well all the women who were doing these quilts. This first class with Carol Hart we all made a block, but we all used different fabric, different, different interpretation, different design and the friends that I made there, Bethany and Mandy who I'm still in touch with – we made our own little group, I probably mentioned to you.

Emma Yes you did. You said you had honeybees.

Ruth Honeybees, yes.

Emma Yes.

Ruth Older women, um, in their seventies – and they have become such great friends. And that was wonderful. Really, those, those lessons at Morley gave me so much, they gave me this as an interest. And they gave me some wonderful friendships. What a gift!

Emma Mmm

Ruth Such a gift. And everbody made a quilt using these blocks. Every single quilt is completely different.

Emma Yes, because you're – you said yourself – different fabric, and –

Ruth Different fabric, different interpretation -

Emma Colours -

Ruth Different colours. Um, people set their blocks differently. Some people set them on points, others – so every, every quilt that's made can't help but be different because it's made by – I doubt,I doubt whether I could make another quilt. Supposing I'd say I'm going to make another quilt like that for you because you like this one so much I'm going to make it exactly the same. But it wouldn't be exactly the same. I wouldn't be able to do it exactly the same. Well, I'd run out of fabric for a start. I'd run out of this, and that and the other so the fabric would be different and I think – no perhaps I'll made the blocks a bit bigger and make a bigger quilt faster so the block would be bigger. Or I'd made the sashing different, or I would put the sash in together and put a post here. It would be different. I wouldn't be able to create something the same –

Emma No

Ruth A second time around.

Emma Yes. Yes, no, I think that's really interesting.

Ruth And I think, think that again is part of the pleasure. It's something different every time. You can't possibly get bored.

Emma No, no. Do you, do you feel you're trying something each time? Are you, do you learn something each time?

Ruth Yes, yes, yes. Every time I try, every time I make something I try and get better. And the better is something that's simply in my own mind.

Emma Yes. I was going to ask you – what's better?

Ruth What's better. I know, what's better?

Emma What's better? What's good? Whats?

Ruth Better, what's good?

Emma Cause these are, you know, they are beautifully, beautifully made. And um -

Ruth Well, that's very kind of you. Thank you. It's – I get pleasure from doing just that. I'm just trying to find the –

Emma What's, what's important to you?

Ruth What's important to me – what's important to me -

Emma The look?

Ruth Is that, is that's it's well made. That it looks well made. That - this quilt is just –

Emma That's lovely.

Ruth four patches, and, um, I think it's what they call a single Irish chain. It's – no – it's nine patches. It's nine, a small nine patch and a plain square.

Emma Mmm

Ruth Again, um, scrap – it's all scrap fabric and I made it with the intention of improving my accuracy. I wanted to make a quilt with a proper ¼" seam so that when I put my nine patches together every, every seam, every –

Emma Lets get one of these out.

Ruth That every one of these joins was absolutely perfect. Well, of course, it didn't work out. No. It wasn't absolutely perfect. But it was an improvement.

Emma Mm, mm.

Ruth I found that very, very satisfying. And I enjoyed making it. And I thought, okay, I got that cracked. I can, and I can now do a ¼" seam – I can get things together so I can do things more complicated now.

Emma Right. And do you – do you find when you feel that you've mastered something you start to, start to invent, or do you - ?

Ruth Yes, I suppose I must have done cause I mastered this design very easily with that quilt, with that quilt.

Emma Uh, uh.

Ruth And I thought, right, I like the idea, I love the tessellation – I love the connection. But it would be more fun if we could do something more with it, and doing something more with it was making it smaller, because the smaller you make things the more difficult it is to maintain the accuracy and the effect and again this is another learning thing. Because once you've cut these things out on a slant it's not a 45 degree cut so it's not totally on the bias, but its 53 – so it's nearly on the bias. These bits that I've cut out are not a straight grain. They're wobbly, wobbly.

Emma Umm

Ruth So, um, if I'm going to use these I'm going to have to be quite careful. And certainly, sewing these together, and sewing these blocks, sewing, sewing this onto the blocks, was something that I had to concentrate on, because all of these edges I could do this with. And I wanted them to sit together nicely. I needed these to match.

Emma Mm.

Ruth You know, I needed everything to – I wanted it to be square but I wanted it to be – I didn't want it to have wiggley edges. So that was something else that I had to – it was a concentration. I had to make certain that– when you read instructions in books and it says "Ease to fit" –

Emma Mm.

Ruth I had to ease to fit.

Emma Mm.

Ruth Along, along from these to there. And over this period, this, this area so that, so that was pretty well on the same level as that, and so on and so on. So, yes, each time you do something you're learning something different, or putting into play, something that you think you know but haven't used before. The, the easing to fit was an expression, I think, I read in – you know the instructions for, ease the shoulder – whatever - you know, dress making.

Emma Dress making

Ruth Yes, dress making

Emma That's right, yes.

Ruth Ease to fit.

Emma Yes, yes.

Ruth And it came into it's own – I mean, I've been doing it this week. So this week it was "Ease to fit"! Ease to fit!

Emma Ease to fit.

Ruth Ease to fit. Laughter

Emma And you've cracked it!

Ruth And I've cracked it. I'm very lucky. I bought my Pfaff machine a couple of years ago and, I mean up until then I just had an ordinary Brothers with - and I bought a ¼" foot, that was for my ¼" foot experiment. Um, and it's got an integral walking foot so that the easing to fit is a lot easier.

Emma Yes -

Ruth Because -

Emma It does it for you.

Ruth Yes it does. It's a lovely machine.

Emma Yes, Gosh, that's, yeh, that's great.

Ruth Yes, I'm very, very thrilled to have it. And its, and I look after it and I took it apart yesterday and took all the dust out of it.

Emma So do you, do you, um, machine piece your blocks?

Ruth Yes.

Emma and you, but you quilt by hand?

Ruth I do some quilting – I do some quilting by hand and, and some machine quilting. For instance, something like this I would probably machine quilt the squares – I'd layer it up and I'd machine quilt in the ditch – really as a means of anchoring it so that then –

Emma Okay.

Ruth I felt that I could handle it easier without things slipping away from me. I'm now quite good at doing quilting in the ditch. I can do it so that you can hardly – you – I don't want you to see it.

Emma Yeh.

Ruth It's not meant to be a design feature. It's something – something for me so that the quilt is then ready to handle rather than sloppy, um, tacking stitches and, and pins. I've got, um, a log cabin on the bed which is pinned, but I can't work out how to quilt it. So, it's kind of stuck there and every time I go into the room and look at it and think how am I going to quilt you and I really can't work it out. Maybe you can help me. I'll show you later! Laughter.

Emma Okay. What, um, sort of, um, what for you is a real challenge – what's a criteria for a really sort of interesting project for you to work on?

Ruth When somebody says to me "The theme is – whatever" and I have to think something up.

Emma Right.

Ruth I find that quite difficult. Um.

Emma So, for an example – ?

Ruth The quilters challenge. There is an exhibition every two years

Emma Yes, which I saw.

Ruth And, yes, you -

Emma In -

Ruth And there's a challenge piece. And the chairman sets the challenge and I have to make something. And it exercises my mind. It is astonishing! And I find that the most difficult thing. One, it's meeting the challenge – what the challenge? Last years' was circles and squares. The year before was flights of fancy. Flights of fancy, I have to say I got an idea from a magazine, from a book which I interpreted, which worked out very well. That got given away. And circles and squares simply became lots and lots of squares quilted with lots of circles. I got John to design all the squares. We had great fun doing that because he's a mathematician – he's a statistician, so.

Emma Right, Okay. Yes,

Ruth So he arranged all the squares and I cut them out and that was a, that was a charm quilt – so every square was different, and he based that on - on prime numbers which is one of his interests. 27 is a prime number so he squared it because it's meant to be squares of 27 by 27. It's whatever. So that many squares and then he made um something with pie to make the circles – it was, he was -

Emma Fascinating –

Ruth What a star this man – wow. And so, so I just made it up as per instructions. And that was a joint effort and we had a lot of fun playing with it. But it's finding the ideas.

Emma Okay, yes.

Ruth I find that very difficult because I think I'm not, I'm not an art quilter, I'm not an artist. I'm a crafts person. I put stuff together; I fiddle with fabric; I – as long as I can sew stuff and – and make – sew little bits of stuff and made a big bit of stuff, really I'm quite happy. I don't necessarily want it to be the best quilt that ever was.

Emma Mm.

Ruth My satisfaction is simply I've used up some fabric and look what I've made!

Emma Mm.

Ruth That's my satisfaction. Anything more complicated, um, or, I don't know - arty I suppose – I don't see myself as an artist, whereas I know a lot of quilt makers see themselves as an artist first. I see myself as a crafts person.

Emma What do you think the, um, – where do you think those definitions come from? Why, what, in, in you opinion, sort of

makes you more of a crafts person than an artist and why do you think those who, who consider themselves an artist more than a crafts person. What do you think it's due to?

Ruth Well, I think its because the artist person is capable of doing what I cannot. Do you see?

Emma Mm, Mm.

Ruth If you were an artist it would be not a problem for you to sit down and work out a design. To plan, and colour up on paper and do all that sort of thing and create. That's the artistic input and if you have that as a skill – it is what you want to do.

Emma Mm, mm

Ruth And I would consider that 1) to be difficult, 2) to be a bore and 3) to be a complete and utter waste of time. Why am I going to be colouring in bits of paper when I could be cutting out fabric?

Emma Ha, ha.

Ruth You see?

Emma Yes

Ruth So it's easy for me to say what I am and what I'm not. I'm not an artist – I am a craftsperson. Because the artistic element, to my mind, in my opinion, is missing from my work. What I give to it is good craftsmanship.

Emma Mm, mm. And that's where you get your pleasure and satisfaction from.

Ruth Yes, yes. If you say –

Emma It's the execution –

Ruth that my job is nicely made. That's a real compliment to me because I get pleasure from 'nicely made'.

Emma Mm.

Ruth I get pleasure in nice stitching – I get pleasure that you cannot see, um, the -

Emma The sink-stitch quilting.

Ruth Yes, yes. Um. So I don't just make quilts – I make – this is quilted. This is a little – um – workbag – But I don't want you to see my stitching. I don't want you to see where I've – where I've stitched - you can just, you can see where it's pulled in – but I don't want you to see the stitching. Nicely made means nicely finished. So. That's, that's nicely made. I know that's nicely made.

Emma Mm. Yes, it is. Very.

Ruth It's nicely done. It's nicely quilted. You can't – the stitching that you, that you're not meant to see – you can't see.

Now that's – that is satisfying.

Emma Mm.

Ruth That is what gives me pleasure.

Emma Can I take a picture of that?

Ruth Course.

Emma Cause that's a very good example of what you say. Yes. Do you - ? If, if something doesn't quite work out do you take it apart?

Ruth Um, yes. God loves a merry ripper, yes.

Emma I like that expression.

J/Emma Laughter.

Emma What is it? God loves -?

Ruth It came from another book. Where is it? (Unclear 0:20:02) I love going to America. Always – I don't need quilting books but, oh, I can't help myself. I'm sure it's from here.

Emma Yes, this is very well made.

Ruth Some lovely, no – 'Lord give me chastity - but not yet'. Where is it? 'Being an old maid is like death by drowning.' 'A really delightful sensation after you have ceased struggling.' It came out of this book – it must, do mustn't it?

Emma Sounds like it, yes.

Ruth They makes me laugh. You see the whole thing makes me laugh. 'I had everything I had twenty years ago, only it's all a little bit lower.' I just know how she feels!

E/Ruth Laughter.

Ruth Oh, I can't find it – I could look through the whole book finding it. I don't suppose it's important. But I read it here and I thought, yes, it's all going to have to get ripped out, and in fact some of that got ripped out. The first one of these I put in. I did my easing. I eased to fit, but I eased to fit along the length of the sash, when in fact, and so when I –

Emma Yes.

Ruth Yes, this one. So when I put these two together these bits of sashing were off – they were off. They, these will match now.

Emma Yes.

Ruth But they were off by about a quarter of an inch. And I thought, oh crikey, oh I can't like, I shan't like that. And so, that I just took it up.

Emma So you unpicked it.

Ruth I unpicked it.

Emma And do it again.

Ruth And pressed out the fabric again to get rid of the holes, um, and pulled out all the bits of stitching and sewed it up again. It was a learning curve. I know now. That this is important. This needs to be – so it, then, I then ended up easing it to fit from there to there – halfway – from there to there – over that – from there to there – from there to there, and then it worked.

Emma And then it worked.

Ruth Of course it works. And that was lovely and it's all fine. But yes, merry ripper. Take it out. If it's not right, take it out.

Emma And do it again!

Ruth And do it again!

Emma Laughter

Ruth And in fact if I'd done it a second time and it wasn't right I would have taken it out again.

Emma Yes.

Ruth I wouldn't have been happy with it. It was a – I don't know it was a quarter of an inch. But as far as I'm concerned it could have been three inches it was a quarter of an inch. It shot me in the eye – look – ow – ehh!

Emma Yes.

Ruth And yet – and now this is something else. Isn't this interesting? I was look at somethings and think 'that didn't really work, did it? ' But of course it 's too late then. Then I'll say – 'perhaps I shouldn't have used that particular colour in there because it kind of jumps out at you' – or some other. There'll be a flaw. Everything you make by hand is flawed in some way. You, there is no such thing as perfection. But what I will not do – I will not say to you 'oh look at my lovely quilt. Oh, but look, I made a real mistake – can you see?'

Emma Yes. Yes.

Ruth Which some of my friends do and which other people do – they don't. Do not point out your mistakes because you

are the only person who can see them.

Emma Mm.

Ruth Nobody else will either look for it, or even if they've found it would know that that's what they found.

Emma Mmm

Ruth Don't do it! I mean one of my patchwork chums, she'll say 'oh well, this is one that I made but look what I did wrong – look what I did wrong here.' Biddy, don't do this! Stop – because the pleasure is in the making. If you've had fun making it then it is a worthwhile thing.

Emma Yes.

Ruth Is it? Is I? I get a lot of fun making things.

Emma Yes. Is it, is it important to you what other people think, as well? Do you take that into consideration?

Ruth Well, I love getting – I love getting compliments -

Emma Mmm

Ruth I think. Everybody does.

Emma Don't we all, yes.

Ruth Yes. But I don't make, but I don't make quilts for approbation. I make quilts because I need to use up my fabric stash, don't I? And I need to – I'm a 'what have you achieved today?' person.

Emma Mm.

Ruth You know. There's – there are people people. And there are what have you achieved today people. And I'm a what have you achieved today person and this is a wonderful way of achieving. Because I can see what I have done with my day. And, I, I don't sew everyday.

Emma Yes, how, how much time do you spend sewing? Say, in a week?

Ruth In a week?

Emma How much time do you think you set aside for doing your patchwork and quilting?

Ruth It isn't a case of setting aside – it's a case of grabbing it while you can.

Emma Right.

Ruth One. There are certain conditions that need to apply before I can sew, which is I – there isn't – there can't be anything

else that demands my time and attention. So, supposing my workroom is in a complete mess, which it was when I was doing the, the squares and circles challenge because I had all my fabric out. John wanted this quilt to be a charm quilt so every square in it had to be a different fabric. So I had fabric everywhere. But I could only work on that quilt because the mess was driving me insane. And, you know, if this is a mess I cannot work. If the house is a mess I cannot work. I need order and the order doesn't just have to physical order, it has to be order in my head. If I think – right, I've got – I need to make bread – I need to write to my friends and I would like to do some sewing the need things have to come first. I don't need to make bread but I think I need to make bread. I don't really need to write to my friends but I feel that I need to.

Emma Mm.

Ruth So, I have to clear away the needy things before I can think 'and now I can please myself'. This is my pleasure. And that's what I do. I have been known, when – John retired last year. When he was working I have been known to be so engrossed in something up here that one – on one occasion I missed lunch. I don't quite how that happened. I was listening to the radio and something came on at 2 o'clock and I thought –2 o'clock? – it can't be 2 o'clock – but it was 2 o'clock and I usually stop at one o'clock. At the one o'clock news I stop and have a sandwich or something and I'd completely missed it. And on another occasion I was working and it was 6 o'clock I heard the pips and I went downstairs and I hadn't even cleared up from lunch or breakfast. There was dirty things in the kitchen – and I hadn't thought about supper - and there was panic on!

E/Ruth Laughter

Ruth I set the table quick so he thinks he's going to get something to eat! So you can – I can get totally engrossed in what I'm doing and time passes. John will say 'well, how have you got on?' and I, and my response is always 'well,slowly'. Cause I never move as fast as I think I'm going to. I never get as much done as I want. I wanted to have the other border on this by today and I haven't. I mean, it's not, it doesn't matter but I always want things to move faster because finishing as well as making – having got to this stage – now this is getting very exciting. Making these was just – it was creating blocks. I was doing it. I had twelve of these things to make and it was quite a, um, a time intensive design because effectively you're making it twice. You're making the squares first, then you're cutting them up and then you're making them again. But once it's got to this stage it's really quite exciting because you can see all of a sudden oh look – it's a quilt coming.

Emma Mm, you can see the results.

Ruth Yes. So I supposed, I suppose we all want things to finish. But this, but every aspect of it is fascinating and that's why

I'd like to have – that's why I've always got more projects than just one project on the go. One of my friends, Bethany, is part of our little group - always has something new to show us. She's moved to Essex so we don't see her that often. But when she comes she's got something that she's completed. Now, I 've got about several things that I'm working on, in different stages of growth, and, so when Bethany comes I say, well I'm working on this and I'm working on that but I haven't finished anything because – sometimes I want to cut these things out and sometimes I want to piece little pieces and sometimes I want to do some appliqué or to sit here with work in my hand and sew, and sometimes I want to quilt. So I've got to have various projects in various stages.

Emma Yes, that's interesting. So why, what do you think makes you want to do appliqué sometimes and quilting at another, or piecing at another? What do you think, sort of, sets that off in your mind?

Ruth Gosh, I don't know.

Emma Cause you're obviously – it sounds like you're – you're wanting to respond to –

Ruth To - yes -

Emma To something.

Ruth Some internal stimulus. Gosh, Emma, I don't know, I hadn't thought. You see, it's only by talking to you that I'm realising the way I'm, the way I work – it's only by, by saying out loud what I do – I see what I do.

Emma Um. You see, I find that really interesting. You know I wonder, because we know we're humans, we're not machines, so we're not happy to just do the same thing all day everyday –

Ruth No

Emma Literally the same. So what is it that?

Ruth It's got to be some sort of stimulus, hasn't there?

Emma Yes, or some form of, um, like feeling a need or a wanting to fill a gap, or -

Ruth Yes, you see cause yes, there is a need because one of the, the little projects that I do and these are gifts for people – um – I make aprons, I make these appliqué aprons. These are my honeybees.

Emma Right.

Ruth These are my honeybee ladies, okay? There's me. There's Bethany, who has now gone to Essex. This is Mandy. Mandy and Bethany were the women who I met at Morley. I met Biddy and Felicity at Morley but the following year.

Emma Right.

Ruth Felicity has now moved to Essex and Biddy is - makes lovely work but denigrates everything that she does and I'm very cross about. And I made them all aprons one Christmas. And it says never trust a skinny cook – and they all took it in good part because Biddy is not skinny. Um, it wasn't meant in any way derogatory about the way people were, it was just meant to make people laugh. And this is all hand appliquéd.

Emma Um, um.

Ruth Now I make these as gifts for people. And it doesn't really matter whether anyone has got a birthday or whether there's Christmas or something. I'll sometimes think I need to sit down and make an apron. And so that's what I do. And the fun part is, 1) it's the hand stitching – it's very, it's very slow and it's very satisfying. I sit here. It's got good – I've got good light. I listen to a play on the radio but I don't know what the stimulus is for it. Just, but just that it is there and, and I know how to respond to it. I know that something says – I think you should do a bit of appliqué –so I do - in the same way as I'll cut fabric, not necessarily for something but for something, not this time but the next time. I'm cutting 2 ½" squares. It's a nebulous idea

Emma Mm.

Ruth What I think I want to do with it is make a lap quilt for the study downstairs because in the winter it's sometimes cold and I've got – and I've got some - you see this is – and I've got some blue fleece – and I thought I could do something – have blue fleece on the back and have something on the front and I know what I'm going to do. I'm going to use bits of the silk that was left over from the - left over, left over, left over. So I've got some silk squares that I've stabilised. And they're just sitting. And I will cut them, but, um, I can't do anything with them yet because I think it need a dark background and I haven't got that yet. You know, it's just – I don't even know where the needle stimulus comes from. But it's different – you're right. There are days when I need to put things together, or days when I need to appliqué, or days when I need to cut or days when I have to tidy up this fabric – it's a mess.

Emma How does, um, does it make you feel something, when you -?

Ruth Satisfied!!

E/Ruth Laughter

Emma Always.

Ruth Always. Yes, always.

Emma If you feel, you know, actually I'd just like to sit down and do some appliqué –

Ruth Yes.

Emma And you do –

Ruth And I do –

Emma And that makes you feel satisfied.

Ruth Yes.

Emma So you've fulfilled –

Ruth So it's like – yes, it's like being hungry. I'm hungry, I'm going to eat something. That was nice. I don't feel hungry anymore. It's like that, isn't it?

Emma Mm

Ruth That's what it is. It's, it's another form of hunger. I was hungry for this. I've fulfilled my hunger. I'm satisfied. And it's not just the satisfaction of not being hungry, it's the satisfaction then – I've also achieved something. You know, back to my what have you achieved today persona. So I've satisfied two things. I've satisfied my hunger and I've satisfied my 'what have you achieved today?' thing. Two in one! What a result, ha, ha.

Emma That's fascinating. That's fascinating. That's really, really fascinating.

Ruth But isn't it?

Emma Yes, it is, it is.

Ruth Yes.

Emma Lots to think about. I mean, so how, how much - back to the time question. How much time do you think you spend?

Ruth How much time have I spent? Um, it's really hard. We had some American visitors staying for two weeks. I did very little sewing during that time because the, having another presence in the house even if they weren't here all the time was too distracting and I couldn't concentrate. So I think the only thing I did during that fortnight was mark up – I had five of those, five of these blocks left to cut out and you have to mark up the square.

Emma Mm.

Ruth Um, you draw on the fabric to mark up the square that's going to be cut out to make these, these tessellations. And the only think I did during that time was to mark up some of these squares. Very little. So in those two weeks very little.

Emma Mm.

Ruth I work one day a week. I'm a bookkeeper for a theatrical agents so I work one day and, and, and one half a day a week. It used to be one day a week when I used to do all the domestic stuff, the cleaning of the house, the shopping, the washing, the ironing. But John wields the hoover for me now. Its – so that doesn't take very long. And that's something that I've noticed. The standard of the housekeeping has dropped. Well, it takes too long. It's nowhere as satisfying, is it? So five days a week and one of them I work and half a day – so there are three. And on a good week I will work each of those three days. Not all day. That's something else. I get – I don't want to do something, unless I'm so engrossed on the days I've told you about and I forgot to get lunch and I forgot that John was coming home. I will spend a morning doing something and then I'll spend, if I can spend another afternoon doing something, but I'll do something different. I won't work on the same thing. Because I, I suppose I, I create my own interests by working on different things. So I can, I work on this and its fabulous and exciting and oh that's enough and then I'll work on something else. But it's different. And it'll be a different technique, or a different aspect or a different something. So I'm constantly shifting stuff around. I'm terrified of dying with all this fabric in my cupboard.

Emma Ha, ha, ha. I can reassure you that you are definitely not along in thinking that!

Ruth Yes

Emma Yes, I've, I have read an article about that. About, you know, fabric stored and, um, women who make patchwork who have their, their hidey holes of –

Ruth Stash!

Emma Their stash

Ruth Everywhere.

Emma The American term

Ruth Yes

Emma – and, um –

Ruth I'm embarrassed by the amount of fabric that I have.

Emma Why are you embarrassed by it?

Ruth Because I can't use it fast enough!

E/Ruth Laughter

Emma Its –

Ruth I think what's happened is, this is – I have got lots and lots of scraps as I say - and lots of these I've picked up from all sorts of places. I very rarely buy fabric now because I've got so much, but fabric is given to me. I told you about the dressmaker. I've got two – can you see those see through boxes underneath my worktable?

Emma Yes

Ruth That's all silk, silk, velvet, other fancy fabric that came from her. It was a gift. I cannot bear myself to throw it away, and yet I'm using it up so slowly. There will come a time when I think – no I am going to have to recycle it and give it to someone who can use it faster. Um. Sarah, at whose house we were, um, was a great friend of Grace, who died a couple of years ago. And, of course, Grace left so much fabric and Dennis, her husband, didn't know what to do with it. And we have been sorting out Grace's fabric ever since her death a couple of years ago. And after the show in November, Dennis said, please please come and just take it away and I don't want anything for it. Please come and take it away. Now, you would think that because I've got so much fabric and because I actually don't need fabric I would not have gone all the way to Dulwich that evening and taken away fabric. I don't need it. And yet I did. I went, I rummaged amongst Grace's fabric and I came back with two bulging plastic bags of fabric that I don't need. But I couldn't resist.

Emma I know exactly - I would have been exactly the same. Exactly the same. Hoards, and hoards and hoards of fabric. Mmm.

Ruth That's right, it is hoards. It's hoards. And some of it is, as I said, old summer dresses that belonged to my mother. She's been dead fifteen years. My summer dresses – as I said that pink was when I was at college. And when I'm in foreign countries I will see fabric and I think that this is going to be a memory of this place. And so I will buy some of that. And people who have travelled will bring me fabric because they know that it's something that I would like to have. They don't always get it right. Sometimes they'll bring something that isn't cotton, cotton or silk, something other. And I think, yes, yes, but I can stabilise it. I can put some Vilene on it – it still could be used. It's somebody else's memory and I want to incorporate that into something. So memory comes into this, doesn't it, into talking about memory past, old summer dresses, memories of places. Memories of people.

Emma Your mother's dresses.

Ruth My mother's dresses, yes.

Emma Did your mother sew?

Ruth No. No that's why my father made our clothes. She had rheumatoid arthritis. She got it when she was eighteen and she had it all her life. It's, um, - you know the kind of arthritis when you get horribly knobbly fingers and her hands were often in a most uncomfortable state. Um, but she could knit and in her latter years I showed her how to do needle point, so she could do that with one hand underneath and she was - she did do it very slowly but I think she also had a creative need. Um. So my father did the sewing.

Emma Mm. That's interesting. That's quite unusual.

Ruth It is unusual. And, um, I think that came out of a lack of money. There wasn't money for clothes and so he would chop up their old clothes to make clothes for us. I think there were occasions when he bought fabric but, you know, it wasn't all recycled, but a lot of it was.

Emma Well fabric was - used to be much cheaper to buy to make clothes out of than it is now.

Ruth Yes, yes. And I find fabric expensive. It isn't expensive per say, but I think to buy fabric and then to cut it up –

Emma Do you ever feel guilty because that's quite an interesting – when you think about what we do – you know, the act of –

Ruth Taking a perfectly decent piece of fabric –

Emma Or a skirt, or a dress or a shirt.

Ruth Now, that I don't mind.

Emma Cutting, cutting up –

Ruth No. A dress, a shirt, a skirt – then all this ties, no, their, their probably finished, their worn. In fact, if you read some of these, um, books they'll say don't ever use recycled fabric because if you mix it with new fabric there's a mismatch in weight and one will wear out, and you know I think I'll be dead by then so who cares! And, so that doesn't matter and I have, I have more of a problem cutting up brand new fabric than I do cutting up old dresses and shirts and ties and scraps, scraps left over from other people's curtains, and what have you. That I have no compunction about whatsoever, and I think, I'm doing this fabric a favour. It is being recycled. Do you know, this is what we are about here. But buying fabric, that goes against the grain. I think surely I've got what I need amount all this – of course there's never enough of the right thing so buying some – as I said to you earlier I have to buy for sashing.

Emma I'm, I'm quite fascinating by, you know, the act of cutting as well, because, especially looking at the tessellated square

quilt that you've got here. They're tiny pieces and there's lots of them. You've obviously spent a lot of time carefully cutting small pieces of fabric out

Ruth Yes.

Emma And if we try and think about, you know, that as an activity – what do you think? I mean, it's –

Ruth It's kind of weird isn't it - what am I doing?

Emma And it's very repetitive. What – how do – if you can sort of imagine yourself doing it –

Ruth I can imagine myself doing it because I've done it quite recently with this. And I sit there and I think. I will do three things. I will either listen to a play. Um, there's the, you know, 2.15 play of Radio 4, which I will often – John will tape for me and so I can listen to it whenever I want. So I listen to a play, or I listen to a concert.

Ruth We're talking about cutting, talking about cutting.

Emma Yes, and you were –

Ruth To either have a play, or music, or silence and I will think. And it's when I do thinking and, and you're going to ask me what I think about. And I don't know. I think about, I think the quilt. I'll think about the people in my life. I think about my friends. I think about having them over for supper and devising menus. I just, I just think. The kind of stuff that we all think about – rubbish really, but just life – my life.

Emma Mm.

Ruth And I also find it very satisfying. I – when I was cutting these out I broke open a new pair of scissors – some Fiskars which are lovely. They're hefty – a bit heavier really than I want but they cut right to the tip – you know eventually your cutting scissors don't cut right to the tip and it was just so satisfying. Everytime I did that and it cut right to the edge of this, of the square it gave me a little frizzon of god these are nice scissors. These are nice scissors – ha, ha, ha.

Emma Yeh, the tools that we use are important.

Ruth The tools.

Emma You've talked about –

Ruth I am, oh my goodness I am a firm believer in the correct tool for the job and I, I am a no expense spared person about tools for the jobs, and I feel this in my kitchen. The right tools for the right job. I have got the most fabulous pressure cooker. I only use it for pressure cooking beans, for pulses, beans and pulses, stews and for cooking beetroot. The only things I

use it for. But it's a perfect piece of machinery. Gorgeous. Totally satisfying to use. Hefty, does the job – perfect. So satisfying. And I feel that about everything.

Emma Same, same with your sewing tools.

Ruth Same with my sewing tools, yeh.

Emma Mm.

Ruth I love my sewing machine. I love my fine pins, um, my cutting mat, my rotary cutter, my lovely scissors. Yes. Yes, it's very satisfying. I get a great deal of pleasure from this.

Emma Mm, I can tell. Yes.

Ruth I really do.

Emma It's really important.

Ruth Yes

Emma Very important.

Ruth Yes, its, um, -

Emma Can you ever imagine not sewing?

Ruth No I can't, no. As well as thinking I can't die yet, because I've got so much fabric I think please don't let me go blind. Once I thought please don't let me go blind because I read a lot and I do still read a lot but now I have two reasons not to go blind. It's not just reading – I wouldn't be able to sew and it would, it would be the ruination of my life. Because I wouldn't be able to sew.

Emma And what about your hands?

Ruth What about my hands?

Emma Because in, in doing this kind of work we're using our hands all of the time.

Ruth Yes we are. And I actually, I actually gave myself repetitive strain injury, one Christmas. My niece had given birth to her second child, a little girl, in the September and she wanted pink and I knitted her a pink dress and jacket and I wanted it finished for Christmas. So I was knitting like a maniac, getting this finished. Knitting, knitting, knitting. But I also wanted to finish this quilt, the one I showed you with the little squares. That one.

Emma Mm.

Ruth I wanted to finish that quilt for Clare – it was her 21st birthday December 29th. So both these things needed to be finished at Christmas time. And I was hand quilting. I hand quilted, um, hearts in each of the white squares. So I was quilting like mad, and knitting like mad and then I wondered why I had this terrible pain, this terrible pain. And I'd given myself a repetitive strain injury here, - it's called tennis elbow

Emma Yes, I get it too.

Ruth And I've still got it. Even with osteopathy treatment and these kind of exercises and I've got a support that I use if I'm going to spend the whole day rotary cutting I'll support it but I've ruined myself for life!

Emma Mm.

Ruth Because of that. One of the women osteopath tutors – I go to the School of Osteopathy for treatment – and she said it seems a very innocuous past time to do that is going to give you such an injury. She's right. Knitting, sewing. You wouldn't think it would hurt you but it did. On this occasion it gave me this tennis elbow, which I still have.

Emma Yes, that's very interesting.

Ruth Isn't it interesting?

Emma Did she, did she think, you know, that's a silly thing to do, you know, to injure yourself?

Ruth No, no. She understood that it, it could happen. That you don't necessarily get tennis elbow from just from playing tennis.

Emma Mm. No.

Ruth You get it from doing something over and over again and I was surprised, that I'd hurt myself. But sorry. Just I had to carry on doing it.

Emma Yes, it hasn't prevented you –

Ruth No.

Emma From carrying on. And you –

Ruth No, no.

Emma And you, you still will. You wont –

Ruth Oh, of course, and there are occasions when it –

Emma Let it stop you.

Ruth I've made it hurt. I do try and support it if I'm going to do a lot of, um, heavy pressing, or rotary cutting, then I will wear a brace, to help it.

Emma What about when you're hand quilting? Cause, I mean, similarly to the cutting, sort of hand –

Ruth It's repetitive isn't it. What stops me hand quilting - what stops me hand quilting is that I am – I can't wear – um – a protection on that finger. I have to feel the needle. I can't rock the needle as I quilt. I have to put it in, feel it and then push it up again. Really, I'm not quilting, I'm just doing running stitches. No there is a proper way of quilting and I can't do it. So I do running stitches and I have to feel the needle. And so when I get to the stage where this is a massive pricked up skin it gets tender and so I stop for a day. You know. What I, I've got to use what I have and – you know. This is it. Get on with it. This, this is the job that you were meant to be doing. I have very little patience with oh come on this hurts – get on with it. You know, stop complaining. You know, I say that to my body. Oh shut up! Get on with it! Ha, ha, ha

Emma Ha, ha, ha. Cause our hands are part of our body

Ruth Yes.

Emma but yet they are tools

Ruth They are tools

Emma as they are, as scissors are.

Ruth Yes, oh yes

Emma And it's interesting, I'm finding it interesting talking to you and hearing you talking about your hands as if –

Ruth It's a tool.

Emma They're tools.

Ruth Oh yes, yes, they are meant to be doing something. Do the work. Um. I will - I've got long nails. Those nails are much longer than usual. I haven't been quilting. If I was quilting I couldn't have my nails this long because the thimble for that finger would fall off because that nail's too long. So if I've got quilting on the go all these nails would get cut down.

Emma Mm.

Ruth Because this, these, this is not a workroom – this is not a craft person's hand. These nails – they'd have to get cut. Ha, ha.

Emma But you don't mind that, do you?

Ruth No, not at all. No, they've grown nicely and I think, oh gosh, that's pretty and I'm going to a fiftieth party next week and I'll think, right, I'll paint them. And then if by that time I've decided how I'm going to quilt this log cabin quilt and I'll start quilting that's the end of the nails.

E/Ruth Laughter

Ruth But otherwise they are good hands. They're good workman hands. They do what they're meant to do. I've got a little arthritic nodule there, but that doesn't stop me doing anything and otherwise they're fit for purpose.

Emma I don't know – I mean I always show – I don't know if you can see it still –

Ruth You've got nice shaped fingers. Your fingers shape – your fingers shape that way and that way. John', John' fingers shape like that. Mine are square. Got workman's fingers. Look at that! Really square, –

Emma Yes, yes.

Ruth Square tipped. You've got artists hands. Ha, ha.

Emma That's interesting, isn't it? But look at my nails. My nails are – oh well they're a bit of a mixture but, um, I'm ashamed to say I bite, I bite them but not –

Ruth Not terribly – you can't bite them terribly – not to the quick?

Emma No,. Not out of nervousness. No I don't bite them out of nervousness, I'm –

Ruth What, you mean sort of nibbling sort of person?

Emma Well –

Ruth You've got your hands in your mouth like that? Is that what it is?

Emma It's - You know I can, for example, I can feel my thumbnails are getting too long. I can't –

Ruth Yes, yes.

Emma I can't work with them so I'll -

Ruth So are mine, I notice that.

Emma I need to –

Ruth And I'll notice soon if these get any longer so I wont be able to type properly. Because I, um, I type remittances in my role as a bookkeeper for this theatrical agent. And so I'll, it will, it will catch the, the line of the letters above and I'll think I can't be doing with that because it is a waste. I'm having to erase things, backspace all the time. So they'll go!

Emma On the other hand I find, sometimes I don't mind growing my fingernails if I'm sewing because opening seams –

Ruth That's right. Flicking up, picking up

Emma And picking things up

Ruth Picking up – yes

Emma Yes

Ruth If they're too short that's really quite a problem. I like that one a bit longer, because that's picking up fabric. Picking the two pieces together.

Emma It's – I always think it's fascinating to look at our hands. You know. People who work with hands, you know, what, what do they look like and how do you use them.

Ruth Yes

Emma And, um I don't know if you can, if you can see – but If I show you my hand – if I put it that way -

Ruth Yes

Emma Um, my fingers, - these, these fingers on this hand. I don't know if you can – can you see that they're different – these two?

Ruth Is that one fatter than that one?

Emma Yes. Can you see there's a – it's actually -

Ruth You've got a callous

Emma It's actually going away and its bent there.

Ruth Oh, yes. Why? Why?

Emma Very slowly. That's from cutting.

Ruth You're kidding!

Emma No, no.

Ruth Is this when you're in France?

Emma Yes. It's partly due to a job that, um, I used to do a lot. Regularly.

Ruth Yes.

Emma And was cutting, cutting fabrics by the thousand it felt like and probably was, actually. Certainly well, well into the

hundreds.

Ruth Well, yes. You - even when I was cutting these at the end of one – at the indentation of the scissors and your hand –

Emma Mm.

Ruth Were you doing that ad nauseoum?

Emma Well, it was in very intense periods, so for relatively short time two or three weeks, but very intensively and, um –

Ruth I'm surprised you didn't end up with repetitive strain injury?

Emma Yes, no I did.

Ruth Oh, you have. You said you had, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Emma Yes, I do. I do, I do get it here in my elbow.

Ruth That's right.

Emma And, you know, like, like grannies I can tell if it's going to rain tomorrow!

E/Ruth Laughter

Emma I can feel it in my fingers.

Ruth Mine doesn't give me that kind of, um –

Emma Yes.

Ruth Yes.

Emma Um, and my knees, as well. Cause where, um, this is your workroom.

Ruth Yes.

Emma So, for example, when you're cutting fabric out where do you do it?

Ruth Well. Depends on – depends, doesn't it? Small pieces on that table, large pieces on the floor – so you're scrabbling around on your hands and knees, yes. Um, in the summer John has devised this fabulous thing. If you look at that – that is a picture taken *(Ruth opens window*) from here – see?

Emma Right.

Ruth John took that. That's me on the patio and he has devised this thing. There are two saw horses from the shed. Then there's a framework that sits on top of it.

Emma Mm, mm

Ruth Then there are four pieces of hardboard – not hardboard, you know that thick stuff that clip together that make a great big table.

Emma That's very handy.

Ruth And what I was doing there, I was layering up. Because I haven't got an area that's big enough, you know, without you know, putting all the furniture in the other room or something. But I could do that and so I could only do it in the summer so –

Emma Right. Oh, you could only do it outside?

Ruth Yes.

Emma Yes.

Ruth Ah, look. And another embroidered cloth.

Emma That's very similar to the only you showed me –

Ruth It is, isn't it?

Emma Yes.

Ruth Yes, look. I expect it's another one of these woman's own jobs.

Emma Can I take a picture of that cause it is just perfect. It's in situation as well.

Ruth Yes, yes, yes. Of course you can.

Emma Being used as a table cloth.

Ruth Oh yes, I use them. I suppose that's why they're still around.

Emma takes photographs.

Ruth Of gosh, that's nice. John has made a nice cup of coffee. Let's get this stuff off the floor.

Emma I'm interested to hear you say, Ruth, that you don't consider yourself as an artist.

Ruth No I don't.

Emma But when you're choosing fabrics, for example for this one, why did you choose the fabrics and the colours that you chose?

Ruth Mm, you see that's something that I'm not very good at. I think that my fabric and my, my fabric choices and my

colour choices are not as good as a lot of other people. Um, Bethany, one of my honeybees – you know I showed you that picture – whose moved to Essex, always manages to, to create these marvellous harmonious, subtle quilts just lovely. I know, I know that what she does is that she purchases fabric to make up her quilt. Okay. She chooses, she goes into a quilt shop and she chooses fabric to make her quilt, so they are harmonious. And she has an eye. She knows what's going to go, and I look at her stuff and it's fabulous, really fabulous. But I do scrap. I like using scrap pieces. So, I'm not going to go into a quilt shop and create a harmonious quilt. In the same way, in the same way as, as Bethany does. So my, my quilt choices, my colour choices for that came about because I had, I had made two lots of green place mats for friends. One was an American friend who'd just had her kitchen and dining room – is it Feng Shui? – how do you say that?

Emma Oh, I don't know how you say that.

Ruth You know that –

Emma Feng Shui? Or?

Ruth Yes, that's it.

Emma Yes, I know what it is but I -

Ruth Yes. She had somebody come and do that for her and sort out all her colours and she'd had her kitchen various shades of green – she'd sent me the little snips of the fab – of the paint colours, um, various shades of green, and in the dining room. The carpet was terracotta. And so I determined that I would make her a set of place mats to pick out the shades of green with a terracotta border, which is what I did. And then some other friends, um, who live in Sweden, um, also had green in their dining room, so I did the same, with some of the left over green. I still had left over green. I still had left over green! And I thought – Right! – it's going to make an autumnal quilt. So I've chosen, I chose all my leftover greens and fabrics with flowers because I wanted it to be – it wasn't just autumnal it was autumnal, it was autumn in the garden. It was meant to be, it was meant to be, yes, autumn in the garden. So the fabric that I chose was all these left over greens, thinking I need all these left over greens – I've still got these leftover green, look.

Emma Laughter

Ruth So all my leftover greens and, and then bits of yellow and ochre, and some brownie shades and some of the fabric that's got flowers in, um, that was sort of autumnal. That was a dress, that was a skirt from my mother, I mean, just – yes, autumn in the garden, that's how I chose those fabrics.

Emma Were you, was this a sort of idea that you had in your mind, or -?

Ruth Mm, yes.

Emma Mm. So you were sort of thinking about it. It was not something real that you were looking at, it was something -

Ruth No, just an idea – um. Now you are asking me to work out how I do things and I've never done that. And I sometimes don't know where it comes from. Why did I, why did I, you know, why did I think – oh autumn in the garden. It was probably because I didn't have enough different greens – ha, ha, ha, ha! You know! It could have been something as silly and as practical as that. Oh my goodness I do not have twenty-five different greens, enough of which to make twelve blocks. I'm going to have to make it green and something else. And we are, considering where we live we are surrounded by a lot of nice gardens and nice greenery and I look out onto our garden, other people's gardens and onto green both in this room and in my kitchen, which is the room below. And so I am very aware of changing seasons. I'm very aware of the colours in my garden, um, and how the colours change. The very start of spring the colour in my garden is very bright – you know that nice, that new green, that bright new green and then the very sort of accidy yellow as the, all the euphorbias come out. And white. I've got a white clematis that's early. And a plant that's – oh I've forgotten the name, my mother in law gave me – that's got yellow. The colours of the spring in the garden, everything starts coming out of the winter, is this bright, bright green and yellow and white. And then it changes. When that all goes then pink comes in and the greens get deeper. And it changes and it keeps changing all the time. In the autumn it will be different. Again. And, and I can see it so maybe it's something that has lodged without my even being aware of it and that the choices that I made for that were made subconsciously by that? I can't think of any other way! Ha, ha, ha, ha.

Emma No. I mean that's fascinating. Absolutely fascinating. And, um, I mean, when you were looking you said you didn't have enough greens to do it all in green so you were looking for other, other bits of fabric to, to make a -

Ruth Harmonious whole – mm.

Emma Um, how do you go about doing that – you've said you've got all your fabric stored.

Ruth Yes, I go into the cupboard and I look and see what would go. And I pull it out – do you want to?

Emma Oh, yes, can I look?

Ruth This is a small portion of it. It's meant to be my airing cupboard. Gradually getting encroached -

Emma It's very tidy.

Ruth with bits and pieces of fabric.

Emma Gosh. Look at that. Yes, very tidy.

Ruth So I try to keep them in colours.

Emma Okay.

Ruth But these are the smaller pieces. I have larger pieces in other places, ha, ha, ha.

Emma Ha.

Ruth So I pull out – you see this is what I was – this is, this is the trunk of the things that I was working on, so its still got bits of – I mean I'll throw them all in together. When I -

Emma Do you pull them out – all the different bits that you were thinking of?

Ruth When I just – Yes, -and I cut them, and I cut them into squares and see whether they go. I'll cut them into squares probably before I decide to use then. Because I, I would find it, I found it difficult to even put the colours, to arrange the colours if they're in too big a piece. So I have to, so I cut a square to see whether it would go. So this is interesting. There's me saying to you that some of what, that some of that design must have been intuitive – and I've just noticed – I don't know what that tree is in Sarah's garden, can you see, by the - , just in front of the, the shed there is something tall – very deep sort of auberginey leaves.

Emma Mm. Yes I can.

Ruth And it's the only one around. There's nothing else like that, is there? I always like interesting coloured leaves. I like foliage. But if you look at that and look at this -

Emma Mm.

Ruth Now where did that come from?

Emma I've given you something to think about, haven't I?

Ruth You have. Yes, you have. Because, I think what you've given me to think about is the fact that it's not just craft. That there is something else going on here! And it might be me! Interesting.

Emma But it's, it's something – it sounds like it's something going on – cause – I'll be honest with you. When you said I'm not an artist, I'm a crafts person and I think – mm. Because firstly I suppose you know its, it depends how we –

Ruth How you make that differentiation?

Emma What, well what, what do we, do we think the sorts of qualities or skills or talents are that you need in order to be able to make something artistically, or to be creative or imaginative or you know there are all sorts of terms that we could use.

Ruth Mm.

Emma But looking at the colours and in the photos that you've shown me and, and looking at this, you know, maybe we can talk about what you've got on the wall here – it's the one that, um, you're working on in a different way. And it's, cause if I look at that why, why have you used different sized squares, what's – cause this is beautiful as well. It's a really, really attractive thing to look at and, um.

Ruth Well, it's a Kaffe Fassett design.

Emma Is it?

Ruth Yes.

Emma And have you copied it?

Ruth His original design was in lots of colours. All different colours. I'll show you the book.

Emma It's really beautiful. Oh, I know that book, yes, yes.

Ruth That's his design. But I've got lots of blue. I'm a blue person.

Emma Mm.

Ruth I, I've got an American friend whose also a blue and white person. I say an American friend. This is a very funny relationship. It's a friend of an old friend of ours, John, and for his 50th birthday I said I would host, um, a luncheon party for him – as a 50th birthday present I would host however many people he wanted as a lunch here. That was going to be my gift. And he chose, he's a, um, gay man and he chose to have at his party, his lunch party, all the women in his life who have made, who were important to him. So his mother came, I was there, of course, and his sister in law and various other people, and another woman who he'd met, an American woman who he'd met in Spain several years earlier. And this is Lesley. And Lesley, I discovered, I had discovered since is all very blue and white and this may well be her quilt. Um. I met Lesley on that occasion of John's 50th birthday. We immediately hit it off and it wasn't until nearly the end of the afternoon we discovered that her birthday was the day before mine. We're both Virgos, both liked similar things, very similar sort of people. I met this woman once on that occasion. She went back to America. I haven't seen her since. But we have maintained such a correspondence that I have a wonderful friendship with this woman who I've met one time only, ha, ha, and various things have happened in her life and one of her things is that she's selling her house, her family home in New Jersey and moving. She doesn't know quite where yet. And her house was filled with blue and white things. Blue and white fabrics and blue and white crockery. And she knew that she couldn't take everything

with her and she's trying to simplifying her life and so she made a choice out of her scrap fabric, mostly, some of it's a bit heavy weight but nevertheless, she chose some of her blue and white fabric and put it in a box and sent it to me.

Emma Mm.

Ruth All the way from America. Surface mail. It cost her 26 dollars to send me her scrap fabric and she said 'I know that you'll use it'.

Emma Mm. That's a lovely, I love the …

Ruth Yes, I'd like to finish that. And I think that if I can make it big enough to make a lap quilt for her, um, so the design is, is Kaffe Fassett. But the –

Emma The one that you've copied is as you said before a copy.

Ruth I've copied, I've copied. It doesn't look anything like his, does it?

Emma Well, no.

Ruth Ha, ha, h, ha.

Emma And, um, and also, I mean, I find that fascinating in that okay, it's a copy of a design so it's not your own original drawn design, -

Ruth No.

Emma But are you piecing the patches together in the same way? Are you following a pattern for -

Ruth Pretty well

Emma The whole composition or are you -

Ruth I'm, I'm going to start out, I think with his arrangement. I have sewn some of that together. But it might not come up big enough to do what I want to do. In which case I will have to add more, um, blocks. But I haven't got anywhere near – that's only about a third of the size.

Emma Right.

Ruth So. But, and it got, it got stalled because of other things. You know, I moved onto other things. That's a, that's another job – it's another project where I have – everywhere's covered in fabric – lots and lots of blue fabric. You've got to be in the right frame of mind to allow disorder to reign here. There's obvious things I can do – if I'm working on some, um, handwork or some, and some quilting and I can sit here nicely, I can make my little enclave here so I can do something soothing whereas chaos

reigns in that part because there's all this blue and white.

Emma Mm, yes. But, yes. Thinking again about, about the design, its - Something obviously attracted it, attracted you to that design.

Ruth Mm.

Emma You -

Ruth I wonder what it was.

Emma You were drawn to want to copy that design, in some way.

Ruth Mm, it's the order again, isn't it? It's very mathematical, square, how various shapes, how various sizes of squares fit together to make bigger squares. Mm. Very pleasing.

Emma And the way – um, have you followed a pattern as well in the choice of fabrics?

Ruth No.

Emma The lights and darks the patterns and plains for example.

Ruth No, it's random. It's meant to be random. I'm trying to make it random. Random's not – once you get to a, to one stage. I started off by making a whole row of random blocks using blue and white and in the various sizes. And it was, it was the most liberating, fabulous thing to do. All my scraps, little, you can use, you can see the size of some of the squares – you can't half use small scraps. I made lots and then I thought there's his design pinned up on the left hand side and I thought well I'll put them together. And then I realised that to create what I considered to be harmony I didn't want darks up against lights and so, having arranged that area which I've sewn together, I'm now finding that I am now constrained in what I put next. I can't just go ahead and willy nilly make up a whole load of – I suppose I could – make up a whole load of other squares. What I'm finding what I'm doing now is saying, right, I'm going to make something here but if I've got these three here – that's a light, that's a dark, that's a dark then I want a light here. But a light here's got to be lighter than that. Do you see? And so I've given myself quite a, not a difficult task – but it's stopped being random, hasn't it? That was random. I just made all those blocks without thought of where they were to go. And that was the liberating part. I think perhaps what I should be doing now, instead of doing what I've started to do which I think has created the stall to nature I haven't gone back to this recently. I should go back to what I did originally. Just blast off a whole load of more squares, willy nilly, with the fun and see where they go. If they don't go anywhere they'll go somewhere else. Cause trying to make a square to fit a spot is no where near as interesting as just scooping out bits of fabric and

making a block.

Emma And following your nose.

Ruth And following your nose. There you are. Now you see. Now, if I hadn't been talking to you I probably would not have admitted that I'd stalled on that. Nor would I have discovered why I was stalled. And I just – talking to you has told me I'm stalled because I constrained myself to make a block to fit a spot and I don't want to play that game. I just wanted to make the blocks in, in blues, and then put them together in a harmonious way. Now, why didn't I think that one through for myself? It's what comes of talking to people, isn't it? Putting ideas out, out. Vocalising is the word I'm looking for. Vocalising,rather than internalising. I wouldn't have worked it out. I obviously hadn't worked it out. The reason why I haven't worked on that for ages.

Emma Well, you'd got somewhere by doing -

Ruth Mm.

Emma Cause we're doing a different activity at the moment.

Ruth Mm, mm.

Emma We're doing a complicated piece of words. But you know what I mean?

Ruth Mm,mm,mm

Emma We're thinking about what you do and you'd, you've done that, you've made that and in the doing had stalled.

Ruth Mm, yes.

Emma You'd sort of hadn't thought about the fact that you'd stalled, if you see what I mean?

Ruth Mm. Well -

Emma But -

Ruth But I had because I hadn't done it for ages. I mean I knew intuitively that something, I know that something was going on because I hadn't got back to it and I thought that it was simply the fact that everything gets into a muddle when I'm working on it, because there is fabric everywhere. I have, I, I set up two ironing boards, both of which have got fabric on. One this side and one that side, me in the middle. My swivel chair goes from one to the other. I've – it's wonderful. It's like playtime. You know, Playdoh. Fabulous. And of course, it wasn't, when I was making a block to fill a spot I wasn't doing that. I was choosing my fabrics specifically for that block and making it. It was – I was being constrained. I had constrained myself and all the spontaneity and fun had gone out of that particular pattern so I had to stop.

Emma It was no longer satisfying.

Ruth No. Isn't this interesting?

Emma But the doing. I think I'm trying to think through how – there was some, some communication was going on between the feeling and the doing cause you, you were doing but had got to a stage where you weren't feeling the same things.

Ruth No I wasn't.

Emma You weren't, and you reacted to that by stopping doing.

Ruth Yes.

Emma It was, again it's -

Ruth Well, if it wasn't satisfying there's no point in doing it.

Emma Yes you were, you're responding to a -

Ruth A Stimulus.

Emma To me –

Ruth It's back to this, to responding to the stimulus.

Emma Something, there's something about that, isn't there? There's -

Ruth Yes, but don't you think it's circular that, and certainly talking about that it's circular because alright, I started off making blue and white blocks and it was great and it was all the rest of it and because it was great I did some more and then I got to this stage where making the blocks – I think I've lost my train of thought. Stopped being fun.

Emma You were making the blocks and enjoying making them spontaneously.

Ruth Yes, yes.

Emma And then you -

Ruth And then what happened?

Emma You were talking about it being -

Ruth I was still making –

Emma Circular.

Ruth Yes. I was still making blocks. It is, it's part of this. I'm just trying to work out where the stimulus comes from. There's the stimulus. You do. And there is satisfaction. But then presumably the satisfaction in this case is also the stimulus for continuing

to do, isn't it? I don't quite know. The original stimulus for that was this Kaffe Fasset design and the fact that I thought I could, I've got lots of blue and white. Joan would love this. Let's play with my blue and white. So there were various stimuli at the beginning that say -

Emma An inspiration.

Ruth An inspiration. Let's do this.

Emma 10% of the design was inspiration.

Ruth Yes, that's an inspiration.

Emma Got you fired up.

Ruth Yes. I've got masses of blue and white and I've got blue and white everywhere. Joan would like this, Joan is moving house. She's, her life is going to be different so something blue and white for her like a comfort blanket would be important and all of this probably milling around without my even noticing it. So I started and I was doing and the doing was satisfying and that satisfaction then goes back to the stimulus. Satisfaction creates stimulus and so you carry on doing. That's the circular point I was trying to make.

Emma Yes, I see what you mean. The, the doing takes over and becomes the stimulus for doing.

Ruth Mm, mm

Emma And the doing continues to stimulate the doing.

Ruth Yes, yes. And while that's going on you've got this great roll of excitement and movement and, and um, and success because blocks are being made here.

Emma Achievement.

Ruth Achievement. Yes. Yes. And then stall. And the stall is because I lost the spontaneity. It was making blocks to fit a spot and I don't want to do that.

Emma You've broken the stimulus of the doing.

Ruth Yes.

Emma In fact, you've got to the stage where the doing, the kind of doing that you were doing -

Ruth Umm?

Emma i.e. making the blocks to fit is no longer -

Ruth Satisfying.

Emma Stimulating you to carrying on doing.

Ruth No, it's not satisfying.

Emma You've broken that circle.

Ruth Yes, yes, yes. It's become a chore. I, I'm having to find the right colours for that spot. I'd do better, I'd do better –

Emma Right, that's interesting.

Ruth to do what I've just suggested to do. Okay, forget, okay, I've got that far. Now and go and do the same thing again with what I did with all those blocks. Make a whole new set of fun blocks willy nilly with this blue fabric, go, go, go and then put them together. That would be just as exciting and even if they don't fit, they'll fit in the next one!

Emma It doesn't matter because you can use them somewhere else.

Ruth No. Yes. Ha, ha, ha.

Emma Yes. And that's really interesting to hear you, to hear you –

Ruth Well, you, you have just solved a problem. You have just solved a stalled quilt problem.

E/Ruth Laughter.

Emma Well, that's fantastic!

Ruth It is fantastic, isn't it?

Emma Yes, yes.

Ruth It is. And of course, even if I don't use those small blocks in that quilt something else I do, which I also find thoroughly therapeutic and satisfying, I make my own cards. And a lot of small designs go into –um, I either buy aperture cards or cut apertures in cards and put in small pieces of patchwork or, yes, patchwork. Sometimes I've quilted it and sometimes, er, just a little piece of, um, of wadding behind it slightly soft and puffy and I, nothing will be wasted. So even if my little, um, blocks don't fit in that quilt somebody will get a fabulous card. Ha, ha, ha.

Emma Oh yes, definitely.

Ruth Ha, ha, ha.

Emma Gosh, this is fascinating, Ruth. I could talk to you for hours.

Ruth Yes. We really could.

Emma I'm really enjoying this. It's really, really interesting talking to you.

Ruth It's, um, - How many other ladies have you spoken to?

Emma Um, I'm just worried about the time –

Ruth You'll have to go

Emma Yes, I'll have to stop

Ruth By one o'clock your time will be up, yes.

Emma That's right. But, um, could I come back and see you another time?

Ruth Of course you can.

Emma And, you know, -

Ruth Oh, of course,

Emma And we can carry on.

Ruth Yes.

Emma Because I can still think of lots of, lots of things to ask you about.

Ruth Can you really? Gosh, that's amazing.

Emma So, but maybe, you know, we'll stop for the moment and I'll come down another time.

Ruth I think stop for now, um, but I think it would be fun to talk more -

Emma Yes, yes

Ruth Um, I don't know about four five six weeks time, when I have got into a different stage of doing things so I can say look, the stalls, -

Emma Okay

Ruth We overcame stalled.

Emma Okay, let's do that.

Ruth Um, I'll find the photographs of the house –

Emma And me too, and me too.

Ruth That would be such fun, wouldn't it?

Emma Gosh, that would be so interesting.

Ruth Yes.

Emma Well, let's do that then. Let's stop for now

Ruth Okay. Yes, yes.

Emma And um, and then, if it's alright –

Ruth We'll do it again, yes.

E I'll see you then

Ruth Whenever you think is a, is a good time, get in touch –

Emma Yes.

Ruth You've got my e-mail.

Emma I've got your e-mail and I've got your phone number as well.

Ruth You've got my phone number. You can get in touch any time.

Emma And, um, -

Ruth It has been such fun. It's been interesting

Emma It's been really interesting.

Ruth for me to, as I say, to articulate, to vocalise what I'm doing because I think a lot of it's simply being, I just sew. But you have made me think about why I sew and what I get out of sewing, and there's more to it than meets the eye. Not just a needle, is it? Not just needle and sew fabric. Ha, ha, ha.

Emma There you have it. Can I take one last picture of this, because we talked a lot about it and um -

Ruth Yes, go ahead.

Emma *Takes photographs*

Ruth I've found this morning's conversation to be just totally illuminating.

Emma Mm.

Ruth As well as fascinating.

Emma We really should stop. It has been absolutely fascinating, but yes, I must stop!

Ruth Yes.

Emma I must stop and carry on another time.

Ruth Yes, do. And, you taught me, I have learnt a great deal from our conversation which is, which is useful.

Emma Umm. So have I, so have I. Yes, it's fascinating.

Ruth And it will be even more useful if that moves on, for the next, for your next visit.

End of conversation.

Transcript of interview with Paula

Date: 28 June 2007

Location: Paula's home.

Duration of meeting: 2 hours 15 minutes

Paula is Brazilian and retired.

Emma Okay, I'll just - I tell you what I'll just put it there. It's the 28th of June and I'm talking to Paula. Okay. Yes, tell me, tell me about this.

Paula Yeah. And, er, I wanted to make a wall hanging for the house I was at the moment living then was near Greenwich, and I love those, um, Indians and Pakistani styles you know, and they use the mirrors and everything,

Emma Um, Um

Paula And all by myself I started trying to do – even then I didn't know the name of this, which is applique isn't it?

Emma Yes, Yes.

Paula but I didn't know the name of what I was doing just by myself. And then I started doing properly and I thought maybe I do rose like this but then I thought no, you know something, I'm going to have fun! So I start reporting things related to myself and the family so here I put Sao Paulo, where I come from in Brazil. And there was, like, I go to London so I tried to put a bit of the buildings because Sao Paulo is very built up, it's very modern town and, um, London with the rain and all the houses!

Emma Ha, ha, ha. Gosh, this is beautiful.

Paula And then I start putting just things, you know, at random – having ideas and doing them –

Emma This is beautiful.

Paula Any silly thing, you know!

Emma The man fishing.

Paula Yes.

Emma It's really, really stunning.

Paula Yeah. But you know, there isn't a good style or I don't know embroidery properly – you know - it's was done just. Then I thought of putting some bananas and the monkey and the hammock – that's very Brazilian thing.

Emma Mmm.

Paula And that was that. Then eventually, I – then I put the initials of the person, -

Emma Yes, I was just looking at that.

Paula R for Robert my son, and L for Lisa my daughter and then C is myself, Paula, and A for my husband, Alan.

Emma Okay. This is stunning.

Paula So I had a great fun actually and eventually I did hang the wall because it was a big white wall and somehow it suited the place actually, so that was a fact.

Emma Gosh, it's beautiful. Did you, had you been to any classes at all, had you then?

Paula Then – no, no, no I haven't.

Emma How long ago did you do this?

Paula You know, I'm so annoyed with myself, I didn't put the year. But if I think the year I moved to that house probably was 80s – 80 something, you know?

Emma Right.

Paula Like '85, or a bit before '83 – I can't remember.

Emma And have you done drawing classes at all?

Paula Ah - yes a bit, actually, a bit. Not too many but a bit. I had er, in fact, I started going was when I lived there – yes - going to drawing classes but it was very free and you were using like charcoal for? –

Emma Mm, mm

Paula and was very free and was not a formal drawing class. But when I first came to England I went for a while to drawing classes for a short period. And, um, then when I moved to Beckenham, that was 87 I think, and then I realised that they had patchwork here – I could have classes and it attracted me – I always wanted to do it.

Emma Right.

Paula Because in Brazil it is not a tradition – there isn't the tradition of patchwork there but I always like the idea of textiles,

you know. Once, when I went back to Brazil I saw a doll, an old doll that I had when I was very young, like seven or something and I made a dress for the, dresses for the doll because, like, they were so well done – I couldn't believe it! Saying this but because I was so young – I was like seven or eight and the little stitches and the applique things – I don't know. My mother used to do machine embroidery. She did beautiful work and, er, then I didn't appreciate at all because it was something like er seemed so easy for her and, er, she used to embroider dresses for us and then when I tried to do machine embroidery then I realised how difficult it is. It's so difficult – do you do that?

Emma I have done a bit of machine embroidery –

Paula Oh, I see

Emma I haven't, I haven't really done much of that except for just a few experiments.

Paula Mmm

Emma But I have done some digital embroidery, which is -

Paula What do you mean?

Emma Umm. Instead of you manning the machine you put in the sort of information of the picture that you want embroidered -

Paula Ahh, yes, of course. Yes, yes, I know.

Emma via the computer.

Paula I know, I know.

Emma And then the machine sort of takes that information and does it automatically.

Paula And it does, yes. Yes, I know.

Emma Mmm.

Paula Yes, it's brilliant.

Emma Mmm.

Paula Now, it is isn't it?

Emma Yes, it's quite amazing, umm.

Emma So where did you learn - ?

Paula Yes, yes. It's good because you create the patterns isn't it and the design. You create and you give the instructions to

the machine –

Emma Yes.

Paula so it's not – so there is creation there as well, isn't it?

Emma Yes. It's a very different way of working because -

Paula Yeah.

Emma you don't – you don't actually work with the cloth in your hands –

Paula Yes.

Emma which is the way I prefer to work.

Paula You, you prefer – yes.

Emma Doing my stitching.

Paula Hand embroidery – yes.

Emma So, I find it fascinating that a machine is sort of taking away what's interesting about doing it –

Paula Yes

Emma If you see what I mean.

Paula Mmm. I know, I know.

Emma But,

Paula Is it different ?

Emma Other than that I haven't, I haven't done an awful lot more.

Paula Yes

Emma I have done designs for embroidery to be done in factories for clothes and things like that, but that's very different again.

Paula Yes, Yes

Emma Mmm. But where did you, where did you learn to sew if at seven you were making dolls clothes?

Paula I didn't – I think – my mother liked sewing and she would do clothes for us – but she never - I can't remember being taught, really.

Emma Mmm.

Paula Maybe seeing her, I think. Maybe just seeing her, yes and, er, just because it was something I like it and I just would go for it. Yes, yes.And then I was ages not doing anything but then when he happens when I move to that house and I had a bit more time because the children were a bit older and I felt that I wanted to do that.

Emma Mmm

Paula So I done that wall hanging. And then when I move here to Beckenham then I start having classes and I remember after the one or two classes I couldn't believe how happy I was. I thought I like this, I like so much and, um, the idea of create a design with the fabric, you know. I remember coming from the classes, and, trying to create a blocks, you know, with anything. And some were so complicated. If I think about now they were very complicated. But I adore it – I really I thought - ahh – discovery was like that.

Emma Mmm

Paula I really love it.

Emma Where, where were the classes?

Paula Well, the classes were part of the adult education of the Borough here and – um – so they didn't have – because now they have Kentwood – I don't know if you know about Kentwood as in Kent – it is a centre for adult education and – er – they have the classes there – and - um - but when I started it was not there yet. No, they didn't have it – it was not so organised. They only had a particular place that was the classes for patchwork and quilting and so I done a bit of this basic techniques, I think they call– and then I decided to do the, um, the sampler quilting, and I think I show you when I took, when we met that day with the group? I look my first quilt – the one I finished in that class, yes.

Emma Yes, it was beautiful.

Paula Well, I love it, I love it. And after that was the first group – because the teachers we had of that sort and Diana Travis they organised the City and Guilds patchwork and quilting and, er, so I decide to do – we were the first group actually.

Emma Okay, right.

Paula And that was, what was – cause the classes I had further were 1990 – probably – I can't remember exactly – I think this is the first – yes, 1990 – yeahh

Emma Right, yes.

Paula -because I remember this was the first piece I've done – er - doing the City and Guilds. Yes.

Emma Oh, I recognise that material. I've got the same.

Paula It is the Liberty, isn't it?

Emma Liberty – the peacock feather one –

Paula Yes, ha, ha, ha. Yes, probably left over from the sampler quilt because the sampler quilt I use mainly Liberty Lawn.

Emma Yes.

Paula And then Laura Ashley galore was, you know. But, um, I love the idea – I think it was this – the block is this one here –

Emma I was just looking, trying to -

Paula Yes,

Emma Here it is.

Paula I love the idea – that's it. Here is the block – and, um, look it is so bent here, actually – it is not accurate at all, is it? Look, it's supposed to be straight here – but, um, this is like a block distorted would be a star but when you take uneven measurements then the star gets distorted.

Emma Uhh, Uhh

Paula And I love this idea and the combined fabric that you don't identify the block straight away.

Emma It's very cleverly done.

Paula So that, I don't know, but -

Emma How did you work the design, the pattern of the block out, in the first place, before you cut it into the fabric pieces?

Paula We draw – we did a part of the City and Guilds. We had design classes as well. And, er, we draw the original block – even I have pieces of, er, how we do it but we draw the block even parts, not like the star would have the same length here isnt it?

Emma Yes, it would be equal.

Paula Equal, yes

Emma and symmetrical.

Paula Yes. And then you measure uneven. Here I think I made longer this bit. His is like it would be the regional one and here I took away some inches, some centimetres, to make a smaller this bit and this bit larger.

Emma Mmm.

Paula But all drawing like – um –

Emma On paper first?

Paula on paper first, yes, yes. And then after that would it make a template. Because then we didn't use a rotary, the cutter – it was only with templates and cutting with the scissors, you know.

Emma Yes, that's right, yes.

Paula So – that's the thing. Doing the drawing and the paper and then making the templates. Usually was a cardboard like a cornflakes boxes, you know.

Emma Old Christmas cards!

Paula Yes, exactly – things like that.

Emma Ha, ha, ha.

Paula Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Emma That's what I've used in the past. Yes

Paula So that was – I think then I done a series of, um, um, wall hangings, using the same block -

Paula That's what I told! This idea of used the same block. But, er. This is the block.

Emma Yup. Oh, yes

Paula Then you use a different, er, fabrics.

Emma Yes

Paula For about, the following -

Emma So you've got the gradation of colours.

Paula Yes. I've done these for my daughter actually. She want me to make a - God, what is this – a little insect. And, um, she had this fabric, she like it – it's an Indian fabric. And she said she would like a wall hanging and that's what I made. So I made maybe two other ones with these idea the changing the fabric around so you – the block has a different, um, look then.

Emma And you can't see the pattern quite so clearly.

Paula Yes, when you start, yeah. I love them, the idea of playing with the blocks and all and using the different fabrics.

Emma Where do you get your fabrics?

Paula I think – then I started was Liberty was the – and then, I think just, um, in the shops of Gazelle – there was a shop nearby and used to have, um, cottons – you know, American cottons for - and I think Laura Ashley fabric as well I use. And then I

started going to the shows, you know, the quilting shows and then the people bring the stuff to the shows – I think it, yup, mainly now it is mainly the shows that I get the fabric.

Emma Which shows do you go to?

Paula Er, I go to the main one now, that is Birmingham in the NEC.

Emma The Festival of Quilts.

Paula The Festival of Quilts.

Emma Mm

Paula Had you been to the?

Emma I've not been. I'm going this year.

Paula Yes, I'm sure you will enjoy that – yes.

Emma Yes

Paula I'm sure you will like it. It is a beautiful show – it is so enormous. And, um, we used to go to – now I enjoy as well to go to a small exhibitions of groups or there is East Grinstead – there is a group that - usually they do exhibitions there and, um, they're very good actually. There is these people are very good. They have classes there as well and doing like dying fabric and silk screen printing. That kind of thing. Yeah. But, er, yeah, there's more exhibitions, as well.

Emma Yes,

Paula I like, actually. I enjoy a lot. Yeah.

Emma What exhibitions do you go to? Is it always textiles, quilting?

Paula Ah, yes, yes, that's right. No, but I love the museums in London, as well, yes.

Emma Mmm

Paula And, er, they're very inspiring, isn't it?

Emma Yes, I was going to ask you where do you get your ideas from? What inspires you?

Paula Very, very inspired. I love then when they do geometric shapes. Recently I've been to the Tate Modern and there is an exhibition of Brazillian artist actually and his beautiful work but he's so patchworky when you look because you see the shapes are so, um, it really is a nice inspiration for the, for a quilt – you know – so fantastic. Yes, I love that as well – the exhibitions in London and the museums, yes. I found they are very – Now this, I think, when I was doing the City and Guilds we did the design

and.er. I think I did I think a few heads of animals so I did this – it's supposed to be a tiger. And I done a fox, as well. And I've done – few work with a fox. But I sewed some of the work I be – I took to Brazil because then I started getting in touch with, er, groups in Brazil that is started now, actually. Is developing very well because there wasn't – when I started doing it I can't remember seeing anything in Brazil. But now they have several groups and, er.

Emma That's interesting, yeah.

Paula Yes. And it's lovely because the approach is so different. They much they very free – and they – because I think – because in England there was the tradition and people – although now there are so many contemporary quilters very good, well. But, um, I think they have a more free approach to colours as well. The colours are very vibrant and everything. It's very interesting.

Emma Mmm

Paula Yes, it's good. And so I took some stuff there because when I got in touch with this group mainly one and they do exhibitions in Brazil in bookshops, or -so I took some stuff there and so I sold some. I think it the ones the fox head I sold in Brazil - I'd done a few and I sold them all.

Emma You sold them?

Paula Yes

Emma Oh, great.

Paula Yes, yes, I know.

Emma Do you, do you sell your work as well?

Paula I do, yes, yes. But again only when there is a opportunity like this to have a exhibition. So in Brazil I sold quite a bit actually, yes, mainly through this group and again though I think a friend, through a friend I bought in a gallery or in a shop a few places and I sold, yes. Oh good. The thing is then you don't have the stuff. You know. But that I did -

Emma Yes

Paula a bit of work with his hands. Ah! This one it should be together with the other actually. You know the one with the block –it's the same block done in a -

Emma Same fabric.

Paula different same – yes, yes, it is the same block done in a bit of a different way. And the third one I sold in Brazil

actually, the, was again the same block but using again different fabrics and it was –

Emma It's lovely

Paula a different – um. Look very different.

Emma What's your favourite aspect about making patchwork quilts?

Paula Um. I like the opportunity for the design and I love to work with the fabric. I think that the texture that I handle is immediate – it is so sensual, isn't it? You touch – I love that, actually. I love cut the fabric as well. And, um, I, so I love that aspect. And again you can express yourself like feelings, or, through creating something. I remember there was a - I've got something here. But there was a phase that I think I was trying – it was not a very good phase in my marriage maybe, ha, ha, because my husband gave me ties and the ties he gave I used to exorcise my feelings, actually. This is, it's very messy. It didn't come out well at all, but I made two pieces. One I sold as well was this one. And it was, they go together. Is that a little – oh now it is not the I was going to say was the third one. Ah, here they are – yup – this one - it was called I thinking was written here – All Tied Up – tied up meaning using the word like this. And the other one – is like, um, - What Happened to my Ties? Meaning that they all ripped off and throw like that. I hate the, the finishing, because it doesn't look what I wanted really – it's too messy. I can see now maybe if I'd done not so many here. I don't know. I think the whole thing it didn't work. But they went together, you see? First all tied up and then -

Emma The pair.

Paula And the pair – yes. And this – whatever happened to my ties. And the, the other one had his shirt.

Emma I was going to say shirt material, isn't it? Are they old shirts?

Paula Yes, yes. Shirts from that again –my husband's shirts. That he, it's not that I – ha, ha, ha, ha, I don't know, I didn't go to the wardrobe and took them. Oh, no. Ha, ha, ha. They were old shirts, yes. And the ties he gave to me because he didn't wanted them anymore and I still have loads of material. But unfortunately it didn't work the way I wanted– the look. But this was more like – I think with that one I was happy because I cut – it is not the tie itself – I cut up – you know.

Emma Mmm. The piece

Paula The piece.

Emma Mmm

Paula Yes. Part of the same size as this one. But this work much better, yes.

Emma That's - that's a really stunning piece of work, both of them together.

Paula Yeah. Together they were fun actually, yes.

Emma Gosh, gosh.

Paula They were fun together but this is bad, actually.

Emma What, yes, what is it that you think is bad about it?

Paula I think it looks a mess, isn't it? Well, you are supposed to be look of a bit of a mess, ha, ha, ha.

Emma Well, that's right. I mean -

Paula But, er, even a mess as design goes has to work, hasn't it? And so how it didn't – why is that – is it because it's too many pieces? It doesn't have a – I don't know – is bad.

Emma Mmm

Paula It is. It doesn't work.It looks messy and er, but it doesn't look appealing. It looks – I don't know. It's one of these things. When you start to making you have no idea how it's going to – to end up – you know.

Emma Yes, then you get very caught up in , um -

Paula It's the way it goes.

Emma In making it – so you're very in it, and, um -

Paula I know. Yes, I know – that's why it's – sometimes it's so good to start something but go away for a while and then when you come back you see with a fresh eyes through.

Emma Mmm.

Paula Maybe that's what it happen. Yes. I couldn't see, you know, beyond this – yes – maybe I was too furious, I don't ha, ha, ha.

Emma That's right. Maybe it's, you know really, sort of, in everything,

Paula I know.

Emma in a wider sense. Yes.

Paula Yes

Emma Gosh, but that's really powerful. I mean you…

Paula Together they work well, actually,

Emma Mmm

Paula because then you can see the message. But, er, the other one work it much better because it is – it's difficult to say, isn't it?

Emma Well, they're very different.

Paula sometimes things work or don't work. Can be messy but it can be good. And this unfortunately is not. But the other one you work it better. Yes. Then I wanted to carry on doing things with the ties and, er, I had so many ideas and I - but I stop. I think it probably this put me off a bit. There was one that was flying ties, I think. I remember I draw – I spent so much time with it and the ties were like flying – you know

Emma Mmm

Paula when you fly by the wind? Yeah, it didn't - never made it actually.

Emma You never made it?

Paula No. No, I draw and I had the, um, the template for it – and, er, I didn't do it. Maybe, because, I don't know. This put me off a bit because I thought Oh God, I can't.

Emma Was it cathartic for you? Did it sort of make you feel nice doing it?

Paula Oh, yes, totally, totally. Yes. Yes, it work. Yes. It made me feel good, yes. I think I feel more confident when I'm doing things. I would love to be very free and doing that but, er, I need a pattern to work. I always have to, er, to start with a design or something. I can't just start throwing the fabric – I'm unable to do it. I would love to -

Emma Mmm

Paula And maybe I wanted to do that and, er, I, because I don't know where I am going and, er, I feel lost and I can't really – I have to do something that it more planned and then I can follow. So maybe that's why -

Emma Maybe that

Paula This, yes. Cause then -

Emma Do you ever work from – not a kit exactly in patchwork, but, um, do you always make up your own blocks?

Paula Yes, I prefer that.

Emma Yeah.

Paula Yes. I, I feel happier doing that.

Emma Mmm.

Paula Yes. Although, like, um, this block is something that is a conventional block isn't it? This one – but at least I felt happier that I was not, er, doing all the same, you know, repeating the block. Yes

Emma Yes. Yes, actually that's really interesting. You -

Paula I prefer -

Emma In all of the quilts that you've shown me there is no strict repetition.

Paula Yes, because then, yes. Yes.

Emma You've always changed each block a little bit?

Paula I remember, I think I took another quilt to that day of the meeting and that I designed the blocks, two different blocks and then I started repeating them and I found it so hard and so boring because you have to repeat the same thing over and over again and really makes me very bored and its difficult. I found it very difficult – then I didn't do – even these ones that, um,

Emma Mmm

Paula I made two blocks, two different blocks. And eventually, they the same, you know. They, I thought, I honestly thought they were two different blocks. Ha, Ha, which you look they the same.

Emma They're the same. Just

Paula That's the shape, isn't it?

Emma Yeah, you got – yup -but this one is a solid.

Paula Solid, yes.

Emma And this one is pieced.

Paula And this one is pieced. But you know when I design, when I draw this I thought they were different, ha.

Emma And these are your – you designed this block?

Paula Yes, yes, I draw them, yes. And I thought when - they were different but exactly not – it's just because this is solid.

Emma That's interesting, isn't it?

Paula Anyway, and these are in draw because you use a different fabrics and I love this –

Emma The colour's beautiful

Paula to be able to, well, I, I think I'm going to make it something else again that you can use a different fabrics.

Emma It's beautiful.

Paula Yeah, I love this idea when you change the fabric. You, you have the feeling of a different thing, isn't it? For a different block.

Emma Yes. You see, that one looks very different.

Paula Yes.

Emma From that one.

Paula That's right. Yeah, because these ones they can – because of the fabric and the way it's used it looks like the same. I, I love that actually.

Emma It's beautiful.

Paula Yeah. And I like the – and that was fun because I started making not following any colour, size, I was just started using each block that I thought I like it and then just put them together.

Emma Mmm. It's beautiful.

Paula Yeah. I like that idea.

Emma Lovely.

Paula Yeah. So -

Emma What, um, what do you sort of think is the most sort of challenging thing to do, or, um, what, what sort of do you really, really, sort of, if you're tackling something, what sort of thing about the making patchwork would be challenging to you?

Paula A Challenge. I think a challenge would be, as I was saying to you, if I don't have anything planned I found very difficult. Some people just with a fabric they started evolve to while they doing therefore I found it difficult for me. That is very challenging, to be able to do that. Or sometimes, another thing that I found very difficult I think this pattern – I, I find very difficult some times to have an idea and to be able to, er, transfer to fabric and pattern my idea. Many times I have an idea and the end result is totally different what I had here. And that is very frustrating.

Emma Mmm. Yes, I bet it is.

Paula And it happens so often.

Emma Cos how do you work – so, if you have an idea in your mind?

Paula Yes.

Emma what are the sorts of stages that you go through before it becomes, um, a block?

Paula I started to doodle, doing a bit of drawing. That's what I have to do, if I have an idea start a drawing.

Emma Mmm

Paula And, um, I think, I wonder if in having design classes if I could, er, be able to, to putting fabric or in paper first in drawing what I have in my mind. I wonder if there was a way to help me channel this, because I have a few ideas but I couldn't even carry on because they were coming out so not what I wanted.

Emma Mmm

Paula That, um, the last thing I made I am still making actually. And that one, I'm wanted to, it's not very good but I am going to dare to send it to Birmingham.

Emma Right.

Paula And, er, it's here. And the idea was totally different, and then I feel frustrate because I'm still quilting this.

Emma Gosh, look at that – Ahh, wow.

Paula Yes, yes, yes. And the idea was totally different. I wanted because I think it still comes from that period actually. There was a still remaining a bit of feeling, um, trapped, or, I couldn't come out, get out of the situation and I wanted to, I draw several times, and when I executed it,s totally different. I wanted like to put colours all together and then make them spreading, like out of something – trapped you start diluting and coming getting your way dissolving, and I wanted to do this again. I've got one upstairs – I'd forgot actually that it is part of this idea but again came out very different.

Emma Mmm

Paula And then I think well forget about it – you have you, I am not a practical person. I think that is probably to do a bit. I think, um, I imagine thinks in a more dreamy way instead of a practical way, what is going to work. Simplify your work and make very complicated and dreamy and I think probably its good to talk about this, Emma.

Emma Mmm. That's really interesting. Yes

Paula It's good to talk and maybe it's going to help me. I have to think about – cause sometimes you have to be practical and simple because sometimes you have things in your mind and people are not going to get what you, what you make -

Emma Mmm. Getting the message.

Paula Message

Emma Message.

Emma Get it across.

Paula You get complicated.

Emma Do you, do you see it in your mind? Can you, do you have picture in your mind of what you're going to do?

Paula Yes, but not very good, I supposed because when I do it's all bad. I do have, but it's probably not like a photograph. Something is a bit of dreamy, you know, like imagining.

Emma And

Paula It's not like a proper picture.

Emma And is it also sort of tied up with the way you feel? Do you think that -

Paula Yes, totally.

Emma Affects your idea?

Paula Probably.

Emma I don't know.

Paula Probably. Yes, probably, yes.

Emma It's like trying to find a way to get the idea out -

Paula Yes.

Emma And

Paula Not

Emma Keep, being faithful to your idea, and -

Paula Yes, yes

Emma So remaining true to your idea and finding not just what it looks like, but sort of what it feels like as well.

Paula Exactly. Exactly, and I can't do it. I can't do it. This is totally what didn't imagine because when I was putting in the fabric what I imagine was so bad because I did and I did this so many times. Stupid, I put in different ways, see? And,

Emma Gosh

Paula There is another one I'm going to get because I –

Emma It's, it's quite extraordinary work.

Paula I don't know, I don't know, I don't -

Emma Mmm

Paula Like.

Emma It's beautiful.

Paula I was having this idea to make like a two or three pieces, er, like stages of this idea of being trapped. Getting up, but, um, as I said – these again, I made but I think it didn't work what I wanted either. I put a name of breaking free. It was this idea – see have all here tied up – and then you going through there. But, um, I think then, I was going to make this one similar.

Emma Mmm

Paula And when I start making this idea again, because I did this separation, this stitching this little things, and I thought I put the fabric, again is going to be the same idea, put them together and then I spread the colour. Even I didn't like it – I thought it wasn't, not working – and I thought forget about it. Do something else. So there you are. I am still trying to break free. Ha, ha, ha.

Emma Gosh, it's amazing.

Paula Maybe now because I tend to know, I don't, I feel much more free, actually, without putting the effort in the fabric and it happens here. Maybe I'll be able to, to be more, not to be tied up to the feelings but to be more practical. That and – I thought I had gave, given up, but maybe not. When I had done this – that's it, give up.

Emma No, don't!

Paula to the idea and, yes, because I don't know the combination of the colour or the fabric – so, it didn't work. Anyway. There!

Emma I think they're stunning.

Paula Breaking free! I still, not in this, yeah. So I -

Emma Do you draw or paint your ideas, when you're working to something like that?

Paula I don't paint, no. Mmm. I draw, I draw.

Emma Mmm

Paula Roughly. Yeah. But this happen then when I have already the fabric. I started doing it with the fabric -

Emma With the fabric, itself.

Paula With the fabric itself. Yes.

Emma Yes

Paula Yes. But I'm enjoying this the quilting by hand, I like that. Baby stitches. Yes.

Emma I wanted to ask you. Because you piece things by machine as well.

Paula Yes, yes, only by machine, yes. The piecing -

Emma Yes.

Paula And then, sometimes, I've done things with er, sorry I should have waited to you finish the cake -

Emma No, no, no, no, no I keep sort of getting a little bit. It's so good.

Paula Ha, ha, ha, oh dear. Yes, but, um I never piece by hand, actually. Just, er, with the machine, and um,

Emma But do you quilt always by hand?

Paula Er, there was, there is a stage I used to do all by hand the quilting, but then you are going to see there are things that when I started doing with a machine as well.

Emma Oh, yes.

Paula Not very brilliant but as still. Ah, these I made for my son. And, er, he'd been using actually, because you can see – you can't - it is very faded. The colours were very bright. This was a very sort of navy blue and now you see so all gone, the, the colour is gone.

Emma Do you like your quilts to be used? Do you give them as gifts?

Paula I do, I do, I do. That as well. I gave them, I do. And some people hate this idea of selling or giving. For me it gives such a pleasure if someone is enjoying something – I really, I feel so pleased, actually.

Emma Mmm

Paula Recently now my daughter went to Barcelona. She, er, I sent a quilt to be given to this friend and the friend like it so much and I was so pleased that she like it and she's going to use it. Now, it's a bed quilt, it's a single bed quilt. But apparently she put it in a sofa or something. But I said it was I thought it was not good enough for that but she said it works. And I was very pleased, yes, I really like that, I do. Yeah.

Emma And that the -

Paula It doesn't work

Emma colours change –

Paula Sorry?

Emma Through being used the colours change.

Paula Yes. Well, it doesn't upset me, too much actually, you know. It doesn't. It's a shame, in a way, but again because they were very bright colours, actually, but this was a navy blue, but – yeah, well. This I made it when I was 25 years of marriage.

Emma Ahh

Paula So I made one with all the each star is one year.

Emma Okay.

Paula So it goes like this.

Emma It goes that way round.

Paula Yes, yes. When you use the fabric same things, you know –

Emma Yes

Paula Easy ways, it's very easy way to do it. I felt, in a way I thought what a cheat. Cause for me I felt that I was cheating doing that but I thought it was fun, actually. So, there is everyone – look, the wedding.

Emma Okay.

Paula And, there was always – God, I put a worm here already, ha ha.

E/Paula Ha, ha, ha

Paula Oh, terrible! I thought it just – I don't know anyway. It then the first year the Brazillian, the monkey and the English horse. And then the apple.

Emma Mmm?

Paula And the bananas. It's when my son was born.

Emma Okay.

Paula And here, I think the first year with my, with the toys and you know, and again toys.

Emma Mmm

Paula And then I put a white guy I had a miscarriage. - And here another miscarriage.

Emma Golly

Paula I know! And then I think this is like a – the miscarriage. And then I was pregnant again. It was now since, the – yes. And then here is like -

Emma Yes, cause there it is again.

Paula Ahh, that's right, yes, yes. I forgot about this. Yes, oh good. And here is because sometimes he's a pig and sometimes he's a little chick and sometimes I'm a cow but sometimes as a pussycat.

Emma Ha, ha. This is fantastic!

Paula Ha. It was fun, actually, it's fun. I had a great fun. Then is my daughter was born. I put L for Lisa and R for Robert and -

Emma Ahh.

Paula Now I can see yeah. I had on the wall that this for ages. Here again is, yes, the girl and the boy, the girl and the boy.

Emma Mm, mm.

Paula I think he's going to school – I can't remember – not yet – yes, yes probably, I think he's going to school.

Emma One, two – three, four, five

Paula Yes, he was already five, exactly. Yes, yes. And more toys and me the housewife and, er, Alan playing tennis.

Emma And watching Wimbledon now!

Paula I know! Yes, this is funny,

Emma How funny.

Paula I know!

Emma Gosh, this is amazing!

Paula I know. And I had such a fun! We moved and the house need everything to be done and I tell you it was upside down –

Emma Okay.

Paula Was so chaos and we had so much of this and the garden as well was all chaos so I put all colours that not very – and then eventually the house was ready. And here I made for Alan, actually, because he's a Arsenal supporter.

Emma Okay

Paula And I put in all the red and

Emma Yes, and the red, the red and the white isn't it?

Paula That's right, yes,

Emma And the, embroidered the net.

Paula Yes. And here because we used to travel a lot actually. We used to have lovely holidays and use all the car and trains and going for the sun because in England we had all this very lush but because of the rain isn't that so much green, ha, ha, like now! And we would go for the sun. And again, now – Ah, I think my son went to boarding school, so the truck. And here – ah, I think, er, Alan was very, very generous actually. He always was covering us with the presents and I think Lisa was started going to school, maybe? No, yes. Oh gosh,

Emma Yes. One, two three four, five -

Paula it was long ago – yes I don't know why I put–

Emma Six, seven

Paula she was going – I don't know –

Emma Swimming? Would that swimming or

Paula I can't remember what was the idea here. I can't - I have it written, actually.

Emma You wrote it all down?

Paula I have it written. Yes, I wrote it all down, yes.

Emma Oh, that's good, yes.

Paula Yes, yes. And here I think – is that the one? Er, er, we went to Brazil and this is Brazil but the dark is my father died that year.

Emma Right.

Paula That's what it is. And here, ah, I went back to work – you see?

Emma Mm, mm.

Paula And the person and – what – can't see what go like this.

Emma Ha

Paula Ah, and me going free, you see?

Emma Okay.

Paula With a wings, trying to. It didn't last too long because we decided the hours were difficult and the children – Er, I

would take days off all the time because the one, they have a play or they have something – and when the holidays came – it was a big holidays in August – I had very little – um - holidays left. Because I'd been taking all these – And my son, because he was in boarding school. So the holidays was more important than before because was the time we could be together so I gave up.

Emma It's beautiful.

Paula and then we got a dog! And here – ah, here because we had a good time, er, going to Ascot – I think this was Ascot. We had, or going to parties. I had the strawberries for I think tennis as well. And my father in law died.

Emma Ahh

Paula I think that's what it is. And we moved to another house. There we moved to Beckenham – because here we was in Greenwich – and then we moved to Beckenham – the we started doing garden – we had a bigger garden, that was the idea. Then here I discover patchwork.

Emma Ahh. So – okay. Yes.

Paula 'Cause I move and then I discover patchwork.

Emma Yes.

Paula So here I have all the, all the restaurants that we used to go to go to restaurants galore because Alan would go with his business. He had to entertain clients as well. And we enjoy actually. And this is for all the restaurants. And here the family doing things that they like. Alan started doing golf. This is Robert at school doing reading and singing and this is Lisa doing painting and playing the drums. She wanted to, we got some drums for her because she want to play the drums! And here is a birthday of someone. Here is the wedding anniversary – the silver.

Emma Mmm. Yes.

Paula And here, I think is Robert 21st. I already – yes, I think so. I think it is Robert 21st or Alan then, was Alan birthday. And then the business of Alan collapsed and then we have a dark -

Emma Mmm

Paula And then the - Here I put the, I, I think it's for each one of us that we have all different patterns and but the colours somehow match each one of us is different. Yes, I think it's for four of us. And, um, that's what it is. There!

Emma Gosh. That's quite a record, isn't it? I mean, that's a life document.

Paula I know! And I had such a fun! I felt -

Emma Yes, I can imagine!

Paula Cheating as you I told you.

Emma Why's it cheating?

Paula Cause I thought – when you use a fabric and but it's such a good fun –

Emma Mmm

Paula Oh jeese. I really enjoy. I used to -

Emma I can imagine.

Paula hang in the other house actually. And these I think I started doing machine. I can't remember when I started doing machine, or maybe here I started. I can't remember. This was a competition, actually. Was the theme was, was a European competition. The theme was, um, how is go – Trompe l'oeil – Light and magic – something like that. So I did the light of Aladdin and the magic -

Emma Oh, Yes

Paula of Aladdin is the lamp, magic lamp, I think. And then I was pleased because they accept and they selected, I don't know, 30 out of 100 something and I was very pleased. And that I was the start doing the machine. Machine quilting.

Emma Do you prefer, which do you prefer, hand quilting or machine quilting?

Paula To make, I prefer, I think, er, hand quilting, yes.

Emma Why do you think that is? What is -

Paula I, I love the, to use the stitch, actually. I found it suiting and nice actually. And it probably I don't feel so confident with the machine so the actual action of doing of it I prefer maybe the hand stitching. Because I don't feel so confident. I do and I don't think I'm doing really it should be. But when it works – and I'm going to show the pieces that I think it work better the machine quilting then I feel happy with the result. But, um, yeah. It is practice, you have to practice so much.

Emma Have – do you practice a lot?

Paula Not really. That's - ha, ha, ha

Emma Ha, ha, ha.

Paula So I am not so good, ha, ha. No, I don't practice a lot, no. I go like phases and I try to do, do, do. But I wouldn't practice as such. I would do when is already there, you know, is not enough, really.

Emma Mmm. I'm the same, mmm.

Paula You have to - Yeah, you have to be, do it

Emma Do it straight away.

Paula I know. Yeah.

Emma And that's – I'm not happy with it then do it again.

Paula Practicing. I know, I know. I know. And this, I can't remember when I done this. This I done some I didn't put the year which is so bad. I would have to try hard to be able to find out. But here when I went to Brazil, a few years before this and I met the group then they ask me if I wanted to show something to do with anniversary of the discovery of Brazil.

Emma Oh!

Paula And this was five hundred years, yes 1500 was when Brazil was discovered. And 2000 was the celebration. And so I done the, um – that's when the Portuguese arrive in Brazil. The three caravels –

Emma Gosh.

Paula They arrive and that's what I've done.

Emma Have you painted your fabric, here?

Paula No, no that was the fabric was like that, actually, was already like that.

Emma Okay

Paula Yeah. All the fabric was like that. I didn't paint it at all. I went to try now if I might try now because I went to a workshop and we did a bit of painting and I think might try but I never did before. Mm.

Emma This works really well, doesn't it?

Paula Yes, I think because yes, yes. And I think because of this shape you can get away with the things better than when you do different, yeah.

Emma Mmm

Paula So then I started doing this machine – by machine.

Emma How long did it take you?

Paula In a year -

Emma Sorry, how long does it take you to do a quilt?

Paula Oh, Gosh, I can't say. I can't say – it's so difficult. Because sometimes you - if you have a deadline and you really go for it and if I have time I will be the whole day therefore three days and then something comes up but then I would be really intensive. It's so difficult to say. I don't know what to say, Emma. Because sometimes you have more time and you do a bit each day and then I did this thing that was fun – and it came up so dark, isn't it?

Emma It is dark, yes.

Paula Isn't it dark? It's funny. I don't know why because I didn't feel so dark, actually. I think – you know what I want to do with the black hole? I think that it was the time that they were talking about these black holes in the universe and I was so fascinated and worried by it, I don't know. Ha, well I just, ha.

Emma Right. That's interesting.

Paula Yeah. Well. That is something that it didn't work very well. Why, but still.

Emma It's quite a complicated piecing.

Paula Yes, that I draw again. You know I just draw this and then just this shape here in the middle and, um, I went, you know, for it already. This is like a crazy log cabin really.

Emma Mmm

Paula You know that, you keep adding –

Emma Yes

Paula The fabric go round and round

Emma Round and round

Paula And this is crazy.

Emma Mmm

Paula Crazy patchwork, which I adore doing it. I love it. It's such a good fun because then it comes out so is a surprise. You surprise yourself. I love it. And it was the time they started using like nets – you know?

Emma Yes.

Paula On top and I think it was experimenting with all this.

Emma Yes.

Paula And I put on – cause I always putting our shows, you know, the patchwork quilting group and, um, I think it the

nephew of one of the women, he like it actually. And, er, she wanted to buy to give him a present, and I regret now actually I didn't, I should let her buy for anything, you know. And it was fun – because he like it. We thought, I don't know. He was young, a child, and we – And this is for, um, a competition of the Quilters Guild.

Emma Okay.

Paula Yeah, it was, it was called, the theme was, they always give you a theme and was er transforming tradition, and was like a seminol, you know, and,er, when you seminol – you know the technique? I think the Indians in Americas, actually, the Indian Americas actually started doing it when they -

Emma No, I don't know that.

Paula they were given sewing machines and they start using this technique.

Emma No?

Paula You just, you er, it mean that you, you sew together strips of fabric

Emma Yeah

Paula And then you cut the strips. You place whatever, and then create different shapes.

Emma Yeah, and patterns.

Paula Patterns, yes. That's what a seminol is.

Emma Okay. Right. Oh, I'll have to look that up, cause -

Paula Yes, yes. So there are four panels and –

Emma I've got that one!.

Paula And this I really hurry up.

Emma That's really strong.

Paula because I must say – you know when they give you a theme sometimes and you, you start, er, thinking of the theme and create something. And that was not the case – I was doing something else, I think with a Brazilian amazon, um, elements in it and it was not working, was not working. I didn't know what to do. And I have started this for fun. That was different – it was not, by then, I think there was one piece only. I can't remember how it was and I think my son came and I show him what I was doing and I said "it doesn't work, it doesn't work", I said. Then I showed this that I was making and he said "Mummy, why don't you use this?" I said, do you think really? "Yes, yes", he says, "its okay" – so I went for it and then I thought oh my God what am I going

to say to transform a tradition I had to do the other way round. Ha, ha. Then I had why this seminol and I thought that this was a different way of doing seminol. Because I think many of the things you see – even I brought it here for you to see – because then, they, they do a little brochure because -

Emma Mmm

Paula when you see – I did a workshop with this woman – she's delightful, she's, er Dutch, -

Emma Mmm, mmm.

Paula she's wonderful. But when people – this is all just forming tradition. When sometimes people discover – then this is to remind

Emma Oh, here you are!

Paula I put it two colours, like. So people – you interpret in so many different ways, isn't it?

Emma Mmm that's beautiful.

Paula Yes, she's very good. She's very contemporary, and she – I think her background is in art, actually, I'm not sure, but I think she is. This was leather, actually. It was interesting the texture of this. Some don't photograph very well because if you're – I think the one who won – because then they choose one, I think, was this one. It doesn't photograph well. Was beautiful because it's so beautifully done –

Emma Gosh.

Paula And is really wonderful. Because the texture – you can see the little squares so well and the quilting is beautifully done – is lovely.

Emma Mmm.

Paula It doesn't show what it is, really. That's what it happen to. This is beautiful. This woman is very – she is Irish and Cretan, yes. Again, she said this she'd done it – because I lent to her that this was exhibited in Yorkshire, in Halifax.

Emma Uh, uh. Yes.

Paula Yeah. And, um, she went especially for the first, when was the opening. And she went specially from Ireland to see – she is very good. And she was telling me that she had this cloth – an old quilt and she didn't like it – didn't like it and she said what am I going to do and she started cutting it up. And they had it making a different thing, you see?

Emma Okay.

Paula Sometimes you have to sew that way.

Emma Mmm

Paula And was wonderful. She's a –

Emma Gosh, yes. Stunning.

Paula Yes. Yes, it was a beautiful exhibition. Was really good. This is lovely, as well. She won last year, um, Birmingham.

Emma Okay, right.

Paula She, she so precise. She does so precise work – I have to take me need a tissue, actually.

Emma Gosh, some of these -

Paula I know!

Emma Are just amazing.

Paula I know. Was a wonderful exhibition. Really beautiful. Was so nice – very light and lot of light was lovely.

Emma And that one, too.

Paula I know. It's felt, actually.

Emma Oh, right.

Paula So was really lovely. Beautiful colours. And that was interesting.

Emma Mmm. Goodness me!

Paula Was beautiful, actually. Was very nice.

Emma When was this? 2002.

Paula So that went there. So these when I really had to hurry up because then I didn't have too much time and I really had to hurry. And it's a pain, here, because you have to stop with the machine all the time, you know.

Emma Yes.

Paula But, it still.

Emma Gosh. All of these, yes, so you've stitched, quilted round –

Paula Yes.

Emma All of these little rectangles.

Paula Yes. Is a pain!

Emma Ha, ha

Paula Aaaah! It is a pain, really! And I didn't have too much time. I really had to rush, it was horrible. Yep. Still, there.

Emma Mmm.

Paula Er, okay. Then I think that quilt, I think, I like, I must say, I like this and when you done – but er. I think this one you would, actually. And sometimes, because these are – um, um, are getting like the theme of Amazon. This was taken from the, the design in the urn from the Amazon.

Emma Pottery.

Paula And the pottery, yes. And then was this like face, you know? And that I took from there. And I don't know if this one – sometimes I put a little animal when I was doing the quilting. I had such fun, actually. And I was happy doing it. I don't know. Maybe I didn't put in this one. But some I put either a, um, alligator, or snake. I don't there is here. Anyway.

Emma I wouldn't know what to look for.

Paula Er, maybe.

Emma Oh, there's two.

Paula Yeah, this one again the same idea was another urn and there was another pattern there. I think it is not in this ones, actually. Is, um, no I think it is another one that a friend bought, actually. I made a very similar one but a year, um, I think I put a black and white. I think it a face like this, and then black and white, I think. It's a bit – very, very similar. Same size and the other one I remember very well putting in the quilting, um, little figures actually, but you have to – I don't think I did in this one. No.

Emma You have to look very carefully.

Paula I know, I know. Ha, ha, ha. Yeah. So this ones I did with all this the theme of the Amazon.

Emma Gosh. It's very, um, what's the word I'm looking for? It's very sort of tiny work – very precise work, isn't it?

Paula I don't know, actually. You I wish.

Emma Cutting, cutting these pieces of -

Paula Yes

Emma fabric out- you have to be so careful.

Paula Yes, yes, it's true. But, er, I use bonder web. And when you have the bonder web the fabric is very firm so it's much easier.

Emma Yeah, of course. And.

Paula Yes, yes. If you do with the fabric itself, it would be very difficult. But with the bonder web makes very easy, actually.

Emma So these are appliqued on?

Paula Its applique with bonder web, yes.

Emma Yup. Okay.

Paula That's it. And then you do the zigzag around. Yeah. So it makes so easy, that's right, so easy to do small pieces, you know. Because er, with er– yeah.

Emma Do you have somewhere where you do all your work, cause you've got an enormous –

Paula I know. One of the rooms now I use – yes.

Emma Okay. Yes.

Paula It's my daughter's room so when she comes – they're not here anymore, of course, but when she comes she still uses the room.

Emma Mmm.

Paula So before when we move I had a tiny room and it was only for that. so was good. But now we had the computer in the other room that my husband was using. But then, er, he prefer to be in the small room, and, er, so I have to tidy up a little bit if I'm doing some work so when my daughter comes, yeah.

Emma Mmm.

Paula And this is again the Amazon, because it's one of those baskets of the Indians. And there was this, um, this pattern in the basket.

Emma Yeah.

Paula And I think for the first time, the only time actually, that I done something and I could manage to do what I wanted – yeah?

Emma Okay.

Paula and it came out cause I didn't know how I was going to go about it to do this –

Emma Mmm.

Paula And then I work out that I could do from the back. I've putted the whole, er, cloth here on top and I draw in the back.

And then I did the stitching. Because first I like tack the cloth, here.

Emma Okay.

Paula And then I sew from the pattern I had to draw in the back. And I cut up then.

Emma After you've stitched it on!

Paula After I've stitched it. Yeah. And it was the only - first time and - only time that I thought I was pleased because I thought I could work out something that I had, er, imagined.

Emma And all that cutting out!

Paula I know, I know. But I love it! I know, I know.

Emma I know I like –

Paula No matter you end up with raw edges but better still.

Emma No. But that's fine.

Paula Yeah.

Emma I like cutting out, as well. I wonder what it is about cutting out. Why don't you - ?

Paula I think, yes. I heard from someone else thing it they like the sound of the scissors going through the fabric. Again, I don't know why I like, actually. Ha,ha.

Emma Cause when you're cutting - think about if you're sitting down cutting up the fabric, cause it's - you have to concentrate –

Paula Yes.

Emma Because you have to cut the shapes out – quite simply.

Paula Yes

Emma The work you're doing, it's very precise.

Paula You have to do – yes –

Emma But at the same time it's, um –

Paula You're creating a pattern, I suppose -

Emma It's rhythmic – you're actually doing –

Paula Yes, yes.

Emma You know, it's the same movement that you're doing all the time – cutting up.

Paula Yes. I don't know. It's strange, actually.

Emma Something to think about.

Paula To think about – exactly! And I was pleased because that was the first year of the, the, Quilters Guild are doing their exhibition in Birmingham, the NEC –

Emma Mmm. NEC.

Paula It's a National Exhibition. The NEC. And the theme was connected – that's why it's connected.

Emma Mmm, okay.

Paula See? Was a beautiful –

Emma Gosh, it – there's Eve as well.

Paula Yes, yes.

Emma I'd like to talk to Eve, actually. I'm sure she's fascinating.

Paula Yes, yes. I'm sure she would be happy to –

Emma Mmm.

Paula she's away at the moment – I think. I don't know if she's coming back soon, if she didn't. She went to Canada –

Emma Okay.

Paula Um, her mother in law lives in Canada and it was her birthday. And, er, that was the winner – against - Pauline Barnes. It was beautiful. Was the spaghetti junction because it's there in, near Birmingham, isn't it? And the theme beautifully done – all embroidered, really.

Emma Gosh.

Paula Heavily embroidered. This was lovely as well. It was a beautiful exhibition. Very lovely, actually.

Emma There you are.

Paula Yes. Was very nice, actually. I was so pleased I could be there. They were lovely, beautiful work, really. Beautiful work. This, this Laura Kemshaw – she's very good – extremely good. Jenny Hughes –

Emma Do you find it very satisfying, to have a quilt selected for an exhibition?

Paula Very. Extremely, yes, yes. Ha, ha. I think so, yes.

Emma What , um,– I only think – why, why do you make quilts? I mean, it sounds like a silly question, but I wonder what, um, obviously you enjoy it?

Paula I enjoy it, yes.

Emma And what's, what is it that you enjoy?

Paula I enjoy to, to work with the fabric and I enjoy to express whatever, what I have to express, ha, ha.

Emma Mmm

Paula I feel the need of create something and I found this media is wonderful and suits me. I feel comfortable with it and, um, I don't, I don't – it sounds pretentious to say to create something but even if it's silly or not good but that's what I feel, that to create something gives me a satisfaction, yes. Yeah. Most of the time I feel frustrated because, as I told you, I end up not liking the things. This one, I must say, I think was the first and only time that I think it came out what I want it to. You know.

Emma It's beautiful.

Paula Yes, so. And then I done some more actually of this. I, this one – how it goes –

Emma It goes like that.

Paula it's again is the same idea and, um, -

Emma Oh!

Paula the maze – yes. Cause I wanted to try to do with a pattern - the background. You know – oh, it keeps coming out.

Emma This one's different.

Paula And I thought with the pattern, because this one has the colour -

Emma Mmm

Paula The bottom fabric is just a plain pale and the top is coloured, isn't it?

Emma Yeah.

Paula And these I wanted to put a pattern in the bottom fabric to see how is going – would react.

Emma So with this one would you – you layered the cream fabric –

Paula Oh top, yes, yes, that's it.

Emma On top of the patterned fabric?

Paula Yes, yes, instead of have the cream on top.

Emma And then stitched it through from the back?

Paula That's it.

Emma That's these stitches?

Paula These stitches.

Emma Then you cut it out.

Paula That's right. And, of course, here I did the machine quilting.

Emma Mmm

Paula And the, in the fabric in the bottom, and here the hand quilting on the top

Emma Mmm.

Paula See?

Emma Yes.

Paula Yeah,

Emma That's nice.

Paula So then I'm making - I'm nearly finished – another one. It's all plain, so -

Emma Okay.

Paula I have to finish. It's good being a bit smaller. It's the same idea again,

Emma Yes.

Paula The same thing.

Emma I see, cause you can really see the edges of the fabric here.

Paula Ah, exactly.

Emma Yeah. Where you've cut out.

Paula Exactly. Yes

Emma Mmm. Okay. And you stitched –

Paula You can't see the stitching. But more or less, yes, you see?

Emma Yeah. I see. Mmm. Yeah.

Paula So that is the last one to do with this, ha, ha. I had enough!

Emma Do you work it on a frame when you're quilting by hand?

Paula No, no, I don't. It's just like that.

Emma Just –

Paula Yeah, yeah.

Emma Holding it?

Paula Just holding, yes. Just holding.

Emma Okay.

Paula Okay. These ones. Oh God I did them with the same idea again and so I think now is enough of the idea.

Emma Ha, ha, ha.

Paula It was a challenge for the patchwork quilting group. It was -

Emma Oh, this was in the exhibition.

Paula Remember? That's right.

Emma Yes.

Paula Ah, yes. You went to the – yeah, yeah, that's right.

Emma Yes, yes

Paula And the thing is, you know I think I had this because I made this because it was, er, circles and squares. But I didn't realise was, er, to – we supposed to use bright colours and I think I miss that when I didn't read any more what the requirements. And I made this and I thought, Oh, God, I didn't use bright colours. Then I thought, I tell you what – I'm going to put the snail with the colours – its called, er, Bright Colour Zeta.

Emma Ha.

Paula He ate the colours. Ha, ha, ha. Though I think I go to that – yeah – I made the quilt with the bright colours and one morning I came and there was the t colours they had all gone. He had eaten all the colours. Ha, Ha, oh, dear! So there you are.

Emma So how, how much time do you think, in a week, do you spend doing your patchwork?

Paula Oh, golly. You know I don't have a pattern. Sometimes I go - you know from last, the last exhibition we had, I had produced very little – I spent nearly two years without doing hardly anything. I didn't, I didn't have an ideas and I don't know what happened. I didn't, I would like to but I couldn't, somehow. I didn't have any ideas and just about now I am just coming back.

Emma Mmm, good.

Paula Yeah, yeah. Now, I do. Then I do – it depends, it depends. Some I can go sometimes doing four days per week and then another week would be twice – two days per week – it doesn't follow. It depends what I'm doing, or happening. But if I'm in the house and if I have something going on then I do instead of doing housework I'll be doing the quilting.

Emma Mmm. Yes. What would be your, your preferred activity?

Paula My preferred activity?

Emma Yes, if you could choose what you could do with your time?

Paula Yes.

Emma Whenever.

Paula This. This would be really a major – yes. These, I think most of the time I could occupy with this and I would be extremely happy. But I like cinema, I like go to the Museums. I love travelling and, um, that's about all. I don't like sport at all. Unfortunately. I don't like practicing. Or any sport at all. I don't like to watch any sport at all. Ha, ha. Opposite of Alan – he loves them all! And, er, yeah, that basically would be that. Travelling and going to see films and Museums and doing the patchwork, yes.

Emma Mmm. And what, um - ?

Paula And that was another thing. Because it takes so long then if things go not very well and you're not very happy with the result – you go oh my god it was so long time, isn't it? And, sometimes, I, when I have some ideas I keep think, oh god, am I going to do right or am I going to waste all this time?

Emma Mmm

Paula And then I don't feel so happy with it. Again. You have to do it. I have a friend in Brazil – she's the daughter of an artist – the mother is a painter in the – sometimes, er, when I went through those two years that I couldn't do it, I couldn't do it – I said I don't know and she said "no, you have to do it because the important thing is to do it". And sometimes I keep saying to myself that's it. You have to do it and then the result is the result, but, er, yeah.

Emma Mmm. I think – yes, yes.

Paula And when you work – you really – it gives me such enormous satisfaction – so much. I can remember the first time I felt that was when, er, I finished that, um, sampler quilt and they had always the end of the year they was an exhibition. And

that was the first time I had entered a quilt and, er, when I saw there I was so happy. I thought – I was able to make something! I remember my mother was visiting us and she would go, er, along to see people if they were looking at the quilt and appreciate and she would come to me – all those people were looking and and they would appreciate. And I was so happy – sort of satisfaction actually.

Emma What, um, what do your friends and family think of your quilts?

Paula Well I think they kind, actually. Ha, ha, ha. They kind. The family, they - my husband is very supportive and usually he likes it. Usually. And they say nice things about – yes - usually - they very kind. Umm.

Emma And you, you mentioned some of the quilts that you've given to your daughter and your son and –

Paula Um. They, I know they have in their home – my son had I think first in the flat where he was and took to another flat and then I think eventually it got fed up I think – he gave me back – ha, ha, ha.

Emma And he gave it back to you?

Paula Back to - I think because then he came to live here for a while and I think was then that he brought everything he had and he didn't want to take it back wherever he was. Maybe he got tired, because he'd been –

Paula Yeah. Anyway, ha. Well, I hope he does – it's no good to say anything because he does what he wants to do. And then my daughter, she had a hanging as well. Not for too long, actually, but she had, she had it in her bedroom here – no in the other house. And then I think she took with her when she was in the University. But then again she came back to live here again for a while and probably left. She was tired of it. Ha, ha. I suppose! And they never showed that they would like to have something that I made but I remember giving a wall hanging to a friend and my daughter was not happy at all. She said "Mummy, why you giving to her?" I said, well she like it and was very nice in her wall, and er, and like showing that she would like to have instead but I doubt if she would do having her flat. I don't know. They never ask for a bed quilt or nothing like that.

Emma Mmm.

Paula But if I – if they have a year in the bed then they feel happy about.

Emma Do you use your quilts in the house?

Paula I do, actually. I do, not so much, but I – yes – I got bed quilts. I have four other ones and I use them. Yes. The trouble is I love a duvet and then it's only when the weather is not so cold then I would have put a quilt instead.

Emma Mmm. Yes.

Paula Because it's lighter than the duvet.

Emma Yes, that's true.

Paula Yeah. And all hangings – I – some – this one was upstairs actually, is one of the landings. And, er, some I do, actually.

Emma Yes, cause a lot of them are wall hangings, as opposed to bed quilts, aren't they?

Paula Yes, that's right. Yeah. And the one I made for the 25th anniversary I used to have as well put the house. And then of course you get tired and you change and then I don't remember to keep putting new ones.

Emma Mmm.

Paula So I don't –

Emma Do you - ?

Paula Use them.

Emma Which, um, which would you prefer to put - make a wall hanging quilt and hang it on the wall or use it as a bed quilt? Would you distinguish a difference?

Paula Yes, I do, I think I prefer to work with a wall hanging. I prefer, because, um, then I can use, er, its - I think it gives you more freedom for ideas, isn't it, than a bed quilt?

Emma Okay.

Paula And I think it's – more, um. I think – things like this, for example, I couldn't put in a bed quilt. And, er –

Emma Why ?

Paula Because the pattern – I couldn't use this technique (phone rings) for a bed quilting because it's very old, you see. Sorry, I am -

Emma That's okay. You go.

Paula leaves the room to answer the telephone.

Paula It's one of these recorded messages. Freephone!

Emma Oh, mmm, yeah.

Paula These I couldn't because you have to wash and then this technique you wouldn't be good for a bed quilt really.

Emma Um, yes.

Paula And then, um, machine quilting you couldn't use, really, because makes too hard, actually, isn't it. It's not very -

Emma It makes it quite rigid.

Paula Rigid. It is no good for a bed quilt. And, er, I don't know. Things like, you know, ideas like this one, you know, it couldn't be a bed quilt.

Emma Mmm. Yes

Paula You see most of this one or this one. I think it's, it's a very different approach, isn't it, you give to a wall hanging or a bed quilt. Mind you -

Emma Yes – its -

Paula I love, I like to do actually a bed quilt as well. But I think I prefer more the wall hangings because you can do, it is less restriction, I think and it's smaller. Maybe it finishes -

Emma It is finished

Paula Quicker yeah, quicker, yes.

Emma You can finish it more quickly. Yes, yes. What, what do you feel when you've finished, when you get to the end?

Paula Um. I, I like the idea that it is finished, it is something you have done. But most of the time I'm not very pleased with the result and I always feel a bit frustrated, actually. But then I keep thinking I go for another one then. Ha, ha.

Emma Mmm.

Paula So you have to think next time it's going to be better.

Emma Yes, that motivates you to carry on.

Paula To carry on.

Emma Yes, yeah. Yeah, it does all of us, doesn't it?

Paula Uh, uh.

Emma And what – how long have you been a member of the patchwork quilting group?

Paula I think how long oh – gosh – um - probably thirty years it must because I was, er, 90 I did City and Guilds. And I met one member of the group doing the City and Guilds – she was doing it as well. And then, probably 93 – something like that – 92 – that's a long time.

Emma Mmm. So that's fifteen years –

Paula Seventeen - eighteen years – yes - seventeen, yeah.

Emma More that fifteen. Uh, uh

Paula More than fifteen years. Yes. A long time. It doesn't seem- it goes – it didn't seem so long.

Emma Mmm. And what attracted you about becoming a member of the group?

Paula I think because I wanted to belong to a group because I think it's nice to share ideas or feel, er, to be amongst people that have the same, the same hobby or whatever you wanted to say. And, um, I think I wanted to, instead of keep doing by myself. Or I used to go to classes and on top of that I wanted to belong to, to be among people that are doing, that share the same liking, you know, of the craft. And I think, yeah, yeah, I wanted very much to be among people and sharing, Um.

Emma Mmm

Paula I think it's important. It's nice. Because in the end is a isolate thing, isn't it, when you making – you, is you by yourself and, um, I love this idea of being quilting together as well, and that's one thing that I think Cheryl take us. She's in charge of organising the programme. She's very keen of this idea as well. Of that, when we meet, one of the things we do is to quilt together because I think the group went for quite a long time losing this, this idea of quilters be sitting there and doing the quilting together. Because most of the time we had a meetings? Talking about what we were going to do in the exhibition or organising a workshop or having a demonstration and not having meetings, just for us to be together and, er, quilting. So she's very keen now to – and many people, some people are keen of that idea and others not so much. They like to go and see something in the agenda, you know, something going on. Either a demonstration or not just to be sitting down, quilting and chatting. Which I like as well, actually. I'm very keen of this idea. What happens sometimes that people not necessarily have a quilt happening that they could bring and do the sewing together so that's why Cheryl came with this idea to suggest a pattern, which is very good. It's a very simple thing, but it's very effective and we all could do this quilting, this piecing and then do the quilting when we meet. Um. I don't know. It seems that it's not going so well so far. actually. With the idea.

Emma Ah. That's a shame. Yes, cause -

Paula I know. I know. Yes.

Emma Mm. Maybe we need to kick start it. Ha, ha

Paula I know, I know. I think it because we not such a big group. We are 25, I think. But it's big enough to not to have many different opinions on the go because if you say it's just a small very tiny group with 6 people or something it's easier to arrange things.

Emma Yes, definitely.

Paula Yes. When I joined the group was very small actually. And then gradually it start getting bigger and bigger and it changed totally the approach, because I think before when I joined they only needed to do quilting together, basically.

Emma Mmm

Paula Basically, was. And then, gradually, because more people came in and there was a start getting more formal the meetings and we realised when meetings were less people like ten or twelve we can make more, relate better to, with, er, chatting and everything. Because you feel closer. And now the size it is that you lose a bit I think, this. I don't know if we're going to get there, actually, although some people are very keen of this idea that we need to put a quilt together.

Emma And would that be to meet together to quilt on a common piece of work? A shared piece of work? Or each person bring their own quilting?

Paula We done before. Each person bring their own quilt – that would be easy, yes. Because, um, we had in the past having a group quilts then we do together but it's not too many that can join, isn't it, because even if it's a big quilt you, you can't have too many people doing the same piece, actually. It's difficult.

Emma You can't have twenty five – no

Paula Ha, ha, ha.

Emma No, no, no, no.

Paula Yeah. So you have to – we done in the past like when we have to finish a quilt you have a special, er, sessions. Instead of being only during the formal meetings we meet twice a month. Instead of being those meetings we would arrange to meet, er, out of these dates. And have less people trying to do the quilting. We had that in the past. It happened before.

Emma And does that work well?

Paula It did, actually. Yes, yes. It did.

Emma Mmm.

Paula It does work well. But it means that only few people are going to meet at a time. What we done as well is to divide the group into small group and this small groups produce a work together. We done that as well.

Emma Right. Okay. And what sort of -

Paula And some people enjoy that very much.

Emma Yes

Paula And others like me not so much. I think it depend on how the group related together, I think some. Even one of the groups – we divide in four groups and each one chose a piece to do, to do together and, um, and I remember one of the groups enjoy so much that they start to meeting separate for a while -

Emma Right.

Paula because they really enjoyed to do that.

Emma And they obviously got on well, as well.

Paula Yes, yes.

Emma Okay. So it's, its about getting on well, as well as –

Paula As well. And I -

Emma As wanting to make something.

Paula Exactly. Exactly. I think so. And another problem is people – how available they are. Because some people if they working that makes more difficult. I think the group I was in we had like at least one of, one of the person that she was very difficult to get, to have free time to join the group. Somehow was more difficult. People were more – it didn't - was not harmonious, actually. Not that we had anything really personally against each other but to arrange the meetings was not easy, somehow, was not – didn't work so well. Was more like stress that pleasure, you know?

Emma Mmm. That's a shame. Yes.

Paula I know, I know.

Emma And what sort of, what sort of things were you working on together, what, what did you make?

Paula We did make a, um, a wall hanging again that was eventually given to the Kings College Hospital. The, the department of the children, the children area. Because it was suitable for that. We did the four seasons.

Emma Right.

Paula Each one of us did one of the seasons. How many – we were five, maybe – and one of them did the quilting at the end, I think. Yeah, we were not, I think five and one was helping. But each one – of the four was in charge of one of the seasons. I did the Spring, I think. It was very cute, actually. It work very nicely – the result was good. Yeah. And apparently they were happy in the hospital to have the wall hanging there in the children's department. Yeah.

Emma Was it, um, was it a gift that you gave to the hospital?

Paula That's right – we gave to them, yes. Yes.

Emma Yeah. Yeah.

Paula And there was mainly, mainly applique, actually. Yes. But each one had a different ideas, but they work very nicely, actually. Was, er, quite sweet.

Emma Yes. Cause, um and what's it like for you working in a group together with people, um, when everybody's got maybe different ideas?

Paula Different ideas. Yes. I know. Ha, ha. Yeah.

Emma Thinking of when you, when you start to work on the project and -

Paula Yeah

Emma Deciding what to do and -

Paula Yeah

Emma who does what?

Paula Yeah

Emma What it's going to look like and so on. How does that work?

Paula I think in our case because each one was in to do – could do anything with the block that was chose – because we were quite - four largish blocks. And I think we were not interfering with each other, really. It's like we were doing our own work – it's just we put them together. And we agree with the – then the colours would go around. But, er, I think it was not too much interference to one's work. But I know other groups they did, er, – I don't know how difficult it was because they did like a, um, many of them did like a blocks and, er, with a, it was like, um, one panel for, and each one would do a similar thing. I think they had to decide. I think it's not too bad actually when we had to decide which colour and it's not too much disagreement, I think, you know.

Emma Do you enjoy working that way, working together in a group and making decisions together?

Paula Er. I do, I do, but I prefer to do my own thing, actually. But I don't dislike that. I like the group quilts when each one he can give their own, can put in their own work and their own ideas. I think, I always think its ideal when each one is able to express their own ideas. And they're not too many big quilts that you can do that but I think one of the most successful ones I think in a

group quilt we done was, um, I think there was, they were blocks of a basket and each one could put in the basket whatever they wanted. And I thought that that was very successful. Because with the pattern of the basket was the same for everybody. But what was inside, coming out of the basket – each one could decide. And was so good because was so, each block was so individual and was very good fun. Because people – it was not only flowers and fruit – there was animals as well and it was such a good fun, actually. Was – and I prefer when you have this each one could put in their own ideas which is not so easy, actually, to create because is, um, is not easy to create a design that is – people are able to do that.

Emma Working with blocks –

Paula Yes.

Emma That – I'm just thinking -

Paula Yes

Emma The blocks would be easier than a more contemporary art quilt.

Paula Oh totally. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Emma Mmm

Paula Because then you – now we going – yes all the quilts we've been making – most of them they be like that – blocks – because then each one would do like, um, two blocks, three blocks, it depends. Now the new quilt that we working together is again, um, we going to do blocks and, er, each one we going to make it four blocks and then it's going to look like a whole – I think its like a child was going this way – I don't know. But, um, we of course we have to make the block the same. But, er, with the different colours. You always can choose a little bit even if they give you the, the fabric. Usually they don't specify the exactly what, the colours you're going to put in where. So you can decide a bit by yourself how to, how to use the colours. They would say dark colour and light colour, for example, and then you would choose. Usually they give the, the fabric to each person.

Emma Okay.

Paula Either we choose, either we choose together the fabrics we going to use and then we buy the fabric or this last one everybody's contributing – showing the fabrics they have – in blues and yellows.

Emma Okay.

Paula And they going to choose the fabric from each – without being, er, having, being necessary to buy the fabric.

Emma Mmm

Paula And we're going to use our own fabric. It's all – someone is in charge of organising. And then -

Emma Yes. I was going to say – who decides - ?

Paula Yes. Yes. The last word would be this person that is organising. But she's – all the people are helping to choose the colours together. The last meeting, which I didn't go, was like that. People came with the fabric that I said my fabric through someone else. And blues and yellows. And they chose together, the people there.

Emma Okay.

Paula Yes, and of course Ruth is in charge and she was the one to be -

Emma Okay.

Paula the last one but they chose together. And then she's going to organise and give us packets ready with the pattern we have, with the templates, or if it's not templates if we use rotary cutter – in this case I think it's the four patch. Four patch, um, little blocks, I'm not sure. But she would give the kit with everything and the fabrics, and she would say dark, or blue or yellow and, um, we choose. I think only one we did more contemporary one. And was, um, we, in the end we work out very beautifully. But I think was not enjoyeahble to make because as you say blocks are much,er, better -

Emma Mmm

Paula with this idea. Yes.

Emma And does, um, each time you do a collective quilt, does the person who decides what the colours are going to be and what the pattern's going to be, does that change, each time?

Paula Yes.

Emma Or is it always the same person?

Paula No. Is a job that is not many people dying to do it, ha, ha. On the contrary, isn't it? Because its usually change but I think Ruth organised the last one and she offered to organise this one, because there are not too many people there who would willing to do it. And she's -

Emma Why? I wonder why?

Paula Ah, because is, is hard work, you know, to have to -. You have to organise the kits that go to all, the packets that you're going to give to each person. And, um, it's a lot of work, actually. You have to organise that and then you have to collect them and you have to give dates and some people are not so, you know, promptly giving that they need to – that is hard work but

luckily she was prepared to do again.

Emma That's good, though.

Paula Because the result was very good. I think then at the end she was very happy.

Emma Um. It was worth the effort?

Paula Exactly.

Emma Yes.

Paula Yes.

Emma And there's some responsibility as well of saying –

Paula Exactly.

Emma Okay it's my decision, we're going to do blues and yellows.

Paula Yes. No, I think when she decide was together, actually.

Emma Okay, Right.

Paula Yes, that was together. Yes.

Emma So those sorts of decisions are made together?

Paula That's right, that's right.

Emma And then the person who's in charge –

Paula Yes.

Emma Is the one who's in charge of the organisation?

Paula That's right.

Emma The sort of logistics of doing it?

Paula That's right.

Emma But the decisions of what the pattern is and what colours you're using -

Paula Ah, is decide together, yes, yes.

Emma Okay, I've got you. Perfect.

Emma How do you do that? Do? How do you arrive and make the decision?

Paula I think someone came with this idea. There was maybe two three ideas with, um, different patterns for the quilt. And I

think, um, the majority is, whatever is going to be the majority for a particular pattern that is what's going to be chosen. But is, er, we try to do democratically as the most we can. Yes, that everybody is going to choose together.

Emma Mmm

Paula Yes, sometimes, yeah, it works well. It usually, usually works well. Usually we try to do something that is not terribly complicated. But is, er – and they been working quite nicely, actually. We donate, then we donate to, usually we either, we use as a raffle or as well. We raffle the quilt and then we use the money for a charity of some kind and keep changing this charity. Usually we try to do something local, the charity, that is in our area and it could be a hospital, or, um I think it is last one was, um, um, community work for young people. Something like that. Is, um, I can't remember. But usually we try to do whatever, either, um, for, er, a hospital or a community that is doing some work for young people. Whatever.

Emma Mmm.

Paula And that is good, actually. We feel happy with that.

Emma Do you like being part of a group? Do you like going to the meetings and –

Paula I do, I generally do, yes, yes. I, I do, yeah. You know, of course, you get on, usually you get on better with some people than others. Is natural, isn't it? That's the way it goes.

Emma Of course.

Paula But, er, on the whole yes. There are some meetings that I feel happier more than others. Usually, it's funny when there are not too many people. Usually it works better, actually. Because I think we feel closer and, er, it seems more – it works – it's a nicer feeling actually.

Emma Mmm. Yes, that's really interesting, actually.

Paula Yes.

Emma When you think –

Paula When you – and I hear that from other people as well – they said "Oh that was a lovely meeting" and when I think about it's always the ones that are of less people,

Emma Mmm

Paula because then you can talk to – everybody can participate. And when you have more people you, I think you go in groups. You don't, it's easier to get together when it's less people.

Emma Mmm. That's very interesting.

Paula But we have nice parties as well. There is, we have two parties - one summer and one in winter for Christmas. One for Christmas and one is the summer party. And then is just a social thing. Everybody brings food and, um, and it works very well, actually. It's really, really works well, yes. It's nice. We're going to have our summer party two weeks time – so that will be the end of July.

Emma Mmm.

Paula And it's got - they very good cooks as well, actually. We say is -

Emma I know

Paula Did say if we fail being good quilters we always can to rely on the cooking, yeah.

Emma I know. I'll, I'll always remember when I came to meet you all that first time at Sarah's house –

Paula Yes.

Emma and we had tea –

Paula Yeah.

Emma and she said to me, she said "Actually, we're all quite good cooks, as well!"

Paula She did, ha, ha, ha. Yes.

Emma Yes, of course! Ha, ha.

Paula It's true, actually. Is true.

Emma Yeahh.

Paula They don't know exactly what we're going to take, we specify either savoury or sweet, but it usually goes well together, so – amazing, yeah. No, but, er –

Emma Mmm. It's very interesting.

Paula Yeah. And of course, we have always two workshops with a, a quilter from, to come, to give a workshop. And sometimes we have a mini workshop, so as we say with someone in the group giving something. And, er, but I enjoy the workshops a lot, actually. Yes.

Emma Yes. Is that, is that where you might, I mean what sort of workshops are they? What sort of ?

Paula Oh, we can rely quite a lot actually. This one we're going to have now in July is, um, it's about, er, embellishing the

quilt using, like, er, beads and, er, fabrics like, er, shiny thin fabrics just embellishing. I think they do this – people coming to do the workshop – they do like, um, book covers or cards, or things like that. But it can be a technique as well, like a crazy – using crazy patchworking different ways, or log cabin in different ways, it can be. It's quite, er, diversity – it can be very – Again when we choose together the – sometimes come two or three ideas and, um, we choose together whatever people would prefer.

Emma For the workshops?

Paula For the workshops. Yes.

Emma Right, yeah.

Paula Yeah. Is good, yeah. Usually we pay less money doing together with a group than when you go to – to go to somewhere else for the workshops–

Emma Yes.

Paula Organised by a shop, or whatever.

Emma Right, yes. When you go and do a class – somewhere.

Paula A class, yes. Yes.

Emma Yes

Paula And, er, is fun, as well. Because then we show our work when we, when all the meetings – the next - the following meeting of the workshop we show what we've done. And many people they use ideas to make the next quilt or -

Emma Mmm

Paula And then eventually you see it coming. Which is, is nice as well.

Emma Do you share your ideas?

Paula So that is nice, sharing this, yeah.

Emma Do you share ideas, as well? Like if somebody is, um, exploring a particular technique, or experimenting, or has just learnt something? When you meet do people share?

Paula Ah, yes, yes, not, not so, not so often. Not necessarily. Unless we organise um, er, in the programme. Because usually the programme organiser is going to come with ideas. She always welcome very - if people come with ideas to her she is very pleased with that. But that would be if, er, someone is prepared to, to give like a demonstration of a technique, or mini workshop, if they agree to do and it be part of the programme, so, er, it happens. Not too often but it happens. Yes.

Emma Okay.

Paula Yes

Emma Okay. Right. I think that's quite a lot of talking about patchwork for an afternoon.

Paula I know.

Emma But that's been really interesting, so interesting.

Paula Mmm

Emma Thank you so much.

Paula Oh, it's a pleasure. It's a pleasure.

End of conversation.

Transcript of interview with Eve

Date: 22 November 2007

Location: Eve's home.

Duration of meeting: 1 hour 40 minutes

Eve is Pakistani and retired.

Emma It's the 22nd of November and I'm with Eve. Eve, what is it in particular, what in terms of technique, what is it that you enjoy doing the most? What's your preferred stitch technique?

Eve Stitch technique?

Emma Or it could be, if it's not stitching

Eve Well at the moment I prefer dyeing my own fabric and then making marks on it, removing colour, adding more colour. Perhaps just seeing how much you can layer different techniques without it becoming a mess basically, and then using it in my quilting. It's not just keep, I think ten years ago I would've said a different, I would have answered it all differently. I would have kept it all stroking it and loving it waiting for something wonderful to happen. But I think as you get older you realise let the here and now is most important and fabric, just like clothes, do go out of fashion. I have fabric that I bought in the 1980's in America, hoping I would use it for something spectacular, and when I look at it it's absolutely just not something I would use now so.

Emma Do you, once you've dyed the fabric do you then cut it up to use, and then mix different fabrics? Or do you use it as one piece?

Eve I've done, I've done a couple of pieces which are only with dyed fabric and all my own dyed fabric.

Emma And would that be with just one unique piece of fabric?

Eve No, the one which you can see in a minute was actually fabric that was dyed, virtually like a sweatshop last year, because a group of us, nothing to do with the quilters, did Nancy Crowe's workshop. Now Nancy Crowe is revered in the States. She is considered a national living treasure, and other things. And so we dyed metres and metres, I dare not even tell you how

many metres I dyed. It must've been between 30 and 40 metres of fabric, because she has this edict idea, whatever you want to call it, that the more colours you have and the more fabric you have, you are then at liberty to give your imagination full reign. I did her workshop last year and I confess I absolutely hated it.

Emma Oh dear why was that?

Eve She worked us hard, that doesn't matter. You know, I mean I do work hard and I do think I'm a good student at workshops but we used to get there and for about an hour we used to have to write all this information that she had put up, because she has this principle that she won't give out typed notes. Now, personally I think it's really stupid, and you don't have to quote me on this.

Emma No it's ok, I won't.

Eve Because if you've taken the notes you've got them down anyway. Her idea is if she gives you printed of typed written notes you can then teach her method, or her exercises, to somebody else. But my…

Emma Ok, yes.

Eve But the thing is that if you've copied it, you can still teach it. I mean I know a couple of people, who live in this country, who merrily teach Nancy Crowe's principles and don't even credit Nancy Crowe for it. But if you've been in one of Nancy Crowe's classes, or seen Nancy Crowe's quilts, you know where they're all coming from. I mean, this year in the Festival of Quilts it was quite fun, you could walk around and you knew who has been to Nancy Crowe's workshops last year without even looking. Because they don't write the name at the Festival of Quilts, they just write the number and the part of England or Europe or wherever you've come from. But if you've been on one of her workshops, you can eyeball them without any problem. Having said all of that, I put my head in the lion's mouth, so to speak, and did another workshop this year.

Emma Ok.

Eve In September, and thoroughly enjoyed it.

Emma Right, good.

Eve For the simple reason, we, I think one of the reasons was that it was a different concept. Last year, we, it was strip piecing workshop and all we did was to cut strips of fabric from salvage to salvage and sow them from salvage to salvage. You do that for a whole day and see how tired you would be, with no, with nothing to focus on at the end. So for me, I was exhausted and disgruntled and very upset because these workshops aren't cheap at all. The expense wasn't the problem, the problem was, I just

couldn't fathom out where I was going in this. Whereas, is this September when I went, I went with a more, well first of all I had been on one of her workshops, I knew how she worked and it was a completely different setup. We were doing different, we were doing three different concepts in five days. So you never did just this repetitious sweatshop type of work and in the end she and I got on well and I came away with what I thought was not bad.

Emma Good. What were you looking for? What sort of challenge where you expecting?

Eve Basically I wanted to learn more about colour.

Emma Right.

Eve That was the main, that was my biggest wish to go to Nancy Crowe's class last year because she is, she is something quite amazing with colour. I have tremendous respect for her. The fact that I didn't enjoy myself last year didn't at all take away my respect for her work and her discipline and this amazing ability to grasp where you're going wrong. But I still think we could have been taught better. Things could have been made much better for the students. I mean we were there from 8 o'clock in the morning until 8 o'clock at night and then drive home here. An hour's journey there and an hour's journey back, it was a very, very long day.

Emma Yes that is a long day, Yes.

Eve But you know I have no regrets; life's too short to have regrets. You know you learn, you always. You perhaps don't learn as much as you hope to learn. One of my biggest regrets is that I didn't get to know her as a person last year. You know when you are in close proximity with somebody for five days, you would hope to get to know them even a tiny little bit. Even if that's not part of the, the sort of workshop. I mean I can't stay with people for five days working in and out without knowing something about them. It's just not me, I like knowing about people much more so now than I probably did when I was younger. But the whole, her whole attitude changed. The one we did last year was in England. The one I did this September was on the borders of Germany and Switzerland.

Emma Oh right.

Eve And she was so relaxed there, compared to how she was here, it just made for a much, much nicer five days. I mean we worked like demons, still worked until 8 o'clock at night but, I don't know, the whole atmosphere was just much more pleasant.

Emma How did it compare with the way you work here at home in England? How many hours a day, for example, do you work on your quilt?

Eve It depends on when the quilters are having their exhibition, or I have a deadline for Festival of Quilts. I'll be pushing the boat out, like I think most people would; I am not the most organised of people. Now, our future chairman who starts next January, Jen, if you saw Jen's work, I don't know if you saw Jen.

Emma No I haven't.

Eve No, well Jen lives in a beautiful old Victorian house, in Allen Road, and her work room is at the top, and there's nothing out of place. Whereas you can see I'm, you know, I'm a sort of little squirrel and have things all over the place, but that's me, I'm not Jen. And her unfinished projects fit in one small plastic box. I dare not tell you where my unfinished projects would sort of stack up. But a couple of years ago I decided that some of these unfinished projects, which were basically from going to various workshops and things, I wrote an article many years ago for the Quilters Guild magazine called Confessions of a Workshop Junkie.

Emma I've seen that, I've read it.

Eve Have you?

Emma Yes, yes, I came across it completely by coincidence and I thought gosh that's Eve.

Eve Yes I do write, I thoroughly enjoy writing. I write for various magazines and I think I told you when I met you that I belong to a contemporary quilt group; which is like a tiny offshoot belonging to the Quilter's Guild.

Emma Yes.

Eve A specialist group. So I write for their newsletter quite regularly and thoroughly enjoy it. I do, I love writing. I enjoy, and sometimes I enjoy writing articles more than I enjoy quilting.

Emma I was just going to ask you, do you have a preference?

Eve No, but I do enjoy it.

Emma Do you, what do you enjoy about it do you think?

Eve I have no idea. I think as a young woman I probably wanted to write, to write poetry and things like that long before patchwork and quilting beckoned, and a friend said 'why don't you write articles you write well' but I don't have a very, I don't, my writing's not formal writing it's more very, not free, but, it's not, I wouldn't call it chatty, but its relaxed if that makes sense? It's easy to read, at least I think it's easy and most people who have read it always said how much they enjoyed the articles. So I must be doing something right.

Emma Yes, quite.

Eve But no, fabric and quilting definitely come first.

Emma Do you know, is it the stitching, the sewing that you enjoy? Or the fabrics, or is there something in particular about making patchwork quilts that you particularly enjoy? Is that part of all the things we might do when we're sewing you enjoy more than others for example?

Eve I like coming, well yes in a way yes, I like trying different techniques. I'm not saying that I would enjoy every technique that I try but if you don't try it you're never going to know. So yes, I have this sort of urge to learn and try different things and happily, you know, teach it to other people. I would have loved to have been a teacher when I finished my City and Guilds in embroidery; that's what I wanted to do. But living in this area there's so many people that have done the same thing and I'm probably far better at it that I ditched the idea.

Emma Where did you learn to sew? How long have you been sewing for?

Eve Sewing? I've probably been sewing since I was a tiny child. My mum embroidered well, my aunt was excellent at it. We had embroidery classes or sewing classes or needlework classes, whatever they called them in school in Karachi before I came here. Of course, by the time I came here I was almost ready to do my O levels, as they were at that time, so that didn't figure, unless you went in to home economics; which I never did. But I've always embroidered and everything and if I tell you that my aunt was an absolute demon, she really was, she sort of, a person that totally expected excellence; there was no question of having something that looked slightly not right.

When I was a child, I must've been eight or nine, I decided I was going to knit a sweater for myself. I remember this quite clearly, I got white wool, which of course was lethal, and I was going to knit this jumper. I couldn't understand why the jumper never got bigger until my aunt told me merrily, about three months later, that she'd unpick it every night because the tension wasn't right. I'm telling you she was absolutely lethal. Lethal is not the word. She was still alive when I did my City and Guilds; both part 1 and part 2. She actually did compliment me, not on everything, but she was glad I did it. She said it would be nice for someone in the family to carry on the tradition. But neither of them, funnily enough, did patchwork or quilting; neither my mum or my aunt. They did proper embroidery, in those days people did gros point and petite point and that was their area. There is actually, in our family, a history of textiles. For the simple reason that my grandfather, who I never met, sadly he died the before break out of World War 2, so you know I never knew him. My sister was just born but you know that was it and in the 1930's, before the world

war, he decided that he would build an industrial home for the poor people, poor women, so that they would learn an occupation as well as get money; very similar to what was being done in this country, and give them a sense of achievement. So he built that, he started it if I remember rightly in 1932/1933 and my aunt took it over.

Emma Ok.

Eve She came to Switzerland with him and learnt, you know, different things and I can remember running around this machine in the home with my cousin. We used to think it was the most wonderful, it was huge and it wasn't until I did my City and Guilds that I realised it was one of the first pantograph machines.

Emma I was going to ask you what sort of machine was it? Right.

Eve And they had all these Singer sewing machines and when it shut down, thanks to being nationalised, or well they shut it down before it could be nationalised actually. At the time of Mr Bhutto's time of power, I very much wanted one of those machines but it was not to be.

Emma Oh that's a shame.

Eve Yes, I would have really loved it because I would have treasured it because you know that part, that area that bit was so much a part of my life. We used to go from school to pick up my aunt sometimes. We used to go, I mean I've digressed from what I do but it's all part and parcel for how it all started for me. I was telling a friend, you know when I think of the things I used to do it in a place, those, we used to have workman who would sew embroidered saris. Saris, if you know, they are of 45 inch width; there is no deviation. 45 inch with 6 yards, plus extra for the extra for the blouse, and they used to work on, very similar you know like quilting frames but they were embroidery frames, and they'd be sitting in the back sewing sequins and, all these sequins and beads, and beautiful floss and everything was kept in the back. I used to love going there, I used to run there and this was until I was probably 12 years old, or until I left to come here permanently; which was at 13. I used to go off there but as a child used to sit on the floor, pull all of the boxes, or drawers open and put my fingers and pick up all this sequins I wanted and sort of played with them. And then when my mum or aunt said come on it's time to go home I'd just leave it all there and rush off happily and they must have absolutely hated me, but being the youngest grandchild of the founder they wouldn't be able to do a thing; not a thing. But, I mean, to me that's one of the nicest memories I have of Karachi. I do, I love it. When I think about it I wish that I could go back now with the knowledge I have and take it over, but there is nothing to take over because it's been shut for years and years. But that would have been, that would have been something really amazing because when I went back to Karachi, in 2001,

for a friend's wedding I actually taught some printing to little kids and then they all went home with a little patchwork square which they had used their own thumbprints. That was great fun, hard work, but great fun. I did it in the textile museum of Karachi; that was the very first workshop ever done in that museum and I'm so proud it was me.

Emma Yes that's quite an achievement, that's great. Yes.

Eve Especially because, you know, the women are still totally second class citizens, but no I was thanked and I was told to come back anytime.

E Great.

Eve To me, that was one of the best things I've ever done. It was great fun teaching of little kids. They came so, I mean they were all different ages, I told the lady who had organised it to please tell them all to wear dirty clothes and come because you know you're playing with silk paint and you're going to be on your hands and knees. But no, all these young girls, little ones were fine but the young girls they came all dressed in their smart school uniform. So, much to the delight, I told them to get rid of, do you know what a dupta is?

Emma Yes that's the scarf that you wear across, Yes.

Eve Yes and what a lot of them use now to wrap around their heads.

Emma Over their heads, yes.

Eve So they were all told to get rid of them quick smart, I mean they looked a bit worried but the woman who was organising it, who is the co-curator of the museum said 'no you do exactly what she says' and I said now come on roll up those sleeves, because I can't speak good Urdu and these kids, you know, speak really perfect and so I had somebody who was translating what I was saying. Then they were all very tentatively playing with the sponges and silk paint, so I got down on my hands and knees, much to their delight, and sort of shoved my hand with the sponge and splodged it everywhere and after that they were off. They had the best time ever, they made such lovely mess because the idea was to soak the fabric and then put the branches or the twigs or with the flowers, and then with the sun it would print. You know it was such an easy thing but yet was amazing to see it happen and these kids just loved it. They had such great fun.

Emma Where did you learn those skills, printing and dyeing?

K Sitting at home myself and playing with it.

Emma Right, ok.

Eve No dying I went to somebody but some printing I do it out here on the patio.

Emma Where do you do your dyeing?

K Well, now if I do it at home, from the kitchen we have a little, like a tiny little yard between the kitchen the garage. So if it's nice weather I stand there, I have dyeing clothes so I don't, you know, the cat even knows when I'm going to dye fabric, she doesn't come anywhere near it otherwise she'd get dyed. But, no I love it, I really do. I think it's a feeling of creating, just like creating a piece of quilting; which is starting from fair white cloth and putting your own marks from the beginning and then to use it in a quilt, it makes it just that much more special.

Emma Yes that's interesting you're, sort of, implicated in much more of a wider spectrum of the process.

K Yes, I mean the ones that've done from beginning to end are very special to me.

Emma Do you keep the ones, those quilts that you've made?

Eve I have, at the moment. One's not actually a quilt, it's there behind you, I'll show it to you in a minute, it's a hanging. It wasn't the very first one I did, you know, to show but it was a happy mistake I have to confess. When it was done it just turned out this way, the fabric, and I remember doing it and everybody said 'ah' and I said don't you dare put your fingers on it, this is how it's going, you know, and I just used it as a whole cloth. It was just too nice to cut up but I then embellished on top of it.

Emma With embroidery.

Eve With embroidery.

Emma Do you work by hand or by machine?

Eve I, two years ago, last November just before my daughter got married, I fell and broke my right wrist, I smashed it.

Emma Oh dear.

Eve And three months later I fell and broke my left wrist, so hand, hand, quilting really was not an option.

Emma Did you hand quilt before?

Eve Yes but my hands were getting tired because I have got arthritis so, but I did, let's say I did more hand quilting than I do now. I still quit but I have to do it only in little, I can't do it for more than ten or fifteen minutes because it really does hurt; the rocking motion is not particularly conducive to slightly knackered wrists. But there is something very satisfying doing it by hand, even the tiniest little bit.

Emma Yes. What does, when you are doing it sort of what does it, what does it make you think of or how do you feel when

you're doing it?

Emma I go into my own little world, I sometimes just think of all the things, I don't know, the past the present the future. Not necessarily even what I'm doing your, you know, your mind drifts like, well like sometimes people's, I have quite a fertile imagination. So I just go with, because it's actually embroidery, more than quilting, that I have been doing, but I have been embellishing. But having said that, you know, I'm going to do a cot quilt for my little granddaughter. I have done the same quilt for my friend's granddaughter, a couple of years back, but I machined around the flowers but this one I'm going to probably hand embroider; either stem stage or buttonhole stage or whatever, whatever just make it a little more special.

Emma Ok, that's interesting. So if you're doing it by hand, does that make it more special do you think?

Eve I think so, I think so, but having said that, because it's for my granddaughter and she's the very first and as I told you when you rang, she almost, I mean she almost died. So, you know, it has to be special for her. Otherwise I wouldn't hand do it, I'd just do it like the other one. I might not do all the flowers by hand but I certainly will do some. Because also you've got to be realistic if your hands are bad now, in ten years' time they're going to be worse not better. So whatever I can do now I'd like to do it and then she's got it, she's got it forever.

Emma Do you often give quilts away to members of the family, or friends?

Eve Oh well, to my children, of course I would; having said that neither of them have a quilt by me. My younger daughter had when she was a teenager, she was quite determined to have a red, no sorry, a yellow and blue quilt; which she had, and then when she went to university it slightly tore, to put it mildly, so it's been folded up and put away for the moment. I hate mending things I absolutely loathe it. But, yes I do, my sister will be 70 years old the year after next and I plan to make her a quilt for that, because she's been moaning for years and years that I'm never getting a quilt from you and I said you will, wait and wait, just wait.

Emma How long, how many years have you been making patchwork quilts?

Eve Too many, when I started there were no patchwork classes in south London and I used to travel every Monday to Swiss Cottage.

Emma Gosh that's a long way.

Eve Tell me about it. She was an American lady, this was before rotary cutters and speed piecing and everything, and she, she had obviously learnt the old way. You know, you have to make a template, draw around it, add a quarter of an inch, turn around, turn over tack around it and then do it very carefully, and I made my sample quilt with her and that was in 1982. So in

1981, I think it was the very first time I went and did a piece of patchwork at the Patchwork Dog and the Calico cat; which has sadly gone for a long, long time ago, which is in Camden Town, Chalk Farm.

Emma I remember that, I remember reading, hearing about that.

Eve And so that's how it started and then I became a member of the Quilters Guild.

Emma Are you still a member?

Eve Yes, yes.

Emma And do you exhibit? I know you've exhibited work with the the quilters.

Eve And at the Festival of Quilts.

Emma Right, you do, yes.

Eve And one of my, one of my quilts went up to Scotland because there was an exhibition there and I had sent my photograph, or a slide or something, and they accepted it. So I had something in Scotland, Festival of Quilts every year since they started.

Emma Really? Gosh.

Eve Every single year I've had at least one quilt, one piece in there. And the quilters, since I joined the quilters in early 1994, so I've been there for thirteen years, and earlier this year the piece which I sent, was just a happy accident, was shown well last year and this year by the, it was the Contemporary Art Exhibition and that was the juried show. The juried one of course are much more, much more feather in one's cap which you actually get in.

Emma Of course, yes.

Eve But all, I mean some are more special than others. Some sort of grab you and you're delighted with them, and they're quite emotional. Because you put so much of yourself into your work, or at least I do, I think most people would do it.

Emma Absolutely, yes.

Eve When you, you know, you're putting so much time and effort it has to be.

Emma And what, what sort of satisfaction, I suppose, do you get from showing and displaying your quilts in exhibitions?

Eve Oh, a sense of pride, a sense of achievement.

Emma What about because other people see your work. Is that important to you, what other people think?

Eve Yes I'm sure it is, it is, but I mean, I think years ago it mattered a lot that what I was doing met with people's approval

for want of a better word. But some of the pieces I've done, I've just sort of dug my toes in and said no this is the way I'm going to do it; even though people said 'oh well I think you should do it this way' or 'why don't you do that' and then you listen to it all. But no, a couple of them I've done literally just out of sheer stubbornness, you know truly I can be very obstinate and it's worked, and if it doesn't work it's not going to be the end of the world.

Emma No. Do you, in the quilters, do you get together and show each other work that you are doing?

Eve Sometimes, it depends on the programme secretary, usually we have one show and tell.

Emma Right, and how does that work?

Eve Very well. We are twenty-five, twenty-five very diverse people.

Emma Yes.

Eve And, if you ask me today what I thought, I would say that the quilters, instead of, have gone downhill a bit.

Emma In what way?

Eve I think they've become a tad too complacent. I don't know, I've also not been so involved with the quilters this year, for lots of reasons, but let's put it that, I'm not going to go out on Monday night if the programme doesn't excite me. I am not going out on a Monday night to take something that I can't really sew, because the light is so bad and it's winter and I'd rather be at home sewing in my comfort, with everything that I've got, I don't need to sort of go anywhere. We used to have such fun things happening, you know, we'd show sometimes we'd show our technique or I use to sometimes show them photographs through PowerPoint presentation and, I don't know, I just feel that it's lost its, a little bit of zing. It'll come back because next year is exhibition year and everyone will start working towards it, but I feel that this year's been a bit flat; it certainly hasn't excited me. We had a very good workshop, which was nice, you know both those girls are so good, they're so organised, they are embroiderers and quilters, but they dye their fabrics and they make silk paper, and they do two different workshops. I've done both of them, I mean I was the one who told our current programme organiser, Cheryl, to get them and it was a great success. I mean, everybody who was there had a ball, no other word for it you know, if you want to see slightly mature women going mad you have to just go to a workshop.

Emma What sort of pleasure do you get out of going to a workshop and learning something new?

Eve Oh I have tremendous pleasure, I really do, I enjoy it. I like being with people who, and so you have that bit of interaction because workshops are not only mainly to learn but you meet new people. Alright, if it's the quilters you're not

meeting them but you're seeing them in a different environment. You're all doing the same thing, we have great fun we really do we laugh, we joke, the tutors are normally great fun. I think of all the tutors we've had, we probably had perhaps two who was slightly not fun, but by and large they always like sitting with you and having their lunch. You know, we've had tremendous, tremendous people teaching us. I had organised a lady, who I knew was coming here, and she stayed with us and she showed the quilters how to do reversible quilting. And, you know, they had taken to it like, like anything we've had reversible quilts coming from every angle, and she was so nice and I still write to her, e-mail her, and when I go to Canada I always ring her and say hi to her. And then we had Irene McWilliam from Belfast, we not Belfast, but near Belfast, Northern Ireland, and she came over here and taught us her method of log cabin. And so, each one has been, first of all, it's a fun, it's, it's fun to be able to get different people, and I used to really enjoy that bit from when I was programme organiser; I never wanted to have the same person or the same technique because we've got a wealth of people in this country, absolutely amazing amount of people.

Emma And is that in the patchwork quilting that you do, is that important to you that you're, you're constantly learning new things?

Eve No, not as much as it used to be.

Emma Right, why is that?

Eve I think I'd like to hone in what I know, and explore it a little more.

Emma More in-depth?

Eve Yes but, having said that, if something really came up which sort of got me going then yes I would go. I don't do as many workshops as I used to, because Nancy Crowe's workshop, which I did, was not really learning a new technique, it was more a discipline of how you use your fabrics and your, it was all free, free cutting, this one, which I think that was one of the reasons why I enjoyed it so much because it was completely ad lib.

Emma Is that close to the way you work when you're making your own quilt?

Eve No not really but I'd like to be able to do it more and I admire people who are so relaxed, or who design a quilt from beginning to end on paper and then go for it, I don't.

Emma How do you do it then?

Eve With a lot of grief, with a lot of grief. It depends, do you know when you say that the fabric calls to you? I truly believe that, that sometimes you look at the fabric and you think yes, I know exactly what I'm going to do with it. Or you find a piece of

poetry that you want to incorporate onto you, because I write onto my fabric.

Emma Right, yes that's interesting, do you write yourself? Or do you use fabric with writing on?

Eve Yes the one that I'll show you later I've actually written by hand myself.

Emma And do you write your own writing onto it?

Eve This one is, it's got Urdu writing, a friend actually wrote it for me because I can't write it. It's a poem by Ikbar; who was one of the famous poets of...

Emma A long time ago.

Eve Years gone by, centuries gone by, and she wrote it because I asked her to do it and she gave me the English translation as well. Actually it is the first one of what I hope will be a series on Karachi.

Emma That's really interesting.

Eve And to me, it's very, very special.

Emma Yes, quite.

Eve Because it's not Karachi today, it's Karachi of the, Karachi I knew as a child.

Emma So it's drawing on your memories.

Eve Oh absolutely.

Emma Of Karachi.

Eve Yes, but when I went back in 2011, I went armed with my camera, no digital at that time, armed with camera and just clicked away happily. And, my sister, I had I told my sister, my sister lives in Karachi and she is five and a half years older than me and sometimes a big sister scathing but she's very supportive when I explained, I said I want to go and see what we knew of Karachi as children. I mean, some of it you can't because it's all built up, you're not going to recapture that, but the old markets and things. She had a driver, I mean he was hilarious. The first couple of days I could see the sort of horror on his face whenever I tell him to stop and I'd jump out of the car and click away. By the end of the week, I didn't have to tell him anywhere he'd stop and he'd say photograph? He loved it, he was you know, he obviously thought I was as mad as a hatter wanting to take photographs of desolate buildings, well they weren't but you know slightly decrepit and thing and when I think back, I think oh I wish I had taken more. It was very difficult, and you see the men will pose for you, happily. The women will absolutely go mad if you take a photograph.

Emma Really?

Eve More often than not. They just don't want their photographs taken. So any photographs I've got of the women, with a lot of trouble or very sneakily without them realising.

Emma And will, will you use that as inspiration for this series of quilts?

Eve Yes

Emma Yes.

Eve Well the first one was windows, doorways and windows I think, Yes. The next one I want to do is buildings, because we still have what you can loosely call from the raj, buildings from the raj, and they are just amazing, they're so fabulous. When you think you know everyone talking about St Pancras for the last few days and things. I mean we have a market there called Empress Market, because you know Victoria, well it could be St Pancras if it was cleaned up; wonderful place, wonderful. So that, that is actually my underlying sort of project. It'll be an on-going project until I'm tired of it and I'm not, certainly no way, will I tire of it yet and it's so emotional, that you can't just churn them out.

Emma No.

Eve You have to think very hard and deeply, well I do, I definitely need to, you know, think of what I'm going to put because I superimpose photographs on it and dye the fabric, and the only fabric that's commercial is organza.

Emma How do you plan your quilts? How do you go about, from when an idea comes to you to when you've completed it?

Eve It's hard, it really is, I am not as organised as I should be, you know, sit there with a design wall and pin it up but I knew what I wanted to do for my Karachi one, and at that time I was in the summer school at East Grinstead with, and we had a Danish embroiderer quilter called Sherlot Ayid, and she was doing the summer school. The sort of title that was working on a series and I literally joined it because I knew I wanted to do the Karachi one, and she, she didn't do any of it for me but she pushed me in the right sort of direction, and literally said 'just don't worry, you know just play with it and if you don't like just put it, just get your background done basically and then play with your images'. And that's what I did for the first one and I'm so pleased with it that I hope the next one will come out well.

Emma Have you got it here?

Eve Yes I have.

Emma Shall we have a look at it?

Eve Yes, you can see whichever you want.

Emma Where do you store all your quilts?

Eve I put them, I've got to make bags like these, but I have them rolled up. It's not very big. You can put it on the floor.

Emma Can I put it on the floor?

Eve Yes, Yes sure.

Emma It's lovely.

Eve Well it's different, I thoroughly enjoyed doing it and I think it shows.

Emma Why do you use writing? Why is important?

Eve I don't know, I just felt that I wanted to. It could be like, sort of, I mean the background could be easily be a wall quilted with graffiti or anything, and for that reason the writing just seemed to blend itself.

Emma Yes. Can I take a photograph of it?

Eve Yes of course you can.

Emma And whereabouts do you work? In here?

Eve Because it's so light.

Emma Yes you've got good light, yes. And have you always worked at home on your quilts?

Eve Meaning?

Emma Apart from going to workshops.

Eve Yes, yes if we go to workshops, but otherwise. Let me move myself. I mean, move it wherever you want.

Emma Do you have yourself permanently set up in this corner to work?

Eve My husband hates me for doing it. That's my one which is a happy accident.

Emma Right, yes.

Eve And except for these bits, it’s almost all hand done.

Emma This is lovely, really beautiful isn't it?

Eve Well it lent itself and literally, I’m not joking, I just carried on until I thought yes I think it's worked because you can overdo it too. It always makes me laugh because one of the people who I go to for the dyeing and different techniques she said, somebody said 'oh ask Claire to show you seat stitch' so I looked at her and she said 'you know how to seat stitch don't you? And I

said I should bloody well think so. It's no great big thing to learn to do seat stitching when you think of all the things you do in the City and Guilds.

Emma Can I take a photograph of this one?

Eve Yes by all means.

Emma I'll put it on the floor.

Eve Yes shall I move this one?

Emma Thank you. And how, how much of your time do you think you spend working on them?

Eve I haven't done anything for ages and I'm dying to do something special. I've been, I told you I belong to a contemporary quilt group and basically what we've been doing, we've been doing something called journal quilts. Now I don't know whether you've heard of them?

Emma No I haven't.

Eve Journal Quilts started in America, a few years ago, and basically they're done in A4, you know the size is A4, or what we call A4, they call whatever they call it in America, letter, and you do one a month. So contemporary quilt group sort of threw it open [do sit down] threw it open to the members; saying anyone who wants to do it, register and basically every four months you have to send your, your photographs of your journal quilts, with the note, to the coordinator so that come December you're not doing twelve quilts in one go. She wants to make sure that you are doing them as you should be doing them. And they are there, on, in that folder, yes. So you can have a look if you want.

Emma Can I have a look?

Eve Yes of course you can.

Emma And, by journal, or using the term journal, does that mean there's like a diary?

Eve Well, I mean everybody's done it differently. Now my friend Danielle, who belongs to the quilters, but she lives in Dorset so she doesn't come that often, she decided to do something pertaining to Dorset every month. So hers are more landscapes or whatever. That, that one that you are holding is September's, mine are got nothing to do with London or anything. I've done them because I've enjoyed doing them. That was a photograph of a flower which I printed on silk and then I topped it up and placed it back.

Emma Where did your ideas for the different designs come from?

Emma I do think about them, now see the one that you're holding was my husband's nephew's wedding in January. So it made sense to have that as January because it was fun to do, and then you put all your little bits. I try to make it one different, and each one a little special. That one was because I had learnt how to use transparent, you know, organzas. I mean, yes polyester glitzy fabrics. And that's using a new type of material called latra door; which is great because you can heat-gun it, you can slice it, it doesn't tear, you can paint on it and I have, I don't know why, I thoroughly enjoy weaving.

Emma Yes, and I've noticed often in the quilts that you've shown me, when you're sit stitching with the sewing machine, there's lots of up and down and backwards and forwards. Do you enjoy doing that?

Eve I think I have better control doing things like that. I am not a good machine quilter, not.

Emma What do you mean by that? Why do you think you're not a good machine quilter?

Emma I don't have, I can do it, but I don't, I'm not relaxed doing it, and that comes from practicing. If I sat and practised free machine quilting every day for half an hour, I would get there. I need to put the, make the discipline to say, you know, right every morning I'm going to machine, do some free machine quilting. I mean I have all these wonderful thoughts in my head and they never, come morning something or the other is happening.

Emma What time of day do you usually quilt? Do you find yourself stitching?

Eve I try and, I try and sort of think of things in the morning. Because morning is the best time for me I wake up early and I'm on my own so I can, you know, go for it. But it really depends, I mean sometimes I sew in the night with my husband's sitting and watching something, but I don't particularly want to do. I need to get something to do by hand in the evenings because if I don't have something to do I'll fall asleep on the sofa more often than not.

Emma That's interesting, do you prefer to work on your own or do you mind other people around you, while you work?

Eve No, it doesn't bother me. I mean for things, I think there's something to start off with, you know, to learn to decide where to place it. I can get very influenced sometimes by what people are suggesting, you know, 'do this, oh why don't you do that?' And in the end I'm going from one to the other like a, I'm getting nowhere. Whereas, If I'm by myself I try very hard to work it out myself and I'm trying more and more to do this, to try and rely on my own knowledge, instinct, whatever. And then perhaps ask a couple of people like Judith, Judith and Paula, they both have such amazing capacity for colour and design. I value both of them and Danielle, but Vanessa's not around so sometimes I take a photograph and send it to Danielle by e-mail and I say what do you think?

Emma Do you often do that within the group do you give advice, or show work that you're working on and discuss?

Eve I do to, not to the group, I would do it to Judith and Paula because I do value, I do value their opinion. Very much so, and they're friends, they're good friends. I mean, I knew Paula before she joined the quilters, we were in a workshop, surprise, together. She had just started to learn how to do quilting.

Emma Right.

Eve And the tutor had asked me to keep an eye on her and look after her, so that's how we met all those years ago.

Emma Yes.

Eve So no, she, I do, I mean it's not that I don't like the others, I get on fine with, but if I want an opinion more often than not, I will ring Judith, because she lives in Herne Hill so it's not far, and say can I bring it, can you come and see what I'm, where I'm going wrong. Because I know whether, you know I sometimes just need that little bit of you're fine, reassurance or whatever. I'm not that confident, it depends on what I'm doing I mean with this I didn't bother anyone, I just went with it because I knew, I knew what I wanted with this. This one definitely spoke to me.

Emma Do you think it speaks of you, as well?

Eve Possibly, it's called solitude so yes possibly. Now funnily enough, my younger daughter has seen so many of my things, this is the one she wants; I told her she can't have it as yet, it's going up on that wall behind you.

Emma Yes, that would be a good place for it wouldn't it?

Eve Yes.

Emma Do you display much of your work here in your home?

Eve I've got my most favourite quilt in my bedroom.

Emma And is that the only one you have out?

Eve And one which I made, which was one of the quilters challenge's, is in, what used to be my daughter's bedroom, but is my husband's sort of mini office.

Emma And where do you store all of the others then?

Eve I, well quite a lot of them I've got one on top of the other and I've just put them in the cupboard.

Emma Right.

Eve So then when you open the cupboard they all fall out, they all fall out. But no, maybe it's time to get rid of some of

them. Now that was actually a journal quilt but there's a little story to that one. We also had what was called a suitcase challenge for contemporary quilt which was Figure it Out.

Emma I saw this, did you not have it at the exhibition?

Eve No, not at the exhibition. I brought it to show you when we met.

Emma That's right.

Eve So I showed you the bigger one.

Emma That's right, I thought it was familiar.

Eve Yes, and that I did, I wrote Figure it Out in, you know, like a crossword.

Emma In semaphore.

Eve Yes in semaphore.

Emma Figure it Out.

Eve So that one actually, in semaphore, just says CQ. Which is contemporary quilt.

Emma CQ the letters.

Eve Yes.

Emma It's clever isn't it?

Eve Some have been more successful than others.

Emma What, what sort of, either a way of working or a technique or a certain kind of material or, whatever it may be, is there something that, for you, would be a real challenge? What sort of...

Eve Well I love working in silks.

Emma And what sort of criteria would be important to you?

Eve Meaning?

Emma If you were starting a new project, for example, what might drive you to do it? What might motivate you or, what would you see as a challenge that would motivate you? To make the project interesting enough for you to do it?

Eve Right well, for example, we've got a new contemporary quilt challenge; called The Thin Blue Line, for next March or April to have the photographs ready. So if, you've got to have the photograph ready you've got to have the quilt ready basically. And, that at the moment, is been at the back of my mind; how I can get to grips with The Thin Blue Line. I mean I don't necessarily

always do every challenge that's thrown at us, otherwise you'll be doing nothing but one challenge after the other. But some do, maybe excite you, but challenge, you for want of a better word, and this Thin Blue Line does because it's very narrow, its only 30 centimetres; which is 12 inches.

Emma That's the size of the quilt to make?

Eve Yes.

Emma Right.

Eve By 120.

Emma Ok.

Eve So that alone is a challenge, to make something that narrow and they've only given you a leeway of one centimetre. You know, you can be one centimetre less or more; which is nothing when you think of what one centimetre is. And 120 centimetres, I mean it's, it's so long and so narrow. So that in itself is going to be the challenge.

Emma Yes.

Eve Of course the other challenge is to make it interesting. There's no point doing something now if it's not, if it doesn't appeal to you, or if it doesn't interest or excite you, what's the point of doing it?

Emma Quite. What sort of thing might interest you, or excite you? Do you think.

Eve You mean besides my Karachi project?

Emma Yes, yes.

Eve Well I think one thing that would excite my husband is for me to get rid of so much in my fabric and clean up the house, definitely.

Emma Does he think you take up too much space with it?

Eve Yes, definitely. I really enjoy, at the moment, making marks on fabrics.

Emma What sort of marks?

Eve Well, you know one of the ones you saw, the very first one? The black one.

Emma Yes.

Eve With the little squares. Now that's, that was a piece of black fabric which has been discharged.

Emma Yes.

Eve Then I over dyed it, no I discharged it, then, I, we were told to see if, one of the challenges was to paint it., so I painted it. Then I discharged it again, and then on top of it, the bit that you can see quite strongly, is the same image but it's been printed with screenings.

Emma Yes I can see.

Eve And that, to me, was great fun learning how to layer, but to layer sensitively. So that itself is a challenge because you can make one hell of a mess.

Emma Yes, it's an aesthetic challenge really isn't it?

Eve Yes and I think that is, that area is something that I want to explore much, much more, definitely. Not just to keep on trying, you know, bits and putting them in a bag and having a mountain of discharged and recharged, I have called that discharge and recharge but you know what I mean. You can just carry on ad nauseum and you just have samples.

Emma Yes.

Eve Which were going nowhere. I feel that it's time now to use the knowledge and go somewhere, even if they are small hangings, you don't have to have monster hangings.

Emma No, quite. Is there something, we've talked about challenge or things that would excite and interest you. What, what bores you? Or what do you...

Eve I don't get bored.

Emma What would you rather not do? Is there anything in, in making your quilts that you try to avoid?

Eve I absolutely hate pinning my quilts. I absolutely I hate sandwiching them. For the simple reason I can always, I'm always worried that I’m not going to get the wretched thing straight. I can measure about ten times, forget about this measure twice, cut once. I measure about fifteen times to make sure that it's, you know, that the line is straight and it drives me bananas. If somebody else, if I could just make them and send them to be straightened and squared or whatever. I mean you can send it but that's a bit of a, I find that really exhausting. I think mainly also because my back hurts bending over the wretched thing and my hands hurt. I still do it, I grit my teeth and do it but I’m always a bit worried that I've not got it straight.

Emma Is it important that it's straight? Does it matter to you?

Eve For certain things, yes. I think, I don't like wonky pictures so I can't very well have wonky quilts. Unless it's solidly wonky.

Emma Do you mean?

Eve Cut, cut at an angle then fine. That's absolutely fine by me, then it wouldn't be a square or rectangle. But if it's got to be a square then yes, I want my square to be a square and not a wonky square, if that makes sense?

Emma Yes, no I understand. Can I take a photograph this one?

Eve Yes sure.

Emma It's so when I, you know I can see what it is that we were talking about, to remind me.

Eve Yes take whatever you want, I'm going to bring my Nancy Crowe to show you.

Emma Yes I'd love to see that.

Eve My little monster. You see I've used the same, I've used the same squares on this one.

Emma I'll just take a picture of this.

Eve Would you like another coffee?

Emma Thank you, I'm ok though thank you.

Eve That's not done yet.

Emma Do you have a favourite colour scheme?

Eve I have, people have affectionately called me the queen of murk. Does that answer your question? Having said that, I mean that's bright right for me but I'm not very a bright person. But, you know, if somebody says that you can't do bright I will show them that I can do bright. I enjoyed doing that, it was great fun.

Emma Where do your materials come from? Apart from the ones that you've dyed yourself.

Eve Well, these were all snippets, this is actually a part of the blouse I had made years ago; a silk blouse. I buy fabric from wherever I, these are actually fabric, you know, clothing fabrics, these. But that's a bit of silk, I don't buy as much commercial fabric as I used to. My ambition is to try and reduce my, my stash; it's my biggest ambition.

Emma Mine too.

Eve And, you know, put more of my hand dyed stuff, because that's the one, that the stuff that I do enjoy using, definitely. And this is the one I did after, believe it or not, after last year's Nancy Crowe; which I hated. I managed to produce this, and I took it to Switzerland to show her and she was quite impressed, so obviously. And that's been quilted to death, but that's what actually it needed.

Emma It's lovely.

Eve I'm absolutely delighted with it.

Emma Can I take a picture of this?

Eve Yes sure, do you want me to hold it?

Emma That might be easiest.

Eve Yes you take it but you can remove me from it.

Emma I just got two hands and, and the quilt.

Eve Ok?

Emma Thank you.

Eve But you can see, it was the quilting that made this quilt. I really quilted it closely and I thoroughly enjoyed doing it, even though it took forever to quilt it.

Emma I was going to ask how long did it take?

Eve Because to put all these little threads at the back and, and hide them. Pain, pain, I still have some that I haven't hidden, the little, little mountain here.

Emma It's very repetitive work isn't it? It's very meticulous.

Eve Yes.

Emma Close work.

Eve But that's what made this quilt. Without the quilting it would have been not much. I, to me, it wouldn't have been. I mean I started it and I had them wider and I thought no, if I'm going to do this properly it's got to be, sometimes you, you do, I mean I hope that we've got, all the quilters have a certain amount of experience. That, instinctively you will know whether you should put more quilting, or more fabric or more texture, because just as much as you can do more you can do too much, and kill it can't you?

Emma Absolutely. Did you mind doing all this quilting?

Eve Not at all.

Emma Because it's all on the machine.

Eve No, thoroughly enjoyed it, it was quite restful. It was a challenge, to keep it, you know, straight, as straight could be.

I mean some, when they were wonky I unpicked it. I know nobody would have probably even noticed, but I knew it was wrong so long as I was happy that's fine, but if I wasn't I wasn't going to: shades of my aunt.

Emma You'd unpick it and do it again.

Eve She would have been proud of it.

Emma Why do you think it was restful doing it?

Eve Because of the repetition probably. When you do things by rote it is quite, isn't it? You don't have to really besides getting your machine foot in the right place, and making sure you had enough thread, and having a good tension and all.

Emma Then you're away.

Eve Then you're away. But I mean you're not a way for long, especially when you're doing these, you're not away at all because by the time you've done one you've got to cut it and start all over again. But the quilting was as much a challenge as putting the rest of it together, because I think without the quilting, this wouldn't have worked so well, not for me anyway for somebody else yes fine.

Emma That's interesting, a different sort of challenge though because you're not doing the same activity.

Eve Absolutely, no it's a different challenge but there are challenges in aspects of textiles, or in anything isn't it?

Emma Yes, I mean I keep asking you questions about that but I find it really interesting. How, how did you keep going because of an awful lot of quilting that you've done.

Eve Bloody mindedness.

Emma Up and down.

Eve No, not up and down, all one way.

Emma Just all one way? That’s right Yes. All one way.

Eve Because Judith kept on, I said can I turn it? Oh you can't turn it. I said: Judith who's going to know. You can't turn it you've done so well don't you dare turn it. Alright Judith. But I did turn it a couple of times, I thought sod Judith sod everybody else, it's getting thicker and thicker more and more because it weighs, it weighs.

Emma I know, Yes.

Eve I had two chairs propping up the quilting because it was weighing so much, while I was doing it, that it was pushing it out of, you know, going a bit skewwhiff.

Emma Have you ever done a really large piece that you found it difficult to manage on your own?

Eve I have but I, really those sort of things I will never do again. No, because I really don't enjoy it.

Emma Why is that?

Eve It just, it drags on my shoulders and my arms and then I go, I don't do it well and it's not worth it. I'd rather do it in pieces and then put it together. You have to know your own abilities and your own, I really don't enjoy doing a nine foot quilt, and then pushing the whole thing through the machine. Well not that machine anyway, put it that way. If I was on a huge table with a semi-industrial machine and the whole quilt is completely, you know, supported. That's a different story and I'm not sort of squashing it because even this, however small it was, I was squashing it into that throat of that machine. Because by the time you get, you know, that's why I thought oh well, no-one's going to know, and no one's going to know I turned it. But no, I'm actually, to be honest I'm very, very happy with this, very pleased. But having said that I'm going to take off the entire binding because it's annoyed me intensely, because even though I was so careful and stitched it perfectly, it whiffles and I can't bear that.

Emma Whiffles, what do you mean by whiffle?

Eve Yes it's sort of, especially the bottom. if you look at the bottom.

Emma Is it here? Sort of ruffles up?

Eve Yes.

Emma Right.

Eve And really bugs me.

Emma Did you have this on display at the Festival of Quilts, this year?

Eve Yes.

Emma Because I was thinking I've seen this, the colours are familiar, very familiar to me.

Eve And they're all hand-dyed. a

Emma But I didn't, I wouldn't have known it was yours.

Eve No. All hand-dyed Emma, every single one of them.

Emma In your kitchen?

Eve No, this was done in the sweatshop.

Emma That's right, at the workshop. It's, it's great, I love the colours yes.

Eve No I'm pleased with it, you know I'm quite happy and I would do another one. So Nancy, all is forgiven.

Emma One last question, Eve, what, is there anything in, what, let me try and get my words out properly. Is there something special about being in the group for you? Why, why, why are you a member of the quilters?

Eve I, I like them by and large, even though they irritate me sometimes. They do, they get my goats up sometimes. Some of them, not all of them. I mean, I don't know, I joined them when they were so different. When I joined in 1994 it was more a traditional quilting group. Except for Paula and Judith who could put their hand to anything and everything. I mean, I'm not saying that because they're my friends, I truly admire their work and they have this amazing capacity, intuitive capacity for colour; which I would absolutely give my eye teeth to have like, I, I can do it but I have to work really hard and even then I don't know whether I have got it right and then I scuttle off to Paula or Judith and I say tell me tell me. Because, when you're doing something, like anything, you're so intense and so into it that you need somebody else who's completely detached to give you just a little bit of push or support or suggestion or whatever. I, I do like someone giving me that bit. I mean I'm happy to work at home on my own things like that, you know, I don't need to worry about how to dye now. I've got enough knowledge of, I can sit there and dye and if it doesn't work I'm not going to be phased out, I'll re-dye it so I have strength in that where they don't; I'll die for them.

Emma Do you share skills?

Eve Yes we are hoping to start a little mini group within the quilters. Three or four of us so that we can we can, sort of, bounce off ideas and do different things, and perhaps one of us will take a turn to show a technique. Because we all have different strengths, mine is definitely in the dyeing, mark making, discharging because I've learnt much more than any of them have learnt. Having said that, when they asked, a couple of them said do it for us, I refused not only because for health and safety issues, because I would do in my house not with more than one person. Because it's dangerous, you know, and also I don't have equipment for a group and also I feel, and I suppose it sounds like a bit of a dog in a manger attitude, I feel that I've spent so much money learning myself, that I feel that it's time for them to give me something back. If they want to know I'm not asking them to pay me what I paid the people I go to, but at least to cover my dyes and, which is more than reasonable because I don't, they don't come out air they have to be bought and paid for; as do all my materials.

Emma Have you ever taught any workshops before, yourself?

Eve I have taught the quilters quite a few things and thoroughly enjoy doing that. I taught them all how to do foundation piecing, taught them Japanese folded patchwork; after which we did a Japanese folded patchwork group quilt. Something called

square dance; which there's an example on that rocking chair that's square dance.

Emma Oh yeah, yes I know that.

Eve And funnily enough, one of the newer members, she was showing another new member about it, about a month ago and they got quite excited about it and I said, you know, we've done this in the quilters goodness know how many years ago. But it's been done, I've given them all notes about how to do it, so it's not something that's new, but new to them so fair enough. But why do I belong? I think it's nice to belong, and also if you don't want to go to the, to the meetings no one's going to hopefully, take away your membership. I think they'd have a hard time taking mine away but still. I can be very strong if I want to be, but no I think they are very, very talented group a lot of ways. But I still maintain I said earlier, that they've not done their best this year, not at all. I hope they do next year because the exhibitions are usually very good and they've become so much more professional than when I joined in 1994. They have, they've become, they are, you know people come to see the quilters exhibitions, they are quite well known. When I joined them, Beckenham quilters was considered the bee's knees and when you go to the exhibitions now it's quite sorry, it's really quite sad. We're definitely head and shoulders above them and I always tell them too much to their irritation. No some of them are excellent but, you know, if you think about how big they are and how small we are, we are definitely better than them, there's no question. But like everything, you need to, to push them slightly.

Emma Right.

Eve But that's what I feel.

Emma Yes. Yes.

Eve You see there's so many different, we've got some who are total traditionalists won't do anything else, won't even try. And then you've got the ones in the middle who can perhaps be pushed to doing something that's not within their own comfort zone, for want of a better word. And then there's the ones who like doing things totally different, and when you think we are only 25.

Emma Yes, it's very, it's a very rich group, yes certainly.

Eve But I think you know, you have to respect their wish to either do it, or not do it, and I think we actually complement each other; most of us.

Emma Do, would say that you learn from each other? You're stimulating and sort of cross-pollinating between you as a group?

Eve I think so, not all the time but quite a lot of the time.

Emma And would, I mean obviously in the quilting works that you're doing, but would you say also in other ways as well?

Eve Well, we're twenty-five and I think so many, see I was from Pakistan Paula is Brazilian, Clara's Spain, Sally's from Canada, then you have the actual Brits from different parts of Britain. I think, I think it does, it lends itself because we're so, from different parts of the world, that we bring our own particular stamp. And yet, you know, we are a group, but we are all different as well. So it works in every way I think, I mean I wouldn't not be part of the quilters unless I had a serious fall out but, you know, that's what democracy is, isn't it? The ability to let everybody say what they want to say and do whatever they want to do, it would be very tedious if we all did the same thing in the quilters.

Emma Oh Yes.

Eve It would make for a very boring exhibition whereas that's half the fun of going around. We've got this new challenge called the Button Up challenge.

Emma Yes.

Eve Which is actually part, it's the Guild challenge. But we've suggested that we would do it as a group. Now, in that respect I am totally at odds with Sandy, our present outgoing chairman, because she says that we should vote within the group which one would go to the Quilters Guild, and I said no because we know each other's work so well that it's not fair, we need somebody from outside to say 'I like that'.

Emma Yes I see what you mean. And, lastly, are you retired now Eve, is that right?

Eve I've been retired for years, I became a mummy and never went back to work.

Emma What did you train to do and what did you do when you were working?

Eve I was a, I was a secretary I worked for my, mum, my dad. He was in shipping.

Emma Right.

Eve And I ran his passenger car ferries in the channel islands, and then when I got married to Eddie, and sadly the ferries stopped at the same time, I then worked for a literary agency; which goes back to my love of writing.

Emma And worked there until I had my first daughter and I was supposed to go back and never went back, so he will tell I've never, he just says I've just never worked but it's harder to be a mother than work believe you me.

Emma Absolutely.

Eve So no, well yes I am at the age of retirement but as he, rightly, would say I have retired since I had my children.

Emma Ok well thank you very much Eve, thank you.

Eve No, no thank you.

Emma It's been fascinating talking to you.

Eve Well I don't know about that, probably you will go home thinking God she's a real nut case.

Emma No, absolutely not, no, no. It's been fascinating, thank you very much.

Eve You're very welcome. You see that one's my little bit of murk. It's called A Little Bit Of Murk.

Emma Is it?

Eve Yes.

Emma Yes there's still these quilts here.

Eve Well you can see them if you want. You can open them.

Emma Just quickly, I must, I must go. But how many quilts do you think you have?

Eve I have no idea, I could sit and count them. I have no idea, I haven't made that many quilts, well I have. Nothing like two hundred quilts and all that people say that they've made. That's my little bit of murk, you've seen that if you came to the exhibition last year, at the quilters.

Emma Yes I have.

Eve That's my wonky which has gone slightly wonky. You the quilters sometimes wonder at my silly sense of humour because they say 'how do you find all these peculiar titles' and that's half the fun, of having titles for quilts.

Emma It's words again Eve, isn't it?

Eve I suppose so. No I like that one, that was all hand-dyed fabric. This is going back many years, this hasn't even got a label, many years. This is true traditional trip around the world and still love that pattern, still love it. There's something very pleasing about Trip Around the World.

Emma It's interesting that sometimes the very, very simple patterns are the ones that continue to please.

Eve No, it's a lovely one. This one was great too. This was using hand-dyed and commercial Japanese fabrics, indigo. That's something that I really want to go back to, is doing some indigo.

Emma And dye it yourself. Yes this one's lovely.

Eve I like that very much. I know it sounds odd when somebody says that they like their own work. But there's some of them that I really do like very much.

Emma That's lovely, thank you. Do you want me to help you.

Eve No, no I'll roll them up, don't worry.

Emma Are you sure?

Eve Absolutely.

Emma Ok.

Eve So when do we see you again?

Emma Well I'm, I'm waiting to hear back from, from Sandy or Cheryl with a proposition of a date, and I haven't yet heard from them.

Eve This is for deciding about the blue project?

Emma Yes, to...

Eve And have you got an idea in mind?

Emma To initially to, to perhaps do a one-day workshop together, and brainstorm some ideas together as a group, and to gauge and see what sort of interest there might be. And then from that, think more tightly about a making project over a longer period of time. So I think that's the way we're thinking of moving forward and, as I say, I'm waiting to hear a date.

Eve Well Cheryl, of course, is totally bogged down because she's got her exhibition.

Emma She's got an exhibition at the moment hasn't she?

Eve Yes but it's not next week but the week after.

Emma That's right, the beginning of December isn't it?

Eve Yes.

Emma Yes.

Eve At the barrister's chambers, it's a lovely location.

Emma It is, yes. Yes.

Eve Are you going to go?

Emma I'm definitely going to try and go, yes. Because she sent me an invitation.

Eve For the private view.

Emma And, I can't remember the date.

Eve 4th December I think.

Emma 4th December, yes and I think I will be in London so I will try and go to it, yes.

Eve Well I'll see you then.

Emma So that would be nice, yes. Yes, see you there. Ok well are you sure you don't want me to help you pack these up?

Eve Absolutely no problem.

Emma And I'll collect up my bits and pieces. It's fascinating to talk to you all.

End of conversation.

Transcript of interview with Biddy

Date: 30 November 2007

Location: Biddy's home.

Duration of meeting: 1 hour 30 minutes

Biddy is British and retired.

Emma So it's the 30th November, today.

Biddy Yes.

Emma And I'm with Biddy.

Biddy Shall we go upstairs?

Emma Straight away?

Biddy Yes

Emma Yes, Ok.

Biddy Now I'm slow so you go before me.

Emma Thank you. Now I'd love to hear about when you were at the Barratt School as well. That sounds fascinating.

Biddy Yes. Well it was a completely different time, and it was because I went there that I carried on sewing all these, all these years. They're in here. This is my work room.

Emma Very well set up. Very tidy and organised.

Biddy Oh well, not always. Now this is a, last year was the 100th anniversary of the London College of Fashion, and they've produced this book of the history.

Emma Ah interesting.

Biddy And because I saw it, I think it was on the television, that they were doing this, that I got in

touch with them and I still had my pieces of sewing that I'd done, and drawings, and I took them along and they were thrilled to bits.

Emma Oh I bet they were.

Biddy And now they're in the archives.

Emma Yes, I was just going to say.

Biddy Yes.

Emma Fascinating.

Biddy Yes, it was.

Emma How long were you there for?

Biddy The course was two years.

Emma And what was the course? What did you learn?

Biddy I'll show you, this was the brochure.

Emma Gosh, the Barratt Street Technical School.

Biddy It was originally the trade school and then they changed it to technical school. It was near Selfridges.

Emma It still is isn't it? Although it wouldn't be the same building.

Biddy Well Barratt Street is, but earlier this year they've pulled the building down. They've probably, having the new building there you know. But they're not there now, they're near Oxford Circus.

Emma Yes.

Biddy I forget the name of the street, but...

Emma John Princes Street isn't it.

Biddy Is it? Right. And I went along to the celebrations; which was very nice and the course was for two years. You see they had younger girls there but, and during the war they were evacuated, to Maidenhead, but they still had a small school in London, which I went to.

Emma What level was it? Was this after you…

Biddy No, I'd gone to a technical school in the art department.

Emma Right.

Biddy I don't know if you want to read that. This is what I wrote for them.

Emma Gosh, thank you.

Biddy So if you just want to have a sit down and read that.

Emma Thank you. Can I sit here?

Biddy Yeah.

Emma It's fascinating.

Biddy Well they were interested.

Emma I bet they were.

Biddy Because there's not many of my generation around you see? And it was only because I had seen that they were going to have this celebration that I got in touch.

Emma Gosh they must be really please that you did.

Biddy Yes.

Emma Oh it's fascinating.

Biddy And, I had a nice letter from them saying they would keep the things, you know, and that they wanted them.

Emma How many people were in your class? Was it small?

Biddy There could have only been about ten of us. And, they were all, well not all, but quite a lot were, they had been refugees from Europe, you know. And they were Jewish, and most of the trade was Jewish at that time.

Emma Yes.

Biddy And all the wholesale manufacturers were sort of north of Oxford Street. Lots of small businesses, you know. And, although some of the girls went into couture, most of them went into the wholesale business, you know.

Emma Doing what sort of jobs?

Biddy Well, if you'd been trained at Barratt Street you were higher up and I mean you went in to the designing or the cutting departments.

Emma Which is what you did.

Biddy Yes. So you wouldn't be a machinist, or sew on buttons, so you, step up.

Emma What made you, what gave you the idea to go and do a course there in the first place?

Biddy Well it was my parents, as it says in the letter, I would really have liked to gone and done an art degree

Emma Right. What sort of art degree?

Biddy Well, like they do now I suppose. You know, you learn the history and you're drawing.

Emma Painting?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Right, and...

Biddy But, I mean you're always concerned about, you know, earning a living and...

Emma Yes of course, yes.

Biddy So I didn't, and it was good because I like sewing. I had done it at school, you know.

Emma Did you learn at school?

Biddy Yes. Yes, we made a little sewing bag sort of thing.

Emma Was that, what stage of school was that?

Biddy That would be at primary.

Emma Primary.

Biddy But then it was during the war so you were evacuated and all those things, you know, went. I was evacuated to Ipswich and the school was already there, the whole school was taken, but because there was two schools we had one school in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Emma Oh yes.

Biddy Because they couldn't accommodate everybody.

Emma Yes, my grandmother taught, she was a teacher and she taught in a school that was being shared with another.

Biddy Yes.

Emma School that was being evacuated and they alternated.

Biddy That's right.

Emma Morning and afternoons.

Biddy Yes.

Emma So, you've sewn all your life really.

Biddy Yes. Yes, yes I have. I like making things, you know.

Emma Do you, would you say you still enjoy it now as much as you ever have done?

Biddy Oh yes, definitely.

Emma And what sort of things in particular do you really enjoy doing?

Emma What sort of sewing or stitching?

Biddy Well doing the patchwork, you know. I like, patchwork covers a big area now. We can use it as an art medium, but I prefer it as a traditional. I'd rather do things for practical reasons.

Emma Right.

Biddy Although when you're in a group, you join in doing the challenge you know. But, but up there is the slice of life.

Emma Right, Coronation Street, that strip. That one?

Biddy Well it's their slice of life, do you see what I mean? They're watching the telly.

Emma Oh yes I see. Yes.

Biddy So it's a slice of life.

Emma Right, yes very good.

Biddy Everybody's was different, you know. But I like a bit of humour.

Emma That's good, yeah.

Biddy So if you're in a group, you join in doing things you wouldn't do, if you were just doing it yourself.

Emma That's yes, yes. Do you enjoy that?

Biddy Oh yes, yes.

Emma What, what do you think is enjoyable about...

Biddy Well working something out. Not competitive, but the latest one is we're doing dark to light. And, see that bit there, that's going to be a volcano. Dark, with the light coming out the top. You see what I mean?

Emma Yes, yes I do.

Biddy And it challenges you to find fabric and how you're going to do it, and it is like an art thing isn't it? It stretches your imagination.

Emma Yes absolutely. Are you doing this with other people, or are you doing this one on your own?

Biddy Well you do it on your own, but everybody else is doing their own idea and then we have them all hanging together. You haven't been to our exhibition?

Emma I was just going to say, is this going to be for the exhibition?

Biddy Next November.

Emma Yes I did go, the last one was 2006, last year wasn't it?

Biddy Yes that's right.

Emma Yes I did go to that.

Biddy Oh right.

Emma Yes, yes I did see that one, and I'll come again to the one next year.

Biddy Oh good, good.

Emma Oh yes, definitely. Ok so you prefer the traditional style of patchwork.

Biddy Yes

Emma Do you, do you make by hand? Do you piece by hand?

Biddy No I use the machine.

Emma Right, ok.

Biddy I prefer hand quilting to machine quilting, because a lot of people do machine quilting now, but I like the look of hand quilting better.

Emma Do you, where do you do your quilting?

Biddy Where?

Emma By hand. Yes.

Biddy Well I, I mean I, I sometimes sit, you know, half watching the telly, doing it there. It's been a while since I've done it. As you get older the time goes quicker.

Emma Yes. When did you start doing patchwork and quilting?

Biddy In the late eighties, a friend of mine who, I don't know if any of the others have told you this, she was American, Grace, and she said to me come along to this class; which two well-known patchwork people were having at their home. And

we went along and then when we finished the course we decided we'd make a group because we enjoyed being together and doing it together, you know. And she had a patchwork background, coming from America, New England, and she was sort of our guiding light.

Emma Right, yes.

Biddy So it worked very well.

Emma Yes. And that's 20…

Biddy It was '86 when we…

Emma '86 so 21 years ago.

Biddy And I keep a record, I've been doing this from '86 to '94. That was the first quilt we did together.

Emma And, when you say you did it together, how did you work...

Biddy Well, each one of us did a square.

Emma Yes.

Biddy And then somebody would have the job of putting them together, and then we'd sit and quilt together.

Emma Did each person...

Biddy Have their own idea?

Emma Design their own idea?

Biddy Yes, yes, it had to be a star.

Emma Ok.

Biddy And I designed the logo. This is where we had our first exhibition. You see in those days I did this by hand.

Emma Yes.

Biddy But now it's all printed.

Emma Yes it's all done on the printer.

Biddy And here we are putting up the show.

Emma I wonder if there's anybody I recognise.

Biddy You should do. That's Lillian.

Emma Lillian Rose.

Biddy Yes, and that's Fran.

Emma No I don't know Fran.

Biddy You'll probably see some more later on. You see people come and go. This is a Dutch lady who's gone back to Holland, that I'm still in touch with. And this was Grace, who has died unfortunately. A selection of quilts. This was another group quilt based on the American house, you know traditional design and we have a raffle of course each time.

Emma Do you do a group quilt for each exhibition?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Yes, I thought so.

Biddy Liz Rowe's, this is the chappy picking the raffle. And when people leave we do different parts and things. And these are a group of Dutch ladies, a group in Holland who come over and stay with us. This is us, having a party. And this was the one, a Zion house they had an exhibition there. Here we are look.

Emma It's beautiful. That's a group quilt.

Biddy Yes.

Emma How did you work that one out?

Biddy I wasn't involved with that one, I don't know. I don't know, it's all based on square you see and drawn together.

Emma So how, I suppose, how did the group members make it?

Biddy Well you'd be given the fabrics with sometimes pieces cut out, or sometimes you cut them out yourself and did so many squares. You know maybe that was one.

Emma Right, so again it was broken down into squares and each…

Biddy Yes.

Emma Yes. And who decides who puts it all together?

Biddy Well it's, the person whose idea it is to do that quilt. Like Liz Rowe is doing the group quilt now and it was her design and idea so she took it on.

Emma Right.

Biddy That's when we were quilting, stitching.

Emma Oh yes. You're not working on a frame.

Biddy No.

Emma Do you ever work on a frame?

Biddy I don't personally and I don't know if any of the others do. But we don't do this so much now, it doesn't seem to be so usual to do that now and that's why we win prizes you see. This is another show.

Emma Is this again a show with the patchwork quilting group?

Biddy Yes this is all the patchwork quilting group.

Emma How many quilts do you think you've made? Now there's a question.

Biddy I don't know, hard to tell.

Emma Have you ever counted them?

Biddy No, we haven't. I've had things in papers and that.

Emma Yes. And this is a raffle quilt?

Biddy Yes. The last quilt, the last exhibition, it raised £1,000. The quilt at the raffle. So I've kept all this up to the present day. You know, the history.

Emma Yes that's really interesting.

Biddy Yes it will be one day, won't it. Things have changed. The thing is, getting younger people, you know? We do have one or two members that are younger.

Emma What sort of age are the younger ones?

Biddy I would think they're well, one is in her thirties I would think. And the other is forties, you know. Not that young.

Emma Yes. I wonder what you think about that. Why do you think the younger women don't come.

Biddy Well because women work, as well as having children and you know, they don't have the free time I suppose. Plus when I got married, you left work and had your family and you know had spare time. Although I do see young women at the cafes now with their children, don't they? They seem to go in groups.

Emma Yes, yes that's I why I'm asking I think. Because I wonder if, even though that isn't the case, if there isn't still a...

Biddy A purpose?

Emma A wanting to get together. I mean, why, what did you like, or what do you like about being part of the group? What has kept you remaining a member and still being a part of it?

Biddy I can't imagine not being in a group, you know? I suppose you get to know people and well, you're not a family but you know you're interested in their life and they're interested in your. Your children all grow up and you hear all about them. You know it's, especially in a place like London I think, it's not a village and you don't know people so well. People in London are coming and going.

Emma That's interesting. You know I hadn't heard someone say that before but yeah, yes.

Biddy Because we've had a lot of people come and go in our group from abroad, you know, and gone back to their countries. You know, their husbands had been working in London for a couple of years or whatever.

Emma How do they find out about the group if they're not from here.

Biddy Well, I think, you know, whether they get in touch with the Quilters Guild but, I don't know, the Dutch friend, I'm still friends with, she was at a show not to do with quilts locally and said do you know of a quilt group and this person happened to know of ours.

Emma Yes.

Biddy So I think it might be a bit word of mouth.

Emma Do people still come and go. Does the membership change or are...?

Biddy Well there's always people that go now are sometimes people that, who retire to the country.

Emma So they move away in fact.

Biddy Yes but not many members just leave, you know. We are 25 and we keep to that number because we don't want to hire a hall. The other local group of quilters have 100 or something members but they have to hire a hall you see?

Emma Yes.

Biddy And we don't, we people, two meetings a month and one meeting is here.

Emma In your home?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Every month?

Biddy Yes once a month. And then the other one is at a workshop or in somebody else's house.

Emma Yes, yes. Yes because 25 people in your home is quite a lot.

Biddy Yes but usually somebody's away on holiday or something's happening. Usually get about 16, 15 or 16.

Emma Right ok, yes.

Biddy And we've got a big room downstairs. And it's mostly talk.

Emma Yes, that's very true, yes. Going back to the sewing, what do you enjoy most? You said you piece the, you piece the patchwork pieces together by machine as your preferred method, but you quilt by hand. So, and what about cutting the pieces out for example? Where do you, where do you keep your materials?

Biddy Well they're all in here.

Emma And where do you, how do you prepare your quilts?

Biddy All the boxes are in here you see?

Emma Yes, very organised. Everything is very organised.

Biddy What I enjoy is making these little bags.

Emma Oh yes.

Biddy I sell them at the quilt shows? See, bags.

Emma Oh, I see, yes.

Biddy And some people buy them for their children for pencils and things, some people use them for cosmetics. At the last show, a lady said to me, it was a jolly bag. I can't remember which pattern it was, she said oh I'm going to put my pills and medicines in here, she said. It cheered me up.

Emma Yes it would do, yes.

Biddy So I buy, I'm very tempted with fabrics you see, that I can use the little bags.

Emma Where do you get your fabrics from?

Biddy Well mostly they have, in the quilt shows, they have stalls to sell and then there's a place at, there's not many shops now that sell fabrics that you can use. And then just over in America, because we're doing these quilts for children. Isn't that fun?

Emma That's sweet.

Biddy Isn't that lovely? So if I'm travelling anywhere, in France or in America, or wherever, and this one look with all the animals, isn't it jolly? So it's not a matter of getting a large amount, it's when you see what you like, you know? But some people have a huge collection of fabrics.

Emma Yes, they do don't they? Yes. And whereabouts do you work?

Biddy Oh this is my work room.

Emma You don't have a table. Do you pull this table out?

Biddy No, I've got an ironing board which I use, and I usually find with small pieces I can use the table there. And I don't have any problem. Come and see the ones in here.

Emma Ok, shall I come with you?

Biddy This is them? This is one I made, that's all, that's quilting.

Emma All done by hand?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Very neat stitches, look at that. How long did it take you to?

Biddy That took me about two years.

Emma Is that including the piecing?

Biddy Yes.

Emma And the applique?

Biddy Yeah.

Emma Gosh.

Emma And you did it without putting it onto a frame?

Biddy Yes, yes I just did it in my hands.

Emma Did you trace out the quilting pattern onto fabric beforehand?

Biddy Yes, yes.

Emma Gosh, that's a lot of work. It's lovely.

Biddy This, and quilts have a story you see because this, we had a cottage garden. Picking out pieces of blue and white china. So that's the idea and that's called, I think it's called, broken plate, something like that the pattern.

Emma Oh yes.

Biddy So I thought I'd do little bits of blue and white.

Emma And where was this, the cottage garden?

Biddy Down at Rye.

Emma Right.

Biddy Do you know it? Down there? It's Sussex.

Emma No I don't, I don't.

Biddy And, so that's why I, I chose to do blue and white China.

Emma Right.

Biddy And this white cotton came from Egypt. We were on holiday there and I bought, I actually bought Egyptian cotton, in Egypt.

Emma Actually in Egypt, which makes a lot of sense. Yes.

Biddy Yes. And this came from a tea towel that I had bought in Boulogne, the little basket pattern that was part of a bigger pattern of course. So, you know quilts always have a story.

Emma Yes they do. Where did you get all the little bits of blue and white fabrics here?

Biddy Oh I I had to sort of gather them and when I saw some blue and white in a shop I got a bit of it. The thing is getting a true blue because very often they're sort of greeny blues or, you know, mauvey blues; it isn't it true blue.

Emma Do you ever use fabric from old clothes or...?

Biddy Not often no, no I haven't. This is an interesting one. Some years ago, when I was a chairperson, I said I'd really like a quilt that I can put over my knees when I'm really old, and I said everybody do a blue square that represents you. And so everybody's done a square that they think, you know, that sort of speaks of them.

Emma I wonder if I can, is that Judith Lewis?

Biddy Yes, yes it is.

Emma Gosh. And I wonder if I can guess any of the others, well I haven't met all of them so.

Biddy That's Anthea Withins. Do you recognise her?

Emma Yes I have I saw her this morning actually.

Biddy Oh right, now this is Liz Rowe.

Emma Right. It's lovely.

Biddy Because she's into embroidery and design; that speaks of her.

Emma Is that Paula?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Gosh I got it right. How fascinating

Biddy And the other thing I've done is I've said I've called this quilt Put Together With Words and it's all sayings. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Take a break. Many hands make light work. So I collected all these sayings and, because I thought one day, you know, people might have forgotten all these sayings.

Emma Life is too short to sit and dream. Time ripens all things.

Biddy Yes there's so many.

Emma Yeah, some of them I haven't heard of.

Biddy Oh really?

Emma No.

Biddy That's it you see.

Emma No I haven't, time ripens all things, I don't know that one. Is that Ruth?

Biddy No that's Eve.

Emma Eve, oh yes I know Eve.

Biddy And, who else would you know? That's Clara.

Emma I've met Clara.

Biddy And, that's Vanessa who's moved away. That's Sarah.

Emma I was going to say, is that one by Sarah?

Biddy Yes that's Sarah. And that, that's Jen. That's Lillian. Because, she'd been to Japan and...

Emma Right.

Biddy That's Sally Lavis.

Emma Ah yes, I've met Sally as well, and here who is? This one's very clever isn't it?

Biddy Yes that's Josephine but she doesn't come very often. You may not have met her.

Emma No I haven't met her, no.

Biddy And this is Grace, who isn't with us anymore. This is Lorraine, who went back to Canada.

Emma That's a lovely thing to have.

Biddy That's Sandy, Sandy Paxton. So, you know, it's a real pleasure for me to have this and, as I say, you know, perhaps in a home or something I can put this over my lap, or up on the wall.

Emma Yes, no it is a lovely thing to have.

Biddy Yes I think that's the thing about quilts, you know, they're not just things, they mean something don't they; full of stories.

Emma That's lovely.

Biddy This is one that we did for Flight of Fancy. I don't know whether you saw the exhibition?

Emma No, I haven't.

Biddy And this is my flight of fancy; a flying fish.

Emma Gosh, that stands out.

Biddy And there again everyone's was different.

Emma Yes. All working to a common theme, but each person doing their own.

Biddy Yes that's right.

Emma Yes.

Biddy What's this one? Oh this was the last one.

Emma Oh, I've seen that one, that was at the last exhibition, the squares and circles.

Biddy Yes, circles and squares yes. And this is Bondawebbed, they're not sewn. I couldn't turn around every circle.

Emma Do you always quilt by hand? What do you like about doing it by hand in particular?

Biddy I just like the result I suppose, you know, I don't know really.

Emma Because it takes much longer to do doesn't it?

Biddy Oh yes, oh yes but I think the end is worth it, you know. You see, you wouldn't be able to do this, all this on a machine and it would look like that.

Emma No absolutely.

Biddy It makes it thinner somehow and looks more stiff, you know. I don't know.

Emma Yes I know, I know you mean. I'm just to think how to, how can we describe it?

Biddy Yes, that's right.

Emma It’s lovely.

Biddy But you see, when we were children we did things like this, this is something I did when I was a child you know. You had the pattern and you stitched it, you know, cross-stitch. So I kept it all those years.

Emma Where did you, where did people get these cloths?

Biddy Well they'd be in, in big stores like John Lewis is today, you know. They'd have a department of these sorts of things.

Emma And, did it come in a kit form?

Biddy Yes, you had all the threads and colours; like knitting patterns you know. I didn't do that but my aunt did that. But you know, you did all this sort of embroidery, and people always did something on the go, you know, that they picked up and did now and again.

Emma Yes do you still work like that?

Biddy Oh, mostly.

Emma Have you got something on the go at the moment?

Biddy Yes, you have a deadline you know.

Emma Right, what sort of a deadline do you have?

Biddy Well we will have a deadline for our next exhibition.

Emma That's true, yes.

Biddy And if it's for somebody, you know a present or something you know...

Emma Have you given away a lot of your quilts to people?

Biddy Well I’ve, I've, I've made some for the family. You know, the children and that’s what I like doing really, that’s what I’d rather do. Do these challenges really but because you are in a group you feel you should...

Emma Have you worked on many quilts where everybody is working together on the quilt?

Biddy Well, in those old pictures we did it more in that time than we do now. I think we meet here in the evening and it’s a bit dark and you'd have to meet in the daytime because more people are not, I don’t know, are working I suppose. I think that’s with the younger ones, you know you wouldn’t be able to do it so much.

Emma Yes they went there to come during the day.

Biddy No.

Emma Quite.

Biddy I don't know whether you've seen these books that, these were in the 70's, I think they were the '70's. Have you seen these?

Emma Golden Hands, yes I have, I think my mother had them, yes.

Biddy I've got the whole lot.

Emma Really, the whole collection?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Golly that's quite something.

Biddy And, you know, I feel now I'm not going to use these anymore, I wish I knew someone that they could go to, you know that they would be appreciated. I don't know whether, they wouldn't use them in schools and things now, I don't know where they'd use them but, they're full of, you know, crochet.

Emma Yes, yes they are. There's macramé, that's really beautiful. Where do you get your inspiration from, for your quilts that you make?

Biddy Well you see with this one, I'd thought about this last year and everybody's saying 'oh I don't know what I'm going to do', but recently they had this, I don't know where it was, somewhere in the world, this volcano and I thought oh that's a good idea. And it comes to you in a flash, and then you have to think it through.

Emma Yes, do you draw? You obviously learnt to draw because you went to technical school.

Biddy Oh yes. Drawings I did, and when I was in the trade. You had to send out to people.

Emma 1946.

Biddy And in a way I'd rather paint than do quilts.

Emma Still?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Have you ever painted?

Biddy Oh yes.

Emma So do you do both now? Do you paint and quilt?

Biddy Well, the trouble now is they've made classes more expensive, less people go. So then if they don't get enough

people they close the class. And so there's not so many ones to go to. So it's not so easy, you know. I think this is a shame because when we first moved here in 1959, the local school had classes, evening and day, and you could give a pound for a whole year and go to as many classes as you wanted.

Emma Gosh, yes.

Biddy So that's the difference.

Emma Golly yeah, that's very interesting isn't it?

Biddy Well I think that was only if you were older, you know, retired sort of thing. But this is the trouble, I think, with retired people there's not enough things, you know, to belong to and learn to do things.

Emma Would you do more if you could?

Biddy Well personally I don't have that much spare time now you know. I find there's enough with what I'm doing.

Emma Yes, the sewing takes a long time. Whereabouts do you do your sewing when you're working on a quilt? Do you, do you work up here in the sewing room?

Biddy Yes when I'm putting it together on the machine and I do the hand sewing downstairs. But then putting it together up here.

Emma And that's the same with the quilts? You'll piece it together up here and then work on the hand quilting downstairs.

Biddy Yes, yes, yes.

Emma Do you, what do you do while you're sitting and doing the hand quilting.

Biddy Well usually the television is on and you're, sort of, half looking at that.

Emma Is it always the television?

Biddy Oh yes, I can't just sit and watch television and do nothing. I have to do something. Do you do any yourself?

Emma Yes I do, I do yes. I certainly, at the moment, I've done lots of different things but I've really come back to, I suppose, you know what is my first love, what I enjoy doing and that is stitching. And I, I embroider and I make patchwork and quilt as well.

Biddy Oh you do?

Emma Yes, I do yes. Yes.

Biddy And do you like the old fashioned or modern art? Or some of both maybe?

Emma I'm not sure actually. I think probably some of both, I do like the traditional quilting. I find there's something very,

very, what's the word I'm looking for, very, the geometric patterns they really capture your eye but they also capture your mind. You, you know, you can imagine things in them. And at the same time they're very calming, very soothing shapes.

Biddy Yes that's right.

Emma So..

Biddy As you can see I've got all of them here.

Emma That's quite a collection. I'm sure, what about the London College of Fashion library.

Biddy Well I don't know, I wondered you know, if they would be interested. I suppose I could ask them.

Emma Or, do you know the Constance Howard research and resource centre?

Biddy No.

Emma It's a research, a small research community and they have an archive of all sorts of textiles; essentially embroidery. Because it's Constance Howard, named after Constance Howard herself, and includes her collection, and a number of other collections as well and they're building up their own. And they do also have a library.

Biddy Oh yes, and where are they?

Emma They are based at Goldsmiths College in New Cross. Do you know that?

Biddy Well I know of it. My daughter went there after her degree she did a teaching course.

Emma At Goldsmiths?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Oh right.

Emma What does she teach?

Biddy Maths.

Emma Right ok, it's funny I only know Goldsmiths for the textiles. Can I have a look at these please?

Biddy Yes, yes there's only a few there because I gave them to a college you know. When people couldn't come in to the show I did sketches to send out to people. That was the fashion of the time course, when New Look was coming.

Emma Absolutely. Lovely drawings.

Biddy We still had to get dresses out of 3 yards of fabric.

Emma Quite a challenge actually.

Biddy Yes, but then I remember things were decorated more. You know they had firms that did embroidery and would, you know, have designs to make things more interesting. I mean there's none on there but very often they'd have a piece of embroidery, you know that they'd put on.

Emma I was reading in the letter that you wrote, to the London College of Fashion, where you talk about the requirements of the course, where you were required to have a very high standard of making things. How was that examined? As it were, did you..?

Biddy Only by the teacher who was teaching you. It didn't have to be shown to anyone. But it was very meticulous, we did buttonholes and they had to be absolutely perfect. You know, all the different ways of making buttonholes, bound and hand sewn and all the different versions.

Emma Is that still important to you now?

Biddy Perfection? Yes.

Emma And is that, would you say is that how you would gauge the quality of a piece of work, is how well it's been put together?

Biddy Yes but then you see with these modern textile ones you can't judge them by that because they're, I wouldn't say rough and ready, but they're you know, they're not, that's not the criteria is it? You know they have all roughages and paint splashed on.

Emma Would you ever do that yourself?

Biddy No, I don't see any advantage of doing a work of art in textile; I'd rather it was paint. I suppose, if it's an abstract thing I suppose ok. Sometimes they do a picture and I think why do it in fabrics?

Emma That's very interesting. What, what sort of things then do you think fabrics, or do you think, what do you think is a Good use of fabrics, in your opinion?

Biddy Well I like the colours, you know and where they go together I suppose, you know. The colour and design.

Emma What fabrics do you use the most? What sort of fabrics?

Biddy Oh I'd only use cotton.

Emma Always only cotton?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Why is that?

Biddy The first quilt I did, I didn't realise, you know, it wasn't a good thing, you did polyester, I had a polyester mix and it feels different. You know?

Emma So is it important to you what it feels like?

Biddy Oh yes I think so, don't you?

Emma Oh yes I, yes I do, yes.

Biddy And for these children's quilts some of them have got a brushed cotton; which is lovely and soft. And I think that's ideal for that. I've got the collection there because they're going to be taken to somebody you know.

Emma Is this the babies in prisons quilts?

Biddy Yes. I haven't done them before, this is the first time. We've done hospital babies but not prison babies. So you can see they're all jolly colours.

Emma Yes, Yes I went to one of the sessions when they were all working together. I went along too and saw them.

Biddy Yes that's right, I missed that one.

Emma Have you made one as well?

Biddy Well I made it with somebody else, yes.

Emma Right.

Biddy And that's another nice thing is, when you're doing a project like that, is that you work together, you know, you're not just on your own.

Emma Do you, which would you prefer? Working together with somebody or working on your own?

Biddy I suppose it depends, if you're doing like the challenge thing you obviously do it on your own and you work it out, but it is nice to work with somebody else; to do it together

Emma What about this one on the wall?

Biddy Well that was one when we first went to the class, and I forget what they said it was about.

Emma So this is one of the first ones?

Biddy Yes, and unfortunately this colour has faded.

Emma Oh right.

Biddy So it should be half way between that and that.

Emma Oh.

Biddy Isn't it annoying? But you know, you don’t know when colours are going to fade and I think this is a bad thing when, you buy fabrics, you know that they've not got a guarantee that they're not going to fade.

Emma Yes, now if you hadn’t have told me I would never have known.

Emma No, but I notice it.

Emma It looks like, you know, different, different techniques aren't there; they're all in one different quilt.

Biddy Yes.

Emma What lovely colours.

Biddy I think what is nice that everybody’s is different isn't it?

Emma Have you ever seen, in all the time you’ve been quilting, have you ever seen two quilts the same?

Biddy No. Have you?

Emma No, I didn’t know. No it was, no I certainly haven't and I, I wouldn’t have thought it was possible.

Biddy Well I’m doing a funny thing at the moment. My daughter in law, in America, [do sit down] they began to become American citizens and she said what she’d really like is a quilt for the bed that has the union jack. So I’ve done that. That's the red cross, you see what I mean?

Emma Oh yes, look at that.

Biddy It goes like that, and then the blue is in these sections. These have got to be cut to a smaller size but they, I don’t know which way they go, but oh yes they go that way. So you get the white bit down there and then the red, narrow red stripes if you see what I mean.

Emma That’s fantastic, what a great idea.

Biddy So it will be fun.

Emma Oh yeah, I think that’s great.

Biddy Yeah and to make it more interesting I’ve done it in patches of different colours.

Emma Do you draw out your patterns before you start?

Biddy Well I did, I drew out on paper, and then cut it into sections, and then I've got to allow for the turnings on each piece.

So that’s it. I've got quite a lot to do on that yet.

Emma Do you often lay the pieces out on the floor.

Biddy Oh yes, yes.

Emma Yeah, do you mind that?

Biddy No. Why don’t you

Emma I don’t personally, although I couldn’t work on the floor for a long time.

Biddy No, well I couldn’t get down. I’ll sometimes put it on the bed of course.

Emma Yeah, yes. I think that’s fantastic. Would you mind if I took some photographs of your quilts?

Biddy No, no of course not.

Emma I left my camera downstairs.

Biddy Yes, ok, ok.

Emma Yes I think that’s fantastic. Can I leave that there and I’ll just pop and get my camera. Do you keep a record of all the quilts that you’ve made?

Biddy No I haven’t done. That’s my husband. He’s talking to someone. Not sure if that's the right way but that’s where the white bit will be.

Emma Down the middle, yeah.

Biddy And these will be smaller. I’ve made them bigger so I’ve got plenty of room to adjust where I cut. Because the trouble is you sometimes get too much of the same together if you’re not, so you want not too much of the same. But that’s how it will be and there will be another red stripe down the middle there.

Emma I think that’s fantastic. What a good idea.

Biddy When you start looking at the union jack, there’s so many variations, you know they end differently. The red bits, some of them end like that. Do you see what I mean? They don't end like that, they sometimes end like that.

Emma In a point, yes.

Biddy And the widths of these vary a lot. You know, sometimes the red’s narrower. So you really start to look at…

Emma Yes it makes you see things differently.

Biddy Yes it does.

Emma Yes

Biddy Yes.

Emma Yes. How do you fold this one?

Biddy Oh it doesn't really matter. Then the only problem I've got to think about now is what do you put on the back.

Emma Can I take a picture of this one.

Biddy Yes sure.

Emma And, the one where you were telling me all the stores about all the...

Biddy Oh all the people?

Emma Yes.

Biddy I can pin it up there if you want. I don't know whether...

Emma Or is it easier where it was, or on the floor perhaps?

Biddy Ok yeah.

Emma Tell me something that I can, you know what we were talking about and then I can remember what it is and look at it and see.

Biddy Yes, that's right.

Emma It makes sense then.

Biddy Yes, that's right.

Emma Perfect.

Biddy It's interesting, the different ideas people come up with isn't it?

EmmaYes, I think this one is lovely.

Biddy I'll roll it up after.

Emma And can I take one of the blue and white one? Is that alright?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Ok.

Biddy This is our group.

Emma Yes, now I do recognise some: Liz, Sarah, Paula.

Biddy And Lillian.

Emma Lillian.

Biddy That's me, and Sandy and

Emma Ruth.

Yes Ruth and that's...

Emma Jane.

Biddy Jane, yes.

Emma Ros? Is that Ros?

Biddy Ros yes.

Emma Judith, Clara, Anthea, Anna.

Biddy Yes, yes.

Emma And Sally.

Biddy And this is our new young member, Hayley.

Emma Right, how long has she been a member?

Biddy She only came, she had something in the last exhibition she must have only come just before.

Emma Right.

Biddy And this, this was our raffle quilt and this is one for the local doctors surgery

Emma Yes I remember those. Lovely. It's crunchy white quilt. I remember that, it's a lovely expression.

Biddy Yes, it's when you get the side light on it.

Emma Yes, yes.

Biddy Is there anything else you wanted to ask me? You're concentrating on quilting really.

Emma I'm, well I'm concentrating, for the moment anyway, stitching. So really, using a needle and thread to make things out fabric.

Biddy Yes, yes.

Emma So it's embroidery patchwork quilting and applique, in terms of technique.

Biddy Yes.

Emma But then, within that, there's an awful lot so I may well focus down even more and just concentrate on...

Biddy Because knitting is coming back.

Emma That's right, knitting is, yes.

Biddy But different knitting. I went to a local craft fair a couple of weeks ago and this lady got an absolutely enormous long needle, about as big as this, it was made in sections.

Emma The needle?

Biddy Yes. And you plug them together and it was designed in America, it came in a box and it was something you can use on an aeroplane.

Emma Yes I've heard that. Now it was somebody I met who was tatting.

Biddy Oh yes.

Emma And I was asking her, I've never done tatting before, I don't know how to do it.

Biddy No I've only done it donkey's years ago.

Emma And so she was explaining to me how to do it and she said to me 'and the great thing is you can take it on an aeroplane.

Biddy Yes, well this was designed especially so you could knit on an aeroplane.

Emma Yes because otherwise you can't take your knitting with you.

Biddy Do you travel a lot?

Biddy Yes, well we've got a family in America.

Emma Of course, yes. Yes. And do you go to exhibitions, other than the quilt festival?

Biddy Well I've been to them in Holland, because of having the Dutch friend; who is in the group there.

Emma Yes. And do you go to any other kinds of exhibitions, any art exhibitions.

Biddy Oh my gosh, all of the art galleries in London because I'm a friend of them.

Emma Right yes.

Biddy Knitting and stitching they have don't they? But not so much quilting. You know, I don't think they do sewing at school now do they, or do they? I don't know.

Emma I think they do in some schools, but it's not common.

Biddy No

Emma And it’s not widespread but it is done. Yes, yes. I learnt to sew at school. But I learnt, I come from Somerset.

Biddy Oh yes

Emma And I grew up in a small village and it was a very old fashioned village, primary school, and the girls did sewing and the boys went outside and played football. So that's how I learnt.

Biddy They didn't do woodwork then?

Emma No we didn’t have the facilities to do woodwork, not at primary school, it was a little bit later on.

Biddy Yes it would be a bit dangerous, wouldn't it?.

Emma But even that was quite a while ago now so I don't, it’s certainly not the case anymore.

Biddy No, that's such a shame. Because I feel that they’re going to die, these crafts you know.

Emma Do you have grandchildren?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Do they sew?

Biddy Well my daughter in America, who is 22, I gave her a machine for her 21st birthday. She does, but she's interested in art, as well, painting. But there again they all seem to be so busy, you know?

Emma Yes. Yes, are they dying out? I don’t know.

Biddy Well you probably know more than me.

Emma Certainly changing. Yes. I don’t think people make things in the same way as perhaps they used to. But...

Biddy We had a lady from the Quilters Guild at our last meeting, from region one, you know, London, to talk to us, and saying that the membership has decreased. You know, there's not as many as it used to be, and they're having difficulty in finding a premises to have area days, because they're so expensive. The place they had it was in Kensington, it was a nunnery.

Emma Yes I’ve been there.

Biddy And apparently next year and they won’t be able to use that.

Emma Because it’s going to cost too much to hire it?

Biddy No because it’s going to be used for something else.

Emma Right.

Biddy So they've got to look for somewhere and where do you go? It's so expensive.

Emma Yes that's a very good point. Are you a member of the Quilters Guild?

Biddy Oh yes.

Emma Have you been for a long time?

Biddy Yes, yes.

Emma And have you ever taught? Have you ever taught people to quilt?

Biddy No, no no. No.

Emma Have you ever shown people how to sew or to quilt?

Biddy I did have an idea, you know, for our next exhibition, I don't know if will come to anything. But I was talking to a girl who is at local secondary school. I don't know if you know James Allen, it's a girl's school, it's in Dulwich, and the teacher apparently is interested in textiles; the art teacher. So I thought, you know, it might be nice if we, you know they have a fashion for these jazzy bags now. Perhaps they could do a bag patchwork, sort of.

Emma Yes.

Biddy You know, then they could show them at our quilt show.

Emma Yes.

Biddy It might if the teacher would want to do it.

Emma Oh yes I think, I think there are, I think there are ways of doing interesting textile projects in schools. And I know a number of people who have done them.

Biddy Oh good, I think it would be nice if they were doing that because, you know, clothes at Primark is so cheap people don't need to make things. You know.

Emma No absolutely. Well, thank you very much Biddy.

Biddy Shall we go and have a cup of tea.

Emma That would be lovely, thank you very much.

Biddy I don't want to keep you too long, because getting home. How far have you got to travel?

Emma Well the station actually isn't far from here it is?

Biddy No.

Emma And then, it's actually very convenient because I'm going to London Bridge. So it couldn't be easier really.

Biddy No, good.

Emma Is that a tape measure?

Biddy Yes.

Emma That's fun.

Biddy Yes.

Emma Is it an extra-long tape measure? A five metre one?

Biddy I've never opened it. Its more for decoration.

Emma You have a very well organised sewing room.

Biddy Oh good. This is painting, you see, it's what I really like.

Emma Are these your paintings?

Biddy Yes. Yes holidays.

Emma How much time do you spend sewing a week do you think?

Biddy Well it's not the same every week. Some weeks I don't do any and other weeks I spend a couple of days.

Emma And do you spend all day sewing when you do that?

Biddy No I don't. It's nice if somebody comes round and we do it together. This is my friend Grace's collection. Fabrics, quilts, quilt box, you know.

Emma Yes, it's a huge pastime, in America. Did she bring lots of things with her when she came back.

Biddy Oh yes.

Emma Her quilting things with her?

Biddy Yes and after she died we had lots of sales of her things, you know, and her husband still got lots of stuff.

Emma But I hadn't got as bad as that

Biddy Can you see all right there?

Emma Yes I can, I'm alright.

Biddy Or you can sit here and there's a light.

Emma I'm ok thank you.

Biddy Are you sure?

Emma Yes, no I'm alright, I just need to turn around, thank you.

Biddy That’s an interesting book. This might interest you, this book.

Emma It is a fascinating book.

Biddy It is, isn't it?

Emma Can I make a note of the..?

Biddy Yes of course you can. This was a project that Liz Baker instigated, some years ago. And this was the...

Emma Yes, when was this? 1996? That’s what it says on it.

Biddy And that was the result...

Emma Oh that was the result?

Biddy Yes.

Emma Wow look at that. How, did she have more panels that she used?

Biddy No.

Emma Or was that the exact number?

Biddy Yes, and it was put up in a church. So that's an interesting project isn’t it? To do something you can see.

Emma That’s lovely.

Biddy And this was my one. This was in Dulwich picture gallery.

Emma Oh right.

Biddy This girl at the window you know.

Emma Oh yes. Is it on the, oh there it is.

Biddy So I, I don’t know.

Emma So you made a painting of her?

Biddy Yes and then transferred it onto canvas and...

Emma And then that’s it.

Biddy Yeah and that’s the actual size.

Emma Lovely. It's quite a complicated picture to draw out on canvas.

Biddy Yes.

Emma Did you...

Biddy I don't know whether I painted it on or what, I might have done.

Emma I was going to say, was it counted or did you paint it on?

Biddy I think I must have painted it on, yeah. And I've got a copy.

Emma Oh that's a good idea.

Biddy I don't know whether they still have it on show there or not.

Emma I could always ask Liz I guess.

Biddy Yes. I suppose if you looked it up on a website or on a computer.

Emma Yes that's right. I'm just looking for...

Biddy I don't think I'd go on quilting if I wasn't in a group, you know if I was just doing it by myself. Do you belong to a group at all?

Emma I don't belong to a group at the moment. I've worked with groups. And that's what has really led me to look into it more deeply and to a research project on the subject. I used to live in Paris for a number of years and moved back to the UK, and moved back last spring / summer. So I'm still really relatively new even though I'm English.

Biddy How long were you in pairs?

Emma 11 years, so quite a long time really.

Biddy Oh yes.

Emma So yes, I'm still getting used to being back in England actually, to be quite honest. It takes time.

Biddy Oh I'm sure. You've got to cross that bit of water and it's different all together.

Emma Absolutely. Well, I'd better be going really. Thank you Biddy, thank you very much.

End of conversation.

Transcript of interview with Liz

Date: 23 January 2008

Location: Liz's home.

Duration of meeting: 2 hours

Liz is British and retired.

Emma There we go, so it's the 23rd of January and I'm with Liz Rowe…and.

Liz Yes, okay.

Emma But lets start at the beginning – how did you, how did you start stitching, when did you start and what sort of…

Liz When I was little. My mother always sewed. She made all her clothes and my clothes and she made felt pictures from kits and used to do a lot of embroidery and sewing but never designing her own. So I learnt to sew very young and, um, made dolls clothes and all sorts of things and I made my school dresses. Then I started embroidery in the sense that you know it probably when I had my first child because I'd been trying to do oil painting and it didn't fit in very well with bringing up small children because you know it is difficult to just put it away and get it out again. So…

Emma Yes

Liz I went to an evening class which probably saved my sanity and it went on from there. And then when I had three small children and one very hot weekend my husband was away and I took them to an exhibition of 25 years of goldsmiths' textiles down in Peckham. I think it was about '75/'76. And we were standing in front of a lovely picture of sheep. There was a member of an embroidery group in those days who lived on a farm and she embroidered, um, feed sacks and things. You know – she used very sort of rough and ready materials and her work was very much related to the land. Anyway, we were standing in front of this picture of sheep and my four year old son Richard looked at it and he said 'I could do that!'. At which point a very nice lady came up to us – we were laughing away and she came up and spoke to me and she was a member of the new embroidery group and that's really how I came to join. Cause she told me all about it.

Emma Right. Can you remember the name – who was the, um, the lady who was stitching sheep?

Liz Marjorie Self.

Emma Marjorie Self.

Liz Umm. And she did another lovely pattern which I remember.which was just a brick wall. It was all embroidered in wool, I think, a brick wall, um, with a little ledge at the top and underneath it a swallows nest with baby swallows in. And it just appealed to me. But I think she left the group soon after and I haven't really heard of her since.

Emma Mmm. Yes, it's not a name I've heard of.

Liz No – but there are other people in the new embroidery group who remember.

Emma Umm. When you learnt to sew did you learn to sew at home?

Liz Yes

Emma Did you do any classes at school?

Liz Yes

Emma As well. You did.

Liz There were rather stultifying really because we made, we made a blouse, and it was so important to get all the little gathers even. I felt – you know – I felt that the emphasis was on the wrong thing. I could already do that, in any case. Ha, ha.

Emma Yeah. Okay. And what - when did you learn to do patchwork, and it that's the right term to use? Does one learn to do it or?

Liz I think probably sometime in my youth I must have learned to sew a few hexigans together and very quickly got bored with it.

Emma Right.

Liz But we did quilting and patchwork techniques as part of the Embroidery City and Guilds.

Emma Which you did at what point after you joined the new embroidery group?

Liz After I joined the new embroidery group yes I'd – I'd been teaching French, until I had my children, full time, and then after that I taught part time in adult education and then I think when my daughter was probably about ten I decided I'd devoted myself to child rearing enough and I would do um the City and Guild's course, which I did.

Emma Did you do that full time or part time?

Liz Er.. I don't think there ever was a full time…

Emma I can't remember exactly

Liz We had two days a week.

Emma Yes, two full days a week.

Liz It was either two or one and a half and we were extraordinarily lucky because, um, Laura McNeil who was the president who you met at the Artworker's Guild…

Emma Um

Liz was our main tutor and she was brilliant at techniques and just had an awful lot of knowledge. But we also had somebody to teach design – Barbara Shilenska. Somebody else to teach us drawing, somebody else for history. And for one term, when Laura was ill I think, we had.. um.. what was her name – Muriel somebody – who did sort of knitting and knotting and all that kind of thing. So whereas most people just seem to have one tutor to teach City and Guilds with we were very very lucky.

Emma Yes, it sounds like a very full programme.

Liz Um. It was. So we had a different technique every week and we had to do design homework every week.

Emma What sort of… what did that consist of? What sort of homework was that?

Liz We were usually given a task like design a curtain for a nursery or something. I don't think that was very satisfactory in fact. And in the design classes we were taught various techniques for exploring source material. But it was - everybody did the same thing – you know – take your newspaper thing and cover it with tracing paper. It all has to be black and white, or whatever the colours are, or you turn all the curl into straight lines or that kind of thing. So it's not like what John Allen does which,

Emma umm

Liz where every individual is treated differently.

Emma Umm

Liz and encouraged to try different things.

Emma How long ago did you meet John Allen and start doing classes with him?

Liz Probably about eight years. I was a stewarding a new embroidery exhibition at the knitting and stitching at Dublin and he and one of his groups of knitters was in the next cubicle and it was very quiet. We were in an unfortunate part of the establishment and we just chatted a lot. And, um, heard about his classes and that was it. So, for two years I drove down to

Farnham for one of his courses and that was extremely tedious – it could take me 2 hours to get there in the rush hour. So I said if I could get together enough people would he do one here? So we now have one here as well.

Emma And that's been running for how long?

Liz It's probably five or six years, now. He was ill for a whole year so we missed that. And then I started one at Waterloo for the new embroidery group, which is now not run by the new embroidery group but still carries on.

Emma Have you taught, um, yourself?

Liz Yes

Emma Stitching?

Liz Umm

Emma Yes you have.

Liz Yes – I used to teach at the local Adult Education, until they got rid of all the interesting things.

Emma That's right – you said

Liz Umm

Emma And that's..

Liz And that's how I've still use my left overs who come and stitch.

Emma That's right. Of course. So which, um, out of all those experiences and sewing,,embroidery and patchwork, which is your preferred technique?

Liz Well – I was thinking having got my work out and looked at it that what I really enjoy doing is really fine work with a lot of detail.

Emma Fine embroidery work?

Liz Umm. Yes. I'm not really a patchworker because it is rather repetitive.

Emma Does the repetition put you off?

Liz Yes – because I have got a low boredom threshold.

Emma Ha, ha, ha.

Liz Having said that I have made quilts. I seem to have sold several of them. There's one on my bed which I'll shall show you, which I made - '93 I think I finished it. And I prefer applicator patchwork because that's more varied and interesting.

Emma Yes, that's interesting because I know there are some people who enjoy the repetition in patchwork and others who don't and I wonder what it is about the repetition that you don't enjoy.

Liz I feel I am just lazy, probably. I need to be stimulated by not knowing how it's going to turn out.

Emma Right

Liz If I have got the design and I know what it is going to look like, I lose interest quite quickly.

Emma And do you find embroidery gives you that stimulation?

Liz Yes

Emma Because embroidery can be quite repetitive too.

Liz Yes, the stitch can be repetitive but not necessarily the design.

And I just, er, I just like fabric and threads as well. I have great sympathy, um, there was somewhere in some magazine there's an article about a Japanese girl who just loved fabrics and she was sitting on her floor surrounded by fabrics and I thought..

Emma Ohh

Liz you know, I can understand that.

Emma Yes. Oh that's fascinating. Er, which magazine was that in?

Liz Oh it was a very long time ago.

Emma A long time ago

Liz Umm

Emma Yes because that's something that I've been, um, focusing on just recently like in the last ten days is what is it about those moments when I have my stuff and I'm doing it and to try and think about what are the sort of components of my stuff

Liz Umm

Emma And how does that make me feel and so on. And it is this enjoyment of being surrounded by fabrics and all these colours and textures and…

Liz That right.

Emma Mmm

Liz Particularly the colours. And I think if I lost my sight that would be the end for me, really, because it's so important. And the other thing that I like very much is china. I've got quite a collection there of 1930's china.

Emma I can see.

Liz And it has the same sort of feel to it. It's very pretty and clean, you know.

Emma Ah. That's interesting. But what about fabric because touch is a very important part of sewing and stitching and fabrics.

Liz Yes, so I really like, um, manmade – I don't mean that I mean the other thing - natural fibres rather than synthetics.

Emma Is that because of the feel of them?

Liz Yes

Emma Umm

Liz And because they handle better on the whole. I'm afraid I've got cupboards full of fabrics. Ha Ha

Emma Ha Ha

Liz For all my good intentions

Emma Ha Ha. That sounds very familiar. I have boxes and boxes and boxes of fabrics.

Liz Um

Emma Do you keep them in a cupboard behind closed doors?

Liz Yes. Well I have a friend, Christine, who you haven't met because she now lives in Dorset. She's a quilter.

Emma Oh yes, you mentioned her to me.

Liz She has sort of wire racks with all her fabrics neatly folded in them and I keep saying to her they are going fade, you're going to get fade marks along the edges. You must cover them up. So that's why I keep them covered.

Emma Mmm.

Liz The quilt that I made for my bed is all Liberty lawn. And it faded so quickly. It took me about five years to make, on and off, and about six months to fade.

Emma Gosh, that's

Liz I thought that was really bad

Emma That's very quick – yes.

Liz Umm

Emma Umm. How much time do you spend stitching in a day or in a week?

Liz Well, I would say none in answer to that!

Emma Ha, Ha, Ha

Liz Because it takes me a very long to get going on something, and then once I do I get through it quite quickly. When I was doing my City and Guilds I would wake up at three in the morning and so long as there was enough light go and start sewing. But I don't do that anymore.

Emma No. Yes. Why does it take you a long time to get going? What is it that sort of slows you down? Not getting going?

Liz Deciding what to do, really.

Emma Umm

Liz And if there's a rather tedious bit. I remember I was making this big quilt – it's 10' square. I'd be fine when I was doing the bits that were all organized, and then I got to a stage where I had to do a lot of measuring and thinking and multiplying and working it out. I'd put this off for weeks, and then once I'd done it I was off again. It's just laziness.

Emma Yes. And there are different parts of the process that, or rather I'll re phrase that – are there different parts of the process that you enjoy more than others?

Liz Of course, yes. I mean, preparing it, tacking layers of fabric together and fitting them on a frame that's all tedious and then I just like the stitching. Seeing what'll happens.

Emma You say that's the most enjoyable part of doing some things though? Stitching it and the putting it together?

Liz Yes. And then not knowing how it's going to turn out and the fact that it usually turns out better than I expect. As I say if I've just got – if somebody said to me copy that then I would know what it was going to look like.

Emma Umm. Yes, I see, yes see what you mean. I'm with you.

Liz I like living dangerously.

Emma So do you draw things out before you start?

Liz Draw them?

Emma Yes

Liz Oh yes,

Emma You do? So even in drawing something out that gives you an idea of what it's going to look like, surely? Or, or doesn't it?

Liz Umm – well, it gives me an idea of what I hope it's going to look like.

Emma Okay.

Liz Yes. What worries me quite often is these people. They make a bit of felt, or they have a - find a fabric with a pattern on it they quite like. They'll embellish it – I always think that this is a recipe for disaster really because there's no thought of the design that's going to emerge, and quite often it's a bit of a mess. But I'm afraid if they're in my class and they want to do it that's what they do. Because it's not a teaching class in that sense.

Emma Umm. Yes. So one you, once you're off on a project you work quite quickly? Do you work intensively, do you - would you sit down at something and do it quite intensively until you've finished or do you…

Liz No not in the way - like Linda Millar who we had speak to us.

Emma Umm – cause she's a different case, really

Liz I couldn't work all those hours.

Emma Yes, I wonder why?

Liz Well, partly because I get sort of cramps and muscles that get stuck. And partly because I need a break. Otherwise if I go too long it starts to go wrong. So, it's much better to do 2 –3 hours, rather than a whole day.

Emma Mmmm. Yes. And do you work every day at stitching?

Liz No, certainly not.

Emma How..

Liz There are too many other things in life..

Emma Ha, Ha, Ha. Yes, now I quite see, I quite see your point.

Liz You see, somebody like Clara will spend a lot more time stitching. She lives on her own, except when grandchildren and so on come and it just helps her pass the time I think.

Emma Right. Like a companion, almost.

Liz Mmm. Whereas I've got a husband and a son who's still living here, and two cats so I've got my companions.

Emma Ha, ha, ha, yes.

Liz That's also why Clara talks so much, I think. I went to, um, Spanish conversation with her and a couple of others but she always has so much to say that there was hardly any time for us to say our bit.

Emma Ha, ha, ha

Liz So it didn't really work very well. I think it's because she lives on her own.

Emma Mmm. Whereabouts..

Liz Sorry, carry on.

Emma Whereabouts do you do your stitching?

Liz Well, I have a sewing room right at the top of the house.

Emma Mmm

Liz Which tends to get so full of stuff that I have to do it somewhere else! So I quite often use that room where we had the class.

Emma Yes.

Liz It's the only room in the house that's got light on two, on windows on two sides.

Emma Right, so the light is good?

Liz The light is good, yes. It's nice and peaceful especially if I've got something big to spread out.

Emma Mmm. When you have something big that you're spreading out, umm, do - how do you do that because sometimes, you know, finding room to actually lay a big piece of work out can be quite difficult.

Liz Yes, well there's quite a big table up there. Our dining…..

Emma You do it on a table?

Liz Our dining table is even bigger. Yes, we used for years to have a room which we sort of said was a sitting room and we didn't really use very much. And then I had the whole floor because we hadn't got round to furnishing it but I can't do that any more.

Emma Yes, working on the table is obviously more comfortable than working on the floor. Mmm

Liz Yes. A lot of people lay out their quilts on the floor don't they?

Emma Yes

Liz To tack them.

Emma Yes, which of course you don't have that same problem, necessarily, with embroidery not needing quite so much space.

Liz No

Emma Umm. Okay, so do you stitch regularly, though?

Liz No. Irregularly.

Emma Irregularly. So by that what do you mean? Do you mean?

Liz If I get really involved in something then I do quite a lot. I disappear upstairs, and you know, to hang with everything else, and get on with it. But on the other hand, we go abroad a lot and I do exercise classes and there's a - we have a big garden which needs attention so I suppose this time of year I'm more likely to be sewing than say May and June and July when I need to be doing things out there. Also, it gets very very hot both in my sewing room you know the room at the front where we were.

Emma Mmm

Liz Because the sun pours in. So the height of summer's not the best time. There's always some excuse.

Emma Ha, Ha

Liz Ha, Ha

Emma There's always some excuse to not do it and to do it, I suppose. Mmm. Okay.

Liz In a way, it's not as necessary to me now as when I had the small children because…

Emma Oh right that's interesting, why's that?

Liz Well, because I felt desperately trapped with these children who I could never sort of get away from and it was a way of having something for myself.

Emma Mmm. What sort of something? Doo you mean by that the piece of work or the activity?

Liz The activity.

Emma And, when you, when your children were young and you were stitching with them around how did you organise that? Mmm. Would you do it with the children by you or…

Liz Sometimes. I could somehow keep an eye on them. And also, I mean they went to bed reasonably early, cause I believed in that. And in those days I could, er, see to do it in the evenings. I find that much more difficult now.

Emma Mmm.

Liz But I really enjoyed doing all sorts of craft things with the children.

Emma Did you teach them to stitch and to sew as well?

Liz Mmm. Yes.

Emma Yes.

Liz Both my boys made shirts at one stage.

Emma Great. Yes. Did they enjoy it?

Liz I think they did, yes. They can, you know, sew buttons on and do things that men need to do like shorten their trousers, or whatever. And my daughter made quite a few clothes at one stage.

Emma Does she still sew now?

Liz No. She hasn't got the time. She's, um, she's doing a garden design course

Emma Oh right.

Liz and it's taking every minute of her time.

Emma Mmm. Yes, I can imagine. So amongst all the things you've sewn who do you sew for?

Liz It's just a pastime.

Emma Do you give any pieces away?

Liz I suppose I'm a bit diffident about doing that because I never think that people will really want them. Unless they buy them, in which case they obviously want them. That's quite nice.

Emma Mmm.

Liz No, I do them because I enjoy the activity and once something's finished I've really lost interest and I go on to the next thing.

Emma Mmm, that's interesting. It's doing it..

Liz I mean some of the people who come to the class, and the quilters and so on – they hang their things on their own walls and Sandy Part for example's got lots of her work round the walls – you've probably seen.

Emma I haven't, no. I haven't seen Sandy yet.

Liz Oh right. I thought you said you'd interviewed her.

Emma Not Sandy, no. I've been in touch with her but I haven't interviewed her.

Liz And a lot of them make things for nephews and nieces. Endless quilts and cushions and things for nephews and nieces. I did make a floral quilt for my granddaughter this Christmas just because I thought, babies don't have bed quilts anymore

in case they suffocate. They put them in grow bags and buttom them over the shoulders so they can't suffocate.

Emma That's right – you just plonk them in bed in their sleep suit.

Liz Mmm

Emma Mmm

Liz So, you know, nobody would thank me for making a cot quilt cause it's not done anymore so I made this floral quilt just using squares of Liberty lawn. I had quite a number that I'd collected and Claire Baker had some more. So I managed to get together 81 different fabrics.

Emma Wow!

Liz So it's quite pretty.

Emma Yes, I can imagine.

Liz Mmm

Emma Mmm. So, it's – um – it sounds like it's the doing it that is the reason why…

A Yes

Emma Why, why you do it – not so much the end in itself – a means?

Liz Yes, cause the ends all go in my cupboard.

Emma Mmm. Do you keep all your finished pieces in the cupboard? Do you ever show them?

Liz No, some of them, some have been thrown away. Oh well, they get – um, they've been shown at exhibitions – at embroidery exhibitions, um, but after that I don't particularly want them visible anywhere. I did make one for my mother-in-law – I'll show you that later.

Emma Why don't you want them visible?

Liz I suppose, for one thing this house has got quite a strong character.

Emma Uh Uh

Liz And certain things just wouldn't look right in it.

Emma Mmm

Liz My husband doesn't seem very interested. He's, he has no idea what I do, I don't think.

Emma I was going to ask you whatdoes.

Liz Mmm

Emma does your husband

Liz Well, its extraordinary. My son Harry is upstairs at the moment. He quite often wanders in and says how is it going and – mmm - I say what do you think about this and that and he generally shows an interest. But my husband will walk in and I've got stuff all over a huge table and never a word. But I suppose, as I don't show any interest in golf its fair enough.

Emma Tit for Tat – ha ha ha.

Liz Yes. Not that he plays a lot of golf but at one time he did - and he was allowed to play as long as he doesn't talk about it! Cause it's very boring!

Emma Ha ha ha! What would be, um, what would be the criteria for a really challenging piece of work? What, as it's – um - the doing, the making that it seems is the most sort of stimulating and enjoyable part, what – um – what sort of work would you consider to be a challenge, or, and why?

Liz Umm. I think I only want moderate challenges, and I like to stick to things where I now know I'm good at. I mean I don't particularly want to dye my own fabrics or use all sorts of modern chemicals and things because I think it takes a lot of practice to get good at these things. Um – I don't - I started doing some tapestry really at one time and then after a couple of years I thought, this is silly when I'm, when I'm so competent at stitching why am I trying to do this, which obviously takes years and years as well. So I gave that up. But I like a challenge within my limits.

Emma And what about sort of learning new techniques? Do you set yourself sort of challenges – not as in a completely different technique like weaving, but within stitching.

Liz I've been going a long time, I think.

Emma You know them all, now – ha!

Liz Well, I wouldn't say that I know them all but I have, you know, over the years tried all sorts of different stitches and, yes, different techniques, crocheting, knitting, tatting and you know, various others, drawn thread work, you name it I've probably tried it.

Emma Mmm.

Liz So, I don't feel the need to do that anymore.

Emma Okay.

Liz And having tried all sorts of fancy stitches I really still prefer a few simple ones, straight stitches and french knots. And I like rhythmic stitches.

Emma Uh Uh? How would you describe a rhythmic stitch?

Liz Well. If, for example, you're doing herringbone you're just do this movement and, and it flows nicely. Umm. What's the other one? Cretan – you can't do like that – you've got to go backwards and forwards and backwards and forwards –

Emma Umm

Liz Or sideways. But it doesn't have the same sort of rhythm to it.

Emma Right

Liz Although it's a very beautiful stitch –

Emma Yes That's interesting.

Liz Things like feather stitch and chain stitch that flow along nicely are a pleasure I think.

Emma Coral stitch – that's a sort of feather stitch isn't it?

Liz I can't remember what it is.

Emma Its. Umm. That's interesting. Yes, I like the same sorts of stitches.

Liz Umm.

Emma But I haven't really thought of why I like them in that way.

Liz I've got a nineteenth century crazy quilt upstairs.

Emma Oh, gosh.

Liz Which is very heavily embroidered. And I sat down one day to analyse, um, the stitches that were used and there are in fact only about 6 or 7 different stitches and they just put them together in different ways so that an ordinary herringbone would have lazy daisies, they aren't called that, attached to it, or french knots, or something, and it looked as though there were fifty different stitches.

Emma Mmm.

Liz And most of those were – they were things like herringbone and feather stitch. I can't remember now but the things that you can do rhythmically and then just with these little additions to make them more interesting.

Emma Mmm. That's really interesting.

Liz Yes, I um had the patchwork quilting group doing all these stitches – they didn't - they grumble at anything a bit new. But one or two of them made some lovely crazy quilts, Claire Baker's done a beautiful one. And Clara did one too.

Emma Umm. That's. Yes. That'll make me look at them in a different way, actually. I hadn't thought of that.

Liz What, the rhythm?

Emma Yes, the rhythm of the stitches and also the - to look more closely at what stitches and how many stitches have been used and how they've been arranged. Mmm.

Liz I find that quilters are much narrower in their outlook than embroiderers.

Emma Umm, umm?

Liz I don't know if you

Emma What sort of – narrower in terms of the sort of stitches they use or in a different way? Or in a…

Liz Well, they don't seem to have, to get the breadth of experience that embroiderers - if an embroider makes a quilt they've got all sorts of things they can bring to it.

Emma Mm.mmm.

Liz Whereas quilters tend to do their running stitches and if you ask them to do embroidery they ha ha ha they can't do that. But they can really.

Emma Mmm. Yes

Liz I've been quite surprised doing this group quilt with them with the felt that they haven't made more fuss about it because – um

Emma Oh

Liz They had to do a lot by eye, which is not the way they naturally do things.

Emma Yes, it's very measured, usually.

Liz And it's turned out very well.

Emma The precision and accuracy in their work is huge – yes.

Liz They've done very well.

Emma Um. Another question. We've kind of touched on it already, I suppose, but I wanted to ask you what you find in all the process of – um - imagining what to do, thinking about to do – planning – getting all the pieces together and the actual doing it.

Which parts do you find, um, firstly, the most awkward and difficult um.

Liz The designing is the most difficult.

Emma Umm. Why is that, do you think?

Liz I suppose lack of confidence really. But designing with John Allen you see is different from anything I'd done before. Because he's very keen that we shouldn't have an end product in mind – you just work with the source material, explore it and expand it and all the rest of it. And maybe something useful will come out of it and maybe not.

Emma Umm.

Liz So. I mean, one year I worked from a little Ethiopian triptyque from the museum and I got so much out of that. Whereas another year nothing really works at all.

Emma Mmm. Yes there's always a sort of, um, you don't know where you're going with your designing and drawing. Its….

Liz No – not the way he does it, no.

Emma No, No.

Liz And it took me two years to realise what it was all about.

Emma Mmm.

Liz When is it finished?

Emma And never sometimes!!

Liz Never – that's right!

Emma Yeah. And what do you find the most boring? I mean you've said you find the repetitive work of patchwork boring.

Liz Mmm. I supposed anything that requires me to be methodical, like tying off ends at the back. But basically I really don't do things that are boring, I guess.

Emma Yes, I was going to say do you, do you find ways to circumnavigate the boring bits and get away without doing them?

Liz Oh certainly, yes. Umm. Where some people would pin everything I would just hold on tight and hope for the best!

Emma Ha ha

Liz No, obviously I have to pin sometimes but I, I don't really find it necessary to do a lot of pinning and tacking which I find a bit of a nightmare.

Emma Oh. Yes. Maybe sometimes that's to do with confidence and handling the materials.

Liz Mmm

Emma Yes – and, and also the knowledge gained from experience that you can, you can actually manage without

Liz Yes, I've got quite a good eye for distance so I don't need to measure a quarter of an inch seam or ½" seams when I am doing ½" seams. I just do it.

Emma Umm. Yes, I tend to that as well. Sometimes I think I'm being lazy or

Liz Well, no it is, um it is experience – if you were in a sweat shop you wouldn't be pinning it and measuring it.

Emma No, No.

Liz Thank goodness we're not.

E/Liz Ha, ha, ha, ha

Emma And what do you find the most satisfying? What – is there a moment where you really think – Ha – you know I just want to do this. It feels, um, more than just enjoyable – its, - um

Liz I think hand sewing rather than machine sewing.

Emma Mmm. Why do you think that – whats?

Liz Because I've got more control.

Emma Okay. Umm.

Liz I mean there are things that you can do with a machine and things that youjust can't and, you know, I like to be in control.

Emma Umm. Yes, that's interesting.

Liz What do you do, mostly machine work?

Emma No. Er, I mean I have done but machine work I would – I suppose I'd classify it as sewing really – you know, it could be piecing in patchwork

Liz Umm

Emma Or in sewing seams of any other description not necessarily just patchwork.

Liz So you haven't done free machine embroidery?

Emma I've experimented

Liz Yes

Emma with doing it but – no I mean I – I get the satisfaction out of doing it by hand

Liz Mmm

Emma Handling the materials and, um, and sort of watching and feeling the hand work and moving the hand. That's what I enjoy the most. So, more and more so I do less and less by machine. Also for convenience in terms of, um, I've been, over the last two years I've been moved quite a bit – re-establishing myself.

Liz Mmm

Emma And getting settled. So you can't really move a machine around very easily with you.

Liz Mmm

Emma So I've tended to – my work has tended to move towards more hand work simply because it is something that I can manage, and I can, I can carry the bits with me and I can, um, It doesn't sort of encumber, or take up a lot of space if I'm staying with somebody else– for example I wouldn't want to sort of bring the whole lot with me. So a combination of the two has led me to really do pretty much just hand work at the moment.

Liz Something else which I really do enjoy is, um, managing a group quilt which I think that this is the third one that I have done with the patchwork quilting group. We did one for the millennium which was very geometric – its one of these it radiates out from the centre and they, for that they had to do something that we hadn't done before which was piecing over papers – they weren't hexagons, but in order to get it absolutely accurate, cause it was geometric, which is over papers. And then a couple of years ago I designed one based on middle eastern rugs and that was all done in strips with – um – you know - figures and animals and things off these rugs and that was nice because some of the strips were very simple. They'd just be alternating squares of something which they could piece and others were applique.

Emma Um, hm

Liz So the other people who were braver could do that and that worked really well. I think Sandy's got that one at the moment. So this is the third one which I am doing in felt which is based on canal ware.

Emma Yes, you were working on that the last time I came. I saw that.

Liz Yes, we are going to have another session on Friday. And what's been really nice is how pleased they are to be working together. I mean they've all said, the other night when we had the AGM which is good. When I joined this group I thought we would be sitting sewing together, which we very seldom do because whoever's doing the programme organizes speakers or

some other kind of activity. I think the problem is that if you are working on a big quilt it is not so easy in somebody's sitting for everybody to be doing their own and it only really works, I think, when there's a group project. I have just remembered another one that I organised. One year we divided up into lesser groups and we did one which was alternate squares of patchwork and camper work which was lovely – I wonder if I've got a postcard in that drawer. Postcards work really well. Of well – I seem to have it four fold here.

This was the patchwork and then we did all these little..

Emma Oh yes, yes that is lovely.

Liz They were beautiful. And um, Lillian was in a great hurry to give it away for some reason. Its gone to a children's hospice I think, somewhere in East London. We should really have exhibited it and taken some proper pictures of it first.

Emma Um, lovely.

Liz Yes it was.

Emma When you say Sandy Paxton has got the um…

Liz What, the patchwork?

Emma Yes

Liz Well she has just got it in her cupboard – it was in mine for a long time

Emma Yes I was curious when you said at the moment implying..

Liz Well

Emma Somebody else

Liz In fact one member said we should be getting rid of all the group quilts we've got. But in fact there are only about four. There's the very first one that thepatchwork quilting group made,

Emma Um

Liz There's the Millennium one, there's one which Biddy has just bought from us which had, you know, sort of basket patchwork design with the basket usually with flowers or fruit in,

Emma Yes

Liz and we all filled a basket with something different. In fact I did two for some reason – one with snakes and one with cotton reels. And Christine did frogs and somebody did butterflies so that worked very well so we still have that except that Biddy

owns it now and the one based on kilims, which I call 'Only God is Perfect' which Sandy has in her house – but we haven't actually kept a lot of them.

Emma And how do you manage that –the keeping of the group quilts? Who decides who keeps one?

Liz Well, somebody will reluctantly volunteer to look after it for a bit - ha ha

Emma Okay

Liz And then they get fed up and say – you know – we've got to redecorate or something can somebody else have it for a bit.

Emma And so it might pass between you that way mmm that's fascinating – yes. Right

Liz So if you go and see Sandy ask to see it because it was one of the most successful one's we've done I think – it was great .

Emma Staying on talking about the groups – um – when did you become a member of thepatchwork quilting group?

Liz I can't remember. Fifteen years ago?

Emma And, um, before that were you a member of the new embroidery group.

Liz Yes, I've been a member of the new embroidery group since about '76

Emma Yes – okay – so more that thirty years now.

Liz Um

Emma Gosh, yes

Liz Yes, I am very very devoted to it. It's always had extremely nice people.

Emma Umm

Liz Umm – never had any sort of squabbles in the committee or anything like that. Very very nice people.

Emma I was very interested um - yes, I mean, very interesting people as well – I found when I met them.

Liz Um

Emma I wanted to sort of talk, talk to more for longer but …

Liz Well perhaps you should go to the AGM –which I am going to miss but Claire would take you I am sure.

Emma I, um - Yes. I mean the embroidery group was – no it's a fascinating group – I agree with you.

Liz Mmm. The other reason I had this feeling for it is that, um, when my son was six he was very ill. He had, um, a sort of

muscle wasting disease - a very rare one – and they were such a support.

Emma Umm

Liz I mean, this illness went on for several years to a greater or lesser degree

Emma Gosh

Liz And it was just wonderful to have that group there.

Emma Umm. Yes, I can imagine.

Liz Partly so that I could do embroidery and forget about the problem for a little while but also as I say because they were so nice.

Emma Umm. Yes, yes I can image that. I've heard other people talk about being a member of a group in that sort of way – the group providing support at times - particularly with illness I've noticed – so yes that's interesting.

Liz Well this is what happens with my class up there – I mean, it's a social support system more than a teaching vehicle really. And, you know, one or two people have lost their husbands or they have got ill husbands who restrict their lives and so on.

Emma And it provides a way of escape as in a, I mean, not in a wanting to run away from something but as just time - time out.

Liz Yes. It also replaces counselling in a way.

Emma Do you think so?

Liz Not that in the sense that counsellors very often just listen don't they so the fact that people listen and you can get things off your chest is very important.

Emma Umm. Yes very important. What other sort of benefits do you find, or in your opinion that there are in being part of a group? Because you have been a member of a group – more than one group for a long time.

Liz I have – yes

Emma So how would you – in your opinion what

Liz What – I belong to lots of other groups as well which have nothing to do with textiles. We also do interesting things together – we go on, you know, visits sometimes. The new embroidery group used to be more active as we had lots of workshops and things but the cost of travel really, I think, is what's put paid to all that – um – and the cost of venues where you can have a workshop so we tend not to do that anymore but to have our main meetings twice a year. I have a summer party here

and other than that we go on visits to – well we've been to Blythe House a few times – which is where the British Museum keep all their textiles. Been to the V @ A to see some of their hidden collections and we've been to art galleries and all sorts of things.

Emma Umm.

Liz But I belong to another group which is not part of your study at all – um – called the Dulwich Dilettantes.

Emma Oh right!

Liz Where there are nine of us and every month we go and do something interesting.

Emma Um,hm

Liz So we might go to an art exhibition or a science exhibition or a visit to a garden. We went to Bletchley Park and we went and saw a ballet lesson at the Royal Opera House and we've been to Chatham Dockyard and the Thames Barrier - all sorts of different things.

Emma Um hm

Liz And I really enjoy that.

Emma That sounds fascinating.

Liz And we take it in turns to do lunch unless we are going too far afield for that to be possible.

Emma That's really interesting. So would you say that being um being part of a structure in this way is also um what was I going to say – because you could do those things on your own, couldn't you?

Liz Yes, but I wouldn't. Probably.

Emma Yes, so what is it, yes, what is is that means that you?

Liz Well some of them I would do on my own but some of them I wouldn't know about.

Emma Yes

Liz One or two of the member of the Dilettantes are lawyers so we've been to a Crown court, a Magistrate court – and been round the Inns of Court so people bring their different experiences and

Emma So you're learning from each other - sharing knowledge.

Liz Yes I've introduced them to textiles. I've made them go to John Allen's exhibition. Um.There was a knitting exhibition as well that I made them go to. Cause they wouldn't – I mean some of them have never stitched, never picked up a needle in their lives. Far too high powered they are.

Emma And how do they find that? Sort of being exposed to a different area they are unfamiliar with completely?

Liz Well they're fascinated.

Emma Its – would – its generally very positively received?

Liz Oh yes.

Emma Of the experience of going to a knitting exhibition or whatever it may be?

Liz Umm.

Emma That's interesting. Yes. Mmm. And would you ever consider not being a member of a group?

Liz It doesn't occur – really. I am also a member of a walking group and reading group. These things just happen when you get old.

Emma Yes, Yes

Liz I mean some of the, the textile groups I've belonged to for a long time. Uh I think since my husband retired I joined these other groups – Scottish dancing -which I went to last night. It's a way of having contacts, which you might get through work but you no longer do.

Emma Yes, that's an interesting point. I wonder because, um, I am noticing that not always but in the majority of cases the age of - well in my case it is women who are stitching – they tend to be over 50s – sort of approaching retirement or retired and of a generation that if they didn't give up work entirely when they had a family they worked part time off and on. Its not always – you know – it's not exclusively that formula – but often. And people have often said, you know, there's great difficulty in getting younger people involved in a group. But if there's a completely different sort of mind set towards social contact…

Liz Well, most of them are working, you see.

Emma learning – yes, and as you say you are getting those contacts through working. But then what about people who work from home – because I place myself in that category – where I am not necessarily getting the social contact and I'm not alone in

Liz and you've found a way of doing it! But…

Emma Ha, ha, ha, ha,. Yes, yes, I mean I think you know perhaps part of my interest in groups has – well my curiosity in groups and in other people comes from that. But, but I did ask one person, with somebody else who's nothing to do with my project or, or textiles at all, um, you know, what, what would she think about being part of a group – does she enjoy it and she said no she is not interested in what other people do. And I thought that quite a telling response. Mmm.

Liz Well, that's sad, I think.

Emma Well, yes, I mean I haven't passed a judgement or anything on that. I mean I think that's a shame but um would you, would you sort of confirm in all the different groups that you're a member of that an interest in what other people are doing…

Liz Of yes,

Emma Is also a common link.

Liz I belong to a reading group. And although I always read anyway

Emma Umm

Liz Its interesting to know what other people think about particular books but also we probably spend half an hour just chatting and finding out what everybody's doing and it's a way of sort of keeping in touch.

Emma Mmmm. And it's keeping in touch physically.

Liz Yes

Emma Its - your actively going out of the door to meet these people and seeing them and talking to them because – yup - you could do all of those things on your own and without leaving, well you couldn't visit places obviously without leaving your home – but I'm thinking of virtual networks, you know, people who belong groups on the internet and share interests and so on.

Liz Umm

Emma But what's – there is something different – its not the same as actually…

Liz Not at all.

Emma What's – what do you think that difference might be – for you in any case. What drives you – what – why do you want to go out there sort of be with people and share interests and?

Liz Why – well otherwise I might feel obliged to stay at home and do housework.

Emma Ha ha

Liz Which since my cleaner's been off sick since before Christmas – um – it makes life more interesting I think doesn't it?

Emma Umm.

Liz Some people are – I mean my son who is upstairs doing something with his computer at the moment –he's very happy to take himself off bird watching in Spain or somewhere for a couple of weeks with no company at all but if I find something interesting I want to share it with other people.

Emma Umm. Do you, um, do you sort of find influence as well? I'm thinking again now again of the textile groups – being part of the group. Do you share ideas and inspire each other?

Liz I suppose so. Um – I've always felt I didn't want to do anything anybody else was doing so it doesn't really work in that way although subconsciously possibly it does.

Emma Okay. But is there – where do you get your inspiration from?

Liz Where do I get it from? I suppose a lot from um art and textiles from other countries.

Emma Umm, umm. In fact from seeing things in books or from exhibitions or from

Liz Yes from travelling – yes, and going to exhibitions. It's hard to say – things sort of happen, don't they?

Emma Mmm.

Liz The quilt that I made upstairs, um, its, its applique and its all flowers from the garden so it took me quite a long time because I'd draw something when it was in season then I would wait for something else to be in season.

Emma Ah, ah. Yes.

Liz But I don't normally work like that, I don't think, And I made a waistcoat for my son which I will show you which has little beetles all over it, cause I'm very - I really like, um, having figures, or something recognisable – not very good on the abstract.

Emma Okay. And you draw them out before stitching?

Liz Uhh, yes.

Emma Do you enjoy – uh – do you enjoy drawing?

Liz I do quite enjoy drawing but I know that I really need to do a lot in order to do it to my satisfaction because you lose the skills so quickly so I tend these days to use photographs and tracing and use the computer.

Emma Umm. How, how important is being good at something to you – being drawing or stitching or choice of colour?

Liz Well, I suppose the satisfaction is being in good at something. But on the other hand it doesn't necessarily stop me if I'm not good at it. Like Scottish dancing that we do cause I've been it for about seven years and I still can't remember one dance from the next. But I still enjoy it.

Emma Mmm.

Liz Whereas my husband's given it up. I think it's more important to him to be good at something. And he's always been

so good at sport of every kind and the fact that he's stopped immediately being top of the class in the dancing made him give up I think.

Emma That's interesting.

Liz It's a man thing, I think.

Emma Mmm. I hesitated to say about that ha ha, but that was going through my mind. So are you likewise with your stitching? Do you – are you quite happy with something having done it even if its it's not as good as you would hope it to be?

Liz Well, in some ways things always turn out better than I expect. But the next thing is always going to be wrong as perfect. It's the same as cooking, you know. I have this vision of what it's going to be like and its never quite right. But the next one - next time it will be.

Emma Okay. Can I have a look at some of your work?

Liz You can.

Emma Shall we do that, shall we go and have a look?

Liz You can, lets do that. Yes

Emma Okay. If that's alright.

Liz Yes. I'm just – I'll take you upstairs and you can have a look, then I'll come and tell you …..There's a couple of other things I wanted show you.

Emma Okay.

Going upstairs

Emma Oh, look.

Liz That's the one ..on the left. The triptyque.

Emma Yes, you had that on the frame.

Liz Yes, I' m – I'm just about taking it off the frame now.

Emma It's beautiful.

Liz Well I don't know. I'm a bit close to it at the moment. And that's one I did a couple of years ago.

Emma Uh Uh

Liz Which was sort of pale yellow and dull weary colours.

Emma Umm.

Liz Anyway. Come upstairs.

Continue upstairs

Emma Are these pieces of your work?

Liz No, they are Turkish.

Emma Ahh.

Liz Got them in an auction.

Emma Gosh

Liz And what ou can see, which is interesting, is that its exactly the same on both sides. There are twelve of them and Christine and I bought them between us and shared them.

Emma Gosh.

Liz Don't know how they do that.

Emma I don't. It does ring a bell. I think I've seen Palestinian embroideries that are similarly the same on the reverse as on the front. Gosh.

Liz I think they use that type of work on sort of gauzey scarves or towels – aren't they – they're guest towels.

Emma Umm – that's right.

Liz So that's why…

Liz There's another one this side which came from a thing…

Emma How have you done this?

Liz Umm. I think it's a sort of tailors tack stitch on a sewing machin3–

Emma Oh.

Liz Now John Allen said that's just what his embroiders group need in his exhibition. And they rejected it. Ha ha.

Emma Oh no – why? Did they give a reason?

Liz I think I'll park you in there. Just um - there was the other thing the new embroiderers group - I think that's the first thing I did when I sort of -

Emma Oh wow, what a feast – thank you Liz so much for getting these out.

This is beautiful. These tiny, tiny, tiny French knots here - its lovely.

Liz My mother-in-law had a house in Spain – somewhere in this complex.

Emma And this as well – the detail. It's incredible.

Liz That's my other little daughter.

Emma The old woman who lived in a shoe.

Liz That's right. This was a dress that I made from a – I've got a book called Cut my Coat and its got a lot of ethnic pattern cutting in it. You know where you cut triangles…

Emma Oh yes.

Liz … and things and you don't waste anything.

Emma Yes.

Liz So its one of those. And this was a drawing of some shadows of a little – can't remember what it was – an object.

Emma That sounds interesting.

Emma All of this

Liz And this stitch I found on a Rumanian blouse. I worked out more or less how to do it. I don't think it's quite right. That's a rhythmic stitch.

Emma Yes and it's all stitched by hand.

Liz Yes

Emma Yes, Gosh. I've got um Mexican, I've got a couple of Mexican – I thinks its what you call repleats

Liz Repleats um

Emma and they are also constructed in a, in a very similar way.

Liz Yes, I've got some Guatemalan ones.

Emma Did you wear this?

Liz Yes.

Emma It's lovely.

Liz And it was – I was away I think – and it was modelled - I must have been – it might have been modelled by somebody – anyway a black girl wore it and apparently looked absolutely stunning in it.

Emma Umm. Is it just plain all the way down?

Liz Yes.

Emma Its lovely

Liz Mmmm

Liz Perhaps I should wear it again.

Emma It's would be great in the summer.

Liz Yes. I might have put on a bit of weight since then.

This was a Roumanian peasant skirt – I think it might have been leather. I never really finished it.

Emma Did you make it all up from scratch copying the stitches and the patterns.

Liz Yes, I copied these more or less I think. And this lovely stitch, I love that.

Emma Mmm How is that done?

Liz Umm. Well I would need to demonstrate really. You take a small stitch. You keep going backwards and forwards. It's a bit like a herringbone.

Emma Mmm

Liz Take a small stitch and a big stitch and a small stitch.

Emma Like a fern stitch.

Liz Yes, I think it probably is.

Emma But its sort of,

Liz I just love it

Emma its not flat – its

Liz No - that's right. I like sewing with wool too.

Emma Mmmm. Gosh, how long did you

Liz I've got a navy lining in it and it showed through and I sort of gave up at that point.

Emma Ahh.

Liz It's really needs a cream lining.

Emma Yes. That's lovely, yes. Do you find you have projects that you've started and then for one reason or another they sort of fall by the wayside?

Liz Not very often.

Emma You do finish everything you start?

Liz Mmm.

Emma That's good.

Liz Yes, more or less apart from that, I think. Yes, and I tend to finish one thing before I start another, uh, whereas Christine, my friend who's now in Dorset, she'll have a lot of things on the go and then a great rush to finish them all for a quilt show.

Emma Mmm. Yes. Yes, it's very methodical of you to – do you consciously sort of say to yourself or it just happens that way?

Liz No, I just do it that way. This was something I made for my daughter – some Mexican creature

Liz So its part machine and part hand.

Emma Mm, Mm. Well it is too, yes.

Liz These are rather nice things. I've got rather a lot of this felt left and I was suggesting to the group that when we finish this quilt we make a wall hanging for a child or something to use up the felt. And we've got to find some images to go on it.

Emma The kind of detail is extraordinary.

Liz Well, that's the fun of it, isn't it?

Emma Mmm. Yes, and going back to what you were saying to begin with you can do - the small bits are the fun bits, and you can do them and see them finished quite quickly and move on. Do you..

Liz That's right

Emma Yeah. Sometimes I find I'll do the small fun bits and then never get round to doing the

Liz Ha Ha

Emma the large boring bits.

Liz I think that was my first attempt at doing anything on the machine.

Emma Right. Again the colours are beautiful.

Liz Yes, I've always liked colour and I think my attitude to it changed when we went to India.

Emma When did you go to India?

Liz Oh Dear. I think three times – no, I've been five times actually, but to India in the sense of seeing all the textiles and things – can't remember – in the 80s the first time? Went on a textile tour.

Emma Umm Umm

Liz But up until, - these are the colours that I was using up until then and then the bright colours started.

Emma Umm, ha – and there's quite a change, yes

Liz This is just a sampler of what

Emma Gold Work

Liz This one was for the City and

Emma I was going to say was that part of your City and Guilds programme?

Liz Mmm

Emma Yes, it's very representative of it, isn't it? I've never done gold work.

Liz No. Some people absolutely love it. And this was on canvas - sort of using the metal threads. Made a couple of arms bags.

Emma Gosh, you can't see the canvas.

Liz Well, no. Ha, ha,

Emma I was trying to work out how

Liz Because I've laid the metal threads down

Emma Oh oh I see

Liz And stitched the threads. Because when you do the goblin stitch you need to lay a thread down anyway to cover the canvas.

Emma Yes. Right. I don't know how to do that. It's really effective, isn't it?

Liz Yeah. Because people don't use arms bags any more - they use buckets.

Emma Plastic buckets.

Liz To collect the money they have something maybe a big bowl like a bucket is.

Emma And that's a similar technique

Liz It's the same, yes.

Emma Yeah, I see. So the threads are lain down. They cover effectively one row of holes and then you are catching down either side?

Liz Yes.

Emma Yup

Liz You can actually see these are the holes here. This is the metal threads laid down. This is the metal thread sewn into it.

Emma Mmm

Liz This was the waistcoat that I made for my son.

Emma Oh, look at that! Ahh. Tiny stitches. That really – yes – gosh. How long did it take you to do that?

Liz I don't know. It didn't matter – I was enjoying it so much.

Emma Do you ever count the hours it takes you to do something?

Liz No. Even when I'm supposed to for some reason I cant remember to do it.

Emma Mmm. Its not something that you consider important - how long it takes you to do something?

Liz Well – I mean if I were being paid I'd have to count the hours., wouldn't I?

Emma Mmm. Yes

Liz Probably. Its all the same beetle – I have just done them in different colours and um the threads I bought in India – now the colour would run dreadfully if I tried to wash them but they just have much brighter colours.

Emma Mmm. Oh, I love those. I think it's fascinating. Coming out of pockets.

Liz This is when I decided to make boxes.

Emma Oh, yes.

Liz And I did some little bits of canvas. Well actually the Embroiderer's guild bought some of these the other day. That's the same sort of technique on a silk canvas which was much smaller. I think those probably go with that dress, in fact.

Emma Mmm. Yes, it's the same colour embroidery isn't it?

Whoops. That looks very Indian doesn't it.

Liz That is in fact Thai silk.

Emma Is it?

Liz Ben bought me back some Thai silk. You see I enjoyed doing that once but to make another box – ha

Emma Mmm

Liz Now that I know how its done. Laura taught us very well – we made a little sort of hinge at the back.

Emma Yes. Very very well made.

Liz Yes

Emma Very neat. Its alright.

Liz And this

Emma Oh wow.

Liz This is called Little Precious, and all these people are looking at the baby.

Emma Ahh, that's amazing

Liz You can pick it up

Emma Yes, I was going to say can I pick it up and put it down there?

Liz line them up

Emma That's amazing, I love those. Did you knit this little

Liz Oh yes

Emma Piece of sweater?

Liz I made the papier maché shape over a hat block.

Emma Uh, Uh

Liz And then sort of cut it through.

Emma That must have been quite complicated to do.

Liz Yes

Emma I love that – save the fox and then that petticoat thing. This is incredible. The detail.

Liz This one's a bit put out because he hasn't got any baby things – a snuggie.

Emma That's incredible – the bra strap showing there. This is amazing.

Liz I did that one for my Part I City and Guilds.

Emma And that's all their faces looking down there.

Liz Yes, I didn't do that as carefully as I might have done, I must have been running out of time.

Emma Gosh, that's incredible. I think that's amazing.

Liz Mmm. What was that – oh I know – I drew some lace from the V&A and then sort of did something on the computer with it so it doesn't look like lace anymore.

Emma Right. Where did you learn to do sort of computer aided design?

Liz Here ha, ha, ha

Emma Yourself.

Liz Well, I hadn't used the computer at all and the new embroidery group desperately needed somebody to do their newsletter.

Emma Ahh

Liz So at that point I leant how to use it and I had two boys at home at that stage so they taught me up to a certain point but now I do learning by discovery.

Emma Mmmm

Liz This is sort of molas work.

Emma Yes, I was going to say it's – inspired by that isn't?

Liz Well, no, I mean it is constructed as molar work, is what I meant. You know what it, don't you?

Emma Yes, Its - you cut, you cut, cut away the layers but these have to be placed on top.

Liz No they do that as well.

Emma Oh and then you've cut through there – yes I see.

Liz They cut through and put on top.

Emma Mmm

Liz I think I did this with patchwork quilting group. They were having a sort of suit case charity – I really should have

quilted it I think. I dare say I still could. Oh this was something – I had a border on it which I didn't like so its come off again.

Emma Oh right.

Liz This is also from the Ethiopia.

Emma Yes, it's more abstract isn't it?

Liz Yes, its sort of got a woman's face somewhere in it.

Emma Yeah. It's a mouth.

Liz Yeah, if you

Emma Yeah, Yes you can, yes I can

Liz And that's a small version of the one that I had hanging outside.

Emma Mmmm. You showed me this one before. This is beautiful. And you were saying you prefer the fine work. Is that you prefer fine work to more - um sort of loose free abstract work?

Liz Mmm. Cause I'm better at it I suppose.

Emma Is there something about um the meticulousness of each tiny stitch that you find satisfying?

Liz Yes. I can make it do what I want it, want it to.

Emma You have more control?

Liz Mmmm. You see this is fine thread – they are starting to fray up there.

Emma Yes.

Liz I don't know if it matters.

Emma No I don't think it does.

Liz Rather than stitching round the edges of the shapes, you see, I use a transparent thread to go this way and that way to hold them all down.

Emma Oh, I see. So they're not actually stitched down here.

Liz No, they're Bondawebbed.

Emma Right. Okay.

Liz And then there is this one behind you, which is partly coloured with aquarelle crayons.

Emma Yeah

Liz I did rubbing over a paper cut out. That's what all these squiqqles come from. And these animals come from some Persian tiles in the other day.

Emma That's an interesting combination of different techniques isn't it?

Liz Yes. I don't know how colour fast it is so I couldn't put it for sort of sale at all, just in case.

Emma But nobody would wash it. Do you mean just in terms of light?

Liz No the sun, yeah, the light.

Emma Yeah. Is this all stitched by hand?

Liz Yes it's all herringbone.

Emma Tiny herringbone stitches.

Liz Mmm

Emma It's really effective isn't it? That looks great.

Liz It's quite funny because, um, I had been doing the design work with John Allen and I came in with that one day without it being framed, and he said when are you going to do some stitching? Ha, ha, ha. He didn't realise that it had stitches on it ha, ha.

Emma Really?

Liz And all the class smirked.

Emma Ah, ha

Liz What's over here? This is a bit of patchwork.

Emma Yes

Liz It was taken from a pillow in a monastery in Bhutan.

Emma Oh right.

Liz These lines are added – but the basic sort of woven design was on the pillow.

Emma So, how do you work that? Is it a block that's pieced together?

Liz I think it's two blocks – I can't remember – no you don't do it like that, um

Emma No, no no, I can see.

Liz I can't remember how ….

Emma Gosh, its difficult to see.

Liz - and then a block like this. I don't know.

Liz And one like this.

Emma Unclear –yes, yes and that's the centre then, isn't it?

Liz Mm. You weren't really allowed to take photographs at this monastery so I had to distract the monk - ha

Emma Ha, ha

Liz By letting him use our binoculars while somebody else took the picture.

Emma Did you dye the fabric yourself?

Liz No. It's all those fossil.

Emma Yes, I've seen then – I've never used them – they're very fashionable aren't they?

Liz I don't know – they just have a lovely range of colours and not dead plain. So

Emma Yes. I like the border.

Liz And there's a huge thing here.

Emma Look at this – gosh – goodness me. This is amazing too.

Liz Yes. Despite the fact that's its big I did quite enjoy doing it.

Emma Is this painted on?

Liz It's, um, it's that foil where you paint with a kind of glue and when it's dry you then press the foil on to it.

Emma I've never seen that.

Liz There's somebody at those stitching shows – she calls herself fashion and foil magic –and she started me. And they have them in John Lewis.

Emma That's really effective too, though, isn't it?

Liz I'm trying to remember how I did the leaves. I know when I was doing the design on paper – I scanned in some variegated leaves from the garden into the computer then changed the colours.

Emma Cause you've then drawn on the veins of the leaves.

Liz I must have done –

Emma Yes. That works really well as well. Wow.

Liz Yes, the images were taken from a panel in the V&A – about a monkey goat? This little bit was actually his tail which had these ribbons tied to it.

Emma Ahh. You could look at it for ages. There's so much in there.

Liz Mmm. What do I do with it?

Emma Is all of this hand stitched?

Liz No that's all machine stitched.

Emma Machine stitched.

Liz Yes

Emma Gosh.

Liz And I sometimes use fancy stitches on the machine.

Emma Mmm. Is that how you've done the horses cloth?

Liz Yes, mmm.

Emma Golly. Where do you keep it?

Liz I keep it rolled up on there.

Emma Ha. Ha

Liz Ha, ha, ha. I had almost forgotten it was there!

Emma Golly!

Liz So there's an actual bit of patchwork here. Sorry.

Emma Oh yeah, whoops, sorry.

Liz Somebody gave me the red fabric which they'd had for thirty years and the person before them had had for a long time and I'd had for about twenty years so it's quite old, in fact the red.

Emma Ha, ha. Its very clever the way you've cut into it though and you've used the different patterns. Did you enjoy doing that?

Liz Yes I did because I couldn't tell that this is the block.

Emma Oh, I see. Yeah

Liz Cause that makes it look square

Emma Yes

Liz So until I'd done a lot of blocks I couldn't actually see what it was going to do so that was exciting.

Emma And whether it would work – it must

Liz Although it had to work because I didn't want to waste any material.

Emma Mmm

Liz So I just cut through the same line eight times cause you had to have eight, eight identical bits. So across the fabric I just cut it all up into eights and cause its,

Emma Yeah

Liz its quite an interesting fabric cause it had

Emma Mmm

Liz the floral bits but also these stripes and

Emma Mmm

Liz And I worked out a way on the computer of joining then so that there was another pinwheel

Emma Yes

Liz In between – which I haven't seen anyone else do before.

Emma Yeah – its very cleverly done that – very cleverly worked out. Cause you cant' – the block isn't immediately obvious.

Liz No.

E You expect the block to be running like that.

Liz I know – but it's impossible to do

Emma Mmm

Liz Like that.

Emma Mmm. Right, lovely.

Liz Another think I was going to show you was something that the new embroidery group did when I was … it was twelve years ago I suppose now, I set them a challenge. They each had to roll a simplest bit of yellow fabric which I didn't like, and they had to do a square on it.

Emma Okay.

Liz And these are, these are the resulting squares. And we had a bigger membership in those days.

Emma So one person did a square? –

Liz Yes, John Allen did this one.

Emma Right

Liz He managed to cover the yellow completely with his zebras, ha.

Emma Ha. How did he do that?

Liz He was, he was working with a felting machine somewhere in one of the universities.

Emma Yes, like, um, a needle puncher.

Liz Yeah, it punches through – a hookey think.

Emma um, yes.

Liz Quite sad looking at it, because some of the people have died. I love this one – the silk worm with all the little worms all over it.

Emma Oh yes,

Liz They're put on with some kind of plasticky thing.

Emma Oh yeah.

Liz They're only allowed to use red, blue, black and white on the yellow, although some people cheat of course, or don't remember.

Emma Yes – there's some orange and pink there.

Liz There's a green one over there too.

Emma Ha. Yes, very green one.

Liz It didn't matter.

Emma Did everybody explain why they'd chosen a particular work?

Liz Somebody wrote 'Cool' because she hated it so much. That's right.

Emma Ha, Ha

Liz Cause she didn't like the expression. And we had a couple of middle eastern members, Sue Howe was Lebanese. She was a member at that time and we had another girl called Nedgler from Iraq who did that. And Sue Howe did the pomegranates.

Emma Oh I know the pamplemousse – um

Liz There's a couple of pomegranates somewhere – oh here they are there's pomergranates.

Emma Oh yes.

Liz And she's written something as well.

Emma That's a really interesting piece.

Liz Mmm

Emma My first thought is I wonder why they chose that particular word.

Liz I know. Well some of them I know. I mean, this girl, this girl lives on the Isle of Wight and she's always had Dalmatians. And she's always talking about them and using them in her work.

Emma Which one is yours?

Liz Um, mine is the glitzy one – look -over there.

Emma Oh yes, Thank you.

Liz Some of them you can't tell what they say which is quite nice. I don't know what this one says.

Emma No. This one's quite sweet. You've got two hopes.

Liz Yeah.

Emma This one's quite beautiful.

Liz Yes, that's also some foreign writing – can't read that word.

Emma Are these - yes they are stitched on. Were these two panels exhibited?

Liz Yes – only once. We, um exhibited them at Knitting and Stitching at Harrogate. I was rather hoping – we had been doing this in stitching this year for our fortieth anniversary

Emma Um, um

Liz And it would be quite nice if we could have them on the outside or something. They wont be part of the main exhibition.

Emma How big is the exhibition going to be? At the Knitting and Stitching show?

Liz Umm. It depends what space they give us really.

Emma Right.

Liz They give it to us free.

Emma Oh well, that's good.

Liz Very generous they are.

Emma Yes.

Liz It's all paid for by the Cross-stitch kits.

Emma Ha

Liz It is – ha!

Emma I can believe that!

Liz 'Cause Andrew Salmon, who runs it. I mean he's, he's known us for a long time and he is always very obliging. If I go over to his office in Greenwich to take something. 'Come in, sit down, have a glass of wine'. You'd think he'd got nothing to do in the world but chat about this and that.

Emma Ha

Liz He does it with everybody.

Emma I haven't met him. I know of him but I haven't met him.

Liz You should go and introduce yourself.

Emma Mmm.

Liz Trouble is – at the shows everybody wants to pay court to Andrew Salmons.

Emma Yes, it's not a good, not a good time to try to

Liz No. He and his wife came to lunch once and - it was such a surprise to meet her because she was a very sort of quiet, um, yes, quiet person. Because his, the partner he works with, she's very vivacious and I always think they go rather well together. And John Allen has suspicions about them but anyway! His wife's not interested in textiles at all!

Emma Really!

Liz Mmm

Emma Gosh, I wouldn't have thought she's had a choice!

Liz No! So. That's that! I'll put them all away later. Actually, um, I might keep all these things out and show my class, cause they probably haven't any idea.

Emma Yeah. Its really interesting to see. Could I take some photographs?

Liz Of course, yes.

Emma Um. I've left my camera downstairs.

Liz That's alright.

Emma I'll just nip downstairs and get it.

Liz Mind these wires – I'm afraid it's not very health and safety conscious.

Emma Ha, ha.

Emma And the colours as well. Yes, I remember you saying.

Liz I've got all these fabrics which I was given when the shop closed down.

Emma Golly. Are they furnishing fabrics?

Liz Curtain fabrics, yes.

Emma Uhh. What are you going to do with them?

Liz I don't know!

Emma Ha, ha.

Liz I'm just trying to find something.

Emma Can I move this?

Liz Of course.

Liz This was, um, that was the quilt we did for the millennium.

Emma Oh, wow.

Liz And I made everybody do two strips all over the papers.

Emma Yes, I can see why.

Liz It's absolutely perfect.

Emma Gosh. And what happened to that quilt?

Liz Claire Baker's got it in her house.

Emma Right.

Liz And this is what I want to do next.

Emma Another embroidery panel, is that?

Liz Yes. Well, it – I'm going to make it the same size as that long banner up there which I've been working on because its for the new embroidery group

Emma Yes.

Liz But I want to do it on that - I've got a piece of orange wool that came from Constance after she died. A long piece of very rough orange wool and I thought I'd do some applique of sort of marble fabrics and some stitching in wool.

Emma Mmm. I like the sound of that. That's a really striking image. Do you see them as a pair?

Liz No – not at all. I don't. These are a combination of ceramic with these cherubs on and some shells that I picked up – we were in Goa when the Tsunami struck – and that, because it came in a long way and went out again there were all these beautiful shells left behind and these patterns from the shells were left in the wet.

Emma Yeah. How would you reproduce that?

Liz Well, I'd do it in the stitching wouldn't I? I've got so many piles of designs upstairs.

Emma Yeah

Liz You see that's two separate bits – they need to be worked on to join it up, if I was going to.

Emma Wow. Lots to do.

Liz Lots to do, yes.

Emma I wanted to take a picture of this one. I love the pattern on this. Um.

Liz I can hang them over the banister if that helps, where the others are.

Emma Umm

Liz Or do you want to do it flat? Has it got a skin? Let's see.

Emma Maybe – maybe it would be alright flat.

Liz Yes, you don't need to take all of it.

Emma No. It's just really to – you know, as a reminder of –

Liz Yes, of course!

Emma The kind of work that you've done. Shall I – I'll put this on the bed shall I?

Liz I did a really big one using this method – um – with a fabric which was white with roses on in pink and blue and so on

and it was 10 feet square and they sold it while I was away on holiday, which was great.

Emma Ahh

Liz But I missed the quilt show.

Emma Have you sold many?

Liz Umm. Let me think. I suppose four or five but I've made a lot. Yes, I sold one at the last show too which was all made of silk samples. Which also came from this shop – and I just thought they needed to be used.

Emma Yes. There's something very satisfying about using bits up.

Liz I know.

Emma Do – do many people manage to sell quilts nowadays, do you find?

Liz Umm. Yes. I think it's easier, well it's easier to sell quilts if people know what their going to do with them – you know – if they – for example one of my friends has got a house in Grenada, in the Caribbean, and she bought a quilt to hand on a wall there at one of our shows.

Emma Oh right.

Liz And people will buy them I think if they're going to look nice on a bed.

Emma Mmm.

Liz Something rather garish like that they probably wouldn't.

Emma Just because the colours aren't necessarily not likely to go with

Liz Mm

Emma Uh trends and interiors. Yeah.

Liz Yeah probably.

Emma So people do get

Liz Yeah – you can get such cheap quilts made in China and India and so on

Emma Yes, that's what I was - had in the back of my mind. Yes, yes. Well, it's good to know that some people do.

Liz We did sell a few at the last show. Not necessarily big ones. I can't remember who did sell one.

Emma Shall I put this on?

Liz Yes

Emma Do you want to put it on the bed?

Liz Have you finished with this one?

Emma Yes I have, thank you.

Liz Oh I see, sorry.

Emma And can I take a picture of this one?

Liz You can – I'm not quite sure how!

Emma I'm not sure how, either but it's!

Liz I can put that one

Emma so unusual!

Liz over the banisters if you want to or you can take it from downstairs.

Emma We could try. Would that be too much trouble?

Liz Not at all

Emma I haven't taken a picture of – um - the ones on the banisters.

Liz Okay, do you want to do that first?

Emma I'll do that first. That's okay. No, that's alright. Do you need a hand putting them away?

Liz No, I don't think I'll put them away – as I said, I might, I might show my ladies. Cause usually I don't do anything for them apart from make the tea!

Emma It's quite a range, as well, Liz, is…

Liz Yes, I don't think I have a style, which is

Emma No. That's really interesting.

Liz Which I think you have to develop if you're going to be commercial, don't you? I think.

Emma A case in point being Linda Miller who's – she's obviously really developed a style that works commercially –

Liz Umm

Emma And a scale ..

Liz I mean she could actually change it a bit from time to time.

Emma Yeah.

Liz I mean David Hockney changes – doesn't he - every few years he's on to something different, which I would have thought would keep the interest up.

Emma Umm.

Liz And Michael Brennan-Wood as well – do you know his work?

Emma I do.

Liz I mean he used to do years ago lots of sort of sticks joined together with threads - three dimensional – and its

Emma Yes

Liz And then two or three years ago he, he started putting lots of flower heads on the floor,

Emma Yes

Liz Taking pictures of them in very regular patterns and you could buy sort of shopping bags and wrapping paper with almost the same thing on it.

Emma Mmm

Liz I don't know what possessed him. Ha, ha.

Emma Yes. I have to say I'm not a huge fan of his work.

Liz No

Emma Umm

Liz He's a very good speaker – very charming though, so if you can get to the AGM I'd go.

Emma When is the AGM?

Liz It's March the10th, I think

Emma Right.

Liz Is that right? I know I can't go because we're travelling, but

Emma And where would the AGM be held?

Liz The same, In the same place, yes.

Emma In the art school. I'll make a note of it and bear it in mind. Umm.

Liz I expect Claire will be going – she'll be happy to be your introductor, or whatever it is. But you've been there before.

Emma Umm, yes, that's right. I'll make a note of it. And, um,I know March is likely to be quite a busy month

Liz Mmm

Emma Coming up- but – um - I'll make a note of March 10th and see if I can. Yes, it would be interesting to hear him speak.

Liz He is a very good speaker.

Emma Umm.

Liz I think he's moved on, slightly anyway, from these flower pictures, so there's hope yet.

Emma Yes. One thing I find people who've arrived – they've carved a niche out for themselves.

Liz Umm

Emma And once they've arrived there's then a sort of um securing of the position, as it were.

Liz Yes

Emma Churning out a lot of work. It's very productive – um –

Liz Well of course if they're making a living they've got to churn it out.

Emma Churn it out – yes – literally to, to sell

Liz Mmm

Emma But commercially but it's not the only way that people do make a living.

Liz No. Have you encountered Richard Box?

Emma I – I haven't spoken to him personally. I've seen him and I know of his work.

Yes.

Liz He's a sweetie. But he's lived for years and years with another textile artist who used to do the most beautiful work all on vanishing muslin. Robin, Robin Giddings his name was. Sort of very ethereal garments he made.

Emma Um, Um

Liz And then he had some kind of breakdown and I don't think he's worked since. Richard Box supports him, as far as I know. So he has to churn things out.

Emma Yes.

Liz He's a really good painter. I don't know why he insists on turning his paintings into embroidery, which aren't as good as his paintings.

Emma Umm. Yes

Liz Maybe he likes it too.

Emma Maybe it's more lucrative.

Liz I wouldn't think so because it must be slower.

Emma No, but on the back of it there's all sorts of things that he

Liz There's lots of courses,

Emma Lots of courses, and so on. And there is, as you know, there's a huge market for that sort of thing,

Liz Um.

Emma I don't know why.

Liz No

Emma I just put – I didn't get a picture of the inside of the box.

Liz Oh, I see. Here we are.

Emma I do think this is amazing.

Liz I'm not sure it's going to stay up. I might have to hold some of its hair at the back.

Emma Ha, ha. Yes, I can get the faces and – perfect.

Liz They're nodding.

Emma That's alright.

Liz Okay?

Emma Lovely. Thank you. Well, thank you so much, Liz. That's been fascinating.

Liz Well, it's been fascinating for me.

Emma Really?

Liz It's been so long since I've seen some of these.

Emma Yes

Liz There's, um, some cards you can take away, um.

Emma Oh.

Liz I used to have plant sales and things for Save the Children, and open the garden and so on.

Emma Umm

Liz I did these machine embroideries. That's Christine. That's Sandy Paxton.

Emma Oh, you.

Liz That's Eve. I think that might be me – I can't remember now. And then there was some – um – we had the garden open and that's the children trying to catch some the fish, or feeding them, or something.

Emma Oh wow. Did you take photographs and

Liz Oh yes

Emma then work from the photographs. Yes.

Liz But I quite often use the fancy stitches on the machine over the top of each other so that they make a texture rather than a pattern.

Emma Mmm

Liz There you are.

Emma Thank you, thank you. Oh, it's far more special that I know some of these people now. Yes. Claire,

Liz No, that's Christine

Emma Christine, sorry.

Liz You haven't met Sandy?

Emma Sandy. Yes,

Liz Yes. I don't think any of the others are quilters.

Emma Eve in the middle. I, when I went to see Biddy, she showed me a quilt that thepatchwork quilting group have given her where each person did - not the basket one

Liz Oh no, the one, yes she's quite funny, Biddy – she said I want you all to do this, so we all did it!

Emma Yes, that's right. And

Liz It all had little squares or something – yes

Emma Yes. And, um

Liz She's did embroidered writing round it.

Emma Yeah. It's very special

Liz Mmm

Emma I find it really, really touching, and, um, having met some of the

Liz Mmm

Emma the members and seen their work and talked to them about their work I could see straight away which were their squares.

Liz Mmm

Emma I thought that was quite, um, it sort of brought myself up short, actually. I didn't think realise that I would be able to recognise so quickly the work.

Liz Mmm

Emma Not all of them, cause a lot of them I don't know.

Liz But Eve did that.

Liz Paula is a very good designer.

Emma Yes, very.

Liz I'm dying to see what's she's done for the, um, you know this thing we've got to do for the quilters' guild its going to be -

Emma The button up quilt, yes

Liz Everybody says it's fantastic what she's done.

Emma Mmm, yes. She's very um, very probing. She really tries to come up with really original ideas.

Liz Yes. I had a design I thought I might use for it and then it wasn't quite the right proportions. Maybe lying around here somewhere. It's probably in here.

Yes, I thought I might do that.

Emma Oh! Wow. Yeah.

Liz But, if

Emma How would you do it?

Liz Well

Emma In appliqué?

Liz I expect so. The only thing is that if I have the minimum width it's still to long this way and I don't want to cut any off.

So, I might do it anyway and it'll fail the test for the quilters' guild but it can still go in our exhibition.

Emma Yes. That's really striking.

Liz This is what I've been doing with John Allen, based on African art, this um

Emma Can I have a look through?

Liz Of course, yes- I mean it's only the most recent things there

Emma You do all of these on computer?

Liz Yes I do

Emma Did you used to do them by hand before?

Liz Yes, mm.

Emma I like these a lot.

Liz Well, I might see that the other way cause he keeps turning round.

Emma Oh. Yes the head.

Liz Mmm

Emma It works the other way round as well.

Liz Mmm

Emma They're almost like little paintings. Very good printer.

Liz Well, it's the paper as much as anything. If you have better quality paper for the inkjet

Emma Mmm

Liz You get the colours. With just ordinary paper it doesn't work. There's this wonderful, um

Emma Mm

Liz sort of wooden sculpture with animals and people all over it. And those are three separate ones.

Emma Mmm

Liz You see, he made this, he bought along a print by his partner which, and we had to analyse the colours and do them all in gouache and I found that quite easy.

Emma Uh, uh.

Liz I've actually scanned in his partner's print and I use it as a paintbox.

Emma Okay. So you click on the colour and then -

Liz Mmm And use it to fill in, yes.

Emma Fill in.

Liz And John Allen doesn't know how I do it so he's reluctantly impressedl Ha ha.

Emma Ha, ha – do you think he know?

Liz Cause the first time I did something on computers he said – ugh, computers!

Emma No, I mean its really, really effective. They do come up really well.

Liz Do you use a computer at all?

Emma Um. I have done in the past, especially for sort of commercial design work. I used, I used to work for a yarn company, knitting, um cotton yarns they produced, so their end products, if you like, were T-shirts, and underwear and so on. And I used to do hundreds and hundreds of stripes and, um, I did all of that on the computer.

Liz John always says that stripes are the most difficult thing to do.

Emma Yes. They're – it's not easy to make good stripes. I did become quite proficient at stripes. You know the colours are amazing. You obviously enjoy the designing, working with colour?

Liz Oh, I love colour, yeah.

Emma Yeah. It certainly comes across like that. That one's quite effective.

Liz Well that's just sort of clicking something that if you do emboss it separates things out -

Emma Mmm

Liz And the more you separate them the more strange colours appear.

Emma Do you do it on Photoshop?

Liz Mmm

Emma Yeah. I think that's great.

Liz That one might not take me too long, possibly.

Emma Cause, how would you proceed from here? Would you stay a lot drawing

Liz I get it blown up – I take it down to – I mean I just had – the one I told you I was thinking of doing next – I've just had it blown up down at the photocopy shop.

Emma Right. Wow. Look at that!

Liz And I trace it off and then I turn it over and trace if off the other way. Anyway. Its quite complicated

Emma Yes

Liz So I don't think I'll be trying any large things myself because there's no point.

Emma Right. And then do you cut up the pieces as the pattern templates? For cutting out the fabric?

Liz No, ha

Emma How do you do that then?

Liz How I do it, well, the – um - the big one with the bishops on it that I had out there I did by having a piece of bonder web the whole length of it

Emma Yeah

Liz And drawing, placing the drawing onto that. And then cutting the pieces out and fitting it like a sort of jigsaw. So I bonder, put bonder web, bonder web shapes that I had taken off that onto the fabric….

Emma On to the ground? Or onto the different colours?

Liz No onto the different colours.

Emma Right. Yes

Liz But I'd also traced it onto the ground so that I knew where it had to go.

Emma Yes

Liz There's a lot of tracing – there's

Emma Yeah

Liz four or five lots of tracing.

Emma Yes, and you have to be very accurate to get them to fit.

Liz You do.

Emma Mmm. How long does that process take?

Liz Oh it varies – it's not excessively lengthy. Although you've somehow got to, um, machine stitching over all the seams on that one, and then a more recent one I've been covering up with little strips of fine leather.

Emma Umm. To hide the bonder web stitches. Mmm. Ah. It's great. I know there was one, one last question, actually, one

thing that I, I wanted to ask but I didn't get round to was, um, when you're stitching, when you're doing your embroidery

Liz Mmm

Emma Does that put you in a particular frame of mind or do you find you kind of need to be a certain frame of mind to do it?

Liz It probably depends on how well it's going or how much I'm enjoying the particular bit. Like my mind goes off, I think. I mean, once I've decided,

Emma When you're doing it?

Liz for example if I were doing this – once I've decided that that's got to be that colour it's just a question of doing split stitch and filling it all in so, you know, I think about something else.

Emma So, your mind sort of wanders away from the task in hand.

Liz Mmm

Emma Mmm

Liz Because all, this was all decided – I did it all on the computer. So. In a sense I knew what it was going to look like but of course its much richer once it's in silk.

Emma Yes, and you have the texture.

Liz Mmm.

Emma What sort of things go through your mind when you're doing…

Liz Ha, I can't tell you that!

Emma No, ha, oh no.

Liz I don't know.

Emma Not in the details but -

Liz I don't know

Emma Just anything and everything?

Liz Mmm

Emma Does something – um - not, you are not necessarily thinking about the work and the stitching and

Liz I can't really answer this question cause I've no idea what

Emma Mmm

Liz What I'm thinking half of the time.

Emma Mmm. Yes. Its interesting, I find, because it's –um – its a particular, it's a medium - a particular kind of medium and way of working that does allow you to do that. I know I do it – my mind wanders often, you know, all over the place.

Liz Mmm. It's like knitting. And what I really love – are tablecloths with very find white crochet.

Emma Mmm

Liz And I would no more do one than fly cause it is – I mean you can see how much of it there is to do and it's so repetitive.

Emma Also though with that you have – I mean I find with that sort of work you do have to concentrate on the task in hand because you have to count – counting stitches and

Liz I suppose people

Emma and so on

Liz who do a lot of it probably don't. They just sort of – they can just do it with out thinking about it too much.

Emma Mmm.

Liz It's like the little girls in India who were doing – I don't know if you know the interlacing stitch, do you? You do a grid, and then you sort of interlace in a particular order otherwise it doesn't work. You make a sort of start of it and pass it to somebody else and they can carry on without really thinking about it. Its just because they've done so much.

Emma Mmm. Yes, yes. There's certainly an element of that but I do find stitching, um, because you're, you're using your eyes to see when to start and stop you can let yourself go in between times.

Liz Mmm

Emma I suppose, you know, if you are just doing plain knitting you can.

Liz Yes

Emma But with knotting kind of work you do have to count a lot. And just because if you are doing counted, counted thread work though it's not necessarily. Mmm

Liz No. I've got a few of these old tablecloths downstairs which I bring out occasionally. I just love them,

Emma I've got one as well. I love it.

Liz Mmm

Emma I will painstakingly wash it, dry it and iron it. In the right orders. Not let it get too dry before ironing

Liz You're supposed to starch them, too.

Emma Yes.

Liz Christine's auntie gave me one and I never told Melissa because I'm sure she'd want it. Ha.

Liz Alright

Emma Okay.

Liz Thank you for coming.

Emma Well, thank you very much.

End of conversation.

Appendix IX: the embroidery group

The embroidery group I joined as a participant observer is based in a small village community in rural Wiltshire. The group was formed in September 2006 by Robina Orchard – an embroidery designer living locally – specifically to make new embroidered panels and vestments to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the village church. The panels were finally completed and installed in February 2009. Participants from varied social classes and backgrounds joined from the wider local community; not all are church goers, and they did not necessarily know each other prior to working on the embroidery project. The group comprises a total of 14 members who have each contributed to the project over its duration, 7 of whom participated regularly. Others came when their work and family commitments permitted. All are British, and the majority are retired. The eldest regular member, Iris, is in her late-80s, for whom, along with 3 other members, access to social events is restricted due to poor health and the regular meetings offer an essential link to the community. The youngest, Kate, is in her mid-40s and has recently moved to the area. She runs her own business from home and the regular meetings provide her with social contacts she otherwise wouldn't have made. Members who have recently retired are all involved in other local community groups, voluntary work or continuing education programmes. The group met weekly over a period of two and a half years; each weekly meeting lasted for approximately three hours. Over the two and a half years, other social events, fund-raising sales and visits to other community embroidery projects were organized, which consolidated the group's identity within the community. The project materials and resources were stored in the village church community hall, which was were the weekly meetings took place. The space was continually re-configured in order to accommodate the varying numbers of participants each week, and the development of the panels. I joined the group in February 2007, initially to observe the group at work: listening, keeping journal notes and using photography. I began recording conversations with individuals in April 2007, and by September 2007 had joined in the collective making. I continued to work with the group until September 2008, attending meetings once a month, recording our conversations and photographing the group at work, Photographic documentation is used to support the thesis text, and transcripts of conversations follow. In the later stages of my involvement with the group and the embroideries, I found these methods of documentation increasingly intrusive towards the friendships I had formed and concentrate on documenting the experience through journal notes. Photo: author.

Reference is made throughout Chapter Four of the thesis text.

Participation and conversation

Transcript of conversation with Kate (and other participants)

Date: 20 April 2007

Location: village church rooms.

Duration of meeting: 2 hours, conversation 50 minutes

Kate is British and runs her own business from home.

Kate Sorry, I'll try not to move around too much.

Emma Don't worry. It's quite good. It picks up the sound very well. So that's ok. OK, what's the date today? It's the 20th April today, isn't it.

Kate That's right, yes.

Emma And I'm talking with Kate …

(pause, shuffling)

Emma It'll be alright there. OK. One of the things I asked Maureen and Lorna last week was where did you learn to sew?

Kate Oh crumbs! Um. I don't know, I suppose … I mean it would've been at home because Mum always sewed, and my grandmother. There were both grandmothers. My aunty was a needlework teacher. In fact she runs embroidery club up in the Midlands somewhere.

Emma Oh, right.

Kate I have another aunty who does a lot of work in the WI and has won all sorts of awards for embroidery and things like that. So it's sort of in the family I'm afraid. (laughs) Everybody stitched everywhere around me, just something I suppose you just did because everybody else did, you know, and you wanted to do as a child, so … Yes, Mum's knee, then on to school. And they taught me everything different. (laughs)

Emma So you learnt at school. Where did you go to school?

Kate In Hertfordshire. Well, to start with in Staffordshire. Um, We did some sewing when we were quite little at school, at

junior school.

Emma Right.

Kate But when we moved to Hertfordshire, I don't think we actually did any at junior school in Hertfordshire. 'Cause I moved when I was eight. Um, but secondary school, you know, normal secondary school needlework, and then onto A level. Um, I did A level needlework. And then I was supposed to have gone on to fashion college, but I sort of dropped out of education at that point, so it didn't go any further.

Emma Right. What did you do instead then?

Kate Oh. Well, because I needed to earn money then in those days, you do when you're young don't you.

Maureen It's quite important.

Kate It's very important at the time. Stupidly! I regret it now. And I ended up … I started temping and I ended up at Xerox. You know, the photocopier manufacturer. And I ended up working for them, testing to start with, and then I just sort of worked my way up the company a bit. And, um, I was uh specifying software requirements, and writing documentation and all sorts of things like that. Something called "systems integration".

Emma Right.

Kate Which is all very technical, and completely the opposite from my education really. Completely daft, but … there you go. But yes, having worked there for eighteen years, I decided I'd had enough of it because it was very rat racy when we lived in Hertfordshire, and um, met my husband, and he said, well, I'd actually started a craft business before leaving Xerox. I'd been working at it for about five or six years. And sort of decided to give up the Xerox side and concentrate on crafts. And …?... so I've been stitching for about, full time now, for about seven years? Yes. 2000 I left Xerox, so. And I stitch full time now.

Emma OK. Gosh, yes. What …

Kate … my leisure time. (laughs)

Emma What drew you, what made you want to get back to doing sewing?

Kate Well, I'd always stitched in my spare time. And, you know, I'd never given it up. I always used to make my own clothes and everything. And, um, so it was always there. And I've… it started off, um, one year, um, many years ago, when Margaret Thatcher was in government, and the mortgage rate was right up there, I didn't have much money for Christmas presents, so I started making lots of Christmas presents. And everybody said, oh you should make lots of these and sell them! And that's how

the craft company started, so… it just evolved from there.

Emma Right.

Kate Sorry, Maureen, were you going to ask something?

Maureen Yes, well, I don't know how to undo this.

Kate Oh right, ok.

(discussion with Robina about what to do)

Kate I tell you what, just snip the threads, snip all the threads up there.

Maureen Don't we need the thread?

Kate No, we'll use something else, don't worry. Just take the scissors and go wucsh straight up there…. (laughs) … yes, so…

Emma OK. What sort of things do you make in your craft business?

Kate Um. New England herbal crafts. There you go. (laughs)

Emma That's a first. You'll have to explain that to me.

Kate Very, very Shaker inspired gifts and … things that, things … I make a lot of lavendar hearts for instance. So it's heart shaped fabric filled with lavendar. I make thousands and thousands of those. Um, lots of other little animals and things. I come up with designs, for instance I do a sleep pillow called Sweet Sleep Sheep, and it's a sheep shaped pillow with hops and lavendar and things inside so it helps induce sleep.

Emma OK.

Kate But I make an awful lot of things with hearts in, stuffed hearts strung up with some … all sorts of bits and pieces like that. But then, there's … I've done some sort of three dimensional um pictures if you like, like Noah's Arks and things like that. Um, but, quite unusual really. Not your run of the mill things.

Emma OK.

Kate And I sell to lots of shops around the country. I've got about eight shops that perm… regularly buy from me.

Emma In the UK?

Kate Yes.

Emma Right.

Kate And I've got quite a few others that buy every so often.

Emma And you're doing that full-time?

Kate Yes. It's not a huge money earner but it's enough to, you know, go on holiday occasionally, and er things like that.

Emma Well that's good isn't it.

Kate One year I did, my turnover was £26,000, but that was quite a few years ago.

Emma Wow.

Kate That was a few years ago. That's turnover though not profit you have to remember. But this time, I've done my tax return for the last year and the profit was only £9,000. But I've cut down a lot, so… I used to do a lot more.

Emma And do you sew in your spare time as well?

Kate Um, well, I don't really have any spare time. This is my spare time now.

Emma Yes.

Kate I mean normal spare time. I suppose, no, I do have more spare time now. I do gardening and things like that in my spare time now. I don't tend to sew for myself anymore. I sew for the business. Unless I'm making curtains of course, or something like that, but that's, you know, it's, I don't tend to .... But you see I don't … I still sew for enjoyment, because I enjoy doing it, and then coming along to this. I'm sewing here and I'm enjoying this, so, it's just I sew all the time I'm afraid. (laughs) Even sitting in front of the TV in the evening I've always got something, either stitching or turning through, or, you know, just …

Emma Do you prefer to sew by machine or by hand?

Kate Er, um … I actually prefer the hand sewing side of things more.

Emma You prefer it?

Kate Yes. Because I don't really like sitting at the sewing machine for ages. You get uncomfy and backache and things like that. I mean, I don't, for the sake of what I'm doing I'm mass producing things so, you know, if, if, I'm doing an order at the moment, somebody, this company wants 56 lavendar hearts, so I'm, I dunno, stitching them up on the machine. And then there's, it comes to, it comes to about 300 quids worth of things, but they're all probably things that cost about 2 to 3 pounds. So they're all very small things, so you can imagine as I'm sitting at the machine, getting backache … although it's nicer sitting down in the conservatory, you know, with the dog at my feet, (laughs) and turning them through, or sit outside in the garden and do it, you know, so… Yes, I much prefer the hand sewing.

(directions being given to find pins)

Emma What is it, um, what do you think you enjoy about sewing? You say you prefer doing things by hand …

Kate I don't know. I just, it's just something I've always loved doing. I can't, I like to get things neat. I'm a bit of a neat freak, d'you know what I mean? When I'm stitching things up. I'm terrible at going round shops and picking up things and saying, Oh God that's dreadful, look at the way that's stitched, to my husband, who gets fed up of it. (laughs) But, yes, so I, you know, for instance, just sewing up a little lavendar bag, I have to have the stitches really neat.

Emma If they're not …

Kate … even though they aren't sometimes. Quality control isn't that brilliant actually, I, I, you know, if I'm doing things very quickly, I'm trying to get a lot done, I'm afraid the neatness does go out the window a bit, but … you know, things do still get thrown in the corner, in a strop, because they're not neat enough. They eventually get chucked in the bin or something.

Emma Right, ok, 'cause I was going to say, what d'you do if it's not neat enough?

Kate Yes, no, you have quality control standards in your head don't you. If it's not good enough, it gets chucked. Because quite, usually you get, when you're making things to sell, you can't undo them and do it again, because it doesn't work, you know, you …

Emma Is that because it would take too long?

Kate Well it's also because it's not going to look right I don't think a lot of the time, so you tend, I usually try and get, and it's only little things I'm talking about. It's not like a, something like this obviously.

Emma Yes. I was going to say, if you did something wrong on one of these (indicating the village embroidery panels) what would you do?

Kate I would very carefully unstitch it and do it again. Yes. I mean you'd … it's a different situation. If I, if I was making one of my bigger pieces, for instance the sleep pillows or my three dimensional works, this Noahs Ark I was doing was a big ark shaped piece stuffed with wadding and then a little cabin on the top, with buttons as port holes, and things, and it was made from tweed, so if I did something wrong with that, 'cause I was selling those for about 35 pounds, so I'd obviously redo that. If it's something that's 2 pounds …

Emma Yes, right. And have you done um, have you done any courses, have you done any refreshment courses on embroidery, or …

Kate No, I haven't done anything, no. I mean, I've picked up a lot from books and things like that, but … most of it it was just stuff you know, that I'd learnt at school, and … doesn't really, some of the techniques change, I mean, the other thing is, I tend, I suppose I've learnt new things by going to big shows like the, I don't tend to go to the normal, um, stitcher shows like this one here, it's a stitcher show isn't it.

Emma It's the Knitting and Stitching Show.

Kate Yes, I mean they're fine, but from my point of view I need stuff, because … they're suppliers, but I wouldn't be able to afford to make my products if I bought from, you know, places like that, so I have to go to the trade shows.

Emma Yes.

Kate And, er, they do a similar sort of thing at the trade shows, they do demonstrations and things. You find new products all the time, you find out how to use them, you know. So, um, I pick up things from there, but not courses. I don't think I've ever done a course. I'm trying to think if I have. But I don't think I have.

(interruption to let Iris pass and pick up some threads to wind)

Kate We've found your thing. We've found the thing that Iris does. You're the thread winder. *(laughs)* Sorry Iris! *(more laughs)*

Robina Iris the Threads.

Pat You know we've got you booked up for the next year, Iris.

(laughs)

Kate Yes. There's an awful lot of threads here … We've found something that you can do and help, that's, you know, a really useful job.

Iris Works for me.

Kate Yes, that's great.

Emma That's a nice picture.

Kate Right, where are we.

Emma So, if you sew all the time with your business at home, um, what's, what do you like about coming here?

Kate It's the social aspect. *(laughing and joking)*

Iris Scintillating company.

Kate Well it is. Because if you think about it, I'm stuck at home all day long, stitching, with a dog and a cat for company, well, one less cat because we had to have one put down on Friday.

Emma Oh dear.

Kate Yes, I know, poor old soul. But, yes, so, it's definitely the social aspect … And, you know, also, because I'm working nearly all the time, in the evenings and things, I don't tend to get out to do any of the villagey things, you know, like the, things up the village hall, and these antics that these girls get up to. So it's nice to come here because I'm actually getting to meet some more people in the village, you know… Social interaction, that's it. And for the gossip, you know, of course. *(laughs)*

Emma Yes, that's all part of it.

Kate Yeah, that's it. I mean obviously because, because … I want to contribute somehow to the village as well, and doing this I think is a good thing for the church, so you know, it's a contribution to the church as well. I don't go to the services, so I just feel like I need to do something to help the church, you know. So … I tend to help out with the village fête and the um, the Christmas thing, um, so, yes, it's just being involved and doing villagey stuff. (laughs)

Emma Yes.

Kate Oh look, I've just found some money in my pocket! … Loose in my pocket. It was in my glasses, I put it in my glasses bag… (pause) Have you run out of questions? *(laughs)*

Emma No, no, not at all. No I haven't. I've got a whole …

Kate Oh.

Robina Are you remembering it, or are you …?

Kate She's got her tape recorder.

Emma I'm taping it.

End of recorded conversation.

Transcript of conversation with Lorna, Maureen and Robina

Date: 9 May 2007

Location: village church rooms.

Duration of meeting: 2 hours, conversation 45 minutes

Lorna is Irish and retired, Maureen is British and retired.

Emma OK so it's the 9th May today isn't it?

Robina Pardon?

Emma The 9th May today?

Robina It is the 9th of May, yes.

Emma Ok.

Robina And this is Lorna.

Emma Lorna.

Robina Yes.

Emma And...

Maureen Maureen.

Emma Maureen.

Emma Ok, so where did you learn to sew Lorna?

Lorna Literally, at my mother's knee. My mother and my aunt, my aunt was a good needle woman. I suppose I must have been about 12 years of age, I'd already learnt to knit and to hand sew. Things like run and fell seams and French seams, and you made, in those days in primary school you had to make a garment each year and we made dirndl skirts and we made knickers. Believe it or not that's what we had to learn to do; run and fell seams yes.

Emma What's a dirndl skirt?

Lorna Well in Northern Ireland we call them 'drindle' skirts, yes a dirndl skirt and we learnt, but this was at primary school. Yes at primary school we learnt to make a placket on the side of the skirt and you learn to insert a pocket in the other seam. You had done all that before you had left primary school.

Maureen Well I had to make an overall, when I first went to grammar school; which I've still got, with button holes and a yoke and set-in sleeves and binding and I've still got it.

Emma At primary school?

Maureen No, at secondary school.

Emma That was at secondary school.

Maureen I mean at the first year at secondary school, because you wore it for science or something, and it's got a belt, I mean it's a very complicated garment.

Emma Yeah.

Lorna Yes my first year at grammar school we had to make a holder for embroidery cotton and, with all the little slots for putting your cotton, and then you rolled it up and you had all your embroidery and you embroidered the outside cover of this. I still have that.

Emma Do you?

Lorna I still keep my embroidery cottons in that and but then I gave up domestic economy and went to the science side and gave up all that. But it was normal in our house, the devil finds work for idle hands so you were always sewing or knitting and learnt to knit socks on four needles and to turn heels and knit your woollen mittens and put thumbs. What do you call that Maureen, when you had the fully fashioned bit at the bottom of a thumb?

Maureen Well, it was the fully fashioning bit.

Lorna Yeah, when you did that and then when my cousins were getting married, and I was only 13 years of age and my mother said no they'd much rather have something you make for them and I was set to embroider trolley cloths; two matching tea tray cloths but slightly bigger so they fitted their trolley, and that was when I learnt to do lazy daisy and stem stich and a bit of, what do, the one you fill the leaves in and that kind of thing. And then when I was about 14 and needed a new Irish dancing costume and there was a mad rush to get it embroidered in time, and the lady who made it didn't have time to embroider it and my mother and my aunt and my older sister and myself spent all our spare time embroidering my Irish dancing costume. And our

house, a doctor came into the house, to see my aunt at one stage, and my mother apologised for the untidiness of the living room and she said 'no it's so colourful' because none of us ever put our work away and we really loved that and I still have the cape; which is called a brath in Irish and I still have my cape, my brath, and I use it as a cover over the back of the sofa, like a chair back on my settee, to this day.

Emma What was it embroidered with?

Lorna Chain stitch, it was all chain stitch but it was Celtic embroidery.

Emma Oh ok.

Maureen What sort of material?

Lorna Linen, Irish linen.

Emma Of course.

Lorna And then you did all the, the designs were done with chain stitch and all the jewel colours; the colours of jewels, was very elaborate designs that were put on it and that was such an achievement within the whole family. So I've always liked doing a bit of embroidery ever since. And then move fast forward about twenty years and my sister-in-law rang up, my children were all in their teens, and she rang up and she said 'Lorna you used to do Irish dancing', I said yes, she said 'where would I find somebody to embroider and Irish dancing costume' because one of her girls needed one. I said 'I'll do it for you Rosemary' and I started all over again and impressed my children no end because it was a talent that they never known their mother had.

Maureen How lovely.

Lorna So I jumped at the chance to come to this, but I didn't know quite what it was going to be like, but I'm enjoying learning the new skills.

Maureen The new ways of doing things, yes.

Emma Good.

Lorna Yes.

Emma When did you learn to stitch and to sew Maureen?

Maureen My mother was a great sewer too, she was wonderful. She used to make lace and all sorts of things, she was South American and then, I don't know how old I was when I started to sew, but I had lots of tonsillitis and this that and the other, I was always in bed for one reason or another because in those days you stayed in bed, and I started to make a doll's house with

a cardboard box and I made all the furniture and I sewed the lampshades and I sewed all the little, I can still see all the bedding and things like that that I made by myself. I remember doing that and at school I remember making a book cover for, what was he called, the Beatrix Potter the tailor of...

Emma The tailor of Gloucester?

Maureen That's it, and I made a cover for him with the felt and all that sort of thing, you know, piqued, and then made an apron for school; which I had to keep all our sewing bits in.

Emma Was that at primary school?

Maureen No it was, well yes it was primary but later primary.

Emma Primary age?

Lorna You would have been 12/13?

Maureen No about, no because I went to boarding school at 13 so about 8/9.

Emma Ok, yes so that's junior school isn't it?

Maureen Junior school they would called that wouldn't they? Yes I remember, I don't know why I always had to sew because well we just did it and learnt how to make my clothes.

Lorna It was normal, we used to have children's clothes and mad our own clothes.

Maureen I was always helping mummy to make my clothes.

Lorna Well I know certainly when I was pregnant, the first time, and I was in my very early twenties and the maternity clothes were dreadful. I mean this was in the '60's and I, they were dreadful, and I can remember going by Vogue patterns and my mother and I cutting out so that I had dresses so that I could go out to functions. Because my husband had to go to functions with them and that I could have nice clothes.

Maureen I was exactly the same because we got beautiful materials. Lovely maternity smocks, always beaded something different on them and always did a sort of like, yes my mother was very good at things like this and she made lovely designs.

Emma Beading and sequins.

Maureen Yes she was, she was, I think she'd never learnt, she just did it.

Emma Right.

Lorna Yes that's a bit like I was, my sister did A-level home economics and produced all these wonderful pattern books and

learnt all the stitches and she said she'd never sewn since and yet I could produce clothes for my children and that and for myself. Yes we always made our summer dresses.

Maureen Oh we made everything, yes.

Emma But you didn't do lessons as such? You just learnt through doing it.

Lorna No, no just learnt, it's like my cookery, yes, learnt it at my mother's knee and read books.

Emma By osmosis.

Lorna Fools work, fools rush in, as distinct from actually knowing how.

Maureen And then when I went to college, as I was telling you before I did dress design, and that, that I loved that. We made some wonderful things, I really did, I was quite pleased with all the things I made there. And then I came home, taught for a year, got married and that was it. Then it was making children's clothes.

Emma But you taught dress.

Maureen All the baby things. Making the baby crib and all that sort of thing, yes.

Emma You taught dress design though?

Maureen No because I was, I taught the little ones.

Emma Right, ok.

Maureen I just did it as my course, because we had to choose something.

Emma Ok, right yes I'm with you.

Maureen So I didn't actually teach it. But no I didn't like teaching anyway, I hated it. I was quite glad to get married and get off it. No but, I mean, I've always done sewing and history.

Lorna You never had your hands still, I mean I used to knit a lot and even when my sons left home to go to university, they came across the Irish sea, and when we would go off to visit them Len used to say 'I know we're on holidays now we never got as far as Larne' which was only 30 miles away from Belfast.

Emma Do you want me to hold that?

Lorna And 'until I had the knitting needles out'. No I couldn't sit in the car for 300 miles without, without something to do with my hands.

Emma Why do you think that it? Why do you?

Lorna Just seeing our parents doing it I think was one of the things, that they were always busy.

Maureen We didn't have televisions and things like that, and computer games and god knows what that they have now, to occupy, we occupied ourselves. I have got a sister, but she's ten years older than I am and we were never really together to do things, so was in a way a bit like an early child so you just had to do things to occupy yourself.

Lorna And also things weren't available and if they were, well we certainly couldn't have afforded it. I mean I have four sons and they all had action men. Well there's no way you could afford to go out and by outfits for them, so you either knit them or you sewed them and you made them all their bits and pieces and you made tents for them and you made parachutes for them and I think now, I made my first holy communion at six years of age and my first communion dress was made out of a section of parachute, parachute silk, 1946 because clothing coupons were still in and a friend of my mother's offered her this piece of parachute silk. One section from her son's parachute that he had in the RAF and my first communion dress was made out of that and I suppose all of those things get into your psyche. That you can make things out of nothing.

Maureen When I was at college and I made a, the underskirt for a very special dress that I made, and I did a sort of tie-dyeing which was unusual in those days.

Emma Yeah.

Maureen On the parachute silk, it was beautiful silk.

Lorna Oh it was beautiful silk, yes.

Emma Were you encouraged to make things when you were young?

Lorna Oh, very definitely.

Emma And who would encourage you?

Lorna Well my mother and my aunt would, yes oh yes, because people had time then. My aunt was single and she was a school teacher so she had the skills to teach, but my mother had the time and the interest. You know she would have sat down at the table and helped and get you underway and things and explain; well if you don't wash your hands your work's going to get dirty and it'll be harder to hand the needle because your hands are sticky, and things like that. She would have helped with all that kind of thing, I mean mentally we were adjusted to doing things for ourselves and my mother in turn did things for us. Do you remember the big sticky-out skirts that we wore?

Maureen Oh yes.

Lorna My mother, you would have heard on television people talking about soaking their petticoats in sugar and water to make them stick out.

Emma Yes.

Lorna And then when it got all hot and sweaty they stuck to the legs. We didn't have that because my mother took two double damask tablecloths, that had been darned and patched over the years, and she made my sister and I each an underskirt made with double damask linen and then when we would be out during the day she would starch these and iron them so that they literally stood up in the middle of the room.

Emma On their own.

Lorna On their own. So that when we went out at night we had our petticoat. And I suppose all of that gets into you, that these things can be made if you do it yourself.

Maureen I don't quite know how I was going to do it.

Lorna No I hate having two arms the one length.

Emma Do you think that's creative? Do you think that's being creative and being imaginative?

Lorna Yes.

Emma Making use of what you can find.

Lorna Making use and re-using and recycling, before recycling was even heard of. Yes I've always thought it was.

Maureen It's nice to be creative too isn't it?

Lorna Well I was never artistic, I couldn't draw but I could sew and do the, and knit and I don't follow patterns necessarily. I just would freelance at it, that and writing stories for my things.

Emma Right. So how would you, yes, what do you think the difference is between being artistic and being creative? Do you think what you're doing at the moment is artistic or?

Lorna No, well it's creative because as far as I'm concerned the artistry comes from Robina.

Maureen Exactly, yes.

Lorna She has planned all this. Our responsibility is to implement and do justice to the wonderful ideas she has and to feel that we'll be part of history. I don't know about you Maureen?

Maureen Yes absolutely.

Lorna I feel it's such a privilege.

Maureen Yes. I quite agree.

Emma In what way? In sort of making something...

Maureen Well.

Lorna Something that's going to last.

Maureen Well it's something terribly special if it's going in a church.

Lorna Yes. Again we had a tradition in our family, in Northern Ireland there was an organisation called apostolic work, which was originally founded to allow all the factory girls and the girls involved in the linen industry in Northern Ireland, to do work for God. These used to come and meet once a week and they would sew for the nations and they sewed and embroidered beautiful vests.

Maureen Really?

Lorna My uncle, who was a priest, founded it way back in about 1920 and all our family and middle class women then joined in and did all of this. My family, we always referred to it as holy sewing and you were using your talents for God. My husband was just saying to me the other day, 'do you realise you're back in the family tradition, you're doing holy sewing, you're doing something for God'. And that's now what I think of this as, you know this is my contribution to the great, I mean I have a fairly profound faith and I just sort of feel I have to do my best because if it's for God only the best will do.

Maureen That's what makes you nervous, you know it's sort of so terribly special that makes a bit nervous because I hope I'm doing it all right. Have you done a lot of sewing yourself?

Emma Yes, yes I have. I mean it's, I find it interesting talking to you how, you know you learnt to sew, where you learnt to sew and what sort of things you did sew. Because I'm a generation later.

Maureen A bit more than one generation.

Emma I don't know, I'm 35 so that's a generation.

Lorna She's the same age as my youngest child.

Maureen She's almost my granddaughter’s age.

Emma So, anyway, there's a difference in generations but I learnt at home too.

Maureen Do you know, I was saying the other day I think our generation, looking at us not you, but looking at the rest of us I

think that there's been most changes in our generation of times. Absolutely from all times.

Robina Particularly I think sort of you know, people from the 90's 80's. People that were born early century, my mother was born in 1911 and I agree they've seen everything haven't they? I mean there's been so many changes even in my, I was born in the 40's you know in my lifetime.

Maureen My lifetime in the 30's. I mean there really has been immense change in everything. I mean the world is small now for technology.

Emma Do you like making things, what does it feel like to make things by hand? I mean talking about how everything is so technological and goes so fast. Why do things by hand>

Lorna I feel there's love going into every stitch. I mean when my children used to put on their cardigans that their grandmother had knit for them and they used to say 'I can feel grandmother loves me'. When I put this on, every stich had love in it.

Emma That's lovely.

Lorna You know that this was, I didn't have a granny to knit for me or do anything like that and I used to love that they appreciated my mother-in-law and all those kind of things, yes.

Emma Do you prefer to stitch by hand than use a sewing machine?

Lorna Infinitely.

Maureen I don't like sewing machines; I only use them at the essential part of now. But I just use, do it for sort of repairs or alterations. I don’t make anything now.

Lorna Well one of the things that absolutely drives me crackers is that hems, in even expensive dresses that you buy now, are all machine done.

Emma Yes.

Maureen Yes.

Lorna We would have been shot for machining up the hem of a dress. It was always hand sewn.

Emma Yeah my mother will say that as well. She'll always make exactly the same remark. Do you embroider at home?

Maureen Not anymore.

Emma No, did you used to?

Maureen Yes, tablecloths and things like that you know.

Emma Yeah, what sort of things?

Maureen I embroidered a lot for my babies, slips and the nighties and useless things like that. I did then, but not now

Lorna Before I left Belfast I went and bought already stamped table linen, Irish linen tablecloths, supper cloths, with the idea that at some stage I would embroider one each for my granddaughters. So that there would be something of me left behind. But I haven't put a stich in them, in six years but this might spur me back into it, when this is finished.

Emma Yes.

Lorna And when my first, when my eldest boy was called to the Bar as a barrister, I made his blue bag for carrying his gown, to and from court, and embroidered his initials on it. He said 'mum would you do that for me?'

Maureen Oh how lovely, oh yes well we had to do that for the children for their shoe bags.

Lorna Oh shoe bags yes. And my daughter, as I say, being the only girl after four boys, never had jeans until sister took her away and bought her a pair of jeans because Lucy complained 'mummy won't buy me jeans' and I promptly decided and I embroidered, it was long before the modern fashion, and I embroidered flowers on the little pockets and everything of her jeans.

Maureen To make them special.

Lorna To make them special.

Emma Did she like that?

Lorna Oh she did.

Emma Was she proud of it?

Lorna She was very pleased yes. Oh yes. She's no needle woman at all.

Maureen Do you know, none of my, my sister's very good; she's a brilliant sewer as well. But I have three daughters and one son and none of the girls are very good. I mean they say 'oh mum can you do this, can you repair that' and grandchildren come and 'say can you do that' and 'do you think you could do this' but the girls are hopeless.

Lorna But I think their head are full of all sorts of other things.

Maureen Actually having said that my grand middle daughter, she went to nursery tech training. She was going to go to Normand but she'd been at boarding school and Normand then was at Hungerford and she thought that would be absolutely back to boarding school.

Lorna Yes.

Maureen So she went to London and there she had to some and she made the most beautiful, I was so impressed with that. That sort of thing. Her daughter, my youngest granddaughter she's just doing, do they call it textiles?

Emma What sort of thing?

Maureen She has had to design and make a cushion so she came all the way over to me to help. I really did look quite, well I haven't seen it finished but it had all sorts of things with bits of lace and sequins and cord. We'd just started doing this cord so I taught her how to do some cording and she did that on it. When she was sewing a design onto the thing I said 'oh this is going to be quite hard for you to do it' and she said 'no it isn't I'll do it on the machine'. I thought it would take hours to do with backstitch and blanket-stitch that sort of thing. Anyway she did that, hopefully she will have done quite well, she's just doing her GCSEs now.

Emma Right.

Maureen I'll be interested to know what marks she gets for that because she then did a bit of patchwork on the back of it.

Emma Oh right. Do you make patchwork at all?

Maureen I have done.

Emma You were telling me about...

Maureen I have done quite a lot of patchwork but my patchwork is just basic ordinary patchwork, just the hexagon about that sort of size.

Emma Two and a half inches?

Maureen Yes it would be.

Emma Diameter sort of thing.

Maureen My mother made a bedspread, a double one, and then she gave it to me and I had to cut it in half for twin beds. Otherwise I couldn’t have used it, and I said 'mummy you're going to sit there and I'm not cutting this unless you're with me. I felt so wicked doing it and she said 'go ahead darling, you cut it in half'.

Emma Did she mind? She didn't mind?

Maureen No she didn't because she knew I was going to be used and it was loved and it is still is loved. I've rebound it two different houses so it goes with the colour of the carpet. And then I've done patchwork to go on the curtains and cushions and stools, usually I enjoy doing that. But I do like to do things.

Emma Do you do that on your own or have you ever joined a class?

Maureen Oh no, I wouldn't like to do that; I'm not a class sort of person.

Lorna I went to a class to learn to do crochet.

Emma Oh yes, I did as well actually.

Lorna Yes I loved it, but again it was a whole lot of women and the craic is that we would say in Belfast the chat and the craic that went on was fantastic.

Maureen I wouldn't like to feel committed because then I'd have to go on doing it.

Lorna No, no I regard it as another skill that I've learned.

Maureen I suppose that's true, maybe I should.

Lorna It's like this.

Maureen I was going to say I reckon this is my skill.

Emma What are you doing there? Oh the beads and the sequins.

Maureen Yeah I put this on.

Lorna Oh and you're beading on to the catching.

Maureen Yes, well down the sides.

Emma Along the edge.

Maureen So that, and then I'm going to go down that one and down that one so that.

Lorna Are you doing a continuous line of beading or will you break the line?

Maureen No I thought I'd go along the edge like that and then down there, like that, it's to cover the, these things and then down here.

Emma The soldering marks.

Maureen Yes, so that's what I thought I'd do. But I think I've come to an end, I think I must go now. I don't know how to leave it. Fun isn't it? I've never done anything like this; I think it's very exciting.

Emma What's exciting about it do you think?

Maureen Well, being creative on top of Robina's creations. You see, she's given us all these and I have to decide where to put them and I think these she said the thicker ones have to go on the outside.

Emma Right. So you decide how you're going use what's in your goody bag?

Maureen Well that's what she's asked me to do. Which is a bit nerve-wracking.

Emma Why do you think it's nerve-wracking?

Maureen Because I'm frightened of doing it wrong.

Emma What sort of things would be wrong? That one's lovely.

Maureen Isn't that lovely?

Emma They are, they're gorgeous.

Maureen You see, I don't know how you actually attach this. I don't know because she said something about not having a cord.

Lorna I don't know how Robina can let go of her designs and not feel 'oh what are they doing to my work?'

Maureen Oh there's a lot on that one, I can see from the back.

Emma That one's coming on really well isn't it?

Robina Yeah well I took it so that I'd have a real go at it a couple of weeks ago.

Maureen Oh that's the one you've done.

Robina Yes. And I just wanted to get enough down so you could all see where I was going to. But I did it so fast that I wasn't really concentrating. Here it needs a load of beads putting in it so that it's always though it's always sprayed; scattered with light. I have brought threads for stitching beads down. Have you been given some wax?

Lorna She's got hers waxed already.

Emma Waxed thread.

Maureen Three strands of wax but I still got some on the needle now. I don't know what you want me to do now. Because I think I must stop now.

Robina Well I bought some special beading.

Maureen Well I've got this now.

Robina Right ok.

Maureen But I don't know what to do with this now.

Robina I'll come and have a look. That's lovely, what you're doing Jane. You've passed the test.

Emma Can I take a photo of you stitching that?

Maureen Is that alright?

Robina Yes they're on rather straight.

Maureen Well they're going along here, like this and then, hold on, that one's going along that way and that one's going up that on.

Robina Oh I see.

Maureen Because you said cover up the holes.

Robina Yes. They just look a bit organised.

Maureen Well they are organised because they're going down like that and there and there. I never thought about looking on the picture. I forgot about the picture all together.

Emma Makes me want to go home and start making things.

[Lots of different conversations.]

Robina Well it started in Chelsea and then it was on West Hill in Putney and John Ruskin started this May Queen festival and each year a May Queen was chosen and girls at the college made the May Queen's dress. They're wonderful. They had an exhibition at Liberty's some years ago. They were all in the archives, but I've got a book of them because all the queens use to come back to see if they could still get into their dresses.

Emma Really?

Robina Yes on Mayday and we used to have a procession around the chapel and a service. But they're wonderful because, like in the war, it was made of parachute silk. You've got all these different styles, I mean it, you know, when you go the first time you think oh this is ridiculous. But just to see the quality of the dresses and all the different styles of the fabrics and everything, it's fascinating.

Emma Yeah who would be, were they making them from patterns, or?

Robina Well I don't you. You see the May Queen was not announced until the actual day. But I mean our may queen it was quite a fitted dress and she was quite tall. They must have had the measurements and things.

Emma Yes to get it to fit.

Robina Yes, I mean some of them were sort of quite loose but it... I'll find the book and bring it to show you because it's fascinating.

Emma Were they decorated as well?

Robina Some of them were, yes there was beautiful embroidery on some of the early ones; panels with embroidery.

Emma Did one person make it, or?

Robina No I think it was a little group, I think it was the students who were doing…

Emma Oh right in a group, made together.

Robina ….Textiles as a main subject.

Emma The May Queen dress. Right, yes that is interesting.

Robina As I say, I went to this exhibition at Liberty's, it was quite a few years ago now, but I mean all the dresses are in the archives so they've still got them.

Emma In the archives of the college?

Robina Of the college yes. I think at one time because I knew, used go visit a May Queen in Salisbury, she's died now but I mean she was 1936 or something like that, but each of them was given a cross. So an artist designed this gold cross which they wore.

Emma Did they get to keep that afterwards?

Robina Oh yes.

Emma Forever?

Robina Yes well some of those are, well when people died they're often given to the archives. I don’t know exactly where all this is kept but.

Emma It would be interesting to find out, yes.

Robina But it was just so fascinating. You know every year there was a photograph of all these queens coming back wearing their dresses.

Emma I think it sounds amazing.

Robina Yes it is amazing. I'll show you, I'll bring the book and show you.

Emma Yeah, I'd love to find out more.

Robina But I think it's quite an unusual thing, I've never heard of it anywhere else.

Emma No, I mean I've heard of May queens and carnival queens but you know they're beautiful dresses. And there's this

connection with Ruskin and everything.

Robina They're beautiful dresses, it's this connection with Ruskin and everything.

Emma Yeah.

Robina I mean in our college we had, because of course we were upset that the college was moving but because we had Burne Jones windows which have actually gone to the new college and a William Morris.

Emma Really? Gosh, where's that gone?

Robina Well that's gone to the new college so they're incorporated that somewhere. I mean apparently the new, I haven't seen it yet, but the new chapel is circular so the windows won't fit in but they put them somewhere. But I mean they're beautiful, beautiful windows.

Emma I can imagine.

Robina I took some photographs actually, the last time I went up to the old college. But what was fascinating was this Mary who was the queen. She was queen when the college moved from Chelsea to Putney, so there was this book which her husband had found after she dies and let me read, which was handwritten.

Emma Really?

Robina Yeah by all the May Queens sort of talking about their year and of course there's all this interesting detail about moving from Chelsea to Putney.

Emma And it's since moved from Putney to Roehampton.

Robina Yes and the old college, because it's, it was Gilbert Scott designed it, so it was a listed building, so it's now sort of very upmarket flats.

Emma In Chelsea?

Robina No in Putney.

Emma In Putney, right. Whereabouts was it in Chelsea when it was in Chelsea.

Robina I don't know. I've always been meaning to go and, I did get the address once from something, some sort of information I had but I can't remember exactly where it was in Chelsea.

Emma It's fascinating all these little bits isn't it?

Robina Yes, but it was so interesting reading about moving to this new college.

Emma What are you doing at the moment?

Robina I don’t know I was quite interested in this rag thing, what's she done with that?

Emma Oh here it is. Yes I wanted to have a look at that.

(Discussion with Robina and Lorna continues).

End of recorded conversation.

Transcript of conversation with Mabs

Date: 29 August 2007

Location: village church rooms.

Duration of meeting: 2 hours, conversation 20 minutes

Mabs is a retired primary school teacher.

Emma Like the others that I've been speaking to, one of the first questions I ask was where did you learn to sew? How did you … how did you come to enjoy stitching? If you do enjoy stitching. I mean, I'm assuming that you do because you're here.

Mabs That's right. I mean, I haven't done a tremendous amount at home for quite a long time. I suppose, I mean I did a certain amount at school, but I think, as I say, the person who was, who had the most effect on me really was my aunt, my mother's sister, who lived with us for all of my childhood. We lived in this … I was saying to somebody the other day, we lived in a tiny little flat in Fulham, and Aunty Nance just lived with us all the time and …

Emma What was her name, sorry, Aunty …?

Mabs Aunty Nance. Her name was actually Annie, but she was always Aunty Nance, and she was the most wonderful person. She, she was one of those people really, she was very bright, but they grew up in this tiny little village called Sherfield on Lodden, near Basingstoke, and although she passed to go to the grammar school, the family couldn't afford for her to go, so she left the village school at fourteen and went into service, but she was, you know, she was an extremely talented person, and particularly at needlework. And so, because she was at home, I mean, it was marvellous, she really taught my sister and I to knit, and sew. I mean you know, she had a sewing machine, she made all her own clothes, and when I was younger, you know, I used to make all my own clothes. She tried to teach me to crochet, but I wasn't … couldn't really … couldn't get the tension right, so I sort of abandoned that. But, she was marvellous. So I think it was not so much my mother. I mean, I think my mother had done sewing and knitting when she was younger but she didn't do it ... We had quite an amusing thing, whenever we went on holidays as children in the summer she took this same piece of knitting. It was never finished! I think in the end she knitted a sort of a

sleeveless top, which we used for fancy dress or something. But, no, Aunty Nance was … I mean, she made my cousin's wedding dress, she ... she sat up through the night making bridesmaids dresses for us, and dresses to wear to a dance at school, and all sorts of things. She was … she was wonderful.

Emma And did she sew by hand or by machine?

Mabs I think, well, she probably sewed by hand as well, but at this stage, mainly when I knew her, she was using a machine, but she had a hand Singer machine to begin with, then she got a … she had an electric foot put on it. But we also had an old treadle machine, which had been my grandmother's, and we used that as well.

Emma And did she embroider as well as making clothes?

Mabs Um … She did to a certain extent. I think my other aunt … I had another aunt, who lived with us as well for a while, and she did, she did quite a lot of embroidery. She was, she was the one … So, I mean, I used to do embroidery. We used to … because as I say, in those days, church bazaars, it was selling a lot of sort of handicrafts. Not the sort of thing you would sell at all now. But I mean, people would embroider tray cloths, and aprons, and all this sort of thing, so I used to do that.

Emma When was this?

Mabs This is, well …

Emma It would be 19…?

Mabs Well, this is sort of … well, I was born in 1942. I mean, this … she was teaching us certain things from when we were quite young, but this would have been sort of, you know, late 50s, into the 60s.

Emma Hmm.

(Pause)

Mabs Well, she was … some of the work that she did was just remarkable really. It was fantastic.

(Pause)

Mabs I think I brought in that sample book …

Emma I was going to say, have you kept some of her things?

Mabs Oh yes. Well, I've got that, and I mean, yes, I don't think we've got a lot, really, of things that she made, but … you know, I just know from personal experience of, you know, of how good she was to me at ... And also she would take you out to exhibitions. I remember going with her up to the Royal School of Needlework at Hampton Court.

Emma Yes.

Mabs … and that sort of thing. So, we used to go round and look at things, which was quite valuable.

Emma Did you then carry on at school, making things?

Mabs Well, to a certain extent. I said, I think, I know we did certain, just simple sort of cross stitch and things at primary school. But, as I say, I do remember one of … when I first went to grammar school, one of the first things you had to do was to make an overall.

Emma That's right. You said that when we were talking about the sample book.

Mabs I think it was for cookery, but … I've still got it … and, I mean, we had to make button holes, set in sleeves, and a collar, and bind the edges, so, it was quite, you know, it was quite a complicated sort of garment to make when you were eleven. So, yes, well that was …

Emma Golly yes it is.

Mabs But I can't remember doing … I can't remember doing a lot of sewing after that really at school.

Emma Right. Did you carry on on your own?

Mabs Well I, yes, I mean I, yes, I did this embroidery, and making, you know making clothes, yes, I mean as I say, I did some quite ambitious … you know, suits and linings and you know …

Emma Gosh, yes …

Mabs And, mainly because I had this aunt on hand who was tremendous at helping cutting, you know, for cutting out, and … so that was marvel … that was brilliant. She was a wonderful woman. Hmm.

Emma Yes, gosh. What … in all of that, what was, what was your favourite … well not really pastime, but activity, stitching activity? What did you prefer doing?

Mabs Well, I suppose at one stage, I mean I haven't touched it for ages, but I suppose the embroidery, you know. I did enjoy doing it, doing embroidery. But I also liked dressmaking, I mean you know, I really … yes. Because it was something, you know, you wore the things you loved. But I've got a machine sitting at home and I just … I don't use it at all now which is a shame really, but I suppose … I mean I've still got some old patterns and things but, but patterns are so expensive now, aren't they. And, some lovely fabrics. But I was terribly disappointed. I mean we used to go to John Lewis, and I went up to John Lewis, I was up in London a while ago …

Emma Is this the Oxford Street store?

Mabs Yes. I went to … well it was somebody's wedding actually, and their wedding list was there, and I went to have a look, and I thought I'll just go and look at their fabric department. Well, it's minute! You know, when you think what a wonderful department it used to be, and it was you know … I was quite shocked really at how, how small it is now. So, I suppose that proves in a way that people are not doing the amount of … although knitting is coming back isn't it, which is …

Emma Yes.

Mabs That's good.

Emma The knitting section and the craft section is big.

Mabs I used to like knitting. I mean, you know, I did, for quite a long time, knit. I've still got wool sitting in the loft, which, one of these days I might get around to doing it. But, I mean this is the first time I've ever done anything like this.

Emma The rug hooking?

Mabs The rug hooking, yes. Yes, I've not done that before.

Emma Do you enjoy learning how to do a new technique?

Mabs Oh yes. Yes. And I like the colours. I mean I'm somebody … I've just started doing watercolour painting. I do like… I like the use of colour. I like, you know … I'm quite … I go in for sort of bright colours, so ... No, I think this is fun.

Emma Yes, I was going to ask, what is it about making things, either making clothes or embroidering, or … that you like?

Mabs Well, I think it's just being creative really. I think I'm quite a creative … It's funny actually, I was, I was … my brother was staying with somebody, when I was about eighteen I had my fortune told. I don't think I ever had it told again. But it was extraordinarily accurate. I mean, I don't know who this person was, but it was extraordinary. And I wrote down what she said. And she said I was artistic, and I think, you know, I think I am because, as I say, I seem to have taken to this painting far better than I ever thought I would. But no, it was amazing, it was an amazing thing.

Emma And when you say you've taken to it … in what way?

Mabs Well, I'm, I'm, I'm far more talented at producing the work than I expected. You know, people … I've got some paintings on my wall, and people come and say "Oh I like that! Oh you did it!" You know, I mean, I've only been doing it for a year, and you know I'm quite … it's like the same with pottery, I did pottery for several years and produced work far better than I thought I would have … I would have done.

Emma Right. And does that … what's … it's obviously satisfying, but what sort of satisfaction does that give you?

Mabs Well, it's an achievement. But I really enjoy making it. And I think the same with the paintings was, you know, you get so involved with that you forget everything else. Which I think is, is very therapeutic. And there have been times when I've had some rough times, and I've needed that, that's, that's been very important to throw yourself into some sort of creative activity, and ... Yes, it's like this, you know, working with a lovely group of people in all these things, you know, the pottery group, the painting group. They've always been very nice sort of supportive people who appreciate what you're doing. So it's very good.

Emma So each time you've always been part of a group? When you were doing pottery, painting …

Mabs Well, yes, in those instances, yes.

Emma Yes. So what is it that attracts … is attractive about being part of a group?

Mabs Well, I suppose it encourages you to do it more. I mean, we all say the same with the painting: over the holiday when we weren't in, I had every intention of doing some paintings and drawings and things, and I've started one! Because you get distracted, you sort of, you do other things, whereas when you're there, you know, it makes you … it makes you get on with it. And I think, I think that's the main thing. I mean there a couple who come to painting who are really very skilled artists, and I think, well why on earth are you still coming, and they say the same, you know, it encourages you to work if they're in the group, and if they're at home then they don't achieve so much as they do when you're part of this, part of the group.

Emma That's interesting.

Mabs And it's helpful to have somebody like Robin, or my artist Patricia, or somebody to call on when you want a bit of advice, or a bit of you know, a bit of help to get you over that next hurdle. You know, you get to a level don't you, when you can achieve that, but then you need a bit of encouragement to reach the next stage. And also you know you can often achieve far more than you ever thought you would.

Emma Yes, almost like on your own you're not aware of what you can do …

Mabs No.

Emma … but when you're in a group … you can …

Mabs And also you mustn't be put off by what other people are doing. Because sometimes in a group, if you've got different abilities, you might think, oh gosh she's good, I wouldn't be able to do that. But often you can surprise yourself. And people work differently, don't they, you know, even if everybody's doing the same thing. I mean I used to find this when I taught

children, you know, you'd ask them to do … but everybody would produce something individual, of themselves. So you know, so it doesn't really matter what you produce, it's what's come from you and …

Emma And what about what goes on while you're doing it, as well? There's the act of making, the doing, and then there's the finished piece. Which part do you enjoy the most, do you think? Why do you do it? For what …

Mabs Well I think … it's quite satisfying in the making of it really. The actual doing it is … is, it's rather like cooking. I like cooking, so you're creating something and, you know, it's satisfying to get the finished result, but actually the making of it is, I think, important.

Emma What do you do with your pieces when they're finished? I mean in this instance, say your pots, from doing the pottery or paintings?

Mabs Well, I've kept most of my pots because I'm quite slow, so I don't … you know, I'm not churning stuff out. So, because I'm satisfied with … I'm quite thrilled with what I've made, I wanted to keep them. And with the painting at the moment, I haven't produced that many, so I'm just keeping them for the moment, because they're some of the first ones that I've done. But if I get on and I paint more, then we have this exhibition, and I make, you know, make sure I sell them. When I've got some more to … but then you see, people… the exhibition was interesting, this couple who I said they were very good, and they say it's quite hard to sell the work because you've produced it. You know, you don't always want to get rid of it, which, I thought was… unless I suppose you get some people who churn stuff out don't they, you know, they get one subject and they keep painting it and they keep painting it. But I mean, I've found I've done quite a lot of … quite a lot of different sort of styles and sort of things, and at the moment I just want… I'm happy just to keep them, and think about how I did them, and not, not want to get rid of them at the moment.

Emma Do you display them in any way? At home …

Mabs Oh yes. Well, I've got the pots and things around, and the paintings as I said, I've got one or two I've had framed and I've got up at the moment, so …

Emma Have you done the same for any embroideries you've done?

Mabs No, not really, because as I said I … I've never done any of that sort of embroidery. I mean I go to people's homes, like Robin, you know, who've got beautiful embroideries, but no, I've never done that sort of …

Emma No.

Mabs No.

Emma More dressmaking?

Mabs Yes, yes. As I say, the sort of embroidery was these sort of tray cloths and things like that, that then were sold, so I haven't really got anything. I haven't really got any samples, no.

Emma OK. Right.

(Pause)

Emma Do you think you'll carry on making things after having done this project?

Mabs Well, I would guess … I mean I would certainly like to continue doing something, yes. No, I've really enjoyed this, yes, yes. And I think we might feel quite (.?.) … keep going doing something. This aunt of mine, the one who lives near Basingstoke … they did this millennium tapestry, they've got a tapestry there, and they've made all these kneelers for the church. But she, as I say, she has terrible arthritic hands. She just loves doing it and she goes down to this group, I'm not sure, I think every week, I think they do, and you know, there's always something, they're coming up with some new project. So you know, I think we might be able to keep going, which I think will be good.

Emma Do you think … have you learnt things being part of a group? Because Robina is managing the group, and …

Mabs Yes.

Emma And she's designed the project …

Mabs Yes.

Emma And tells people what to do. But there's all sorts of different things, in the panels there's all sorts of different techniques, and the kneelers are something very different again, and so, have you learnt? And what sort of things have you learnt? And particularly, being part of a group on a common project …

Mabs Well, I think you've got to learn to cooperate with everybody, haven't you. You can't just go wildly doing your own thing, you've got to conform. I mean, you can put a bit of yourself in, as I say, you've got a certain freedom, but you've got to conform to a certain extent, you know, because you're part of a whole aren't you, that's being produced … you know, it's not like doing something just for yourself, and also for the place where it's going to be put. So, that … I think, you know, I think it's important that we follow to a certain extent.

Emma Do you think that motivates people differently than if you were doing something just for yourself?

Mabs It may do. Some people might feel restricted and you know, they'd rather be doing their own thing. But, I think within these… the sort of format that we've got, I'd say we have got a certain amount of freedom, you know, to do what … how we think, interpret it to … you know …

Emma Do you feel restricted at all?

Mabs No. No, no. No, I mean, I say I'll do my own thing, then I suddenly think I better just check, because you know, you don't want to think … you'll be doing something that … because it's taking quite a long time to do, so I do check occasionally that I'm doing, you know, if I'm doing the right thing, or ask a little bit of advice on things …

End of recorded conversation.

Transcript of group discussion

Date: 5 September 2007

Location: village church rooms.

Duration of meeting: 2 hours, discussion 35 minutes

Participants: Kate, Lorna, Iris, Mabs, Emma (researcher)

Emma ... and I've fixed it since last time, so it should be all right. So, today is the 5th of September and I'm with the embroidery group. And ... one thing was what you were just saying Lorna, actually, is since you've been doing this, what kind of a difference has it made to you and to your lives, I mean that's a bit of a major thing to say but, you know …

Kate Well, it's made a huge difference to mine because, I was, you know, with my job sitting at home working on my own all day long, and now I know lots of people in the village.

(Noise)

Kate ...very much so.

Lorna But it's also, it has, I feel it has taken years off my mental age because I've learnt new skills.

Kate Yes.

Emma Yes.

Lorna … and the sheer beauty of the thing...

P Yes.

Lorna … is so exciting. To be a part of something like this. Do you not feel a bit that way Iris, that you're a part of something with this group?

Iris Well, yes, yes of course I can.

Lorna And I mean, you were, you're like me, you're a newcomer to the village.

Kate I'm newer than you two.

Lorna Yes, but it's harder sometimes for older people to integrate into a community.

Kate Well you say that but...

Emma D'you think so?

Kate … you know, I think it's the other way round. Personally, from my point of view it's been more difficult for me. You guys have got all your U3As and all sorts of things. All the people my age, they've got kids or they're working...

Lorna Yes.

Kate … so they're not around.

Lorna Yes of course.

Mabs No.

Kate And you know, for me, no, ...single dog owners.... And my husband's off at work, and my husband's work, because of being secret and things like that, you can't sort of socialize with that gang, you know, and they're all down in Salisbury and everywhere. So it's been very difficult for me up here. I think you lot are you know, you older girls are a lot better able to fit in to a community. And...

Emma Yes, I mean I'm slightly different again but I've noticed that I've got to know more older people than people my age…

Kate Yes.

Emma for the same reasons, yes.

Mabs I do. I mean, lots of the people I know are quite a lot older than me.

Kate Yes.

Emma And because people my age, as I/you say, they've got children at school and jobs and...

Kate Yes, and they all sort of hang around in a gang of mums or something, or...

Mabs Yes, that's true.

Kate D'you know what I mean?

Mabs Well, you see my problem is that most of my sort of generation have got children and grandchildren and they've now got grandchildren, so …

Kate Yes.

Mabs … they're tied up with those, so again, you're out on a limb a bit.

Kate Yes, yes.

Emma Yes. Yes that's very interesting actually.

Kate Hmm, but this is great because its, you know, we're getting to meet all ages, aren't we?

Mabs Yes, yes.

Kate And it's mixed.

Emma Yes, it's … yes, I agree with you.

Kate I mean, because I've tried to sort of meet people in the village, I mean, because we're not we're not great ones for going down the pub.

Mabs No, well you see this is the trouble, Kate, you see, I go down the pub and the people there I've never seen before, because…

Kate Yes.

Mabs …unless you know people through the church…

Kate Yes.

Mabs … or when I was going to the WI, which I don't anymore now.

Kate Yes.

Mabs Or the gardening club.

Kate Yes.

Mabs Yes, there are groups of people you don't meet.

Kate Well, we did, sort of… We came along to the gardening club a few times, and we didn't really meet many people there to tell you the truth.

Mabs It's not terribly social is it, apart from the socials.

Kate No.

Mabs I mean you're going to listen to the speaker, and …

Kate Yes, exactly, yes ... but I mean, it's strange that the people that we did meet at the social, when we had the meal in the village hall, lived in our old village, in Puckeridge.

Mabs Oh, who's that?

Kate Brian and Sarah.

Mabs Oh gosh.

Kate And ...so that was a bit weird.

Kate No, I recognized Sarah but I didn't know her in Puckeridge. But yes, so there you go.

Emma How strange, yes.

(Pause)

Emma And the other thing that you were saying, Lorna, I thought, was the time element. You were talking about "just think of all the floors you're not brushing".

Lorna Absolutely!

(Laughter)

Mabs Good excuse that.

Emma And how all the ordinary things get in...

Lorna Oh, the ordinary things get in the way.

Kate Yes.

Lorna You get to a stage where you resent…

Kate Yes, I know what you mean.

Lorna … having to hang the washing on the line and bringing it in.

Kate Having to get up and make husband's dinner 'cause he wants....

Lorna Oh, now he's not convalescing anymore ... well, you know where the fridge is.

(Laughter)

Kate Oh dear.... poor Len.

Lorna Poor Len nothing. He's a big boy, let him get on with it.

(Laughter)

Emma Is that familiar territory? A familiar grumbling zone, having to stop what you're doing to go and get ... your husbands' lunch?

Kate Yes.

Lorna Yes, well it would be if,.. if,.. but no, no he will make his own lunch. And...

Kate But you get so hooked on…

Lorna ...what you do...

Kate … doing beading and everything don't you, you don't want to get up and do normal stuff, and the time just sort of flies by.

Emma I know exactly what you mean.

Kate Yes.

Lorna It's an excuse for having rubbishy daytime television on.

(Laughter)

Lorna Something you don't have to look at, or you could put a CD on.

Kate I put radio 6 on, sorry radio 7.

Emma Yes, what d'you… 'cause you're all working on the panels as well at home as well as here, aren't you?

(General agreement)

Emma What do you do while you're sitting at home with them?

Kate I usually have the radio on.

Lorna Either have the radio on or a CD playing or something like that.

Kate Yes, oh I'll put something, yes, I'm a great one for having the TV on and sort of listening to things while I'm sewing, but it has to be something that I've seen a hundred times before.

Lorna Yes, but that's what I'm saying.

Kate Like 'Pride and Prejudice', the BBC adaptation, I've seriously watched it about a hundred and fifty times now. But I have to say I haven't watched it for a while – I've listened to it. Sad isn't it.

Lorna At the moment, there are re-runs on BBC2 in the afternoon of old war films.

Kate Oh yes.

Lorna Which again, I could nearly give you the script.

Kate Yes, 'The Wooden Horse' was on yesterday wasn't it?

Lorna Um?

Kate 'The Wooden Horse' was on yesterday.

Lorna 'The Wooden Horse' was on yesterday, and there was 'Escape from Colditz' before that.

Kate Yes, yes.

Lorna The day before that.

Emma Do you ever go round to each other's houses and say, ok well, why don't we do this, I'll bring mine round and let's do it together? Or do you just...

Kate From ... well, from past experience, if I've ever done that with other sewing, I never get anything done.

(Laughter)

Lorna Yes. No, because of having to put the frames, and...

Kate Yes, just …

Lorna … take them with us.

Kate No, no, it's not that so much, because you end up chatting, and then you end up saying, oh yes, look at this, and you go off and get off subject and then you ... I've tried sewing with other people in their houses and it just doesn't... I don't get anything done. I probably get about a quarter of what I'd normally do.

Emma If you were doing it on your own?

Kate Yes, yes. But I mean in this situation it's different because we're all in bits...

Emma Yes, what about here, what's...?

Kate … aren't we. But you can't get up and show somebody something, if you know what I mean, get a book out and, you know, you have these conversations, then you end up getting a book out, and you often make a cup of tea, and ... I'm sure you've been there, haven't you?

Emma Oh yes, I know exactly what you mean, I know exactly what you mean. So it's the fact that you can come here and work?

Kate And get away from it, yes.

Lorna Yes, and you're meeting other people and it does, you know, it clears your head, and it either confirms, or somebody else'll say well, why don't you do that …?

Kate But there's less distractions here as well isn't there, so you can sort of get on with the work, if you know what I mean.

Lorna Yes…

Kate Whereas at home it's....

Lorna … it's quite acceptable to talk and work together.

Kate Yes, yes.

Lorna Whereas if somebody came in to visit me while I was working, I would feel I really should put it down and throw a cover over it.

Kate Yes, but Emma's saying, you know, have we gone round to each others' houses to work, and I was saying...

Emma On this.

Kate ...that it would be unproductive from my point of view, because I...

Lorna I would doubt very much if I'd get a lot done.

Kate No, exactly.

(Laughter)

Kate Yes, so we're better off in here girls, aren't we?

Lorna I think so.

Kate Did you go round for a session round at Robin's? Did you go for a session round at Robin's one time?

Lorna No.

Kate I remember Betts did, didn't she.

Lorna Betts did.

Kate Yes.

Lorna Because she'd missed so much.

Kate Yes.

Lorna I don't even know where Robina lives.

Kate I sort of know whereabouts it is, but I don't know where it is.

Mabs Past Green Lane hospital.

Lorna Oh yes, it's down…

Mabs By the new houses on the Roundway site.

Iris Mabs, do you know her address?

Mabs I do know it. I can't tell you the number at the moment but I, I've got it at home.

Emma Yes, I think I've got it as well actually.

Iris Well I'll ring you if I want it, 'cause I dare say Sheila will have it.

Lorna I mean I have it. I would have it at home too. From our U3A.

Emma Just a sort of pause … how do I thread this? ...Sorry.

Mabs Ah, ... thread it, yes, thread it through the …

Emma Ah, I need a big needle like that.

Kate Mabs, you need to get Emma to thread it the right way for ... starting, don't you. You know, 'cause there's two ways of threading it, effectively, isn't there. You thread it the one way but you need the short end at the start.

Mabs Yes, so you thread it through here.

Kate Yes.

Emma Ok, go backwards through it.

Kate Yes, and then pull...

Mabs And then pull it through the eye.

Kate Yes.

Emma That way?

Mabs Up through the eye, yes.

Kate Yes, then pull it back through.

Mabs Then pull it right through so you've got a little short end...

Kate Yes.

Mabs … to begin with.

Kate Yes. We got very confused about this to start with, didn't we?

Mabs Yes, we did.

Emma Yes.

Kate And we kept on having this long bit. And everybody was going "what do we do with it now?"

Emma Co-ordination.

Kate And we were all sitting here puzzling over it for ages weren't we.... oh dear.

Emma I'm just working out this bit. There's green here so I cut it off, but actually I'm going to carry on.

Kate Yes.

Emma So I'll start again.

Kate Yes.

Emma Do that bit.

Kate Yes.. Ignore that edge. She went wrong there.

Emma OK. So the green actually goes down to there, and then I'll go back up there and stop.

Kate Yes, back up in that patch, yes.

Emma There's a sort of blurry pink patch but I think I'll just ignore it.

Kate Yes, I'd do that in green. And you can always blend in, oh mind you, you've got two colours there already anyway, haven't you.

Emma I've got the two colours and then I'll blend in, say, the green and pink.

Kate Yes.

Emma Actually from here…

Kate Looks like you've got a bit of …

Emma And there's a bit of purple, a bit of dark purple there.

Kate Yes. Oh it's so complicated.

Emma So, yes, so...

Kate I've got a huge patch of green here, so I'm hoping this is all ok, 'cause I've just ... greens.

Mabs Yes, I've got blue here. I'm going to try and...

Kate Yes, a massive patch.

Emma Yes, sorry about that pause. But yes, going back to what I was saying. How many... Or what are the sort of things that you're glad not to be doing because you're doing this, if you see what I mean?

Kate Making lavender hearts.

(Laughter)

Kate It is really. Well for me it's working, you know.

Emma What sort of activity might you all be doing if you weren't here?

Kate Well, I would be working.

Lorna I've given up my sketching class.

Iris I should probably be asleep.

(Laughter)

Iris I fall asleep after lunch. I listen to the afternoon play, and after that go to sleep.

(Pause)

Iris I feel I'm really consciously bound to go out into the garden.

Kate What would you be doing Mabs?

Mabs Well, I don't know. I'd be doing some gardening, or having a walk, or visiting somebody, or...

Lorna Yes, you've got your parochial work to do of course.

Mabs Yes. Well I've got to go this afternoon take home communion to somebody. I've been to one, and I've got another one to go to.

Iris Oh goodness. I didn't know it flowed over into the afternoons.

Mabs Well...

Iris I suppose it depends what they can do.

Mabs Well, this morning we really didn't finish the service until about quarter past twelve, and I'm supposed to be at somebody's at quarter past twelve, so...

Kate Oh dear.

Lorna Yes, do you do it by appointment?

Mabs Well, I usually ... Well, to see whether they're, you know, they want us to go anyway, so ... I haven't been round to Beattie for ages, so I thought I'll go to her this morning, then I can have a bit of lunch, come and do this this afternoon for a couple of hours or so, and then go round to Mick's. So I'm going round to him after.

Kate Oh you're a busy girl you, aren't you.

Mabs Then we've got PCC tonight.

Kate Crumbs.

Mabs So it's a busy day.

(Laughter)

Iris Wednesday's are....

Lorna Yes, I suppose I use this as an excuse to not come to grips with the finer points of my computer.

(Laughter)

Mabs That's what I've got to do – check my emails when I go back.

Kate Oh, they are such time wasters.

Mabs I'm trying to book some hall in Market Lavington for some church thing. The person I'm supposed to be contacting has left. And I've got hold of another lady who sounds Australian. She's very nice. So I've no idea ... Meanwhile I've two other people to see what they think about what I've found out. It's all been very tiresome.

Kate Oh dear.

Emma How much time in a week do you think you're spending doing this?

Mabs At the moment, a lot, aren't you?

Lorna I was just going to say ... 11, 12, 13, 14, about anything up to 20 hours a week, and...

Emma Doing it? Gosh.

Kate I'm doing nothing at the moment though. I've done nothing this week at all on it. I mean last week I did about 2 hours and that was it.

Lorna I mean I reckon I'd spent 81 hours on doing this panel, but then of course you see now I'm getting better at it.

Kate Yes.

Emma Yes, you're getting quicker.

Kate Yes.

Lorna I'm going quicker.

Kate Yeah

Lorna I was counting that up there because we're supposed to keep a record. (Points to the timesheet pinned on the wall)

Emma Are you?

Lorna So in the end, the final...

Kate Just for interest really, wasn't it?

Lorna Oh, I thought in the final analysis somebody was going to work out how many hours had been spent.

Kate Ah.

Lorna And we don't include in our record Wednesday afternoon hours.

Kate No, no, I don't.

Emma So, your 20 hours is not including Wednesday?

(Somebody else comes in)

Emma Would you like to spend more time in general ... I mean, you're already spending a lot, Lorna, but would you all spend more time if you could doing it?

Kate I would, yes. Because I'm really enjoying doing it, and work's getting in the way a bit at the moment, if you know what I mean.

Lorna It's an addiction.

Kate It is a bit, isn't it, yes.

Emma I wonder what is addictive about it?

Kate Well, from my point of view, 'cause it's so … its still creating, because I love, you know, the creative side obviously, but it's different from my normal work, so, and, you know what it's like, when you've done a lot of sewing, you like to do something different, don't you, and it's... just exciting.

Emma Yes.

Lorna It is.

Kate I know.

Iris I should think the feeling also of conditions to get to know well, this is similar, or something, or I'll do that, ooh well I've just got this bit

Lorna Yes. Oh good, I'm sick of pink. I'm going to treat myself and do another colour for a little while.

(Laughter)

Lorna Oh yes.

Emma So, would doing it … I'm just thinking, doing this rug thing, I know that would be my case, would it sort of, I suppose a) result in a certain way of being, a certain state of mind, or b) do you do it in a certain state of mind? Does that make sense?

Lorna At the beginning doing it, I was terrified. But now I just absolutely love it. It puts me in a good mood.

Kate Yes. It's funny because that really shows. That really shows in your work because your work now is absolutely beautiful. It really is stunning what you've been doing recently. I was quite taken aback when I saw it earlier.

Iris High praise.

Emma There you go!

Kate But do you know what I mean? And to start with I was sort of...

Lorna Yes, I'm dreading whenever I open the door. I was just so nervous. I just am so proud of it, and so excited by it. I keep telling people on the phone – I'm doing more embroidery, and more beading.

Emma That's fantastic.

Kate She's a bead addict.

Lorna I feel in my head, I'm twenty, at least twenty years younger…

Kate Yes.

Lorna … than I was when I started. And it's done my own self-image a lot of good. Because I would always have said I was never artistic.

Kate Yes.

Lorna You know...

Emma And has that changed now? Would you say you are?

Lorna Well, there has to be a bit of artistry to have done that.

Kate Well, you're a creative person, aren't you, yes?

(General agreement)

Emma Good for you, yes.

Emma What about you Kate, what sort of state of mind does it...?

Kate Why I like it, because it.... oh, state of mind, hang on...

Emma It makes Lorna very happy, and...

Kate Umm...

Emma ...a sense of purpose and achievement.

Kate Yes. I suppose it's slightly different for me because I'm creating all the time.

Emma Yes, you're doing it...

Kate And it's relaxing, in a way. It's not stressful because I know I haven't got any deadlines to meet with it. So it's more relaxing, and sewing for enjoyment, rather than work. And it's absolutely… it's a bit bizarre but... yes, relaxing I think, I find it is the best way of my, you know, state of mind would definitely be ... relaxed doing this sort of work than my normal work.

Emma Yes, I know what you mean by that. I think it's the same with me. It's...I love doing my work but I find it difficult to place it. I think it's sewing work, and it's not proper work, you know, it's not computer work or something, so I do it....

Kate Yes, but I don't think of computer work as proper work. I think of sewing as proper work.

Emma Good for you.

Kate Because, d'you know what I mean? But it's a different type of sewing. It has a different purpose in life.

Emma Yes, it's like if I'm sewing for me and it's my work, it's … a lot of effort goes into that. And so I actually really enjoy doing things for other people that....

Kate Yes, yes.

Emma … that, not that they're effortless, but they're not for me so I can enjoy it more.

Kate Well it's slightly different for me because when I'm doing my normal work, I'm having to work to sell something to somebody else. In most of my cases I sell to shops, so I don't want to let them down, 'cause I know they've got to make, earn a living from the things that I'm supplying them with.

Emma That you're doing, hmm.

Kate You know, so I've quite a bit of responsibility to get things to them on time. You know, like they're doing a big show or something, or they've got, you know lots of people in on a, like in Scarborough at the moment, in one of my shops, they're very busy with tourists, because it's been raining so much up there and all the tourists are going in the shops. D'you know what I mean. So you sort of feel you have to get things done quickly and made on time.

Emma Yes, but you...

Kate It's quite... I still enjoy the sewing, but it's still, you know, you got deadlines to meet.

Emma And effort, and...

Kate Yes, yes.

Iris It's relief from pressure.

Emma ... and tension...

Kate Yes. Whereas this, it's not is it, it's just enjoyment.

Lorna It's sheer pleasure.

Kate Yeah. It's just enjoying the sewing.

Lorna It's sheer pleasure.

Kate Oh it is. Yes. Are you trying to get cottons that match your top right?

Lorna That's right, and ... no, it's for the seeding, the gold bits.

Kate Oh right.

Lorna Isn't it that colour we used?

Kate We mixed them actually, Lorna. We have mixed, so I wouldn't worry too much. I would go for....

Lorna Well, there are ones over here that are mixtures of...

Kate There are some variegated threads as well.

Lorna That's what I'm saying, there are...variegated ones.

Kate Yes. I wouldn't go for a particular colour, unless you're following on from a patch which is already...

Lorna No, no it's not. It's quite separate.

Kate In that case just choose the ones that you feel look good on it.

Lorna I'll take those little tiny gold sequins in case I want some of those. Well no, I think possibly in my box I've got some of these. I'll check.

Emma What about you Iris?

Iris Well, I don't do any of these creative things, I never have.

Kate Yes, but you, your enjoy ...

Emma Never?

Kate No, but the thing is, Iris, you're part of the group, aren't you, and we are ... I know, it's… you're getting little jobs to do aren't you?

Iris Well yes, I mean you've all accepted me in a very friendly way.

Kate We've not accepted you, you're a part of our team!

Lorna You're absolutely invaluable to us. How on earth would we have boxed all these threads without you?

Kate Yes. No, seriously Iris, we wouldn't have been able to do all this without your help. Because, I mean, we need to get on and do prodding and things like that.

Lorna We couldn't possibly have had time to wind... no.

Kate Oh Iris!

Lorna No, but you contribute so much to the conversations too.

Emma And the poem!

Lorna Pardon?

Emma The poem.

Kate Yes, exactly, yes.

Lorna Oh yes, the poem!

Kate Look, accept it woman!

Iris There's another one coming up for approval.

(Laughter)

Kate Yes, I mean you are part of the team. All team members have different roles, don't they? That's fantastic.

Lorna I'll mix the two of them and use one for one panel, and one for the other.

Kate You can mix the two together if you want.

Lorna Right.

Iris Well, I just listen open mouthed to all they say, and you know, this, that and the other... colours, and all the rest of it and ... just wish I could ... I can't hear half of it.

Kate Oh.

Iris On Friday afternoon I've got someone coming to fit two new hearing aids. I've only ever had one before, so…

Kate Yes.

Iris I'm hoping for, well...

Kate So next Wednesday you'll tell us all to stop shouting.

(Laughter)

Iris I can't hear everything that goes on, which is a disappointment to me.

Kate Oh. I think a lot of the time we all shout over the top of each other as well.

Emma Yes, there's a lot of talking over each other.

Kate Yes, we do a lot of that.

Lorna Did we ever have a waste paper basket or an empty cardboard box that we use for rubbish?

Kate No, there's a bag on that window ledge.

Lorna Right, I'll just put it there. It's ok, I'll just put it ... no, no, I'll put this on the window ledge, and I'll put these away.

Kate I think it's behind the curtain.

Mabs Nobody's seen a first aid kit here have they?

Kate Oh no, what are you up to?

Emma Oh no!

Mabs I've just prodded myself.

Kate Mabs!

Emma There must be one. Maybe in the kitchen?

Kate I'll go and ask.

Mabs Would you?

Kate Don't worry.

Lorna Might be a bandage in there.

Mabs I usually have some in my handbag.

Mabs I don't want to bleed over it, that's the thing.

Iris Oh dear, no.

(Noise and dog barking)

Iris If you do, make sure it blends in.

Mabs With red, exactly.

(Noise)

Emma Is there something in here?

Mabs Can't see one in there.

Lorna No, and there isn't one there.

Mabs No, I've looked around...

Lorna Something's gone.... oh yes, it's all their stands that were in there.

Mabs Oh, those things. That's right. They're outside now I think.

Lorna Yes, well that's where they belong and they were moved in here...

Mabs When they were doing the window.

Emma Oh dear, is that...what have you done?

Mabs No, it's only … I've just stuck the end of that into my finger for some daft reason … I must go again soon actually. Oh wonderful!

Lorna Yes, I nearly placed this...

Mabs I knew there must have been one somewhere.

Kate Now, what have you done? What do we need to do to it?

Mabs If you just put a little plaster, that's all I want.

Kate It's one of those funny shaped plasters.

Lorna Here's a smaller one.

Iris Probably horse plasters.

Emma Yes, I was...

Lorna There's the....

Emma Stallion plasters.

Mabs Thank you, that's great.

Kate Yes. I nearly did that to myself just now, so I know exactly what you mean. It's just … you think it's in the right place,

isn't it...

Mabs I think it's just the angle I've got it, it's actually just ... and I thought, oh dear.

Kate Hang on. I tell you what. I'll read the instructions.

Lorna She's showing off that you can read the instructions without your glasses.

Kate Surely...

Mabs You probably have to get in from the top. Some of them open at the top, don't they.

Kate Umm… I'm just going to go for ripping it.... Ah...I'll just get the edge. It looks technical ... See, I never would have made a very good nurse.

Mabs No. That's one thing I've never wanted to be was a nurse.

Kate Hmm. I'm trying to press too hard.

Mabs Should be two nurses for this.

Kate And I've caught under that. We should have got somebody else to do it. Look, I've stuck the two pieces together, haven't I.

Mabs Oh, I see what you mean.

Kate That's it. That's fine.

Mabs Well done. Thank you very much.

Emma Are you all right?

Mabs Lovely.

(Lots of noise)

Kate I usually have some in my handbag. But...

Mabs Yes. But I haven't got my handbag. So I've got all this other stuff with me, and I...

Lorna All these little boxes of stuff. Do you see how inventive we've been with all our...

Emma Oh yes.

Lorna ... little boxes?

Emma They're good boxes those, that you've got, yes. I hope I'm doing this all right. I think it looks ok.

Kate Well, quarter past four.

Lorna Health and safety all sorts...

Kate I don't have to go to the Post Office today, 'cause I don't have my parcel ready.

Emma Have I been doing this all right? Kate, d'you want to have a look?

Kate I need to get closer. I can't see from over there … Well it's not too much of a problem if it is wrong, because we can always undo it. I'd say these stitches were a wee bit big.

Emma Right, that's going from that line to that line.

Kate Yes. But don't worry about it too much. That's fine. Yes.

(Noise)

Kate That's ok. You know what I do. These girls are all for sort of reversing sides, you know, sort of like reversing round and coming down again.

Emma Yes.

Kate I actually snip it off and start again. And I just go all in one direction. Personally I find it easier.

Emma Is that easier?

Kate Well, try it. See how you get on with it. They all find the other way easier.

Emma Yes, I'll try it.

Kate But I don't. I find it easier to snip it off and then just start and work towards me all the time.

Emma Yes. You might be right.

Kate But I think it's up to personal taste really. If you know what I mean.

Emma Yes, whatever works for you.

Kate Yes.

Kate And because I always slant the ... Can you see the way I'm holding the ... sorry, you're looking underneath.

Emma That's all right.

Kate Can you see the way I'm holding the prodder? I actually slant it downwards...

Emma Right.

Kate ... and then push it away like that.

Emma Yes.

Kate Whereas Robin does it, she goes sort of like backwards like this, but I was looking at the instructions for them and it does actually say slant it down and then go, you know, do it that way. And it seems the logical way to do it to me, but...

Emma Yes, I agree with you. I find your way, I think, is the same as my way.

Kate Yes, yes.

Emma I'm going to...

Kate But you're actually working a different direction to me, 'cause...

Emma Yes, let me try, I'm going to do it.... here...

Lorna I'll put this to bed.

Iris Yes. *(Laughs)*

Kate But Robin and I bicker about that one you see, 'cause I say I'm doing it right, and she says she's doing it right. *(Laughter)*

Emma Had you done this before?

Kate No, no. But I read the instructions and she didn't, you see. *(Laughter)*

Kate Oh, it was on the fete day, wasn't it?

Lorna Yes.

Kate Because I'd never done the prodding before that. And I decided, right, I need to find out how to do this. There was nobody around to ask, so I read the instructions.

Emma Right.

Kate So I started prodding away, and I was prodding away quite happily, and then Robin said, "Oh no, I do it this way round".

Emma You're doing it the wrong way.

Iris Well, if the result's right.

Kate Yes. Yes, that's true. I think she finds it more comfy doing it that way, so...it's fine.

Emma It's quicker I think doing it your way as well.

Kate Yes. Well I think it's a case of the way you get used to doing it really.

Mabs It's what you're used to, I know. I tend to do it the other way.

Kate Yes. Yes, 'cause you're working away from yourself there as well aren't you?

Mabs Yes.

Emma Yes.

Kate But the Robin method is sort of like that. She does that sort of thing, whereas I do that.

Mabs Yes. No, no, she did say she does it the other way round.

Kate Yes. She had the needle upside down.

Emma Yes, she's turned it round.

Emma It is addictive though isn't it. You can sort of...I'd quite happily sit here for hours. And not have to worry about flats.

Mabs Flats, quite.

(The conversation continues about flat/house buying)

Kate I suppose it is time, isn't it.

Mabs I must go. Because as I say, I've got to go and visit Mick...

Kate Well I've got to get on and finish what I'm working on at home, so ... Did somebody take your cards away?

Lorna Yes, I have them all here ready for filing.

Kate OK.

Lorna Isn't that what Mabs was going to say? Would you like me to file some?

Kate No.

Mabs I'm not in a rush. No, I'm not in a rush.

End of recorded conversation.

Appendix X: ethics

Participant Information Sheet

24th March 2007

Dear Potential Participant,

I am **Emma Shercliff**, a research student in the Textiles department at the Royal College of Art. My research project is entitled: **Articulating Stitch**. As part of this study, I am conducting a series of conversations with makers about their work. You are invited to take part in this project. Please read this Information Statement and be sure you understand its contents before you consent to participate. I will answer any queries you might have.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

- answer questions relating to the patchwork and/or embroidery work you make
- show me example(s) of your patchwork and/or embroidery work
- make a stitched piece of work during our conversations
- consent to the use of images or video footage for publication, presentation or exhibition purposes

With your consent I will:

- record these conversations about your work using a voice recorder
- use a camera to photograph your work and document our meetings
- in some instances use a video to document the making of the work

All information collected will be anonymized, unless you request otherwise, and stored securely. It will only be used in relation

to my research study. Participation in this research is entirely your choice. Only those people who give their informed consent will be included in the project. Whether or not you decide to participate, your decision will not disadvantage you in any way. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw from the project at any time without giving reason or without penalty. If you have any concerns or would like to know the outcomes of the project, please contact one of my supervisors at the address below.

Thank you for considering this invitation,

Student: Emma Shercliff, MPhil/PhD candidate
Royal College of Art, Textiles Department, Kensington Gore, London SW7 2EU
Tel: 020 7590 4395 / 07809 140951
Email: emma.shercliff@rca.ac.uk
Supervisors: Freddie Robins and Prue Bramwell-Davies
Royal College of Art, Textiles Department, Kensington Gore, London SW7 2EU
Tel: 020 7590 4362 / Fax: 020 7590 4360
Email: freddie.robins@rca.ac.uk

Complaints Clause:
This project follows the guidelines laid out by the Research Ethics Code of the Royal College of Art.
If you should have any concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which this research is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, if an independent person is preferred, addressed to the Research Ethics Committee of the Royal College of Art at the above address.

Participant Consent Form

24th March 2007

I (please print name) …… have read the information on the research project entitled: **Articulating Stitch**, which is to be conducted by Emma Shercliff from the Royal College of Art, and all queries have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree voluntarily to participate in this research and give my consent freely. I understand that the project will be conducted in accordance with the Information Sheet, a copy of which I have retained. I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time, without penalty, and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

I consent to:

- participate in the conversations and answer questions relating to the patchwork and/or embroidery work I make
- the audio/video taping or photographing of my contribution to the conversations
- show example(s) of my patchwork and/or embroidery work and allow them to be photographed by the researcher
- make a stitched piece of work during our conversations and allow the researcher to keep this work for the duration of the study

I understand that all information gathered from these conversations will be stored securely, my opinions will be accurately transcribed and any sound or images of myself or my work will only be used in the public domain (publications, presentations or exhibitions) with my consent.

Print name: ……..

Signature: ……..

Date: ……..

This project will be conducted in compliance with the Research Ethics Code of the Royal College of Art.

Appendix XI: dissemination

A Poetics of Waste: evaluating time and effort spent sewing

Conference paper given at:
Making Futures I: The Crafts in the Context of Emerging Global Sustainability Agendas, convened by Plymouth College of Art, held at Mount Edgcumbe Estate, Plymouth, 17 & 18 September 2009. Complete conference proceedings published in: M. Ferris (ed) (2010) *Making Futures*, Vol. 1, available from: http://makingfutures.plymouthart.ac.uk/journalvol1/about-this-publication.php.

Abstract

Waste *v.* 1. To use to no purpose or for inadequate result. 2. To fail to be appreciated or used properly. 3. To treat as valueless. 4. To be expended without useful effect.
n. Unwanted or unusable remains or by-products.
(OED)

As makers in Britain today, we usually strive to limit wasted time and effort in the production of craft objects. The result of our labour – a unique object or a series of products – is of primary interest and must be seen to encompass and reflect the high premium placed on our time and effort. Its value, both commercially and culturally, is calculated accordingly.

This paper will examine this understanding of waste as fault or weakness when applied to the labour intensive and time-consuming making processes of patchwork quilting. In particular it will reconsider assumptions that 'wasted' time and effort compromise the experienced value of making an object, and will suggest alternative approaches for addressing 'wasted' time and effort as productive and constructive.

To illuminate these issues I will draw on findings from a case study that forms a part of my doctoral research, which investigates the experience of stitching both as creative practice and as social relationship. Over the course of a year I observed and conducted in-depth interviews with participants from a group of quilters in south London.

The motivations and rewards for quilt making are at first glance as invisible as the stitches that hold the work together. However, the time and effort invested in quilt making has multiple outcomes alongside the material production of the work. 'Other' work, of a social and relational nature, is generated that has significance for the maker as an individual, for the individual as part of a group, and for the collective as part of a wider community. The slow, fragmented nature of the stitched work mirrors the gradual piecing together of human networks and support systems.

This makes heavy, 'wasteful' demands on the time and effort of these makers. Our common understanding of efficient production values, failing to account for this invisible 'other' work, will assess the time and effort invested to have failed to be appreciated or used properly, or to have been expended without useful effect. Undervalued in this way, it will have been 'wasted'. On the contrary, might it be possible to propose that this 'other' work, serves a primary purpose, is an effectual use of assets such as time and effort, and produces wanted and usable remainders?

Introduction

Popular conceptions of waste related to the production of objects in contemporary Britain usually concern the use, or misuse, of resources. The economics of productive gain mean us to measure and quantify these resources. Much can be said about the excessive use of materials and energy, but my interest here specifically addresses the input of time and effort.

One way of thinking about the use of time is to consider it as a measurable commodity. Like money, we are encouraged to spend it wisely. As an accountable resource it is meted out with the understanding that gain is acquired in exchange: we expend time and effort and are consequently rewarded. Increased productivity and higher rewards are achieved by streamlining and maximizing the expenditure of time and effort. Speed and efficiency are, on the whole, highly prized and generously rewarded. In this model to take one's time is considered inefficient, even extravagant or profligate, and is generally

discouraged.

However, this particular framework does not allow for consideration of the immeasurable quality of other types of rewards that fall outside the rules of economic productive gain. This paper will discuss the use of time in relation to craft processes, and will outline the nature of the gains acquired in exchange by the maker. To illuminate these issues I will draw on findings from a case study that forms a part of my doctoral research, which investigates the experience of stitching as both creative practice and social relationship. Over the course of a year I observed and conducted in-depth interviews with participants from a group of quilters in south London.

Making things is the production of material objects. According to Thorstein Veblen 'throughout the history of human culture, the great body of the people have almost everywhere, in their everyday life, been at work to turn things to human use' (Veblen 1898). This purposeful action he terms 'the instinct of workmanship' (Veblen 1964), an activity, he argues, which furthers human life on the whole and is endorsed by humankind. Traditionally the functionality associated with the crafts pertains to this purposeful production of necessary and useful things.

But how could we consider the making of unnecessary things? Our world is already too full. As design historian Tanya Harrod asks 'Why make art or craft in such a full world?' (Harrod 2005). Many of the material objects we make are superfluous to our requirements. They do not at first glance serve a purpose. Is this not wasteful? The key factor behind this assumption is the link to functionality: the purposeful production of necessary and useful things.

Sewing commonly falls into this category. It has the history of a functional craft whereby the relevant skills are employed primarily to make requisite goods. The necessity of the object defines its value. Its making has therefore been purposeful. But if it is deemed unnecessary, what purpose does its making serve?

Side-stepping a discussion of the merits or otherwise of craft as art, I will explore a contemporary purposefulness embedded within the process of making unnecessary things: patchwork quilts.

As a method of making warm bedcovers for the family, patchwork quilting is in origin purposeful production. However, nowadays this is no longer so, as the majority of people choose the convenience of duvets, making the quilt functionally

redundant.

Patchwork quilting has two salient points of interest in relation to the notion of wasting time and the production of things:

• it is a laborious and time-consuming activity, the products of which are unnecessary.

• the production of patchwork quilts and its strong association with domesticity pertains to a hierarchy of purposeful labour that has conventionally held this sort of activity in low esteem.

To return to Veblen, he argues that labour is purposeful; that human beings have a natural proclivity for workmanship and are generally appreciative of accomplishment and achievement, yet find effort wasted in uselessness 'distasteful':

> 'They like to see others spend their life to some purpose, and they like to reflect that their own life is of some use. All men have this quasi-aesthetic sense of economic or industrial merit, and to this sense of economic merit futility and inefficiency are distasteful. In its positive expression it is an impulse or instinct of workmanship; negatively it expresses itself in a deprecation of waste.' (Veblen 1898).

He also reveals in his argument the categorization of a hierarchy of purposeful labour:

> '… there comes a distinction between employments. The tradition of prowess, as the virtue par excellence, gains in scope and consistency until prowess comes near being recognized as the sole virtue. Those employments alone are then worthy and reputable which involve the exercise of this virtue. Other employments, in which men are occupied with tamely shaping inert materials to human use, become unworthy and end with becoming debasing… In the barbarian scheme of life the peaceable, industrial employments are women's work… In this way industrial occupations fall under a polite odium and are apprehended to be substantially ignoble.' (Veblen 1898)

Labour in the domestic realm falls into a category of work that is classed in these terms as base and distasteful. Essentially menial tasks, they are relegated to this base level as they do not further the progress of humankind, but are concerned with maintaining the balance of a stable foundation. The work is invisible, only noticed perhaps when, or if, it is not done. Typically, a cyclical rhythm establishes itself in the domestic sphere, whereby the work is done, undone and re-done, leaving behind very

little trace of the effort expended.

In her essay 'Women's Time', Julia Kristeva introduces her concept of 'cyclical time' and 'monumental time' as distinct from 'linear time'. Linear time she presents as sequential and directional; the time of history, progress and language – the 'symbolic order'. Cyclical time, associated with the recurring cycles of nature and biological rhythms, and monumental time, in the sense of the infinite and eternity, in relation to female subjectivity, are helpful concepts here to situate the pertinence of such repetitive invisible work and its significance in maintaining stability.

The cyclical nature of invisible domestic work patterns sets a rhythm that is replicated in the making processes of patchwork quilting, evident in the repetitive manual work of piecing together fragments of cloth with tiny invisible stitches. Making patchwork quilts – unnecessary household goods – is an occupation undertaken for the most part within a domestic setting. In Veblen's terms it is futile, inefficient, unworthy and base. It is quite possible therefore to conceive it as wasted time and effort.

When discussing function in relation to craft, it is perhaps not the function of the object but rather the function of the making process itself we need to think about. The purpose and usefulness, i.e. the function, lies in the process.

What is the purposefulness of a time-consuming process in the making of an unnecessary object?

On closer inspection, the craft of patchwork quilting enables 'other work' to go on alongside the material production of the unnecessary object. Of a social and relational nature, this 'other work' has significance for the maker as an individual and for the individual as part of a community that convincingly argues for the craft process itself to be considered as purposeful production.

Marking time: leaving a trace

> I'm a 'what have you achieved today' person and this is a wonderful way of achieving. Because I can see what I have done with my day. [1]

Stitching is a method of leaving a visible trace of one's existence and achievements. Anthropologist Alfred Gell writes of

drawings that they are a 'frozen residue left by this manual ballet' (Gell 1998: 95). Extrapolating from this, other forms of mark-making, including stitching, are similarly a freeze-framing and recording of an instance of human activity. Stitches mark, and thereby record, the passing of time leaving a physical and visible document testifying to the presence and achievement of the maker.

Located in a domestic realm of otherwise cyclical, non-progressive, invisible work, the craft of patchwork quilting offers the maker a method of visibly marking the passing of time that otherwise goes unrecorded, balancing Kristeva's cyclical time with an inscription into linear time.

For the women that make them, quilts serve as a narrative of events lived through time. Sociologist Marybeth C. Stalp in her recent study *Quilting: The Fabric of Everyday Life* (2007) describes completed quilts as 'life bookmarks' acting as receptors and emitters of both personal and collective memories of events and experiences.

The quilter participants in my study are not in the habit of recording the amount of time spent on a piece of work, but they remember and recount 'the intention of the quilt and the artistic processes surrounding it, and they detail what they were experiencing in their personal lives at the time that the quilt was constructed' (Stalp 2007: 114).

One such example of a quilt as 'life bookmark' was described to me by Paula, a quilter participant:

> It was not a very good phase in my marriage because my husband gave me ties and the ties he gave I used to exorcize my feelings. It's very messy. It didn't come out well at all.

Me time: the pleasure of making

> In a way, it's not as necessary to me now as when I had the small children because… I felt desperately trapped with these children who I could never sort of get away from and it was a way of having something for myself.

Stalp writes of women quilters that 'they pursue it voluntarily and intensely for individual pleasure. Women also quilt because it helps them to relax from paid work, unpaid household work, and other familial carework duties' (Stalp 2007: 96). Choosing to

expend effort and ‘waste’ time in this way suggests a preoccupation with the **quality** of time spent.

Quilt-making absorbs immeasurable emotional investments, and equally rewards the maker. Penney Burton notes in her study of North American textile artists that ‘these artists choose this type of work because they receive some sort of physical or emotional benefit while creating with repetitive and accumulative textile techniques, which then results in their desire to continue with these artistic practices’ (Penney Burton 2007: 147). Making is pleasurable. The doing of it for its own sake has value. This attitude is briefly and succinctly exemplified by Liz's response to my question ‘how long did it take you to do that?’:

> I don’t know. It didn’t matter – I was enjoying it so much.

American scholar Ellen Dissanayake suggests that this pleasure we get from making is ‘hardwired into human nature’ (Dissanayake 1995b: 41). Noting that a great deal of time and effort is spent on what might appear to be gratuitous pastimes that take away energy from more directly useful activities, she proposes that making might be considered as a human behavioural trait that ‘satisfies an intrinsic and deep human imperative’ (Dissanayake 1995a: 34). The pleasurable experience of making means therefore that we are positively inclined to do it. It contributes to our well-being.

She uses the term ‘making special’ in place of making art or craft. As a verb it indicates that the significance for us as human beings is in the doing of it; in the process: ‘Making special emphasizes the idea that the arts… have been physically, sensuously, and emotionally satisfying and pleasurable to humans’ (Dissanayake 1995a: 59). Making is inherently gratifying. Playing with pattern, shape, colour and materials is pleasing perceptually, emotionally and cognitively. Art-making that exploits this pleasure has become attached to valuable behavioural traits and is associated with desirable results.

Aside from the satisfaction of creating something that did not exist before, there is pleasure in handling materials. These sensations trigger emotional responses (Metcalf 1997). This is particularly pertinent for a textile craft as the pliability of cloth, the subtlety and variety of textures, colour, patterns and weights of fabrics provide a limitless playground of sensory stimulants [2]. For good reason this behavioural trait is built in to us biologically. The enjoyment of handling stimulates the activity of play noticeable in small babies. Thus predisposed to enjoy handling, we are born to make things with our hands, ‘to be tool users and makers’ (Dissanayake 1995b: 41). We therefore continue to make our world and to make it special.

Paula emphatically stresses the pleasure she derives from making patchwork:

> I love to work with the fabric. I think that the texture that I handle is immediate. It is so sensual, isn't it? You touch – I love that, actually. I love to cut the fabric as well.

Slow time: re-collecting the self

> And the fun part is… the hand stitching. It's very slow and it's very satisfying.

Stitching is slow work, endlessly repeating the same gesture of piercing the threaded needle through the cloth and pulling it out again. Whilst appearing to be a mindless and achingly dull occupation, close observation reveals that on the contrary, there is a productive 'mindfulness' to the act of engaging in these repetitive, accumulative gestures typical of stitchcrafts.

Dissanayake argues in defence of invisible repetitive labour and craftwork:

> 'Let us not forget that nature itself is cyclical, or repetitive, and human work in the world, concerned with the daily round and the cycles of the seasons, has a rhythm and recurrence that for millennia have given satisfaction to many. Such work engenders a contemplative state with access to remote parts of our mind, unknown to those who dash continually after novel experience.' (Dissanayake 1995b: 45).

Stitching is not a craft that allows for instantly gratifying results. However, it is recognized and appreciated by those that practise it as offering moments of calm to reflect. Its rhythmic, repetitive nature encourages a contemplative state of mind generating conditions that draw together mind and body. Piecing together bits and scraps of discarded fabrics into a new whole illustrates metaphorically the piecing together of the dispersed self.

William Morris was a passionate believer in the redeeming qualities of good craftsmanship. One of the earliest supporters of the idea that there is pleasure to be found in making things, he acknowledges in *The Lesser Arts* (1877) – without our contemporary knowledge of scientific progress – a sensitivity to mind-body synchronization and the intrinsic physical and emotional benefits:

> ‘nothing can be a work of art which is not useful; that is to say, which does not minister to the body when well under command of the mind, or which does not amuse, soothe, or elevate the mind in a healthy state.’ (Morris 1877: 174).

Although she discusses knitting, design historian Jo Turney writes of the self-healing virtues of taking up a seemingly benign craft activity and how a contemplative practice such as this supports individuals ‘by emphasizing spiritual awareness and a sense of the creative self as a means of self-help, personal empowerment and self-healing’ (Turney 2007: 249). This could equally be said of patchwork quilting. Crucially, the experience of doing it is central to its effectiveness:

> ‘Experience is initiated and consequently marked by the ability to create and sustain a state of stillness and calm, which is described as “mindfulness”. Like meditation, mindfulness is far more directional and pro-active and encourages the meditative state to focus on progressive activity, combining both body and mind. Mindfulness exists in the moment, it has no past or future, and can be understood as the expression and experience of being.’ (Turney 2007: 251).

Fine Cell Work is a charitable organization that teaches prison inmates embroidery, patchwork and quilting skills. Manned in large part by volunteers, it operates in twenty-two HM Prisons. Collections of needlepoint tapestry cushions and bed quilts are made by hand by the inmates. Their work is sold enabling them to build up a capital of savings to draw on once their term is finished. Embedded within this very practical purpose are the psychological benefits of practising the contemplative craft of stitching. Purposefully productive, it is also a means to repair and restore dignity: ‘I find the marking, cutting, piecing and quilting are in themselves calming and therapeutic,’ says one inmate (Fine Cell Work, 2006).

Time in: total absorption

> If I get really involved in something then I do quite a lot. I disappear upstairs, and you know, to hang with everything else, and get on with it.

This total absorption with the task in hand, which is commonly experienced in rhythmically repetitive tasks like stitching,

typically generates a heightened sense of self-awareness and a losing track of time that is described by American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his research into states of optimal experience as 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Flow is understood to be a form of pleasure that arises from total absorption, a merging of the self with the work, and is explained as an experience worth having for its own sake independently from any other type of reward.

Participants in my study have described to me occasions of total absorption in their sewing work matching that of Csikszentmihalyi's state of flow.

Ruth recounts:

> I have been known to be so engrossed in something up here that on one occasion I missed lunch. I don't quite know how that happened. I was listening to the radio and something came on at 2 o'clock and I thought - 2 o'clock? It can't be 2 o'clock. But it was 2 o'clock and I usually stop at one o'clock. At the one o'clock news I stop and have a sandwich or something and I'd completely missed it. And on another occasion I was working and it was 6 o'clock. I heard the pips and I went downstairs and I hadn't even cleared up from lunch or breakfast. There was dirty things in the kitchen, and I hadn't thought about supper.

Time out: belonging to a group

> One or two people have lost their husbands or they have got ill husbands who restrict their lives and so on…. It also replaces counselling in a way.

The restorative self-healing benefits of patchwork quilting are amplified when a stitcher belongs to a group. The quilters participating in my study all belong to a quilting group that meets regularly once or twice a month in one or other of their homes. Many textile crafts are highly social activities and lend themselves to the building and consolidating of an informal support network. Belonging to a sewing group offers a distraction from personal problems and facilitates access to emotional support in times of difficulty.

Discussing the reasons why she was attached to and appreciated the sewing group she belonged to, Liz explains:

> The other reason I had this feeling for it is that when my son was six he was very ill… and they were such a support… this illness went on for several years to a greater or lesser degree…. And it was just wonderful to have that group there… and forget about the problem for a little while.

Conversation - the exchange of news and advice, friendly distraction and reassurance - provides a continuous soundtrack to the group meetings. It is as essential an ingredient as the stitching work. Meeting to chat is arguably constructive in itself [3], but doing something 'productive' at the same time gives permission for it to take place. The sewing provides a cover that loosely staves off the accustomed derision directed towards gossip [4]. Participants admitted that although sewing was the official reason for meeting, they spent most of the time chatting.

According to linguist Jennifer Coates the function of gossip is to create and maintain an informal and mutually supportive networking facility. The exchange of information is essential but not, she argues, the chief goal, which is to reinforce communality and 'the maintenance of good social relationships' (Coates 1988: 98). It is not necessarily the subject of conversation that is of interest. Members of the group appreciate being a part of the network and therefore able to access the support system. Similarly it is not making something for swift and profitable accomplishment that attracts them. The aims of the meetings are twofold: to do a bit more stitching, and provide a mutually beneficial social encounter. In my observational notes from one visit I remark:

> *The stitching work advances at a slow pace. It cannot be described as intense production. Instead there is a fluid interaction of bodies, gestures, tales, suggestions, advice, and somehow a few more beads are applied, background stitching filled, tacking stitches removed. The work gets done almost in spite of itself. If efficient production were the goal, the groups fail on every count. But when asked, the members are extremely proud of their achievements.*

Just as the stitching articulates pieces and fragments of cloth into a larger unity, the 'idle chatter' binds together the participants, articulating the group members as a community.

Taking time: taking care

> My quilt is nicely made. That's a real compliment to me because I get pleasure from 'nicely made'.

Taking time to ensure that the work is well done matters. Investing care in the execution of the work is important to the quilters. As Veblen says, 'much of the functional content of the instinct of workmanship is a proclivity for taking pains' (Veblen 1964: 33). Arguably taking pains is more than just 'the functional content'. The emotional content also has influence. The satisfaction of doing a job well is a source of pride for the maker (Metcalf 1997).

Peter Dormer, addressing craft as a 'practical philosophy', advocates the importance of learning and practising a skill in order to do things well. A search for excellence in one's work, practised as a disciplined learning of the rules, acquiring knowledge through doing, is, according to him, an 'exercise in self-clarification' (Dormer 1997: 219). In support of this, Ruth explains her search for satisfaction and consequent motivation to launch into a new project:

> I made it with the intention of improving my accuracy. I wanted to make a quilt with a proper ¼" seam so that when I put my nine patches together every one of these joins was absolutely perfect. Well, of course, it didn't work out. It wasn't absolutely perfect. But it was an improvement. I found that very, very satisfying. And I enjoyed making it. And I thought, okay, I got that cracked. I can now do a ¼" seam – I can get things together, so I can do things more complicated now.

Returning to Dissanayake, she explains that 'discipline and carefulness are virtues that have sustained humans for millennia… making special meant making with care, that is, taking pains and doing one's best… indicating the value we attach to a thing' (Dissanayake 1995b: 45). If the taking pains indicates the value we attach to a thing, and this thing, in the case of a patchwork quilt, has no function per se, what is the nature of the value attached to it?

Quilters often make quilts as gifts for family and friends. The taking pains in the work reflects an investment of care that suggests an emotional value whereby the work represents the receiver of the gift and/or the nature of the relationship with that person. Gifting quilts is a way of securing and maintaining emotional ties, reflecting a 'positive factor of care and concern' (Dissanayake 1995a: 53), and the value of connectedness running through family and friendship networks.

Conversely, not being able to take the time necessary for the job to be well done is expressed by quilters as a negative or unpleasant experience, as is apparent in these statements:

> I didn't do that as carefully as I might have done, I must have been running out of time.

and:

> I didn't have too much time. I really had to rush, it was horrible.

Snatching time

In answer to my question 'how much time do you set aside for doing your patchwork and quilting?' one quilter's response was:

> It isn't a case of setting aside – it's a case of grabbing it while you can.

Stalp writes 'Women incorporate quilting into everyday activities, they steal time away to quilt' (Stalp 2007: 99). The quilters participating in my study are in the majority retired or nearing retirement with relatively busy lifestyles juggling part-time work, volunteering duties and caring for other family members. Like Stalp, I have found that they 'make quilting fit into the rest of their lives' (Stalp 2007: 98), snatching short periods of time when they can, sometimes even for just half an hour. Other demands on their time will normally take priority and sewing is slotted in around them. Ruth explains:

> There are certain conditions that need to apply before I can sew, which is there can't be anything else that demands my time and attention…. I have to clear away the needy things before I can think 'and now I can please myself'.

The nature of patchwork, especially when hand-sewn, lends itself to being executed in small separate sections before joining the whole together. Clean and dry work, it can easily be packed up in a bag and bits taken out to do in situations outside the home. Some quilters will travel with their work, sewing whilst in airport waiting lounges, in the aeroplane, on long car journeys or whilst in hospital, making use of time when otherwise incapacitated or restricted. The design of certain quilt projects such as the traditional American block quilts, friendship quilts and charm quilts, English hexagons, and the more contemporary 'quilt as

you go' [5] projects are popular as they enable these ambitiously large quilts to be broken down into portable smaller units.

Fractured time

> It took me about five years to make, on and off.

Elaine Showalter describes patchwork piecing as 'the art form which best reflects the fragmentation of women's time, the dailiness and repetitiveness of women's work.' Lucy Lippard observes, "the mixing and matching of fragments is the product of an interrupted life…. What is popularly seen as 'repetitive', 'obsessive', and 'compulsive' in women's art is in fact a necessity for those whose time comes in small squares (Lippard 1983: 32)". (Showalter 1986: 228).

It is worth expanding here on the relationship between the use of time and the design of the craft process. We see how quilters snatch time to accommodate their making fitting it in and around other demands. The flexible and fractured nature of the craft makes this possible. Making patchwork quilts consists of a series of different tasks that can be broken down into singular activities, resulting in advantageous propositions of time use for the makers:

• the work can be easily interrupted: picked up and put down again without disrupting the continuous quality of the work. It will not dry out, fall apart, burn or rot. It can even be safely forgotten in a cupboard, pulled out and taken up again years later. Liz explains how she started on her sewing projects:

> Probably when I had my first child because I'd been trying to do oil painting and it didn't fit in very well with bringing up small children because you know it is difficult to just put it away and get it out again.

• despite the inherent repetition and the sometimes painfully slow progress of a piece of work, tedium is offset by variety. Different tasks can be undertaken independently from one another, and in parallel to each other, without compromising the whole. This diversity of tasks provides opportunity for the maker to progress steadily through the work avoiding boredom. The variety also offers a series of different satisfactions that respond to different bodily or mental stimuli:

> Every aspect of it is fascinating and that's why I've always got more projects than just one on the go…. Sometimes

> I want to cut these things out, and sometimes I want to piece little pieces, and sometimes I want to do some appliqué, or to sit here with work in my hand and sew, and sometimes I want to quilt. So I've got to have various projects in various stages.

Reflecting on why she chooses to work in this manner, Ruth says:

> It's got to be some sort of stimulus, hasn't it?…. I don't know what the stimulus is for it. But just that it is there and I know how to respond to it. I know that something says – I think you should do a bit of appliqué – so I do…. There are days when I need to put things together, or days when I need to appliqué, or days when I need to cut or days when I have to tidy up this fabric.

She acknowledges the satisfaction she feels at responding to the stimuli, that they seem to be varied and not always requiring the same action to be taken. The multifaceted and fragmented process of sewing patchwork quilts permits the satisfaction of a plurality of physical and mental requirements. Interestingly, she hints that this gratification is physically felt and draws a parallel with a biologically engineered need echoing Dissanayake's claim that our impulse to make is biologically 'hardwired':

> It's like being hungry. I'm hungry, I'm going to eat something. That was nice. I don't feel hungry anymore. It's like that, isn't it?.... That's what it is.

Conclusion

When viewing a patchwork quilt, its arresting, visually complex patterns waylay consideration for the many layers of invisible work that have produced it. This paper has set out to peel back these layers and reveal the nature of the invisible effort and rewards, and demonstrate how the immeasurable quality of time spent takes precedence over speed and efficiency, producing rich and multiple outcomes. Valued highly by the quilters as contributing to their well-being, the purposefulness of the craft is firmly located in the process of making, and goes some way towards offering an answer to Tanya Harrod's question 'why make art or craft in such a full world?' (Harrod 2005).

Less needy of material objects now, we are nevertheless needy human beings. Perhaps the more time and effort we 'waste' on making things, the better we provide for our social, emotional, physical and biological needs, all justifiably wanted and useable remainders, or by-products, of spending time and effort making otherwise unnecessary things.

Functionality has been an unfashionable topic in craft circles of recent years. Suggesting a shift of emphasis within the debate to the function of craft processes rather than the function of the craft object might be more relevant and of greater interest today as an expanded field of craft practice increasingly addresses issues of community cohesion, the therapeutic benefits of mind/body synchronization and the self-actualizing gains afforded by learning and practising manual skills. [6]

The quilters I have been observing and working with embrace a mode of practice that effectively straddles and intertwines the human 'instinct for workmanship' and purposeful action with the less conveniently measurable roles of listening, feeling and taking pains, thus ensuring, for the individual and for the community, the good maintenance of human relational networks.

In the context of a discussion on crafts and sustainability, it is pertinent to note that it is the working methods employed by these practitioners that successfully negotiate time and relational networks. Situated therefore in a position that counters one of the propositions that 'environmental and sustainability discourses might be leading to new formulations, or re-articulations, of craft practices' (Plymouth College of Art, 2009), is this not an example of a craft practice that might contribute to sustainability discourses?

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With my grateful thanks to Prue Bramwell-Davis, Claire Pajaczkowska and Freddie Robins.

Notes

[1] Extracts indented are from transcripts of interviews held with quilter participants. Names have been changed.
[2] A fuller discussion of the significance of touch and the stimulation provoked by handling materials would require a separate

study, and in this instance falls outside the remit of this paper.

[3] Linguist Jennifer Coates (1988) explores in depth the structure and purpose of women's conversation in her study *Gossip revisited: language in all-female groups*.

[4] The word 'gossip' originates from 'godsibb', an Old English word denoting the relationship between a godchild and godparent. A 'gossiping' in Early Modern England was a christening feast; a gathering of mainly female friends and family to congratulate and bless the mother and newborn baby. The use of 'gossip' as it is now commonly understood to mean: 'idle talk; trifling or groundless rumour; tittle-tattle' (OED) – dates from 1811. Since classical times women gathering to gossip has been at best disapproved of, and at worst feared. Held to be a symptom of idleness and time-wasting, an unbecoming tendency to tell tales, or evidence of a malicious streak, women's chatter has constantly been ridiculed and openly discouraged. For a greater cultural analysis of gossip see Marina Warner (1994) *From the Beast to the Blonde: on fairy tales and their tellers*.

[5] 'Quilt as you go' quilting projects intend the decorative pieced top to be quilted to the batting and backing fabric in small manageable blocks, which are then sewn together to make the whole, instead of in the traditional manner of completing the whole top first before doing the quilting.

[6] Examples include: Craftspace, Fine Cell Work, the work of artist Françoise Dupré, amongst others.

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Appendix XII: dissemination

Hidden values in human inconsistencies: ways in which hand skills enable prized encounters between matter and thought

Conference paper given at:

TRIP - Textiles Research In Process: an international symposium exploring the role and relevance of traditional hand skills in contemporary textiles, and the value and status of craft process, held at the School of the Arts, Loughborough University, 16 & 17 November 2011.

Abstract

An increased demand for handcrafted textile products leads us to question reasons why as a society we are expressing such an interest in the handmade. Set against the virtual cultures of our post-industrial society there are grounds to consider the qualities and values these objects allude to. The individuality of the handmade mutely reminds us of the very unique beauty of being human: that we are all different and imperfect. Above all, we are curious and thinking beings endowed with five senses. These crucial attributes form the bedrock of our creative capacities, and the value of handcraft processes lie here.

Taking the position that the artefact produced is the residue of a stimulating process of encounter, investigation and interpretation between eye, hand, mind, materials and method, I am considering the value of hand skills, drawing on observations from a series of hand-stitching workshops undertaken as part of my PhD research.

Key words: hand-stitching, value, embodied knowledge, attention, emotion

Introduction

If there is an apparently growing demand for handcrafted textile products, it leads us to question the possible reasons why we are expressing such an interest in the handmade. It may be the fashionable appeal of a certain aesthetic quality, but set against the virtual cultures of our post-industrial society there are grounds to consider what other qualities and values these objects allude to.

Fashionable aesthetic qualities that speak seductively of the handmade might include the uniquely individual, personalized product made to the customer's own specifications, or exclusive objects that demonstrate a high degree of care and attention to detail in their design and manufacture, or the current trend for all things vintage, particularly the 'make do and mend' revival reflecting a well marketed, nostalgic ideal of a handworked past.

Clever designers and clever machines can, and do, reproduce all this. However, it is the qualities a machine cannot reproduce or mimic that I am interested in: the physical and emotional stimulation experienced by exploring the material world by hand and the implications of this in understanding and responding to it. These are the prized encounters I refer to in the title.

> "Thinking about manual engagement seems to require nothing less than that we consider what a human being is. That is, we are led to consider how the specifically human manner of being is lit up, as it were, by man's interaction with his world through his hands" (Crawford 2010, p.63).

• The handmade reflects the uniqueness of the individual. The infinite differences represented by traces of the hand now no longer indicate imperfection eagerly replaced by machine uniformity, but on the contrary are prized and valued representations of personal expression.

• In contrast to the reproducible perfection achieved by machine-made textiles, the individuality of the handmade mutely reminds us of our inconsistencies and the very unique beauty of being human: that we are all different and imperfect. In my experience of making I feel our curiosity about ourselves, others and our environment is aroused, as is our capacity for experimentation, and our ability to learn.

• The mark of the hand is a physical trace of the human being. In a fast-paced, digitally mediated lifestyle much can pass us by without leaving any real impression, any real testament, to us 'being there' and 'having done it'. The handmade is a document of close physical interaction between the maker and their world. In a world dominated by visual information where image and concept hold supremacy over sensory experience, the value advocated by handcrafted objects is in arousing a sensual, affective response from the viewer (Veiteberg 2005). They have the capacity to "touch on the inside" (Driscoll 2009).

• The handmade is a demonstration of inquisitive, exploring hands knowledgeable about their world; hands that know how to handle and manipulate matter, hands that interact with it and respond to it: "The need to make, to engage with the world in a tactile way, the need to transform materials or to respond to those transformations… an articulation of being in the world through the senses" (Johnson 1997, pp.297-298).

Hidden value

I have found 'hidden' a useful concept through which to study this physical quest for knowledge described above. A certain kind of 'hidden' knowledge is embodied in the handmade object. 'Hidden' implies here that which cannot be put into words, the unmeasurable, the taken for granted. The mark of the hand represents a store of knowledge and information about the physical world, unwritten and non-verbalized.

Where 'value' implies preciousness, something worth having and worth insuring to secure an investment that matures with time, the value of this 'hidden' knowledge will be the focus of this paper, influenced by an appreciation of individual expression.

Resurgent interests

The current renewed interest in things crafted, or handmade, is not confined to textiles, but can be seen across art and design disciplines, and even in areas not usually associated with making such as public health and citizenship [1]. "Making is a revelation of the human impulse to explore and express forms of knowledge and a range of emotions; an impulse towards knowing and

feeling, which shapes human action and hence the world we create" (Margetts 2011, p.39).

Craft historian Paul Greenhalgh (2011) claims that craft, as an "every-day attitude", is "at the heart of much of what we do". He argues in favour of a concept of craft that emphasizes a social and political purpose towards enriching life more broadly in the wake of the chaos and collapse of material culture and a dysfunctional mass-commercialization of visual culture.

The sociologist Richard Sennett in *The Craftsman* addresses the notion of 'craftsmanship' within broad cultural issues as "an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake" (Sennett 2008, p.9). He argues that the rewards of good craftsmanship potentially reach beyond the maker to benefit society as a whole:

> "the craftsman's way of working can give people an anchor in material reality… the past life of craft and craftsmen also suggests ways of using tools, organizing bodily movements, thinking about materials that remain alternative, viable proposals about how to conduct life with skill" (Sennett 2008, p.11).

In his 2009 publication, philosopher and motorbike repair man Matthew Crawford puts forward his *Case for Working with Your Hands*, a moral argument against the substitution, in education and the work place economy, of the patient application of hard-earned hand skills for intangible, speedy results and instant gratification.

In his recent keynote speech at the Heritage Crafts Association forum, Professor Ewan Clayton, calligrapher, explains how in his view "we're re-appreciating our whole sensory involvement in the world" (Clayton 2010). He draws our attention to the potential social problems identified with the speed of action made possible by digital technological developments: "one experiences a certain dislocation in time and space" (Clayton 2010). This has given rise to attention difficulties and in some instances has proved to be an addictive medium that disassociates people from their bodies. Digital technology developers are researching solutions and have turned to hand-skilled crafts for inspiration:

> "Because if we are about anything, what we are about is embodied engagement with material things, the cultivation of focused attention, the ability to be present now in this place, at this time, responding to these conditions, coming through to us in all our senses" (Clayton 2010).

The consensus appears to indicate that the particular ways of knowing and understanding the world that are stimulated by

using our hands merit closer study. As the architect Juhani Pallasmaa states: “our embodied existence is rarely identified as the very basis of our interaction and integration with the world, or of our consciousness and self-understanding” (Pallasmaa 2009, p.12).

Prized encounters

Making something is an immensely complex experience and can be a hugely satisfying thing to do. We are curious and thinking beings endowed with five senses. These are crucial attributes that form the bedrock of our creative capacities.

I take the position that the artefact produced is the residue of a stimulating process of encounter, investigation and interpretation between eye, hand, mind, materials and method. My findings are elucidated by the theories of anthropologist Tim Ingold, who considers the process and practice of making from a phenomenological and ecological perspective “as emerging from a progressive and continual adjustment of practitioners’ perception and body movements in relation to their environment” (Douny and Naji 2009, p.413). With reference to the writings of Paul Klee he proposes that rather than imposing our will on inert matter to produce objects, we “join with and follow the forces and flows of material that bring the form of the work into being” (Ingold 2010, p.10).

An encounter suggests an unforeseen ‘coming-up-against’ [2]. ‘Coming-up-against’ is critical here as it implies being ‘in-contact-with’. There is therefore, a physical, active, dimension to an encounter. All senses are alert to the event including those which detect with difficulty the edge of the experience. The boundary between the self and the thing encountered is permeable, or as Ingold puts it: “it is in the opposite of capture and containment, namely discharge and leakage, that we discover the life of things” (Ingold 2010, p.8).

The impression is made. Elements of the thing encountered have seeped into and enmeshed with the self.

Hand-stitching

Are there particular modes of encounter associated with hand-stitching?

This question is addressed in a series of practical workshops undertaken as part of my PhD research. Over a period of five months I ran three workshops with students to explore the nature of this 'hidden' knowledge: two at the Royal College of Art with participants of varied stitching experience, and one at the Arts University College at Bournemouth with experienced stitchers (fig.1). The workshops involve drawing and hand-stitching exercises as a prompt for discussion with participants, with the expectation that being engaged in making provides a different perspective from that achieved by interview or questionnaire.

Fig 1. Workshop held at the Arts University College at Bournemouth, 23 June 2011.

Being ‘in touch’ with the material world

As Ingold points out, we human beings continually act on and with our world. We are curious and in search of gratification, and I suspect we may be motivated to do this beyond satisfying our material needs [3]. The things we make are a by-product of our actions. The action is possibly more stimulating to us emotionally, biologically and cognitively than the product. Pallasmaa quotes the poet Joseph Brodsky in emphasizing the importance of the process over the end result in a maker’s consciousness: “… ‘[T]he first, the second, and the last reality for him is the work itself, the very process of working. The process takes precedence over its result…’” (Pallasmaa 2009, p.80).

In her book *Homo Aestheticus* ethologist Ellen Dissanayake also considers this “behavioural tendency” to be more meaningful than the result. Her term for creative activity is “making special” (Dissanayake 1995a, p.51). A verb, it conveniently relocates the emphasis from the artefact to the act of making: “Making special emphasizes the idea that the arts …. have been physically, sensuously, and emotionally satisfying and pleasurable to humans” (Dissanayake 1995a, p.59). She suggests that this pleasure is “hardwired into human nature” (Dissanayake 1995b, p.41). For example, the enjoyment of handling stimulates the activity of play noticeable in small babies. Thus predisposed to enjoy handling, we are born to make things with our hands, “to be tool users and makers” (Dissanayake 1995b, p.41).

The jeweller and writer Bruce Metcalf argues that the foundations of craft practice are rooted in a biological context. He recounts that in his experience as a teacher, students attracted to a craft discipline discover that “the exercise of their newly discovered sensibility is both pleasurable and powerful… The motivation is felt: self-perceived as an emotion” (Metcalf 1997, p.77).

Discovering our potential to ‘make’ our relationship to the material world is associated to meaningful and pleasurable sensations and emotions for good reason: we fuel our curiosity and therefore continue to make our world.

Doing as a way of knowing

The furniture designer David Pye contested the proposition that there is pleasure to be found in repetitive and monotonous tasks, but he nevertheless admits that "there can be a certain pleasure in finding that one's judgement is being exercised only half consciously and in letting the process continue… The hands appear to do it on their own, without referring to the head" (Pye 1995 [1968], p.124).

Tacit knowledge is the term used to describe the phenomenon of the body learning how to do something, to consequently store this knowledge to refer back to and use intuitively to execute tasks like cooking, driving and making things. Craft critic Peter Dormer called it "personal" and "practical know-how" (Dormer 1997, p.147). It is acquired from watching others and by practising, through physically engaging the body as opposed to reading instructions in a book. The knowledge is evidenced in the doing, and can become so habitual as to go unacknowledged. Yet these actions of the body are intentional and thereby imply an understanding of the possible consequences: "it is the knowledge which enables him to understand and overcome the constantly arising difficulties that grow out of variations…" (Frayling 2011, p.78).

From participants' comments I discovered that the knowledge gained from doing is a notably different experience from looking. The first workshop requested participants to make value judgements of simple stitching tasks I had executed myself prior to the workshops, firstly by looking and secondly as a result of having done the tasks themselves. Their evaluation changed; the doing altered their perception:

> *- I found that my evaluation in terms of its aesthetic qualities changed a bit after doing it according to which I enjoyed more (fig.2).*

Doing the tasks led to a deeper appreciation of what is perceived visually:

> *- There is a change in the balance of how I appreciated the patterns and textures after I made it myself.*

> *- Now I've done it, it gives me a different insight.*

A method is not necessarily apparent from just looking. It makes sense only through doing it.

Fig 2. A participant initially ranked the sample on the left, executed by me prior to the workshop, as the least aesthetically pleasing. After executing the task herself, sample on the right, she then ranked it the most aesthetically pleasing.

Embodied intelligence

The coordination of eye, hand and mind is therefore not limited to equipping an individual to mechanically execute practical tasks. A later exercise that entailed reproducing a piece of stitching made by one participant by another illuminated how it is also a means of understanding a process. The hands that “appear to do it on their own, without referring to the head” (Pye 1995 [1968], p.124) are themselves investigating and responding.

Participants drew on their store of practical knowledge to work out the methods used, and then again to reproduce the techniques recognized. Participants sought to interpret the original work with a personal response (fig.3). [4]

Initially, all found it difficult to describe in words how they had set about the task. The activity was performed by the thinking hands without recourse to language much as Pallasmaa explains: “Artistic images expose us to images and encounters of things before they have been trapped by language. We touch things and grasp their essence before we are able to speak about them” (Pallasmaa 2009, p.36).

Further discussion revealed that the eye, mind and hand were working simultaneously in that they were looking closely to dissect what had been done, they drew on their own views to interpret the intentions, and they drew on their store of practical knowledge to execute the techniques.

Paying attention

Hand-stitching is precise work. Its slow rhythm sets up a particular frame of mind. The focused coordination of hand and eye absorbs the individual in the task. Activities described by the participants as demanding similar types of attention include driving, drawing and model aeroplane making. The mind and body are fully engaged in the activity, albeit whilst sitting still. The attention requires a combination of the senses, adjusting constantly on the hoof to stimuli, without knowing what will happen next. The repetitive gestures of the hand are made in conjunction with the eye looking and the mind responding. Tiny adjustments are made with each repeated gesture. Importantly, it is almost the same each time, so similar that the body repeats it without having to learn a new movement, but each time the slight adjustment retains the mind’s attention.

This total absorption with the task in hand generates a heightened sense of self-awareness and a losing track of time described by the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his research into states of optimal experience as ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). ‘Flow’ is understood to be a form of pleasure that arises from total absorption, a merging of the self with the work, and is explained as an experience worth having for its own sake independently from any other type of reward. As one participant explains:

Fig 3. This workshop, the third in this series, was held at the Arts University College at Bournemouth with a small group of Textiles students, all experienced stitchers. Samples on the left are the originals and samples on the right are the reproductions.

- You really get into it and you can't stop.

Pallasmaa describes this "mental and material flow between the maker and the work" as "so tantalizing that the work seems to be producing itself" (Pallasmaa 2009, p.82).

Different tasks can be undertaken independently from one another without compromising the whole. Depending on the task, the stage of execution and the skill of the stitcher, the type of attention varies.

An accomplished stitcher, having made her design decisions, describes the execution as

- a purely enjoyable process you know, I could do anything I could watch telly… not something new, one of my favourite films, one I've watched a hundred times before… I could talk on the internet with my friends.

On the other hand, an unskilled stitcher explained her need to pay more attention:

- If you come from a non practical stitching point of view, as I do,… what was difficult was to actually put the needle in the right place… I needed to concentrate more. (fig.4)

And a skilled stitcher un-learning a technique was acutely aware of the level of attention necessary to prevent the automatic reactions of the hand:

- I was automatically pulling it to make sure that the tension was right… I had to consciously pull the thread out again… I don't know how much my hand is used to it, but it kind of did it on its own. (fig.4)

Practical knowledge is applied and challenged, but the emotions are also called upon to drive the activity and make decisions.

Emotional responses

The emotions involved in the decision-making fall into two categories: the first, as outlined above, are to do with the externally imposed challenges of problem solving. For example, the frustration felt at not finding the appropriate solution, or the

Fig 4. Samples from the first workshop, held at the Royal College of Art, evidencing attention paid to different tasks, by variously skilled hand-stitchers.
Left: skilled in the basics, having to pay attention to the placement of the needle.
Right: moderately skilled, having to pay attention to not pull the tension of the thread taut.

nervousness at learning a new method. The second is more intimately entwined with the maker's sense of self, their identity and their connections with people and places.

On the one hand, a simple task of stitching a straight line in parallel to the edge of the cloth (fig.5) demonstrated how the more prescriptive the task is, for an accomplished stitcher, the less the attention given to the task and the less emotional involvement attached:

> *- You didn't really have to think for that one… not really a lot of emotion… [I] paid attention to a certain extent, just trying to make it straight enough for it to be a line… You could think about other things whilst doing it.*

However, the more open to interpretation the task is, the greater the attention paid. Asked to stitch a freely interpreted response to a given piece of found fabric during the third workshop held at the Arts University College at Bournemouth, participants described their experience. For example:

> - *… with the ones where you're thinking more about the design, you're thinking loads of different thoughts at once but it's generally all about that design… When you're doing the straight line, part of your mind is thinking about that and part of you is thinking: what am I going to do tonight?*

Fig 5. Stitching a straight line parallel to the edge of the cloth: a 'warm-up exercise' executed by all participants in two of the workshops, at the Royal College of Art and at the Arts University College at Bournemouth.

Responding to found materials, already coloured and patterned, also provoked the most overtly emotional responses. In order to find a way of making a satisfactory mark, particular types of encounter were sought.

Following the contours of shapes, one participant, who had chosen a fabric she was sympathetic with, explains:

> *- Using the shapes that were on the fabric already and just adding to it really… I think I blended in a bit. (fig.6)*

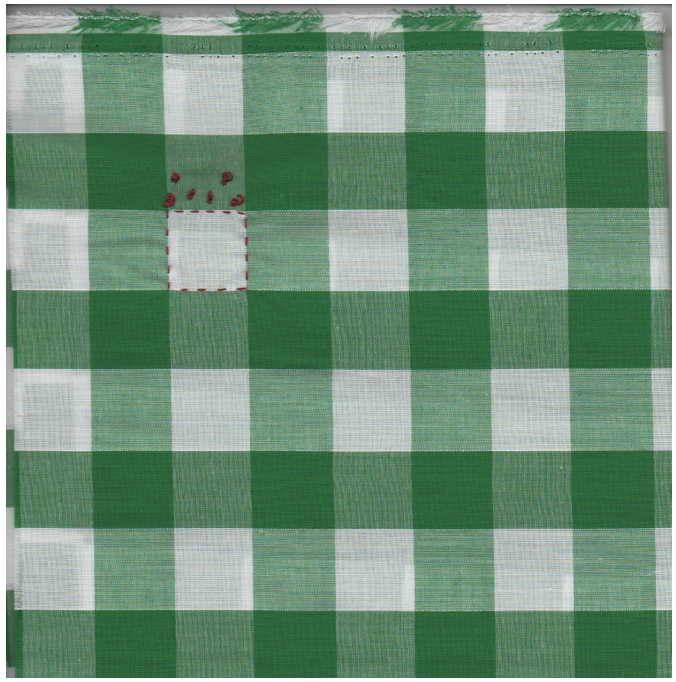

Fig 6. Blending in.

Another described responding with extreme emotions like hate, love and anger in an attempt to overpower the material:

> *- I didn't do it to make it blend in. For me that was like vandalism, it was like graffiti … I didn't want it to blend in. I'd rather passionately hate or absolutely love something. Like if I absolutely hate something I'll try and put my stamp on it. If I don't have any emotional response towards it then there's no point really. (fig.7)*

Fig 7. Hating flowers: putting a personal stamp on a found fabric.

This gives an insight into how Ingold's "processes of formation" (Ingold 2010, p.2), following "the forces and flows of material that bring the form of the work into being" (Ingold 2010, p.10) may be driven by emotional responses, experienced diversely as possession, integration, or re-appropriation.

Self-centred

The practising of a technique embeds the knowledge into the body. This marks the boundaries of its limitations as well as its strengths. Being unique individuals, each body that makes is different. The ability to make becomes deeply entwined with an individual's sense of self. Embodied knowledge may be tacitly shared but is necessarily personal in its purpose. The act of making is a non-verbal expression of 'I am here and this is what I think and feel'.

Responding to matter, following the forces, in these instances was accompanied by, even driven by, a personally shaped emotional experience. When probed to think beyond the stylistic intentions of their stitched work, participants began to hint at more visceral motivations that have the body, the embodied self, very much at the centre of this world:

> *- … it's almost like a bridge between us and the world, because textiles … are constantly in contact with our body. For me that's why stitch is so important. Because it's almost like, a part of us. … it's almost like at one with us. When I think of stitching, I think of mending. So I think of scars, making something better, like embellishing, ….. going through the body, like through the skin, from outside going in, and then coming out again.*

Another imagines it to be:

> *- almost like tattoos in a way, all over us, almost like clothing … just all over, messages and images.*

And:

> *- I see it as threads that go through the body but then join on to other people. So there's a link.*

In conclusion

In considering some of the qualities and values alluded to in the handmade, I have tried to explore ways in which hand skills enrich our understanding of the material world and our continually changing relationship to it, as well as how they contribute to an empowered sense of self. If screen-based work can provoke a fractured, dislocated sense of self, by contrast handwork can encourage a focused awareness of the body as a whole being literally in touch with its environment. Hand skills highlight the significance of touch, and the powerful stimulation provoked by handling materials reminds us that the body is a sensate being affording access to particular types of embodied knowledge. In our increasingly virtual cultures the body as a site of learning, and the emotions as drivers, both run the risk of neglect.

However, screen and hand are not mutually exclusive. Discussion with colleagues suggests that when working with digital production technologies mediated via a screen, the user is nevertheless drawing on the body's tacit knowledge to make

decisions. This supports Pallasmaa's view that:

> "the computer probably cannot do much harm after the student has learned to use his/her imagination, and has internalized the crucial process of embodying a design task. Without this mental internalization, however, the computerized design process tends to turn into a purely retinal journey in which the student remains an outsider and observer." (Pallasmaa 2009, p.99).

The acquisition of a hand skill is an enabling mechanism. The doing of it is in itself a valuable behavioural tendency that generates meaningful encounters whereby the coming-into-being of stuff collides with the curious explorations of hands to create, not necessarily a product, but an experience that influences an individual's sense of self as an active and knowledgeable follower of "the forces and flows of material" (Ingold 2010, p.10).

NOTES

[1] The powerful appeal of the handmade can also be seen in the myriad craftivist activities that seek to demonstrate an active, and politically engaged, revolt against mass-consumption and mass-manufacture. This merits further discussion but lies outside remit of this paper.

[2] 'encounter' derives from the Latin *contra*, which means 'against'.

[3]. American psychologist Abraham Maslow's work on the categories and hierarchy of human needs provides further insight into individuals' motivation and consequent growth potential when basic needs are met.

[4] All participants in this particular workshop were Textiles students skilled in embroidery techniques and used to elaborating a personal interpretation.

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