



THE TEXTILE SOCIETY

For the study of the history, art and design of textiles

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New Research Strategies II

Sat 16th March 2013
Wellcome Collection
Euston Road, London

Jacqui Carey: Reading objects: an interpretation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English needlework

Bridget Long: Uncovering British patchwork in the long eighteenth century

Carolyn Ferguson: Curtains and covers: The framing of Jane Eyre

Cathy Terry: 'Camlets, callimancos and crapes': An outline of the Norwich textiles project

Dr Michael Nix: Hanks and herrings: Making links

Karen Nickell: Flagging up trouble: Political textiles in Northern Ireland

Dr Luz Garcia Neira: Material culture of textiles in Brazil: An introduction

Dr Helena Britt: Inspirational archives: Examining utilisation by textile and fashion practitioners

Lynn Settrington: Social networking old and new: how the creation of early US signature quilts has impacted on the evolution of two contemporary UK collaborative cloths

Drs Angharad Thomas & Barbara Smith: The collections of the Knitting and Crochet Guild: a treasure trove for researchers

Christina Cie: More than pretty: How can textiles and related disciplines use the phenomena of pattern as record to its richest potential?

Sue Kerry: Where Are They Now? A research project that tracks the whereabouts of textile archives and where they are held throughout the UK

Report by Helen Cresswell

The Textile Society's recent symposium proved both inspiring and informative.

An audience of makers, writers and thinkers all attended to celebrate the latest research in the field; introducing new material that covered a range of historical periods and geographies, our group of speakers proved that textile scholarship is flourishing in good fettle. Sharing their personal textile projects our panellists not only related particular aspects of textile history and culture, but suggested sources and methodologies to be employed by supporters of the discipline.

The concept of 'reading' textiles informed the morning session. Jacqui Carey discussed the dominance of text over object within textile studies and the over-reliance upon secondary literature that has remained unchallenged for decades, particularly dictionaries of stitch. Arguing for a more nuanced approach, Jacqui convinced her audience to challenge these norms and exercise caution when using established definitions and diagrams of stitches. However, this is not to disregard the written word entirely. In her research upon British patchwork in the long eighteenth-century Bridget Long has been contextualising these objects amidst print culture and other primary sources, including testimonials from the Old Bailey records. Using texts her research so far has revealed fascinating uses of the word 'patchwork' – often used as a metaphor for feminine efficiency in the home, or to imply

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incoherence within the masculine sphere of politics. Also considering textiles and metaphors, Carolyn Ferguson enchanted us as she described the ways in which Charlotte Bronte employed textiles as framing devices within *Jane Eyre*. Various curtains and covers within the novel not only provide symbolism through their colouring and construction, but are agents that drive the plot, often with a subversive stitch...

Subversion, protest, handmade tales – this was the focus of Karen Nickell's paper sharing her PhD research into socio-political textile art practices in Ireland since 1968. Her talk was punctuated by examples made by amateurs and professionals alike responding to shared conflict and grief; these are moving works of public expression that harness the therapeutic power of craft. Travelling from Belfast to Brazil, Luz Garcia Neira provided an overdue reassessment of Brazil's presence within the international world of textile production and trade. Examining the reasons for its absence from western histories of textiles and collections, Luz surveyed the production, circulation and consumption of Brazilian textiles. A new area of research, hopefully the significance of this material will come to be appreciated and understood in the near future.

Two of our speakers presented the theme of communication. Inspired by historic examples of signature quilts, Lynn Setterington shared her research journey that resulted in collaborative projects and a personal artistic response of her own making. Exploring issues of identity that arose from the projects, her initiatives informed her own interpretation of the original material. In another personal project, Christina Cie has been investigating pattern as record. Her emotive research-practice has looked into the employment of textiles as a clinical tool for pregnant women – a canvas-stitch colour-coded diary of daily symptoms acts as a record and memory trigger to pursue healthcare. Used in a similar way, beaded bracelets are not only decorative but an emotive communicator that symbolise the patient's health journey.

An abundance of textile archives were introduced for potential exploration. Sue Kerry's recent project on mapping textile business archives of Britain will become navigable via the National Archives website. Her intrepid efforts to identify and locate hundreds of company materials will facilitate future researchers of these textile manufacturers. Angharad Thomas and Barbara Smith provided a comprehensive survey of the collection belonging to the Knitting and Crochet Guild that exhibited the latent possibilities of this great resource. Its range of publications, patterns and objects should delight all textile enthusiasts, particularly those with an interest in women and domestic craft. For all those interested in textile trade and shipping networks between Britain and Europe in the eighteenth-century, Michael Nix demonstrated the potential to be found in the pattern-books and business records accessible through the Norwich Textiles Project; his illuminating talk upon Norwich worsted production showed how archival evidence could reveal the fortune of individual weavers. Cathy Terry introduced the work that the project has been conducting and how they have been utilising the textile collections of the Norwich area, convincing us that a rich resource is to be experienced here – including a working handloom in action. Helena Britt's presentation reflected upon a project conducted at the Glasgow School of Art within its archives; through direct engagement and self-reflective practice teachers of the school had recorded their research experience of the archive and how it impacted upon resulting design work. Documenting this participation is now an established methodology practised by their students. She also introduced a current research project into the Stoddard Templeton Design Studio, 1843-2005, which will be promoted in due course by various means.

The atmosphere was buzzing during the break-times as the audience established new contacts, developed ideas and shared knowledge via this textile research network, which is exactly what this forum was all about. We eagerly await the next research strategy event, to see what happens next.