

p a i r i n g s I I

conversations & collaborations





previous: sharon blakey & ismini samanidou left: jane mckeating photos: ben blackall

Pairings II conversations and collaborations brings together partnerships of artists and designers from a variety of material backgrounds to discuss and share the experience of making in an experimental and unscripted dialogue. This newly commissioned exhibition by Stroud International Textiles Festival develops these working partnerships with at least one maker working with textiles.

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foreword

Collaboration in the field of craft comes in many guises. It may be offered with open arms; and sometimes through gritted teeth. It may result in work of the perfect moment; or underpin a whole creative life. Yet I can think of one example where collaboration between two vocal makers led, at one and the same time, to fine work and long acrimony.

There is a lively track record in collaboration. In the mid 1960s, John Makepeace and Ann Sutton forcefully stated their case for creative, equitable innovation by making work together. In one example, a companion sofa and chair made a clear demarcation of these individual contributions (Makepeace's pine frame; Sutton's hand woven slung rug). In a later piece, a chair with a hidden steel armature was upholstered in a brazenly bright knitted wool stocking, padded with terylene and foam. There was nothing restrained about this collaborative work and it played to both maker's adventurous ambitions for striking form and colour. This was work expressive of a moment in time.

There have been other occasions when collaboration is, so to speak, for life. Where creative tensions have to be held in the clamped outcome of harmony. Where the tussle of the idea is resolved in advance, and where two voices seem as one.

John Hinchcliffe and Wendy Barber reached this long-standing position from seemingly disparate starting points (rag rugs and tapestry weaving). This would not have been, from the outside, the most propitious place to start a ceramic studio trading under the Hinchcliffe Barber name. Yet the impact of this partnership on studio ceramic production (as well as printed textiles) leading to industrial collaborations was highly influential especially in the 1980s. And, whether the work was resolved – through

negotiation, critique, balance, challenge – neither artist lost or let go of their individual voices.

It feels today as if craft collaboration has reached a peak of achievement. This may owe to craft's harmonious grounding: in the shared tasks of communal quilting or guerrilla knitting, for example. The mood to collaborate is also, presently, a feature of crafts 'senior common rooms', and it is no accident, it seems to me, that collaboration is vigorous in collegiate and inquisitive studios in specialist Higher Education Institutions, none more so than at the cutting edge of the Crafts Research Centre at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University. Here is a natural place for potters to weave and weavers to pot: engaging, research-led, experimental and risky. It is a place where craft collaboration grows from trust and dialogue; counterpoint and challenge.

This kind of collaboration cannot be a dry sport or an academic exercise. The best collaborative practice is borne out of enterprise and equality. It advances craft practice through the mercurial linkages of sometimes disparate materials and processes. It makes craft behave through what Jivan Astfalck has called 'the integrity of enquiry' where there is high confidence in the possibility of surprise and the thoughtfulness that comes from giving up a fixed position on the making of the object.

Professor Simon Olding
 Director Crafts Study Centre
 University for the Creative Arts, Farnham

conversations & collaboration: re...think, re...value, re...position

Pairings II takes the conversations and collaborations between skilled makers as its starting point. If the creative act is seen as going on a journey from this starting point, then how much more rewarding and revealing might it be to travel with a companion? By bringing together the *Pairings* project at Manchester School of Art, Manchester Metropolitan University and the *Stitch and Think* Research Group from the University of the West of England Bristol, Alice Kettle has instigated a very special journey. It has afforded those involved the opportunity to *re...explore*¹ their relationship with creativity and their use of materials, to build a greater understanding of this, what it can do and where it leads to. The travelling has been as important as arrival, or to put it another way: 'It's not the beginnings or endings that count, but middles. Things and thoughts advance and grow out from the middle, and that's where you have to get to work, that's where everything unfolds'.²

The nature of collaborative practice opens up a lot of middle ground to explore; to *re...think*, *re...value* and *re...position*. The spaces between open up an invitation to respond creatively as well as to think critically about the nature of work that values skill and tacit knowledge. If as Richard Sennett argues the 'hand is the window to the mind'³ then this exploration is as important as the finished artworks in building knowledge about the importance of skill in today's culture, and sits well in a current landscape that is reinvesting in an interest in exploring the value of making⁴, or as writer on the crafts Glenn Adamson states, 'to identify and do justice to the reality of Crafts position within modern culture'.⁵ This exhibition does not simply deal with an unpacking of craft practices but embraces the breadth of visual arts in revealing the cultural relevance of skilled art practice.

By referencing email conversations conducted with the

makers and artists involved in the *Pairings II* process this essay aims to identify some of the issues and realisations resulting from the activities of a particular group of makers that might add to this debate.

re...ciprocate / re...examine / re...invent

Collaborative practice enables the artist to see into places beyond their normal vision. Most often artists and makers work alone, and although the creative journey takes them to new places, the horizon of possibilities for the work is extended through collaboration. Alice Kettle states that the collaborative process has resulted in 'a shift from the boundaries of my practice. (To) A more outward looking position, less internalised and introspective'. She also says 'my work has been set free, it feels as though it is freewheeling in a way that it was closed before...the permission to make discoveries through the conversation with another has opened a new universe'.⁶

This 'permission' might be viewed as a form of reciprocity which is a vital element in making collaboration workable, allowing a space to *re...examine*, *re...value* and *re...think* what we rely on and what we have to give to the creation of a visual language that is not entirely our own. It is perhaps a risky business allowing another person into the space we usually inhabit by ourselves. It takes bravery to make yourself vulnerable enough to allow this to happen and to share in this 'workmanship of risk'⁷ in order to enter into unknown territory. Nigel Hurlstone comments upon this when talking about the creative journey. He says that 'this journey demands a high level of trust in the person with whom you are collaborating. Conversations that skirt the subject of work are just as important as those that ask targeted questions – they give the time and space needed to forge a relationship based as much on empathy as it is on critique'.⁸

This balance between empathy and critique is crucial in allowing work to develop. Shelly Goldsmith states that 'viewing Annie [Shaw's] work and discussing her intentions and process has helped me critically evaluate my own process and work made'.⁹ Goldsmith is describing the ability to think critically that is released through physical engagement with another person's work. The artists and makers in this exhibition are all 'hands on thinkers'¹⁰ who have used the opportunity of collaborative practice to provoke and explore something new within their own practice. In the creation of what could be viewed as 'aesthetic contracts'¹¹ between makers and artists multiple combinations of new ideas and approaches are given voice. For example, Janet Haigh is interested in how collaboration offers the opportunity to respond to the 'wish to work together, taking advantage of what each can offer the other regarding material, space and technique'.¹² Interestingly, collaboration also offers the opportunity to confirm something about our own practice. Goldsmith expresses this as 'opportunity to understand different and new perspectives, test my own responses and share and talk about my practice in a way I do not usually have opportunity for'.¹³ Jane McKeating says of her collaboration with Jilly Morris, 'It has freed us both up to take risks and also to ask ourselves what are the factors that are so important to our work that we can't leave them out'.¹⁴

As part of the collaborative process, it is this testing that is usually conducted as an internal conversation that has been revealing. As part of our individual creative process there is the constant internal balancing between instinct and rational thought. This conversation between the 'visceral body and the cerebral mind'¹⁵ is part of practice that is usually explored internally in a non-verbal way. It is an exploration born of sensory perception and practical engagement, or as anthropologist Tim Ingold calls it, 'the

skilled practitioner participating in a world of materials'.¹⁶

Collaboration affords an exploration of verbal language relating to the translation of unspoken, embodied and haptic knowledges that are familiar to the skilled maker. Is it possible to make this conversation verbal and how have the artists and makers involved in *Pairings II* talked about their work? It has opened the opportunity to talk through and give value to a conversation that we usually do not think about or record as important. Hurlstone explains this by saying 'it can be difficult to articulate the moment at which an idea is born and the processes and materials that will engage that idea come together to form a coherent whole. Conversations with Dawn [Mason] have forced me to articulate this process more coherently. What was previously a singular mental monologue born out of twilight or early morning meanderings, has by necessity, had to be shared and communicated. This undoubtedly aids the development of the work'.¹⁷

The types and methods of conversation between makers have been broad and varied including telephone conversations, face to face discussion, text messages, screen capture, emails and 'visual discussions'. The use of props such as photographs, post-it-notes, drawings, lists, blogspots, websites and 'wordclouds' have aided the conversations. The performative aspect of talking through the decision making process reflects 'the way that words actively articulate possible worlds rather than simply refer to a world that already exists'.¹⁸ This idea has also been activated by the use of the written word within the collaborative processes used in *Pairings II*. Jane Webb, when commenting about the effect of writing with someone's practice rather than about it says 'when people write about something, it is as though it has no impact, it just exists in a space that is not the real world, but that is not true'.¹⁹ This seems to suggest the

transformative effect and the realisation of potential released through writing as part of the collaborative act.

McKeating also comments on the value of writing as part of the collaborative process. She says of the blog used by herself and Morris that ‘it has been useful to write. It kind of helps us process the thoughts and acts as a kind of neutral space that receives bits of the conversation’.²⁰ It is as though writing creates a gap for the conversation to be heard.

re...value / re...experience / re...position

There is a third voice that enters into the conversation – that of the materials and processes used. All makers have an interest in ‘the what’ and ‘the how’ of work; about materials and their inherent values and meanings, or as artist Grayson Perry describes it ‘a relaxed, humble, ever-curious love of stuff’.²¹ Haigh states that in the work for *Pairings II* the ‘materials and how we use them will be integral to what we produce’.²² This suggests that the materials used have a vital role to play in shaping the work that is made. The importance of the voice of materials in the creative act is further defined by McKeating in saying that ‘the materials are the conversation’.²³ The selection of appropriate materials and processes to help us say what we need to say is key to making successful work, as is the balance between concept and materiality. This is commented on by Hurlstone in saying, ‘conversations between us originated from what materials we enjoyed...This type of conversation is vital for makers to have; it establishes reference points that cut across the conceptual (that by its very nature can be more opaque), and establishes a territory that is based in the reality of material pleasure’.²⁴ This identifies the role that materials play and their importance in creating a particular sort of space for thought. The recognition of anthropologist Tim Ingolds’

plea for the need to take materials seriously and to recognise that materials can impose and shape thoughts²⁵ is common to most makers. I have previously commented upon this, stating that:

‘I am aware that the stitches start to lead me, to take on a life of their own. There is a balance between my will and that of the needle, thread and cloth. I realise that there is an unconscious flow of action and ideas, a call and answer, and that something other than the work is generated. There is a performance on a register between internal and external, on entering into and passing through the spaces between them, between the spoken and the intuited’.²⁶

The intuitive understanding and knowledge that accompanies decision-making and critique might be viewed as recognising a truth. Artist Barbara Bolt comments upon this when she says, ‘Art creates an open region in which truth or instances of truth emerge’.²⁷ What new truths have emerged for the makers and artists involved in *Pairings II*? Kettle expresses a deeper level of understanding about her own practice in saying ‘I have confronted the essential nature of what defines my practice. This turns out to be line, a drawn line or a three dimensional thread. I see the passage of this line as being fundamental to my work. Understanding and unpacking this has been key to unlocking a variety of ways of working and keeping the integrity of my own practice especially when applied to other materials’.²⁸ A truth for Webb has been that ‘working with other people always changes your own work’.

If the work and its maker do exchange ideas and change one another then collaboration allows the maker to harness the poetics of materials and process in a new way. The working through and sharing of skills with

different materials allows us to revisit our own work in a totally new place. Another way of explaining this is that ‘we must not try to make materials speak our language, we must go with them to the point where others understand their language’.²⁹ An ability to listen to materials and processes and the reciprocal conversation with them is evident in the work produced for this exhibition. McKeating explains this as ‘batting ideas back and forward, chucking in opinions and challenging assumptions. And listening, that became important, visual listening, which of course doesn’t make sense but it is happening’.³⁰

This exhibition has developed new and extended existing visual vocabularies. It has allowed us see things through the lens of another discipline or skill and to collapse boundaries through an act of translation. The multidisciplinary demonstrated here has created a ‘domain of exchanges’³¹ where values can be shared. This has offered a materials and practice led definition of research and adds to a re... thinking of the ‘knowledge knowing bases of humanity’.³²

re..think / re...invent / re...charge

This exhibition provides a reaffirmation of the importance of the sensuous in opening new areas of potential for development of thinking and knowledge, and repositions the importance of the handmade. The artworks created links the maker and the viewer to ‘thoughts, memories, sensations, histories and relationships and rather than being an end in itself...it is a catalyst for any number of unpredictable effects’.³³ The making, connecting, negotiating and risking that has been undertaken is of great value. It could be seen to enlarge a conception of what is possible. It shows us ways from what we are towards pluralistically what we could be.³⁴ Perhaps the real role of this exhibition is to draw the viewer into artworks in which new ‘experiences and new life

possibilities might prove to be possible’.³⁵

In setting up a new network for creativity making the work for this exhibition has offered an opportunity to explore practice as dialogue. The skills and creativity of the makers and artists involved contributes to a discussion about the importance of retaining particular skills bases at a time when increasingly government policy sees this as unimportant.³⁶ It reflects the comment made by cultural historian Nigel Whitely when he stated: ‘Creativity is important, and not only for the sake of art, but because art is supposedly the epicentre of creativity, providing a model of how life should be lived in a post-industrial age’.³⁷ Making and thinking need to be part of the future.

Dawn Mason

Award Leader of BA(Hons) Drawing and Applied Arts at the Department of Creative Industries, University of the West of England, Bristol.

Current PhD ‘The Provocation of Stitch: Unpicking the Cultural Relevance of Skills Based Art Practice’ UWE

¹ Pope, R. *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice*. Routledge, 2005 p279. Pope provides a useful overview of various philosophical models that offer various conceptualizations of ‘re...’

² Deleuze, G. in Pope, R. *Creativity: Theory, History, Practice*. Routledge, 2005. pXV.

³ Sennett, R. *The Craftsman*. Penguin Books 2008 p149. See this book for discussion about the nature and value of making and craftsmanship.

⁴ Recent exhibitions exploring the value of making have included *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* at the British Museum (6.10.11 – 19.2.12) and the V&A and Crafts Council exhibition *Power of Making* at the Victoria and Albert Museum (6.9.11 – 2.1.12)

⁵ Adamson, Glenn. *Thinking Through Craft*. Berg, 2007 p169. Adamson provides an overview of issues and debates relating to

craft and the visual arts.

- 6 Email from Alice Kettle to Dawn Mason 26.2.2012 (15.50)
- 7 Pye, D. *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*. Cambridge University Press 1968 p20. The phrase 'the workmanship of risk' refers to the description given by Pye to definitions of creativity.
- 8 Email from Nigel Hurlstone to Dawn Mason 26.2.2012 (12.28)
- 9 Email from Shelly Goldsmith to Dawn Mason 26.2.2012 (12.56)
- 10 The phrase 'hands on thinkers' is used by Daniel Charny in the essay 'Thinking of Making' included in the *Power of Making* exhibition publication p.7.
- 11 Bourriaud, N. in *Participation. Documents of Contemporary Art*. Eds Claire Bishop. Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press 2006. P160-171. I am referencing the phrase 'aesthetic contracts' as used in 'Relational Aesthetics' 1998 as the ideas behind the *Pairings II* exhibition are based on an exploration of the sphere of human creative relationships as knowledge creating.
- 12 Email from Janet Haigh to Dawn Mason 25.2.2012 (19.07)
- 13 Email from Shelly Goldsmith to Dawn Mason 26.2.2012 (12.56)
- 14 Email from Jane McKeating to Dawn Mason 25.2.2012 (21.03)
- 15 Ullrich, P. 'Workmanship: The Hand and Body as Perceptual Tools', *Objects and Meaning: New Perspectives in Art and Craft*, ed. M. Anna Fariello and Paula Owen, Scarecrow (2004) Quoted by Owen, P. in 'Fabrication and Encounter', *Extra Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art*, eds Maria Elana Buszek. Duke University Press 2011, p 88. Owen provides an examination of the balance between concept and material in the making of artworks.
- 16 Ingold, T. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Routledge, 2011 p 30)
- 17 Email from Nigel Hurlstone to Dawn Mason 26.2.2012 (12.28)
- 18 Pope, R. 2005 p85.
- 19 Email from Jane Webb to Dawn Mason 26.2.2012 (19.24)
- 20 Email from Jane McKeating to Dawn Mason 25.2.2012 (21.03)
- 21 Perry, G. *The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman*. The British Museum Press 2011 p169
- 22 Email from Janet Haigh to Dawn Mason 25.2.2012 (19.07)
- 23 Email from Jane McKeating to Dawn Mason 25.2.2012 (21.03)
- 24 Email from Nigel Hurlstone to Dawn Mason 26.2.2012 (12.28)
- 25 Ingold, T. 2011 p 213.
- 26 This quotation is extracted from the filmed interviews that were conducted as part of the inaugural *Stitch and Think* workshops in September 2009.
- 27 Bolt, B. *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*. I.B.Tauris. 2004 p 89

- 28 Email from Alice Kettle to Dawn Mason 26.2.2012 (15.50)
- 29 Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Thinking Hand: Existential and Embodied Wisdom in Architecture*. John Wiley and Sons Ltd. 2009 p55.
- 30 Email from Jane McKeating to Dawn Mason 25.2.2012 (21.03)
- 31 Bourriaud, N. in *Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art*. Eds Claire Bishop. Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press 2006 p160-171. I am referencing the phrase 'domain of exchanges' as used in 'Relational Aesthetics' 1998 as the ideas behind the *Pairings II* exhibition are based on an exploration of the symbolic value of the 'world' the exhibition offers us or the image of human relations that it reflects.
- 32 Pope, R. 2005 p59
- 33 Owen, Paula. 'Fabrication and Encounter: when Content is a Verb' in *Extra Ordinary: Craft and Contemporary Art* (Eds) Maria Elena Buszek. Duke University Press. 2011 p84
- 34 Pope, R 2005 p81
- 35 Pope, R. 2005 p81
- 36 See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/apr/19/art-colleges-face-uncertain-financial-future> for an overview of the effect of financial cuts on the design and delivery of arts degrees. (Accessed 20.2.12)
See <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2012/feb/07/arts-index-skills-education-value> for commentary about the effect of changes to arts curriculum. (Accessed 20.2.12)
See <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storycode=402969> for commentary about the implications of providing higher education programmes that demand the delivery of traditional craft skills. (Accessed 20.2.12)
- 37 Whitely, N at http://h08.cgpublisher.com/proposals/534/index_html (accessed 30.1.11)

jane mckeating photo: ben blackall



Collaborating is hard but extraordinary. It feels like a tough and negotiated relationship with new thoughts and materials where I draw out something new about the nature of my own visual language which is defined by glimpses into another's. Alice Kettle



alice kettle with david gates & jane webb

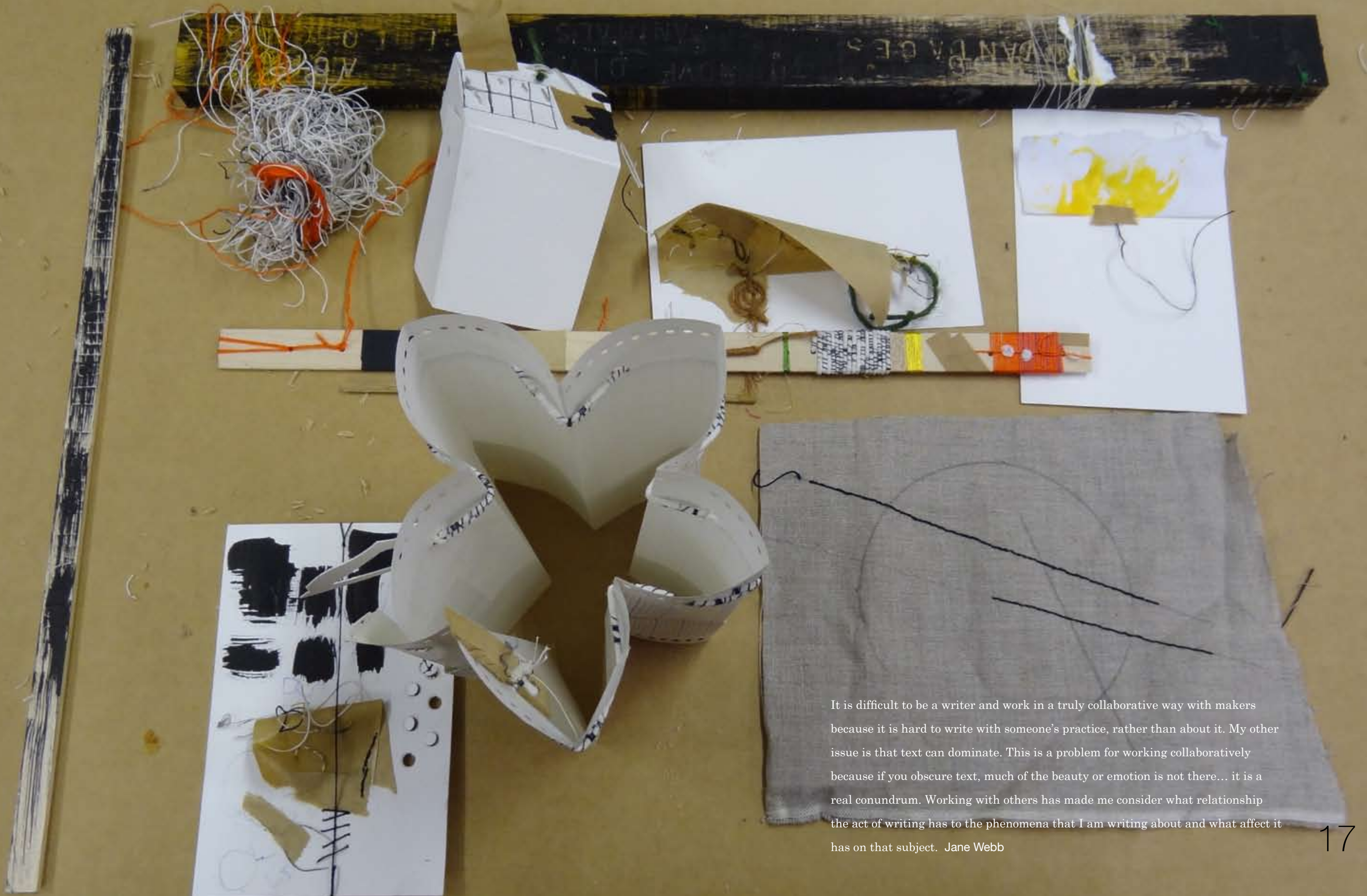


alice kettle with david gates & jane webb

Working with other can be a very revealing process and there can be many ways of collaborating. Of course very little of what we do is a truly solo activity or done on our own, others are always involved. But framing a project within the constructs of collaboration can bring into sharp focus the edges, the leaky boundaries and the shadows of our habit(at)s and practices. It offers the vantage of another place and other perspective. David Gates



alice kettle with david gates & jane webb

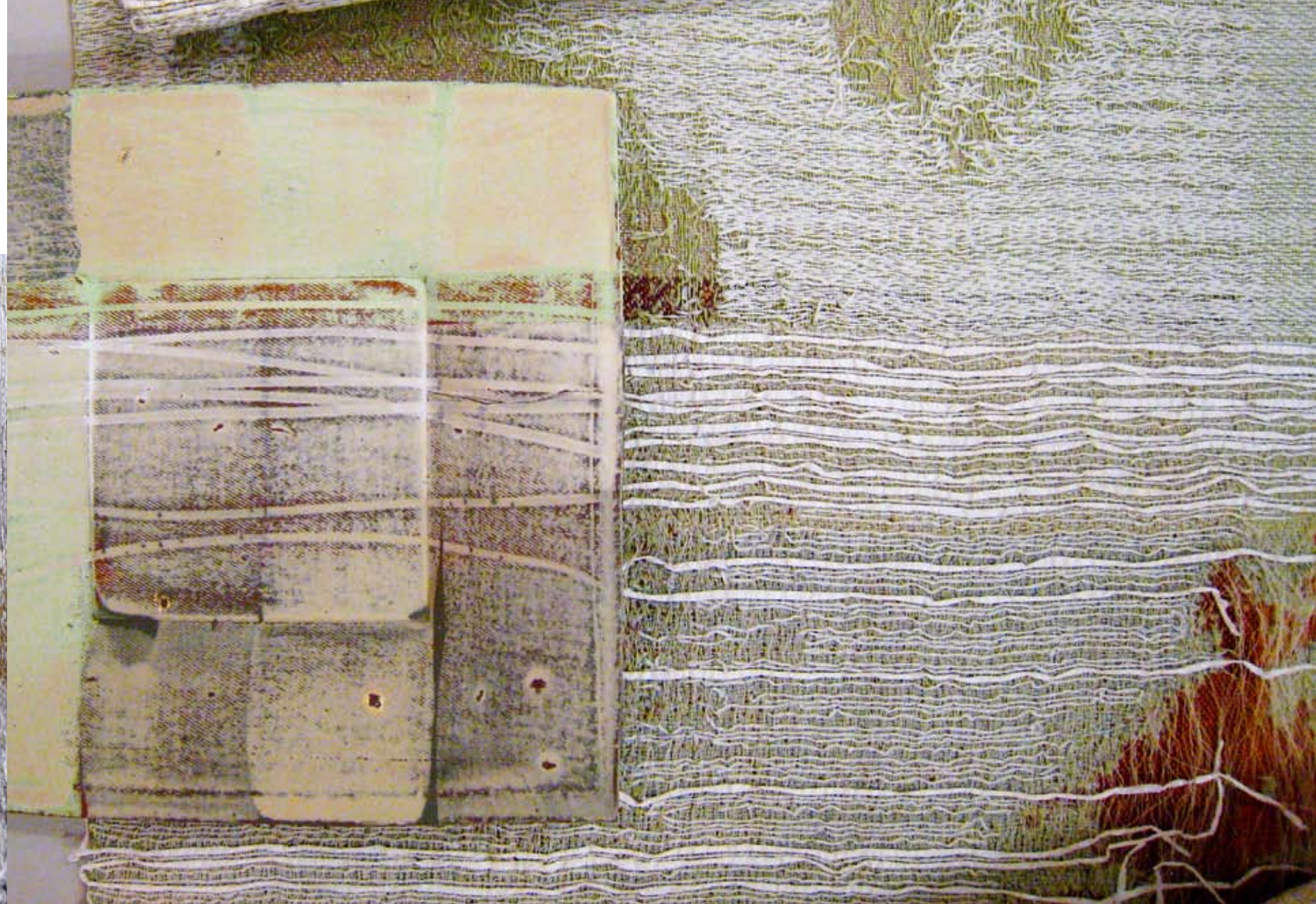


It is difficult to be a writer and work in a truly collaborative way with makers because it is hard to write with someone's practice, rather than about it. My other issue is that text can dominate. This is a problem for working collaboratively because if you obscure text, much of the beauty or emotion is not there... it is a real conundrum. Working with others has made me consider what relationship the act of writing has to the phenomena that I am writing about and what affect it has on that subject. Jane Webb





photos: ben blackall



sharon blakey with ismini samanidou

For the Pairings project Sharon and Ismini first used cloth and clay pieces as a common ground, exploring the colour, marks texture and how these materials can come together and reference each other. They then responded to a hidden collection of spoons, shut away in a drawer for more than 50 years. No prized or polished silver here, but the tarnished, worn and broken. They wanted to somehow put these spoons back on the table, elevating the value of these forgotten and overlooked objects. In doing so they also sought to explore the creative relationship between cloth and clay, hand and machine, texture and story.



In recent years I have been investigating the creative uses of water-jet cutting for glass. This has led to the development of new work that is utilising this cutting edge technology in an imaginative and unique way. Kate Egan



photos: ben blackall



The collaboration was like having two brains even whilst you are asleep the other one may be ticking.
Vanessa Cutler



photos: ian mason



dawn mason with nigel hurlstone



A haptic and sensory focus for making work was prominent in the creative process for both Nigel and myself. The mutual focus on a very limited colour palette and a similar aesthetic has greatly aided the development of work. Dawn Mason

photos: ben blackall



Celebrating the 'stuff' of making, and understanding how other practitioners form their own relationships and language around materials and media has been pivotal to this experience. Nigel Hurlstone



annie shaw with shelly goldsmith



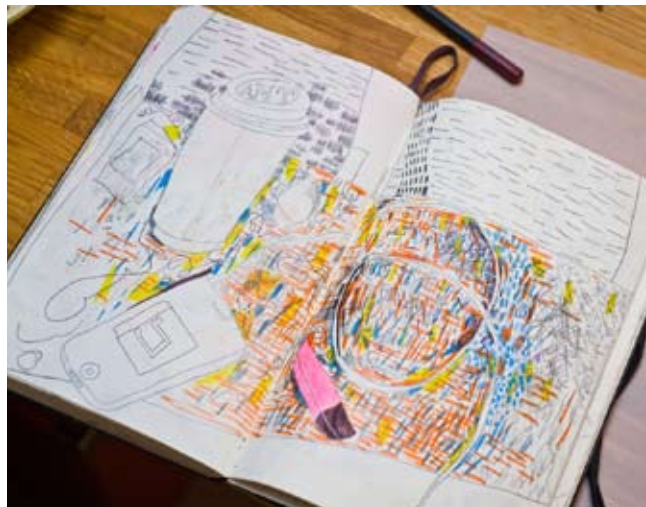
photos: ben blackall



Recent work looks at the intimate space between ourselves and the clothes we wear whilst being very aware of the 'veneer' of cloth that stands between us and the world, often a veil to the interior storm.

Shelly Goldsmith

My drawing and textiles are figurative whilst Jilly's drawings are abstract and led by marks and materials. Her work is larger scale than mine and she uses primarily black and white whereas colour is central to my work. We agreed early on to work in black, white and red as a compromise. Jane McKeating

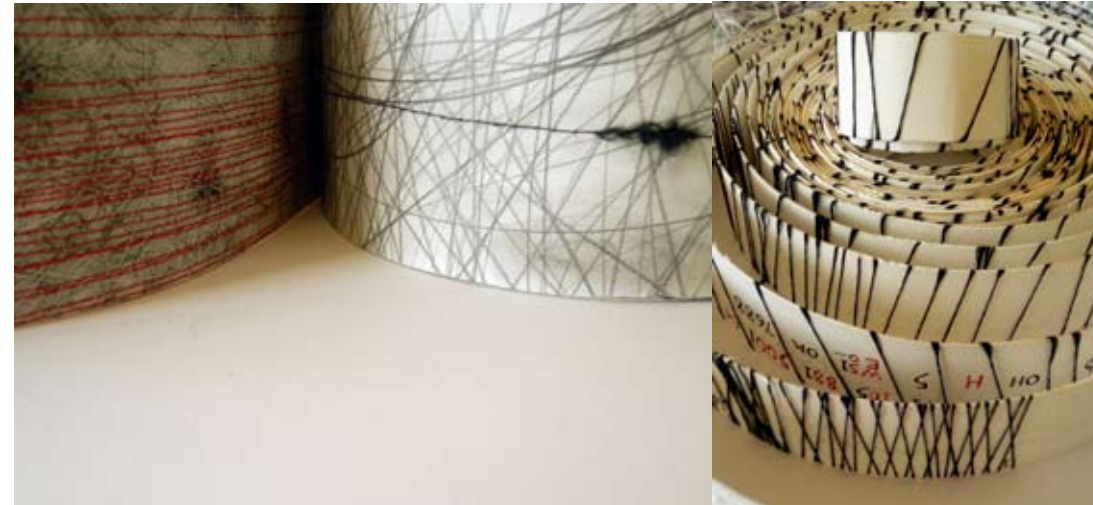


photos: ben blackall

photos: jane mckeating



At first we wanted to stamp our own presence on something. It was as though each of us was trying to be 'heard' over the other. Gradually we became more receptive, as though we were listening to each other more. Jilly Morris





janet haigh with rachel kelly

Thank you to Kemin Nahkatarvike for the vellum via the Central Ostrobothnia University of Applied Sciences



We started by drawing, and drawing became the key to making and a fundamental part of the finished work. We take it for granted that issues of colour will naturally develop as we work together. Janet Haigh



janet haigh with rachel kelly



We hope that by combining materials from Janet's research with the 'heat generating' laser and my print techniques that new surface finishes will be discovered. We are both intrigued by one another's studios and kit. Rachel Kelly

makers in collabroration

Alice Kettle

My work uses stitch but increasingly I view my practice as being about thread, a material rather than a process. Collaborating is hard but extraordinary. It feels like a tough and negotiated relationship with new thoughts and materials where I draw out something new about the nature of my own visual language which is defined by glimpses into another's. I have learnt much about ideologies, materials, people, and processes. How that is manifest in my own work is a further understanding of surface, of the additive and reductive, the two and three dimensional and wider material culture.

David Gates

My studio-furniture practice embraces craft-making, exploring mechanical expediency as well as our relationships with the stuff around us. My work draws together a multi-stranded approach to designing and making and I am currently working on a PhD on the role of talk in craft practice.

Jane Webb

My current practice is as an academic. I am a historian although my background education is in art history and mainly anthropology. So I would suggest that I do anthropology but about the past. It is difficult to be a writer and work in a truly collaborative way with makers because it is hard to write with someone's practice, rather than about it. My other issue is that text can dominate. This is a problem for working collaboratively because if you obscure text, much of the beauty or emotion is not there... it is a real conundrum. Working with others has made me consider what relationship the act of writing has to the phenomena that I am writing about and what affect it has on that subject.

Sharon Blakey

Sharon Blakey's work commemorates the ordinary and the unsung, revealing the significant in the unnoticed and the value in the overlooked. Mundane objects are imbued with latent messages of the people, times and places they bear witness to. Utensils tarnished with frequent domestic service; old toys scuffed with the devotion of their playmates, tools discarded because the machines they were made for are now obsolete. All carry with them a value and poignancy over and above their intended purpose. As a ceramicist Sharon's collaboration with weaver Ismini Samanidou brought together a shared love of narrative and a mutual appreciation of the beauty of transitory surfaces.

Ismini Samanidou

Ismini Samanidou uses weave to describe and the world around us. The information Ismini collects attempts to capture the impermanence and beauty of the everyday; by closely examining and analyzing this information she then reconstructs it in woven form. Weaving is central to Ismini's practice working on a digital jacquard loom. She decided to work with Sharon because of their love for stories, surfaces, details, old keys, forgotten things. "We thought about how we both love collections, and how collections are sometimes presented in textiles."

Kate Egan

I set up the art label *FLOAT* as a platform for interdisciplinary and collaborative projects in order to create new and unexpected mixes. I combine new and old technologies in my work making reference to mass consumerism and observations of the universe (the macrocosm) in relation to the domestic (the microcosm). The development of our collaboration has come through kitchen table meetings in a family home environment in which we meet away from the hustle and bustle of work commitments, enabling free informal discussions that allow our separate practices to come together in a relaxed, unforced and informal way. There has been a great openness and humour in expressing ideas. The collaboration is like having two brains even whilst you are asleep the other one may be ticking.

Vanessa Cutler

In recent years I have been investigating the creative uses of water-jet cutting for glass. This has led to the development of new work that is utilising this cutting edge technology in an imaginative and unique way.

Dawn Mason

My background is in Fashion and Knitwear design but the current focus for my own art practice has been to develop work around stitch as a language and as a knowledge base. My work explores the theme of inheritance and loss through the use of cloth, stitch and paper. A haptic and sensory focus for making work is prominent in the creative process for both Nigel and myself. The mutual focus on a very limited colour palette and a similar aesthetic has greatly aided the development of work.

Nigel Hurlstone

Following my Art Foundation year I stumbled into a studio at MMU. Students were working both two and three dimensionally and there was a sense that what they were doing was driven by well understood technique, material and diverse visual languages. I had no idea that this was an embroidery studio, but wanted to become part of it. My fascination for this subject has persisted ever since. Early on conversations between us originated from what materials, those that were considered problematic and those that were seemingly impossible. This type of conversation is vital for makers to have; it establishes reference points that cut across the conceptual (that by its very nature can be more opaque), and establishes a territory that is based in the reality of material pleasure. Celebrating the ‘stuff’ of making, and understanding how other practitioners form their own relationships and language around materials and media has been pivotal to this experience.

Annie Shaw

My main interests are menswear, Knit (particularly seamless) in mapping practice, seamlessness, connection with location, landscape and genealogy through materiality. My PhD was necessarily a solitary experience, which defined my interests, practice and position within the research. As a designer I enjoy working as part of a team, but have not collaborated through my personal practice before. Finding commonalities helped us to establish the content and approach to the work and a shared sense of humour helped too.

Shelly Goldsmith

My own recent work looks at the intimate space between ourselves and the clothes we wear whilst being very aware of the ‘veneer’ of cloth that stands between us and the world, often a veil to the interior storm. Annie and I initially undertook a visual construction of our key concepts, ways of working and thinking, in the form of a post-it-note collage. We discussed, photographed and ceremoniously binned these notes as a way of establishing a joint understanding and a point from which to move off from. We are now communicating through text. We are keen to divide/respond to a garment which is used in a pair. Annie has an extensive collection of gloves and we are hoping to send out our pair, as single pieces, into the wider world in some way, physically as a ‘garment in a bottle’ (both of us reside by the sea) or digitally/virally.

Jane McKeating

Drawing is central to everything I make and it was through drawing that I became interested in embroidery, as one is just an extension of the other. I find myself thinking about our collaboration a lot of the time. At times it’s exciting and at times quite scary to work with hard materials that I can’t piece or pierce. My drawing and textiles are figurative whilst Jilly’s drawings are abstract and led by marks and materials. Her work is larger scale than mine and she uses primarily black and white whereas colour is central to my work. We agreed early on to work in black, white and red as a compromise. The posting of objects and drawings has a lovely physicality to it. I loved going on an expedition to find a post office in Paris on a Sunday, it didn’t matter that what I was posting was no more than a drawing on a serviette. I loved hearing from Jilly how excited she was about waiting to open it.

Jilly Morris

My work borders a strange line between craft and fine art. I work with a variety of mediums, abstract drawings, enamel, sculptural interpretations and installations. Jane and I came to know each other through sending objects by the post. We got to know the trademarks of our creativity before actually knowing each other. At first we wanted to stamp our own presence on something. It was as though each of us was trying to be ‘heard’ over the other. Gradually we became more receptive, as though we were listening to each other more. I see a pattern emerging from Jane’s work, and therefore I have questioned my own patterns.

Janet Haigh

About ten years ago I undertook a major research project to research textile techniques for other substrates and I have continued to develop mixed media work for textiles. The idea/theme we have chosen is Metamorphosis as we want to develop work together that changes both material and form through making. We are working with the idea of consequences where we send one another an image we have generated and then the other reacts to it and carries on the drawing/ image into another form and in another media. Rachel felt very strongly that we should start by drawing, and drawing should also be key to making and a fundamental part of the finished work. We take it for granted that issues of colour will naturally develop as we work together.

Rachel Kelly

I run a web-based design business *Interactive Wallpaper* and I design site-specific installations and push the boundaries of interactive surface print design. Janet is interested in developing her work with surface decoration exploring materials which broaden the scope of textiles and its applications. We hope that by combining materials from Janet’s research with the ‘heat generating’ laser and my print techniques that new surface finishes will be discovered. We are both intrigued by one another’s studios and kit.



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