

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST

CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP 2002/2

To further develop my skills and vision by meeting with artists working similarly in the UK and the USA

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Dated

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INTRODUCTION

This Report summarizes the findings from a 2002/2 Churchill Fellowship visit to the United Kingdom and the United States of America to meet with other artists working in similar ways.

- The artists I sought were those with preference for working with a range of recycled materials, using traditional construction techniques, incorporating text, artefacts, material culture and photographic images with an emphasis on subject research and oral history interviews.
- I initially used the World Wide Web, to contact with a wide range of artists and gradually narrowed down to those whose philosophical approach to their work was akin to mine.
- These artists are exploring ideas using a disparate range of techniques. For example recycled denim hooked rugs making powerful statements about our urban environment.
- I was curious to learn how these artists went about promoting and exhibiting their work and to compare their methods with my own.
- As historical research underpins my work, I was most interested to visit a particular museum housing a textile collection documenting immigrant women's work in its social context.

My visit to the United Kingdom and the United States of America would not have been possible without:—

- The financial assistance given to me by the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. In addition to financial support the high regard of Churchill Fellowships helped open doors that would have otherwise been closed.
- The continuing support and commitment of my community through the early years of developing my work and finding my voice as a narrative visual artist.
- My many friends for their love, support and encouragement through the whole experience; from the original application to my return to Australia.

Executive Summary

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Fellowship objective

To further develop my skills and vision by meeting with artists working similarly in the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Fellowship Highlights

My first stop was the UK and met with a number of artists in London and Hampshire who I had identified through my research as likely to have similar technical and ideological concerns. Through the Constance Howard Research & Resource Centre I contacted the postgraduate student body of the Visual Art Department of Goldsmiths College, University of London. Goldsmiths is an internationally recognised centre of excellence in the teaching of fine art and textiles. It is world renowned for its innovative research and conceptual approach to training textile artists of the future. I also gave a presentation at the Constance Howard Centre on Goldsmiths campus where in addition to an eclectic treasure trove of textiles and 10,000 slides dating from 1948, provide a unique record of the emergence of textiles at Goldsmiths College.

My presentation at the Constance Howard Centre, using *Morley Grainger's Touring Exhibitions* CD Rom, website and exhibition catalogues, prompted a lively discussion comparing domestic practices, women's issues, construction techniques, conservation methods and aesthetic issues. This created a valuable network, which I continue to develop. The highlight of the UK leg of the tour was a strong collegial link with Joan Ben-nun, conceptual artist based in Israel. From these contacts came the idea, with the Fellowship as the catalyst, to approach each of the artists I would met along the way, suggesting a thematic group show.

The next ten weeks across fourteen states of the USA, exposed me to a great many artists who stimulated my own thinking. This new network of likeminded people will provide a new platform for collaborative work and additional support. It has also been instrumental in increasing my confidence and breaking down the isolation I have experienced in the Australian arts community because of my unique way of working, and the use of touring exhibitions. While I only found one other person who tours her work rather than selling it (sculptor, Al Johnson, London), there was great interest in this strategy for retaining ownership and control of one's work.

This experience was immeasurably enriching and will revitalise my future work. The next planned exhibitions, *Line of Blood—Myall Creek Massacre 1838—our shared history* and *Petals & Thorns*, the collaborative project involving fifteen artists from Israel, Jamaica, UK, USA and Australia, will be a testament to the far-reaching effects of the Fellowship.

This intense and overwhelming experience no doubt will influence my future output and provide an invaluable global community of peers. The positive response to my exhibitions by these artists has increased my confidence about the way I approach my work. I now plan to continue and develop new touring exhibitions, curating the international exhibition and promote my work through lecturing, workshops and presenting my work to a wider audience.

PROGRAMME

United Kingdom Goldsmiths College of Art, London University Constance Howard Research & Resource Centre, London Anna Cady studio, Hampshire Ben Hall studio, London Meeting with Al Johnson, London Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Office, Kensington	22 May – 4 June
United States of America Kansas City, Missouri Surface Design Association Conference Kansas Art Institute	4 – 8 June
Minneapolis, Minnesota Textile Centre of Minnesota, Minneapolis Nancy MacKenzie studio Warren MacKenzie studio Nancy Gipple studio Ruth Mordy studio	8 – 13 June
New York, New York Debra Bernath studio Ellis Island Immigration Museum	14 – 16 June
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Tina Gravatt studio American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia	16 – 26 June
Boston, Massachusetts Tirocchi Collection Rhode Island School of Design Art Museum, Providence RI	26 – 30 June
Lake Erie, New York State Alice Guffy Miller & Mars Hall summer studio	30 June – 5 July
Asheville, North Carolina Penland School of Craft 2 week workshop Tutor: Arturo Alonzo Sandoval <i>Designing for Art Quilts</i>	5 – 19 July
Iowa City, Iowa Beth Nobles studio Astrid Bennett studio	19 – 24 July
San Francisco, California Susan Taber Avila studio San Jose Quilt and Textile Museum Meeting with Caroline Dahl San Francisco Museum of Modern Art	24 – 30 July

MAIN BODY OF REPORT

Introduction

Narrative¹ visual artists are hard to find. Perhaps this is because the term “narrative visual artist” is a term coined relatively recently, or perhaps because there are few Australian artists working at the nexus of history and visual arts; and even fewer combining history and textiles.

This realisation, prompted me to seek other artists working in similar ways.

My work combines: -

- Textiles
- Traditional construction techniques
- Text – poetry and/or prose
- Extensive historical research including oral history interviews
- Artefacts
- Material culture
- Recycled materials

—in other words, whatever it takes to tell the story.

In addition, I work in series; making a number of pieces about a particular theme enriches the subject matter and creates a particular ambience for the viewer.

My solo exhibitions tour regional galleries and museums in Queensland and NSW. I was keen to find other UK and USA artists working similarly, retaining ownership of their work whilst generating an income from their creative output.

A Churchill Fellowship would enable me to explore the various aspects of my eclectic areas of interest in textile conservation and collections.

Locating narrative visual artists in the UK and USA

This was done firstly by word of mouth and secondly, the World Wide Web.

In some instances I received little or no response from the artists I contacted. Of those who did, a successful outcome was not always guaranteed. Determination paid off, however, and allowed me to compile a valuable list of artists to visit.

By their very nature, artists tend to keep their heads down, few have a Web presence and there are limited opportunities for publication of unconventional, cross-disciplinary work. Needing to work a first job to pay the rent, ‘art’ often becomes the artists second job hence their creative output is limited.

UNITED KINGDOM

The Visual Arts Department at **Goldsmith’s College, London University**, New Cross has for many years provided a dynamic, critical and distinctive environment for students wanting to develop an innovative culture of contemporary visual art in all its diverse practical and critical aspects. At the *Fabric(ation)s of the Post Colonial* conference, Wollongong University, November 2002, Professor Janis Jefferies, Head of Visual Arts and Textiles, Goldsmith’s College suggested I visit her in London.

¹ “Narrative” - noun; *tale, story, recital of facts*. “to narrate”- *to give a continuous story or account of*;

The **Constance Howard Research and Resource Centre** attached to Goldsmiths, greatly contributed in sourcing UK-based narrative visual artists. The Head Curator, Ms Margaret Hall-Townley, was instrumental in establishing contact with Joan Ben-nun, Lizzie Reakes, Katja Then and later Ben Hall; a group of artists working with textiles and recycled materials as part of their continuing conceptual art practice.

Joan Ben-nun's preliminary Masters presentation at The Baths, New Cross, was one of the many highlights of the trip. Comments from Joan's tutors and fellow students demonstrated the importance of places like Goldsmith's College where this kind of art practice is seriously considered. Sufficient time is made available in order to tease out and explore the many aspects of the art making process so artists can develop their vision in an atmosphere of supported challenge.

The Zipper Jacket and friends

A jacket made from discontinued coloured zippers, became a major talking point during the trip. In addition to being a colourful, dramatic and wonderful icebreaker, it became a charming travelling companion, drawing comments from men and women alike. (Image No.1)

While at the British Museum, I was approached by **Erica Spitzer Rasmussen** an American Fine Arts Professor who asked to photograph The Jacket and use the image for her creative garment class. During the photo shoot she revealed she was based in Minnesota. As I intended to visit that state as part of my trip, I informed her of my intention to meet with **Nancy MacKenzie** an artist working with recycled onion bags. To our collective amazement Nancy was Erica's mother!

Rasmussen informed me that she would be holding an exhibition titled *Second Skins* (Image No.2) from June 5-July 26th in Kansas City, Missouri to coincide with the Surface Design Association's Conference, which I was scheduled to attend.

The Jacket also facilitated a meeting **Jee Hyun Kwon**, at Goldsmiths College. Hyun Kwon, a Korean artist who also works with zippers, offered to show me her own work and presented a series of digital images as we discussed our individual approach to working with zippers, and the many challenges they present.

Prior to embarking on her Masters studies at Goldsmiths, Hyun Kwon worked with heavy plastic zippers to create forms for exhibition. She had set up a number of installations created by stitching heavy plastic zippers stitched together. Because of their prohibitive cost in the UK, Hyun Kwon has now moved on to performance art. She now combines computer technology and textiles to fascinating effect.

I visited the **Anna Cady** studio, Winchester. This visit gave me a powerful insight into the successful combining of images and text to make techno-art with emphasis equally placed on creating images of artistic merit with stimulating text. With a Masters from Goldsmiths College graduating in 2000, Cady has moved away from textiles to digital photography, after establishing her reputation in the use of the pinhole camera. Plagued by illness, Anna's work combines her art training the technology to make really interesting, cutting edge art.

Her latest project uses a series of Winchester billboards, 40 foot by 15 foot, with a number of images featured on her interactive website. (AnnaCady.com)

Our first meeting was spent chatting and exchanging notes about our personal philosophical stance, marketing, promoting our work, our backgrounds, training and the journey we have taken to produce the work we do today. We drove to Southampton to the John Hansard Gallery in the grounds of Southampton University, to see an exhibition of photographs by

Sunil Gupta titled *Pictures from Here*. Gupta is an Indian artist whose autobiographical work combines self-portraits and urban vistas. The scale of the works, 30" x 59", in addition to their confronting visual content is most challenging.

A meeting with **Ben Hall** at his London studio, allowed me to see first hand additional examples of his hooked rugs made from recycled denim. The Constance Howard Resource and Research Centre has examples of his work in their permanent collection. Hall had explored rag rug making during his MFA from Goldsmith's in 1995.

Hall has a collection of antique rattan rug-beaters, and uses its imaged as his trademark and often incorporates this motif in his rug work. (Image 3) In addition to the ground floor of a block of flats where he lives, Hall has converted the basement below into a studio.

As well as the carpet-beater motif, Hall often incorporates the thumbprint as a design element in his rugs. Sydney based artist Beth Hatton also uses the fingerprint as a design motif. In addition, Hall has been involved in an innovative art-making project at Towner Art Gallery and Local Museum, Eastbourne; in response to the building and its collections. A very interesting concept and something I'd like to suggest to an Australian gallery/museum at a future time.

A contact at the British Museum introduced me to the work of sculptor **Al Johnson**. Johnson designs and casts medals, often with text and incorporating textiles, as a means of honouring the often unacknowledged contribution made by women in times of war and peace.

Johnson and I went and saw her installation piece *Bitter Place* at The Atrium Gallery, Price Waterhouse Coopers offices, Charing Cross. (Image No. 4) The work commemorates family groups, couples and individuals forced to leave their homes as a result of events beyond their control, becoming refugees.

Johnson is the only other artist I found who is touring solo exhibitions of her work and commanding an exhibitor's fee. However, our approach differs slightly in that she travels to the gallery/museum and sets up the show, while my exhibitions are crated to the gallery with full instructions for hanging and displaying.

On my last day in London I visited the British office of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, Kensington and met Air Vice-Marshall Nigel J Sudborough CB, FCIBD, FRAES, the Director General. He explained how the British version of the Fellowship was structured and how the selection is made by categories in any given year; eg, artisans, farmers, etc. Britons apply as their category comes up. The average Fellowship is 6,000 pounds Sterling and there is a trust system in place regarding final reports. A photo opportunity in front of a portrait of Winston Churchill concluded the meeting.

I also visited –

British Museum, London
Portrait Museum, London
The National Gallery, London
Tate Modern, London
Tate Britain, London

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

My first engagement in the USA was the *Hands On* 12th International Surface Design Conference in Kansas City Missouri.

This Conference, sponsored by the Surface Design Association and hosted by the Kansas City Art Institute, has a reputation as a leader in the field; at the cutting edge of contemporary

textile art in the world. Their goal, to present new explorations and developments in both advanced technology as well as fresh discoveries with needle and thread, brush and dye, shuttle and yarn or any other textile-related process or material.

Presenters at the Conference—artists, designers, and a diverse array of textile experts from fields such as anthropology, education, history of textiles, and industry—discussed the most current creative work and scholarly research.

In and around Kansas City, fourteen exhibition spaces showed a breathtaking range of work. One of the most exciting was the work of **Wenda Gu** at the H & R Block Art Space. Using lengths of plaited human hair hanging from the ceiling to just above the floor, an enclosed space with a single opening was defined. (Image No.5) All of his installations come with projected video footage of the creative process and the artist's working environment.

Gu's imposing pieces on a grand scale made me realise how I too would like to work large, something I've not been able to achieve with my touring exhibitions to date, due to crating constraints.

As well as making new contacts, the Conference was also a great opportunity to meet a number of artists I would later visit during the trip.

Nancy MacKenzie studio, Minneapolis MN

As a committed recycler, **Nancy MacKenzie** collects used onion bags from all over the world to incorporate into her wall and body hung pieces. The onion bags are given form by using baling twine as piping cord with flat pieces of fabric placed between the resulting layers. (Image No. 6 & 7) This technique is adapted for "one of a kind" fashion statements.

My visit to MacKenzie's studio was an affirming experience as our commitment to recycling and materials is similar. MacKenzie's husband, Warren MacKenzie is a distinguished potter and his studio is situated down from the house in the garden. They sometimes exhibit together.

Presentation at the Textile Centre of Minnesota, Minneapolis

The Textile Centre of Minnesota is a new community initiative, bringing 28 textile related groups under one roof. Using a converted automobile showroom, the Centre offers a retail outlet, exhibition space, meeting rooms, library, a fully equipped dye laboratory, workshop/function space run by a managerial staff.

I was asked to talk about my work to a luncheon gathering using *Morley Grainger's Touring Exhibitions* CD Rom. I was delighted to find the audience of men and women resonated with the content of my presentation. It seems the issues I'm addressing in my work are universal.

The experience was confirming and I intend to continue working in the same way, the object being to touch people's lives by reconnecting them with their individual or collective memory.

I also visited –

Nancy Gipple & Kengi Akagawa studio, Minneapolis

Ruth Mordy studio, Minneapolis

Wiesman Art Museum, Minneapolis

Minnesota Historical Society, Minneapolis

Minneapolis Institute of the Arts

The Axe Man, Minneapolis selling recycled materials of all kinds

Tina Gravatt studio, Philadelphia

In 1999, Tina Gravatt a published quilt maker, visited my studio while tutoring in Australia. I was particularly interested to see her impressive collection of miniature quilts and discuss the historical research underpinning them. Gravatt uses a 'tableau' format to display her work, recreating period 'interiors' in miniature for the viewer.

This artist has made a niche for herself, honouring the fine hand and machine construction techniques of generations of American women, reproducing them in an original way. Miniature quilt projects are most suitable for workshop situations as they require smaller quantities of fabric and, quite often are quicker to complete than a full-sized quilt.

Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia

The Fabric Workshop was founded to preserve and promote the fibre arts through exhibitions and installations of sculpture, performance, costume, furniture prints, paintings and works on paper but has gradually morphed into one of Philadelphia's premier exhibition spaces for contemporary art in all media. It is the only museum in the United States creating and exhibiting new work in fabric and experimental materials in collaboration with emerging and established international artists.

It was very interesting to access the workshop space and have the opportunity to speak to a member of staff. The FW&M has the reputation of being at the forefront of contemporary textile art. The work exhibited was a confirmation of the way in which I've worked and will continue to work in the future; the belief that my work has to be strong conceptually, intellectually and technically.

Debra Bernath Studio, Brooklyn

Debra Bernath attended the Kansas City Conference. A free-lance textile designer for the fashion industry, she invited me to visit her New York studio. Using state of the art computer technology, Bernath produces designs for men and women's fashion and swimwear and is in great demand for her wonderful sense of colour and design.

The resources Bernath requires are considerable and costly. In comparison, the equipment I need to produce my work is quite basic.

Ellis Island Immigration Museum, New York

My work often makes reference to the fact that we are a nation of immigrants. I'm familiar with the various waves of immigration arriving here, bringing with them a wealth of heritage to enrich Australia in so many ways. Ellis island was one of a number of places where third class passengers from all over the world were assessed for entry into the United States of America. It was interesting to see how immigrant stories were told in the museum context.

The museum attracts people from all parts of the world as well as Americans wanting to visit the place where their relatives arrived. The audio tour offered by the Museum was splendid. Visitors moved from one display to another prompted by oral history interviews with people who came through Ellis Island as children or young adults. The scale and quality of the displays, combining the historical and the contemporary, were stunning.

I noted various types of displays, for instance using two suspended sheets of Perspex to sandwich bank notes, brought from all over the world, by immigrants. Should the opportunity arise, I could incorporate this display method in a future exhibition; the advantage being the material can be viewed from both sides.

I also visited –

The Smithsonian American Indian Museum, New York.

American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore MA

Visionary Art as defined for the purposes of the American Visionary Art Museum (AVAM), refers to “art produced by self taught individuals usually without formal training whose work arises from an innate personal vision that reveals foremost in the creative act itself”. In short, visionary art begins by “listening to the inner voices of the soul and often may not be thought of as art by its creator.” (AVAM website www.avam.org)

A visit to the AVAM was a ‘must’, because of its worldwide reputation. I was eager to see the work of artists without formal training, many of whom used recycled materials.

The exhibition titled, *High on Life—Transcending Addiction*, was profoundly moving. In the curator’s words “Addiction is a spectrum in which we all participate, whether our drug of choice is caffeine, nicotine, morphine, sugar or shopping.” Never before have I seen such a powerful body of work in one place. The didactics were really clear and told the story of the individual artists, describing their joy, their pain and their creative process.

I was particularly touched by a series of small embroideries 2.5”x 2.25” by Ray Materson. He began stitching while he was in jail, using unravelled sock thread. As a child he had memories of his grandmother stitching on the porch and, to save his sanity, he began to teach himself to stitch. In the course making art he turned his life around having found a positive mode of expression and a purpose for living. Now out of jail, Materson’s work is in demand for its graphic quality, content and technical excellence.

My visit was complete with an unscheduled meeting with Rebecca Hoffberger the Founder and Director of the AVAM. We discussed the Museum’s exhibitions policy; free-lance curators, appointed by the Museum, select artists for thematic exhibitions. Australian regional galleries are doing likewise, funds permitting.

My visit to AVAM was a very important experience. I came away with a newfound boldness in my approach to future work, in particular, *Line of Blood—Myall Creek Massacre 1838—our shared history*. The exhibiting artists were fearless in their approach to story telling. I intend to do likewise.

I also visited –

Winterthur House, Delaware

University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia

Amish country, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence RI

In my research, I found the interactive Tirocchi project, launched in 2001, on the RISD website. The website powerfully combined textiles, history and women’s stories presented as a virtual exhibition with a strong educational emphasis.

I contacted Susan Hay, Curator of Costume and Textiles, as I very much wanted to access the collection having been inspired by the website. (<http://tirocchi.stg.brown.edu>) (http://www.risd.edu/museum_exhibitions)

Titled, *From Paris to Providence: Fashion, Art and the Tirocchi Dressmakers’ Shop, 1915-1947*, the exhibition presented a unique collection of more than three hundred early twentieth-century textiles and garments made by Italian émigré sisters Anna and Laura Tirocchi in their shop at 514 Broadway, Providence. The Tirocchi collection and Website are unparalleled

resources for understanding many wide-ranging historical issues, including Italian immigration, women as workers and consumers, and the transition from hand production of garments to ready-to-wear clothing.

I was shown exquisite examples of garments made for the social elite of Providence from imported fabrics and stored in state of the art rolling storage designed for garments in a controlled environment. (Image No 8) I inspected an important cross section of the Tirocchi sister's creative output over 32 years.

The Tirocchi collection provides an uninterrupted time line charting the fashion and fabric changes in a prosperous US community, influenced by European trends. It is supported by comprehensive archival material; photographs, correspondence, client and staff lists, patterns and fabric carefully saved and stored until the building was put up for auction in 1990. The auctioneer alerted RISD Art Museum and the beneficiaries of the estate agreed to allow the entire contents of the workrooms to be documented prior to dispersal, a mammoth task taking two years.

The visit reinforced my belief in the societal significance of textiles as central in the lives of both the women who wore the garments and the women who designed and made them. Textiles connected women across different social classes in a powerful way. The makers, often women in poor circumstances, invested themselves through their intense handling in the garments, whose wearers they might never meet, but who nonetheless carried next to their skin, something beautiful; dense with meaning and aspiration.

I also visited –

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Alice Guffy Miller summer studio, Lake Erie, New York State

Alice Guffy Miller is a celebration and performance artist who works on community projects with young and old. Her work had been brought to my attention by artist Evelyn Roth; particularly her use of recycled materials for large public projects. (Image No.9)

Alice invited me to be part of a public installation project on the shore of Lake Erie. All materials for the project were collected from the beach, washed up over the winter by the waves. I was given two tasks. 1. To create an installation on the beach and 2. To make myself a costume for the 4th of July parade: the theme, "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness". I used the blue plastic raincoats collected from our Maid of the Mist excursion at Niagara Falls to make a Lady Liberty outfit. (Image No.10)

The installation was made from dark grey slate stones, worn smooth by the lake water. I created a spiral of stones curving away from the existing line and winding in to encircle the existing fireplace hollow. When complete, a fire was set and the sand between the stones raked. (Image No.11)

4th of July Parade, Van Buren Point

A particular highlight of my visit was the Parade. Alice got a group of us organised and Lady Liberty went down really well.

Working with Alice Guffy Miller gave me the opportunity to work on a large scale and to work in consultation with other artists, an opportunity I rarely have in Australia.

Mindful of the likelihood of a storm washing my spiral away, I was interested to note that the temporal nature of the work did not influence or diminish the intellectual process involved in my art making.

On my return to Australia I was advised the spiral had been washed away by a storm some two weeks after my departure.

**Penland, North Carolina
Penland School of Craft
2-week workshop**

Tutor: Arturo Alonzo Sandoval *Designing for Art Quilts 5* – 19 July

I became a student at Penland - one of the best art/craft schools in the USA. (Image No.12)

I found Arturo Alonzo Sandoval's work on the Web and subsequently discovered he has a high profile and is highly regarded in art circles, nationally and internationally. I particularly liked his use of recycled materials to make in large public art pieces. I felt I could learn a lot from him.

His Penland workshop description appealed: "This workshop will use collage, patterning, and image enlargement to generate designs, which may be used as inspiration for art quilts. Students will create collage studies using found imagery and/or photocopies of personal imagery. Image enlargement exercises extend the abstract possibilities of our collage designs. The result of these successive steps will be dozens of design ideas. Work produces results."

The first four days of the workshop were spent collecting the images to make a *Vocabulary of Art Terms* and *Representation to Abstraction* examples. The latter, through a series of steps, led us to be able to create our own unique abstraction suitable for a textile project. (Image No.13)

In the evenings tutors showed slides of their work. The standard revealed an extraordinary depth of talent. For example: Pinkney Herbert, *Freedom to Paint*, Keke Cribbs & Alicia Lomne, *Mixed Media Glass Sculpture*, Julia Woodman *Flatware & 3D Tessellation*, Holy Roberts, *Photo Collage & Paint*, Holy Brackmann, *Hand-woven Devore: Beyond Burnout* and Jenna Goldberg, *Colour & Carving*.

While experimenting with the design skills learned as part of the workshop, I had ideas for two new series of work; one autobiographical; using family photos and the other, the Americana series.

My lasting impression of the USA is the plethora of flags. Flags for all occasions and displayed in the most inventive and creative ways. Post 9/11 and with the Iraq operation in full swing, the stars and stripes, in all sizes, could be seen everywhere. It will take some time to integrate the visual experience and I hope to be able to combine my ideas with a variety of new construction techniques learned at the workshop to produce a fresh approach to the subject matter.

I also visited –

Ion Gallery, Asheville
Blue Spiral Gallery, Asheville

Beth Nobles studio, Iowa City

I found Beth Nobles work on the Internet. I established dialogue with her and accepted an invitation to visit her studio. Her fine contemporary embroideries are powerful statements about a wide variety of issues including the "glass ceiling", the civil rights movement, politics and family members. Using computer-manipulated images, transferred to fabric, Nobles carefully stitches the image by hand and machine. The results are strong visually and

conceptually. Of all the artists I met, I share most with Nobles. Even though her scale of working is much smaller we are both addressing societal anomalies, and feminist issues in our work. (Image No.14)

As a result of meeting Nobles, I feel I have forged a link with another artist with whom I share a similar mind-set and approach to creative work. I sincerely hope our dialogue continues, as I'm certain to be confronted with difficult decisions regarding content and approach in future exhibitions which I intend to discuss with her.

While in Illinois I gave a presentation at **Augustana College**, Rock Island to textile students, past and present, using the *Morley Grainger Touring Exhibitions* CD Rom. The content was extremely well received. The comments from the audience lead me to believe there are many parallels between settler culture in both countries.

In Iowa I was invited to **Astrid Bennett** studio, Surface Design Association representative, Iowa where, before a pot-luck dinner a group of Iowa based artists were guided through my website. (www.morleygrainger.com)

San Francisco, California

I met **Caroline Dahl** at the Station House Café, Pt Reyes Station outside San Francisco, where she was doing a 'gig'. Dahl describes herself as a 'boogie-woogie' piano-playing textile artist, making intricate embroideries often of the characters she encounters while performing.

I discovered her music and artwork on the World Wide Web and contacted her. I wanted to meet her, as I had been so impressed by the humour and movement she is able to bring into her embroideries. The pieces often include text, the narrative providing the viewer with clues to understand the image.

Our second meeting enabled us to do 'show and tell'. Caroline brought a number of her framed embroideries as well as boxes of cards with a selection of her embroideries printed on for sale. (Image No.15)

As my work is not for sale, I realised that taking a leaf out of Caroline's book, by putting together sets of cards for sale with printed images of a selection of pieces from my exhibitions, would make good economic sense. These cards could be added to the income generating merchandise already available with my exhibitions.

Susan Taber Avila studio, San Francisco

I had made contact with **Susan Taber Avila** early in my search for artists. She had made some useful contact suggestions. I had met her and her colleague Valeri Clarke at the Surface Design Association Conference in Kansas City and she had invited me to visit her San Francisco studio.

Avila's work is experimental incorporating text and textiles. A Goldsmiths College graduate, (MFA 1986) she does very exciting and innovative conceptual work; for example, working with felted female torsos as a carrier for text. She has moved away from straight screen-printing for the top end of the fashion market and is concentrating on work for exhibition and building a solid reputation as a textile lecturer.

At present she is experimenting with stream of consciousness embroidery using the sewing machine to 'write' the words. She didn't have any new work to show as she'd just sent off a batch to various curators and galleries exhibiting her pieces. It seems the way to develop a reputation is to encourage curators to approach you to be part of a group show. Touring one's

work the way I do is unheard of in the US. Galleries do 'buy in' shows but with the recession it's an increasing struggle to procure ongoing funding.

San Jose Quilt and Textile Museum, San Jose

The San Jose Quilt Museum has an international reputation and warranted a visit.

On display was **Andrea Kalinowski's** touring exhibition *Stories Untold—Jewish Pioneer Women 1850-1910*. The work is striking. Using computer generated fabric patterns, Kalinowski has 'constructed' quilt surfaces based on historical research of quilt fabric and designs of the period. The designs are made to look like the 'real thing' and are then printed out on a flat surface of white canvas seven feet square; weighted top and bottom. The 'quilts' include enlarged photographic images superimposed on the design as well as boxed areas of printed text, telling each woman's story. Kalinowski, a painter by training, has had a change of direction in wanting to tell Jewish women's stories; each one has it's own 'quilt'.

In addition to the large faux quilts, Kalinowski included some of her smaller, more intimate pieces, enabling the viewer to understand the development through to the larger works. A terrific catalogue supports the show. The exhibition is toured by the Art Museum, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

In discussions with Jane Przybysz, Executive Director I expressed a desire to contact Kalinowski as her approach and the work she is producing are very similar to my own.

At last I've found another artist working at the nexus of history and visual art, textiles. However, Andrea is using cutting edge technology to produce an interesting textile composite of three dimensional object (the quilt) translated into two dimensions and embellished. She also uses the computer to arrange blocks of text and photographic images on the canvas surface. By contrast, my work incorporates many of the time-honoured hand and machine construction techniques, used by generations of women making both fancy and utility quilts. In my exhibitions, a wall-hung boxed montage supports the quilt. It contains a selection of artefacts, historical photographs, poetry, prose—whatever is needed to strengthen the story line.

I also visited San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Marc Chagall retrospective. This featured 194 pieces of Chagall's work including backdrops for performances in Russia before he left for France. The narrative quality of Chagall's work has been an inspiration. In the face of Modernism Chagall held the line and continued to make art his way. I aspire to doing likewise.

In Fort Mason, San Francisco, I visited the Craft Council of America trade show where the finest craftspeople displayed their wares for both the general public and the trade. The quality of their work was awesome and The Zipper Jacket was duly admired and gathered additional friends.

CONCLUSIONS

- “Narrative visual art” is a new term. The research for the trip uncovered a growing community of artists describing themselves this way. I feel that my trip both enhanced my sense of where my work fits in the visual lexicon, and hopefully reinforced a sense of identity amongst the other artists I met. I believe the term “narrative artist” has developed because all people have a need to hear and tell stories; either their own or other people’s. Some make complex narrative work, others more minimalist and the range of media used to tell the story is breathtaking. But I now have a sense of my place in the art world.
- Artists share a common language that transcends culture. It was a constant delight to meet and share the instant understanding—thematic and stylistic—that comes from having found one’s place in a group. My sense of isolation has been reduced and my identity as an artist profoundly affirmed by the opportunity to network with a like-minded community.
- While I met only one other artist, Al Johnson of London, touring her exhibitions independently and thus retaining full control and ownership of her work, I benefited greatly from the approach to this vexed question taken by others. For a visual artist, the question of how to feed oneself is never far from consciousness. There was great interest in my approach and I gained a lot from the other artists, which may be useful in maintaining an income stream. The card sets based around exhibitions could be a simple but profitable merchandising development.
- Nearly all the artists I met have full time employment. I feel proud of my independence and privileged to be as free to create as I am. For most artists, moving between full-time employment, family responsibilities and artwork involves a delicate balancing act. The mind-set to make art requires substantial time; it is quite draining moving between the “real” and creative worlds. Given this “schizophrenic” experience of the employed artist, I am amazed at the work people get through. Most of those whose work I admire have strong social networks and support. In the USA, where the art world is much larger, such networks of like-minded people seem perhaps easier to maintain than in Australia. But with the Internet and email and through the Churchill Fellowship I now have a virtual community, which I believe will be mutually sustaining.
- There is a genuine commitment by many of the artists to continue using recycled materials as a planet saving as well as a creative exercise. This makes my spirit soar. Having occasionally encountered bemusement about my own preference for the pre-loved, I was thrilled to find so many working so passionately and cleverly with found objects; from recycled bank notes to onion bags and driftwood. I feel totally affirmed in this way of working as it adds another dimension—awareness of the finite environment—to my work. It’s a serendipitous as well as economical way to work—the objects suggest directions in the work and the whole exercise becomes a dance between the possibilities in the materials and the vision in the artist’s mind.
- All the artists sell their work through galleries, in the conventional way and found my approach novel.
- All the artists I met take their work very seriously and wish to have it viewed by as many people as possible. They are all represented in public and private collections nationally and internationally. I gleaned some valuable strategies for marketing my work through galleries in the conventional way from the artists. However the art scene is somewhat different in the US—galleries are often generously funded by benefactors, for instance, and have bigger budgets for buying work. Even so, as the

result of recent events, art gallery funding has been slashed and galleries now have to stretch their budgets like never before. It seems arts funding is a tenuous business worldwide.

- I learnt a great deal about textile conservation, which is relevant for my own work as I store it myself at home. The textile conservation set-ups in UK and USA were atmospherically controlled and state of the art on rolling tracks with shelving placement for whole garments to lie flat to minimise the stress on the textiles. While such a set-up is out of the question cost-wise for a freelancer like myself, there are elements of these techniques I can adapt to my own needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- I will continue to make touring exhibitions, the next project being *Line of Blood—Myall Creek Massacre 1838—our shared history*. As with the other touring exhibitions, a workshop will be offered as an optional extra. In the workshop I will be able to share the information I acquired on my Fellowship trip, information gleaned in the interactive meetings I had with artist's I planned to meet and others I met along the way. I have also begun incubating two other exhibitions, largely as a result of my time at Penland. The autobiographical series of works, *My Family*, tapping memories of an Australian upbringing including family photographs and ephemera and *the Americana series* (working title) synthesising fabric prints, artefacts and images gathered as I travelled through the USA.
- A touring exhibition is planned; bringing to Australia the work of fifteen of the artists I met. I will curate this exhibition involving, using a uniformly sized format, and a common theme of roses. Titled *Petals & Thorns*, the exhibition will tour to at least one Australian gallery; hopefully in a capital city then, continue on to the USA, UK, Israel and Jamaica.
- I am exploring with Daniel Abad, Arts Promoter, the idea of a lecture tour to be offered to corporate Australia, art schools and associations with an interest in my art form. This strategy will be an effective way to share my experiences, to promote the Churchill Trust and publicise my current and future work.
- I am still processing the experience of the Fellowship and at this time am not yet able to say in what ways it has changed me. I will continue to network with my new artistic community and expect the collaborative process to reap great benefits for me, my fellow artists and my wider community. I have a ready source of technical and aesthetic input, and no longer have to work in deep isolation. For this I am deeply grateful and hope in future I can continue to produce art of value to the Australian community.
- In terms of improvements, the benefits of this trip are mostly to my own development as an artist. I would strongly recommend awarding Fellowships to other artists as the advantages of developing a global network of peers have immeasurable benefits for those of us who could never afford to do it without assistance.

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