

Moving on

Alice Fox ponders on her development as a textile artist

I'M DELIGHTED TO have been invited to write again for *The Quilter*, having last written in issue 133 (Winter 2012) to report on how I'd used the Guild BA Bursary that I'd been awarded at the Festival of Quilts the previous year. That's three years ago now and a lot has happened since then. When I spoke to Anne Williams [editor of *The Quilter*] about what I've been doing since winning the bursary, I expressed how much I felt I owed to the opportunity given to me by The Quilters' Guild, and here I reflect on how things have progressed since then.

Exhibiting ...

My article in 2012 outlined the residency I undertook at Spurn Point in East Yorkshire. Following completion of that project the body of work I made at Spurn was shown in a number of galleries in the region. Each time I took that work to a different venue it was a case of almost starting from scratch in curating the exhibition; the venues varied so much from one another. The Bowery in Leeds was a particular high point for me. Through discussion with the gallery owners we settled on an installation featuring the 10-metre long rust-dyed and printed cloth that I had made at Spurn. This was hung horizontally around the gallery space, wrapping itself around half of the room. I then continued the band around the walls using layers of rust-dyed and printed papers collaged directly onto the gallery wall. This resulted in an immersive experience when you stepped into the space and was something far more exciting than it would have been if I'd hung my pieces more conventionally. There was no plan B if it didn't work – thankfully it did!

When I was approaching galleries to show 'Textures of Spurn' there were a few that said they were interested in showing my work but because nearby venues were already going to show it then it would need to be different pieces. This enabled me to put together a new body of work drawing on similar coastal themes but not tied to one place. 'Tide Marks' became a follow-up to the Spurn project and allowed me to explore more deeply some of the influences and techniques that I had developed at Spurn. That collection showed at Gate Gallery in Grimsby in autumn 2013 and I published a new book to accompany the exhibition. This was the third self-published book I had produced, each time learning so much and really enjoying the process of recording and bringing a project together in book form. I applied for Arts Council England funding to take 'Tide Marks' to more venues, and was successful, meaning I could show the work as part of SIT [Stroud International Textiles] Select in Stroud, at Artlink in Hull, and at the Society of Designer Craftsmen Gallery, London during 2014.



Above:
Alice at the Festival of Quilts 2015

Right:
Spurn Cloth #2 on the beach: 'Textures of Spurn'

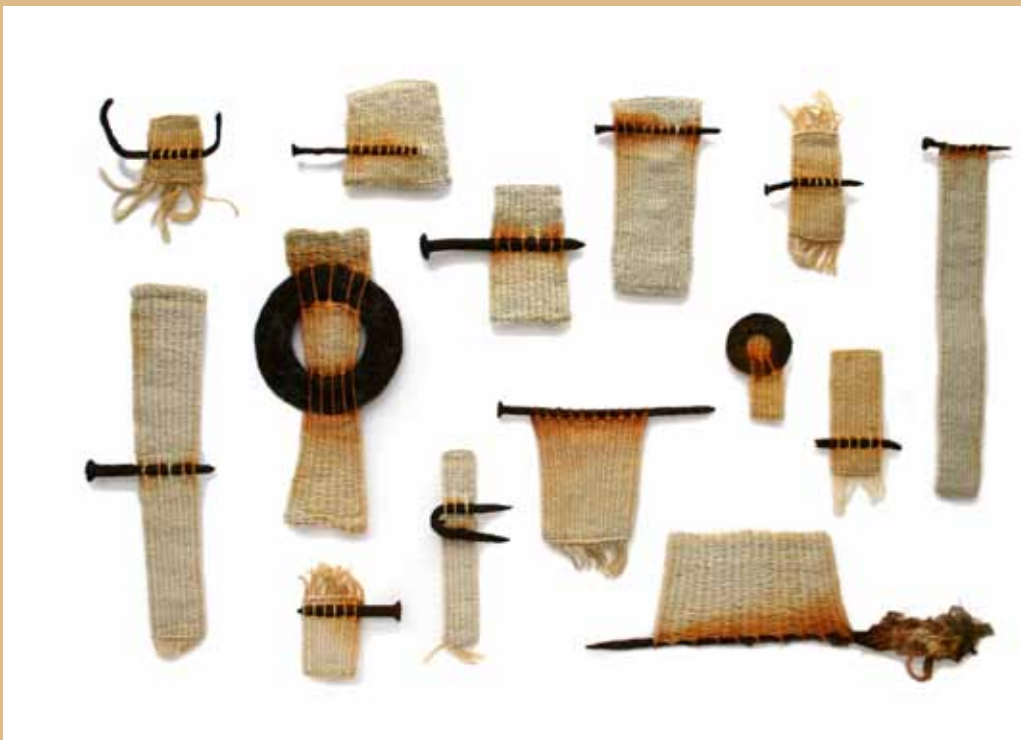
Below:
Spurn Cloth extended at The Bowery in Leeds: 'Textures of Spurn'





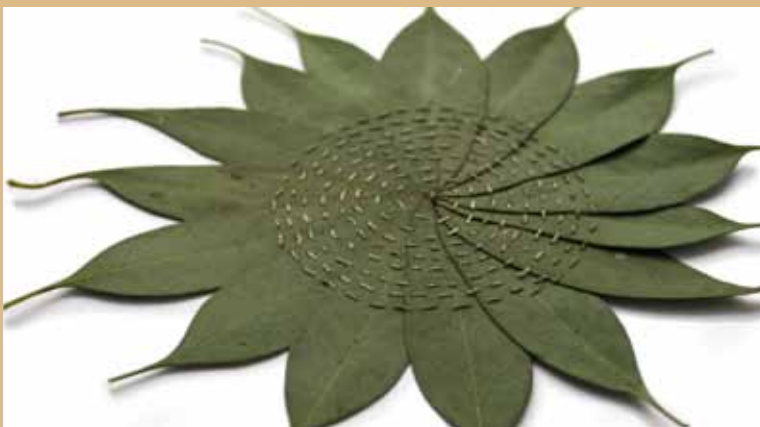
Publishing ...

In the meantime I was planning and then writing a book. This is no mean feat! After showing my degree work in the Festival of Quilts Graduate Showcase in 2011, I was asked by Sara Impey if she could include an image of my work in her book *Text in Textile Art*.* I was thrilled to have been asked, but this also sowed the seed of an idea about writing my own book. From initial proposal to publication took around three years, during which I experienced another of those 'learning curves' that feature rather frequently following graduation. *Natural Processes in Textile Art* was published in August 2015 and features a whole range of the techniques I use in my work, alongside examples of exquisite work by international artists. This book celebrates our relationship with the world around us, looking for the potential in the everyday and promoting a way of working that is in tune with natural processes and rhythms. I'm very proud that I've been able to bring this way of working into a form that can be shared with people all over the world.



... and teaching

While the book was coming together I had been doing more and more teaching. I was first invited to teach when I showed my work at the Festival of Quilts, both in 2011 and 2012. This wasn't something I'd planned to do, but it immediately became obvious that there was an expectation within the world of textiles that artists also teach workshops and talk to groups about their work. I think this is a special feature of working with textiles. There's such a spirit of sharing within the textile community, and an appetite for learning among its enthusiasts. Of course this can work against the artist too: people are sometimes more interested in learning how to do what you do, rather than in buying your work. But on the positive side, it means there's a market for artists' time, and teaching workshops can provide



Top:
Beer Bottle Tops, detail

Above:
Tide Line: tapestry-woven pieces incorporating found rusty objects

Left:
Eucalyptus Circle: a leaf stitching

a necessary source of income for the struggling practitioner. With the experience of sharing my work and techniques my confidence as a teacher has grown. Last year I was accepted as a member of the Textile Study Group; it's an honour to have been absorbed into this group of well-respected textile artists and teachers.

The ups and downs

Of course it isn't all rosy. There are many struggles associated with being a self-employed artist. Balancing the different roles that you have to perform can be very tricky. Doing all your own business administration and trying to be a marketing expert, it can sometimes feel as if there's hardly any time left to be an artist. Once you add the family into that equation then things can get very complicated. We tend to shout about the successes but there are always disappointments happening in the background: getting turned down for funding you've spent hours applying for, or not being accepted into exhibitions you have entered. These go with the territory. Each time you get a knock-back the best thing is to be philosophical about it, learn from it if you can and plan the next application.

On a positive note, I've been selected by the readers of *Craft & Design Magazine* as a finalist in the Selected Makers Awards in 2014 and 2015, with a Silver award in 2014. I've also been invited to show in several exciting group exhibitions by selection panels and curators. These include 'European Art Quilt VII' and 'VIII'; 'A Group Gathering: The Shirt Collar Project' in 2014; 'Meticulous Stitchers' at Unit Twelve Gallery, Staffordshire; and 'The Language of Objects', also at Unit Twelve Gallery this autumn/winter.

Development of practice

In some ways my work has developed considerably since the graduate collection that got me to the Festival in 2011. I'm fundamentally interested in landscape and the natural world.



Oak Leaf Quilt, detail: a leaf stitching

Through my work I'm exploring ways of recording experiences of the landscapes I encounter. I'm working increasingly with found objects, these forming a tangible link to places I have walked. I've developed a relationship with rust, and many people now associate this with my work, although it's only one strand within my practice. Rust dyeing with found metal objects emerged out of an interest in natural dyes and in working (and living) as sustainably as possible. I'm keen to use found and gathered materials and to explore the potential of these creatively. My latest solo exhibition (and self-published book), 'Leaf Stitching', came about through this exploration of the things I find, engaging with materials and testing out ideas; taking an experimental approach in responding to what I collect. This approach continues as I plan for my exhibition at the Knitting & Stitching Shows in 2016.

I've always tried to make the most of opportunities presented to me since graduating. I feel the opportunity I was given by The Guild back in 2011 has helped me to progress my career and I'm very grateful for that. It's always lovely to see many familiar faces when I go back to the Festival of Quilts each year: people are so supportive and interested in where my work is going.

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* *Text in Textile Art* by Sara Impey, Batsford, 2013, ISBN 978-1-84994-042-9

Find out more about Alice and her work at: www.alicefox.co.uk

Books

Alice's self-published books are available via her website: *Gifts from the Pavement* (2013); *Tide Marks* (2014); and *Leaf Stitching* (2015).

Within Sight of the Sea (e-book): this collaboration with the poet Nigel Morgan features Alice's illustrations and is available from Amazon.

'The Language of Objects'

Until 19 December

Unit Twelve Gallery, Tixall Heath Farm, Stafford ST18 0XX
www.unittwelve.co.uk

Natural Processes in Textile Art

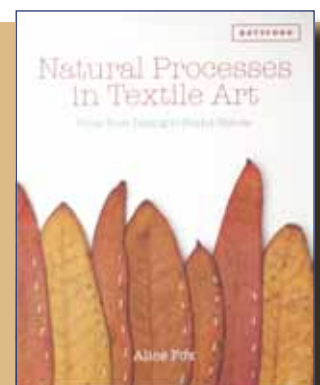
From rust dyeing to found objects

by Alice Fox

Batsford (www.pavilionbooks.com)

128 pages h/b, £22.50

ISBN 978-1-84994-298-0



Using natural processes such as dyeing with vegetables, berries and rust, and also incorporating found or foraged materials into her work like woodland, urban and beachcombed items, Alice tries to work creatively with what is to hand, in tune with her environment. The book is intended to be a source of inspiration rather than a prescriptive how-to, so Alice has kept things as low-tech and simple as possible. As well as loads of ideas, this lavishly illustrated book features both Alice's own work and pieces by other international textile artists who use sustainable materials.

Signed copies can be ordered from Alice's website: www.alicefox.co.uk