

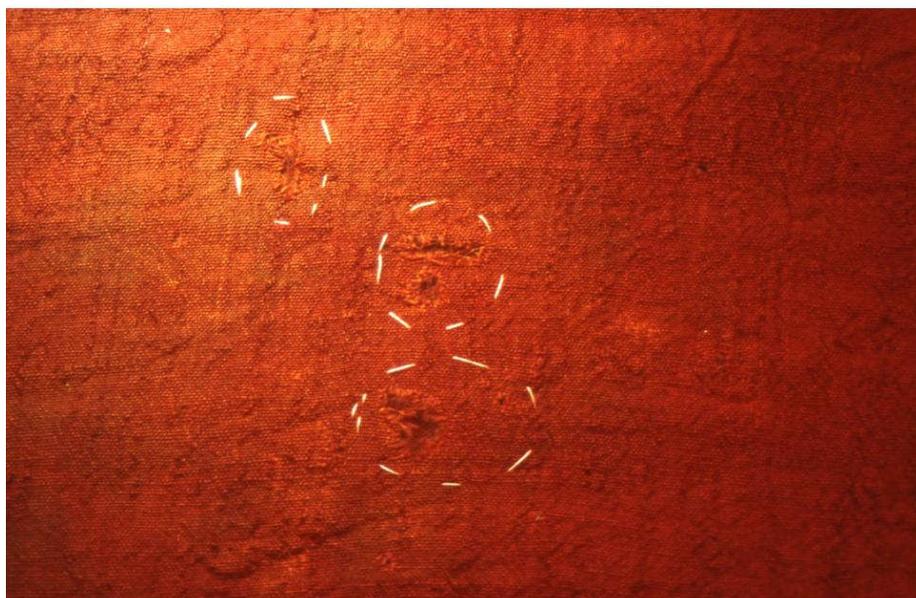
A Thread, a Line, a Fabric: Caroline Bartlett

The term 'Migratory Practices' suggests movement from one place to another, as a frequently repeated act. It conjures up the crossing of permeable borders and relocation, mobility in the field, the establishment of networks of different routes. It suggests a fluidity between disciplines which might otherwise be discrete. In this presentation, I consider this idea of 'cross-overs' in relation to strands in my own practice. Whilst this engages with issues around how knowledge is constructed and transmitted and draws on other disciplines to inform it, my enquiry is practice led; this will be reflected later in the presentation.

My work is driven by questions, such as: how do we record memory and construct knowledge? What role do the senses and touch in particular, play in this? What is the space between intuitive remembering and the deliberate act of recollection? What is the potential of materials to trigger recollection and association?

A thread, a line, a fabric; social, cultural, historical

I think through fabric. Fabric tempts touch, and touch invites a bodily way of knowing and remembering. Cloth is fundamental to all human experience, inhabiting every part of our lives as functional and social and symbolic objects. Whether produced as a site of resistance, (as in suffragette banners), or as a commemorative cloth in which meaning is intentionally embedded, (as in memorial quilts), or existing as a fragment marked by time, fabric can be a powerful mnemonic device.



It can trigger individual or collective memories and histories, and it can provoke feelings and meanings beyond its physicality. Textiles have a history in which the embodiment of memory is part of their cultural encoding.

Cloth is a sensual medium. It is also strongly associated with the body, intimacy and with the domestic and everyday. Historically, smell and touch have been seen as the lowest of the senses, associated with the animal, with sex, with immorality and with the 'primitive'.

The evolution of a ranking of the senses, giving primacy to sight, and the development of a hierarchy of the mind over the body in the Western world have been much explored in academia.¹ Value is placed on text based models of representation and text becomes an authenticating device. The sensory order (where sight is supreme) is bound up with the cultural order, influencing forms of social organisation and other areas of cultural expression. It has been argued that this ranking of the senses has affected the formation of art hierarchies, the separation of practices into 'fine art' and 'craft'. New technologies have also brought with them an ever growing emphasis on image based culture.

It has been argued that placing vision at the top of a sensory hierarchy has dictated the kind of art which has had the most prestige in the West. Emphasis has been placed on the viewers' distance and on ideas of detached contemplation. In this interpretation we have the art object disconnected from the social and cultural functions it had in the past, and conceived of as autonomous, an intellectual aesthetic act. Objects of symbolic and practical use, close to everyday activity, lack this detachment. Handled and used, they develop a patina which assumes a different and intimate value.

In her essay *Craft, Creativity and Critical Practice*², Sue Rowley refers to the anthropological study of 'biographical objects' by Janet Hoskins, in which she suggests that an object can become 'a way of knowing oneself through things'. She connects these ideas with:

... the perception of many craft makers that objects may validly act as vehicles by which identity and memory may be organised and expressed. From this perspective, objects are imbued with meaning through use and, in turn, they enable personal and cultural experiences to be constituted as meaningful.

¹ Ong, W. 'The Shifting Sensorium in *The Varieties of Sensory Experience; A Sourcebook on the Anthropology of the Senses* ed Howes, (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press 1991) p25-30. The debate is continued by Howes in *Sensorial Anthropology* p167-189

² Rowley, S (ed.), 'Craft, Creativity and Critical Practice' in *Reinventing Textiles; Volume I: Tradition and Innovation*, (Telos Art Publishing 1999), p 16-17

This 'insight into the symbolic function of an object', making us (its audience) construct the idea it represents, can become, for the artist and maker, a point of departure for producing new work. How does an object function in the world? What does it represent and how is it presented? What systems control the means of interpretation?

The Artists Journey

My attention was drawn to these issues in an early project entitled the 'Artists' Journey' in which I had been selected to produce work in response to the collections of Sir Richard Burton at Orleans House and Lord Leighton at Leighton House. Unwrapping with gloved hands the carefully preserved fragments of Burtons life, housed in two archival boxes; a splinter of wood, an odd shoe, drew attention to the poignancy of these disparate objects in which absence is such a recurring theme. Burtons' wife, Isabel had destroyed many of his papers in an effort to sanitise him for Victorian Society but in the inventory accompanying the collection, lay further evidence of how and why stories can get lost or altered in the telling. Isabel had itemised each item of memorabilia with her own description and this had been reformed into the objective language of the museum collection.

'The last flowers my darling culled the day before his death in Casa..., Trieste' became 'an envelope containing a few brown fragments.'

The privileging of sight as the primary form of knowledge and understanding has particular implications for forms of artistic production, in which the complete reception, and appreciation of such objects comes, not only through sight or reference to touch, but through touch itself. Touch evokes past bodily experiences, prompting not only visceral responses but also memories, associations and felt intensities. The actual handling of an object informs us in other ways; is it in fact light although it looks heavy? Is it something other than what it appears to be? What particular insights can we glean from an object through the use of touch? The meaning and power of the object may lie in areas beyond the act of viewing alone.

Objects placed in galleries or museums, as things to which cultural value or significance is attached, can lose their potential to be experienced and understood except through sight. In the recent exhibition *21;21, The Textile Vision of Reiko Sudo and Nuno*, curator Lesley Miller circumvented this by introducing handling materials. In the exhibition space, monitors show interviews with a diverse range of people responding to the question 'what does cloth

mean to me?' Emphasis was placed on the tactile, the visual and the audial; on using other forms of knowledge rather than textual information as a means of sensing, understanding and explaining the objects.

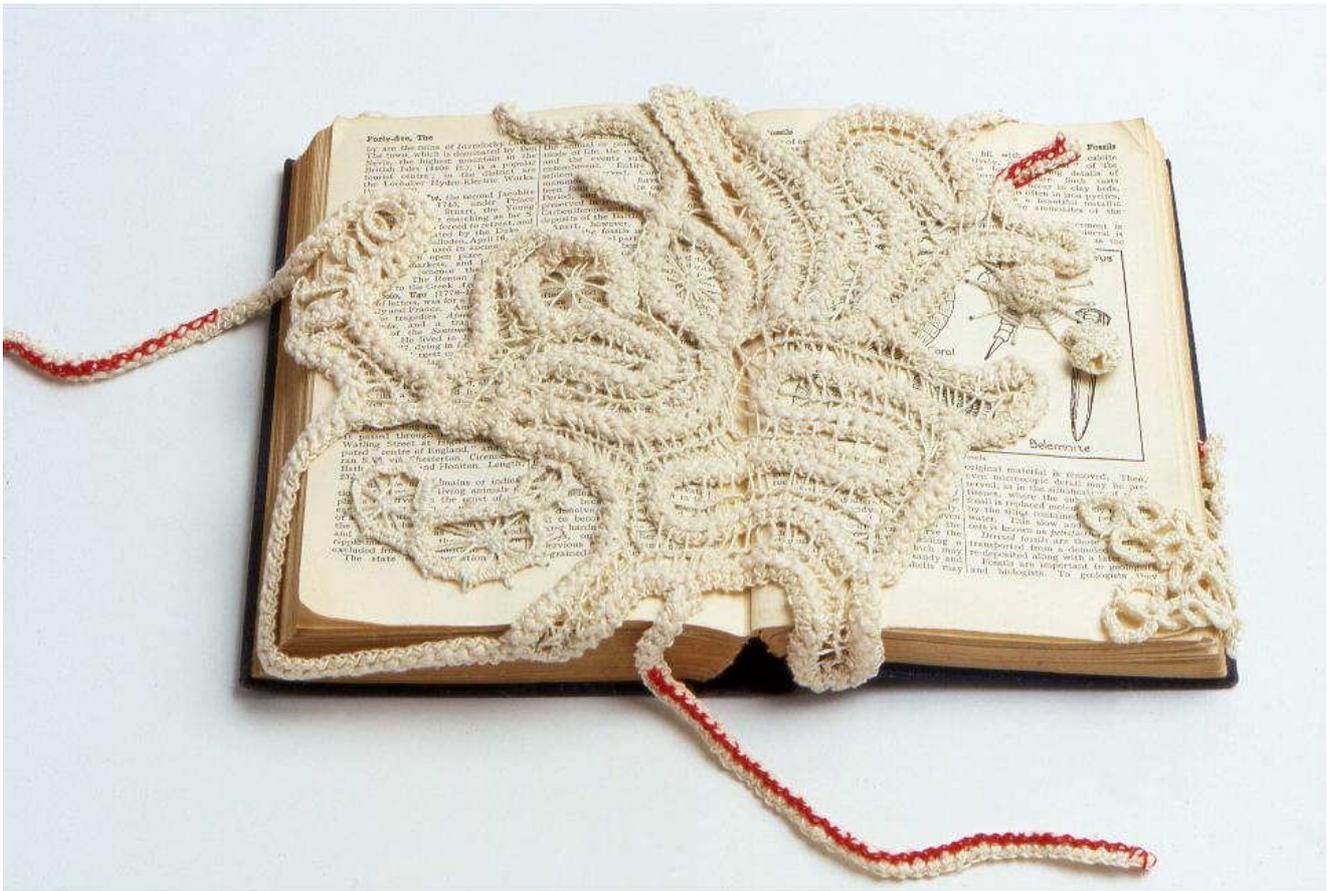


How can something which is based in the experiential and sensorial realm adequately be translated into words? What language do we use to transform the immediate, holistic sensory experience into the 'sequential chain-linked world of verbal description'?³

In my recent works, I have explored the idea of knowledge as a social construct and the use of the written word as an authenticating device, defining what reality is, has been and will be, through examining various sites of cultural production, presentation and reception. My starting points have been historic sites, museum collections, archives and encyclopaedias. These 'bodies of knowledge' play a significant role in the forming of individual and collective

^{3 3} Fletcher, R. 'The Messages of Material Behaviour; a preliminary discussion of non verbal meaning' in *The Meaning of Things: Material Culture and Symbolic Expression* ed Hodder, I. (London: Unwin Hyman 1989) p37-8

identities, memories and value systems; in determining what we choose to preserve, which stories to tell and how we tell them.



Bodies of Knowledge

Over a number of years, I have been involved in a process of customizing a set of eight encyclopaedias published in 1934, relating each volume to a different museum collection. This one for example was shown in Cambridge Zoological Museum.

Viewed as a microcosm of the museum, with the alphabet becoming the arbitrary order of categorisation, the encyclopaedia is analogous to museum systems: it reflects dominant values and governing ideologies evident in content, presentation and use of language.



Bodies of Knowledge Volume V; Arbiters of Taste makes reference to the V&A as an 'encyclopaedia of treasures'. Open at pages on Interior Design, the encyclopaedic text belies objectivity in advising readers to 'rip out ugly Victorian fireplaces'. The Art Nouveau chairs depicted in the rings on the margins of the work refer to the donation of 38 pieces from the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1900. This collection was reviled by critics at the time and 'banished' to the Bethnal Green Museum. Ironically, these very pieces were later recognised as prime examples of their type. However, anxieties generated by the controversy contributed to a policy (in place until the 1970s), to collect and show very little that was less than 50 years old, on the basis that perspective and distance were required in matters of taste.

The work shown here was first exhibited in 2003 in the *Textiles in Context* exhibition at the V&A. In 2004 it was acquired by the Department of Furniture, Textiles and Fashion. In *Collecting the Contemporary; Love will decide what is kept and Science will decide how it is kept*⁴, Sue Prichard refers specifically to this work in questioning how traditional museology, with its narrow parameters and genre hierarchy, can be reconciled with twenty first century artistic practice. Traditionally, objects in cabinets of curiosity

... were arranged according to their material base and these arrangements were replicated in the creation of specific museum collections and departments, (Furniture and Woodwork, Textiles and Dress, Prints, Drawings and Paintings), further divided into geographical areas.

⁴ Sue Prichard, 'Collecting the Contemporary;' 'Love Will Decide What is Kept and Science Will Decide How it is Kept', *Journal of Cloth and Culture* p153-4

Alluding to *Bodies of Knowledge Volume V; Arbiters of Taste*, she asks how such work should be categorised - 'as textiles, textile art, art installation, text?', and which collection should acquire it: 'Furniture, Textiles and Fashion; Word and Image; Sculpture?' Ideas of tradition are being deliberately challenged in material practice through an unravelling of fixed categories, and much contemporary work no longer sits neatly into material and technique based categories. A reluctance to rethink definitions means that objects remain constrained by the traditions of institutional structures from migrating to inhabit different spaces.





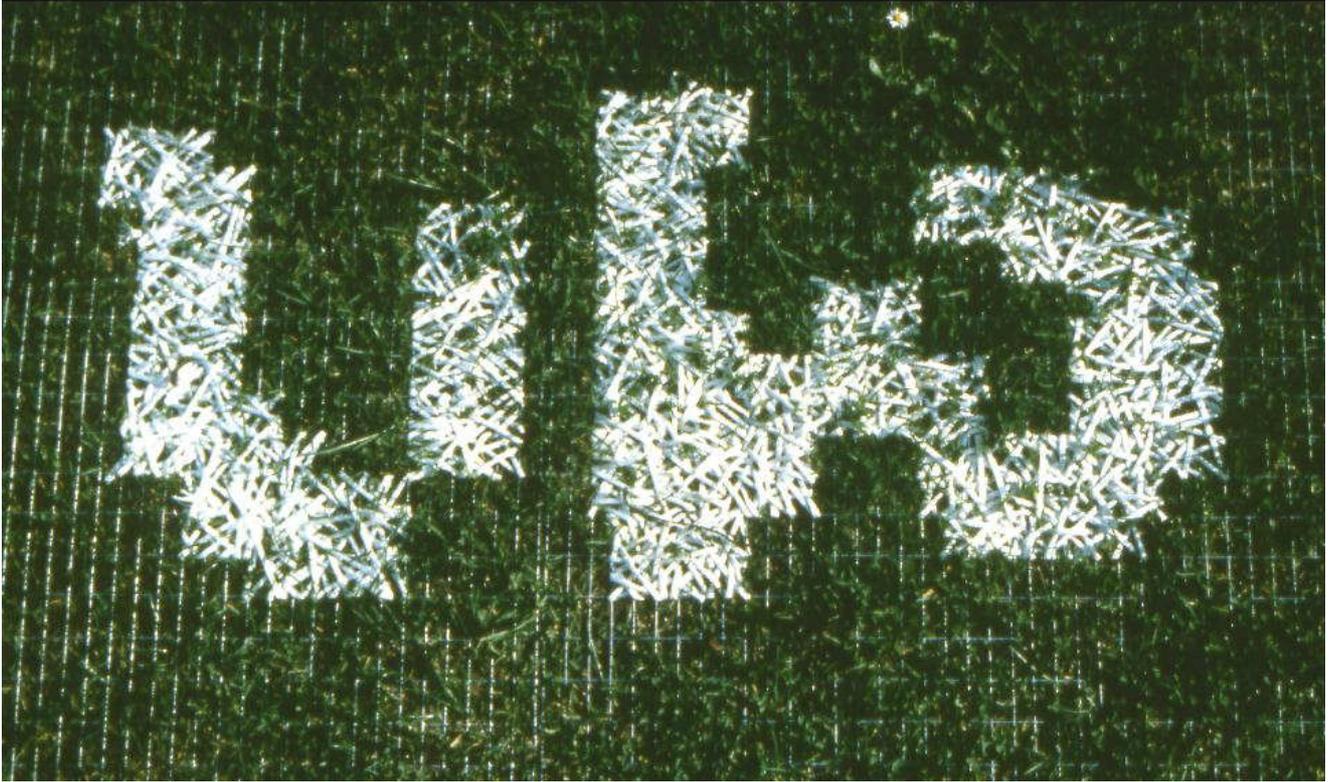
Codices 2000

In such sites of cultural production and representation, (museums, historic sites, encyclopaedias etc.) the written word becomes an authenticating device, embodying knowledge and power, accessible to those who are able to decode it. Histories get omitted, overwritten and erased, books get burnt. A commission undertaken for the Abbey Gardens in Bury St Edmunds, in 2000 explored these ideas.

The keeping, making and copying of books by hand had been undertaken by the monks, placing them in a powerful position as guardians of knowledge. With the advent of the printing press and translations from Latin, the written word could be disseminated to a wider audience who could form their own opinions. The dissolution of the monasteries brought with it the destruction, burning and scattering of the archive.

The temporary installation, *Codices* is sited in the ruins of the abbey where the library once was. The Latin text, drawn from an old manuscript of *St Benedict's Rules for Monks*, is illegible as the words are partially erased and digitised. Two large letters have been burnt into the grass and these are combined with other fragmented markings which appear to have been stitched into the grass.





The letter forms are slowly erased as Nature takes over and blades of grass gradually push through the stitching. Here the work is shown in November, disappearing and largely obliterated.

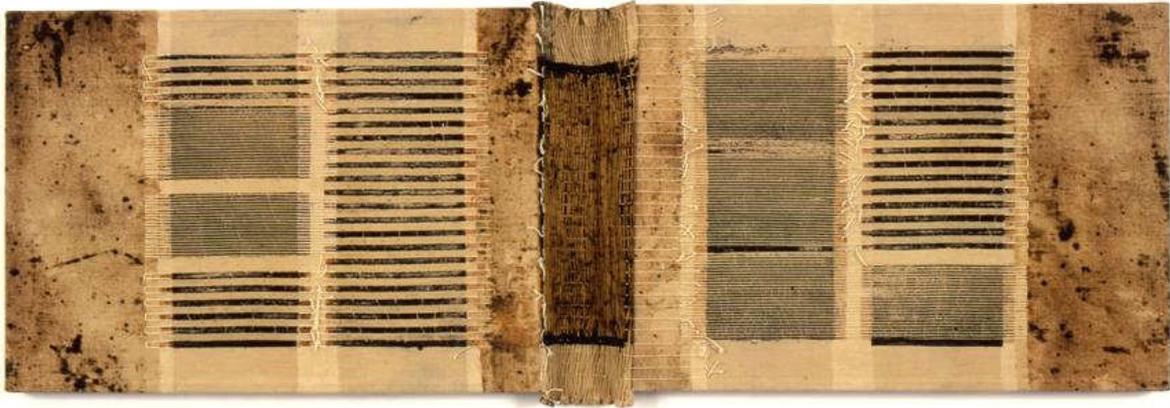


Storeys of Memory

On Holocaust Memorial day, 2001, I was invited to attend an event at the Weiner Library, an archive which documents the Holocaust and which continues to chart these devastating moments of history. This is an archive that demands to be approached with humility.

In the company of writers, journalists and other interested parties, I was shown around the archive. This was housed in the cramped labyrinthine basement of a former kitchen beneath the pavement of a London townhouse. Small spaces tightly packed with periodicals, propaganda pamphlets, a collection of anti-Semitic hate letters, documents, photographs showing people, places, the burning of books and the Torah. Boxes bristle with memory; the mouthpieces of the dead and living. The labels themselves engender a chill; Buchenwald,

Auschwitz, and in this context, titles such as Poland, Czechoslovakia conjure up momentous events. Here lies a chain of evidence of histories, cultures and peoples being erased.



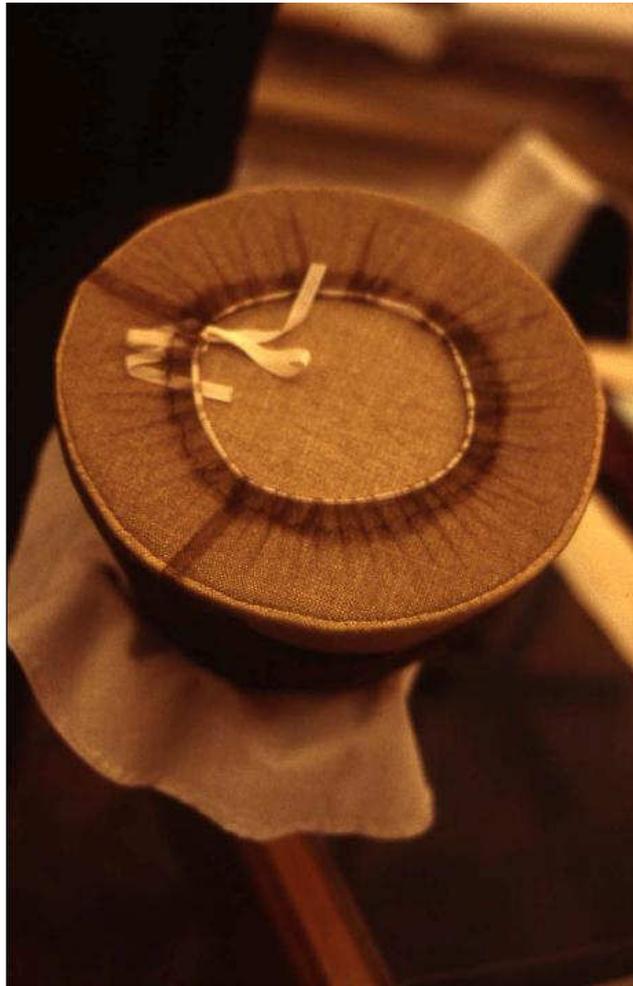
I made several visits and on one, encountered a team of volunteers who met once a week to painstakingly remove staples from propaganda pamphlets and other materials. They then stitch the pages back together with linen thread to preserve the text for posterity. Eye witness accounts in which there is an implicit absence, lie side by side with anti-Semitic propaganda; polarised testimonies to the power of words to unfold terrible truths, conceal them or rework them with ideological motivation.

The word text derives from the Latin *Textus*; something woven, a tissue, from *texere/textum* to weave. According to the Oxford dictionary of Etymology, to weave can mean to pursue a devious discourse. Constructed from fabric, Storeys of Memory is book like in form but there are no pages to be turned. The fabric has been printed and then treated with processes by which the black ground is bleached out. Text is implied but is broken and incomplete, surfaces are partially erased, some are reworked. The centre is folded backwards and forwards. A cutting of the threads which hold the pleats together suggests a release of the secrets between the folds. Lines are stitched back in with linen bookbinding thread, knotted and bound to anchor them to the cloth. There is an implicit absence, a suggestion of erasure and destruction.

Whitworth textile project ; Conversation Pieces

In 2003, I was commissioned by the Whitworth to produce work in response to its textile collection. A book entitled *The Whitworth Art Gallery: the first hundred years* came through the post, introducing me to the history of the institution and outlining its collections. An initial site visit and orientation introduced me to the building, and to the curators and conservator who worked with the collection. I was shown the different storage systems and mechanisms for covering items in the collection and for keeping their form (as shown here). I was also introduced to the catalogue card index (now superseded by a computerised system).





The textile collection houses thousands of articles, drawn from different times and places, diverse in their histories, methods and systems of production, social, economic, and political roles and symbolic meanings. A huge criss-crossing of cultural terrain.

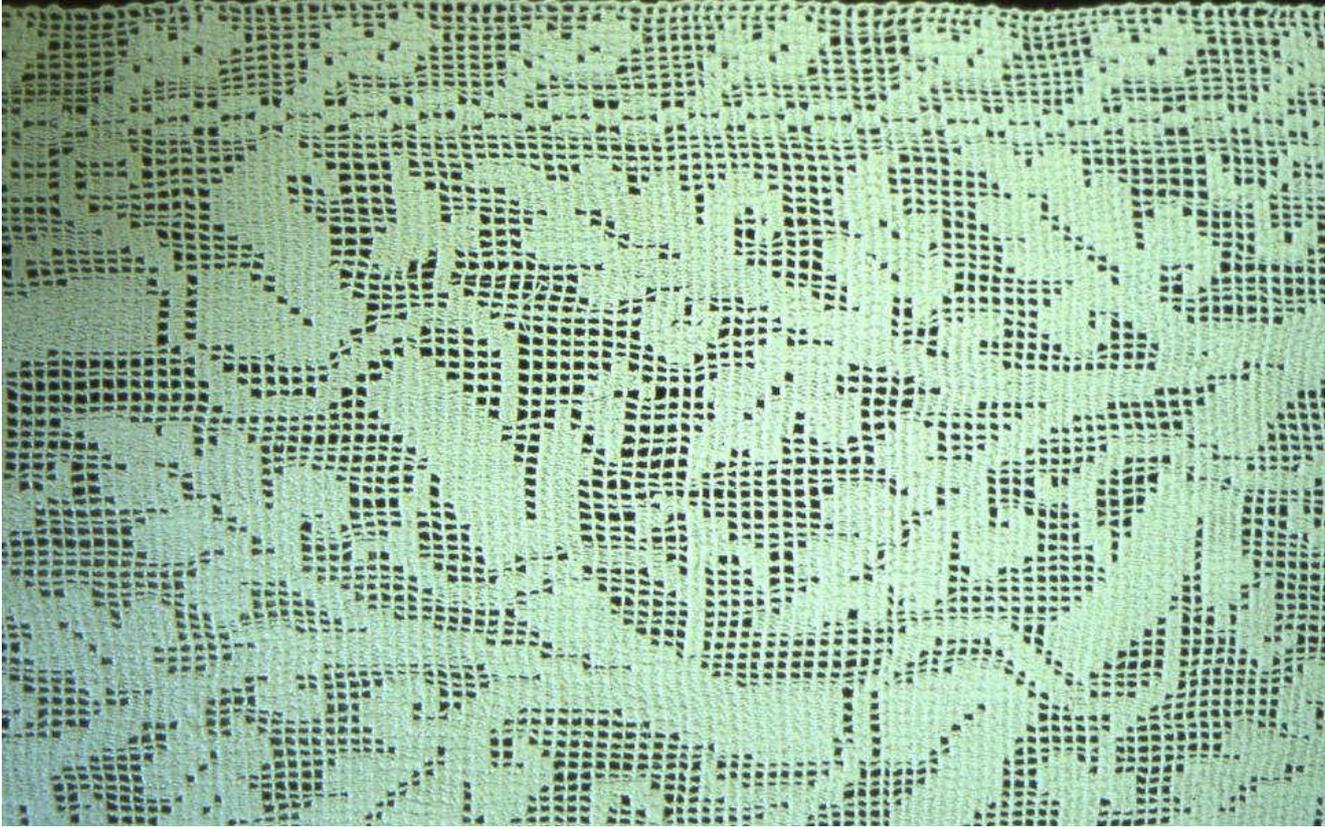
Entering into the museum environment and assuming collectible status, these objects are formed into new associations and groupings and become subject to museological systems of categorisation, display and conservation. Scholarly expertise is brought to bear on them as attempts are made to piece together missing and objective information. Histories are reconstructed around them and interventions are made to conserve them against damage and the erosion of time. What stories can these objects tell? What 'secrets lives' do they have?

My first impulse was to explore items marked by wear and tear, damage and repair as evidence of the relationship between the textile use and human experience: faded remnants, the holed and the threadbare, the pieced, patched and darned. How could these markings be used to indicate the elusive nature and incompleteness of our systems of knowledge and remembering? What is the space between intuitive remembering and the deliberate act of recollection?

Here a Coptic textile and other items from the collection.

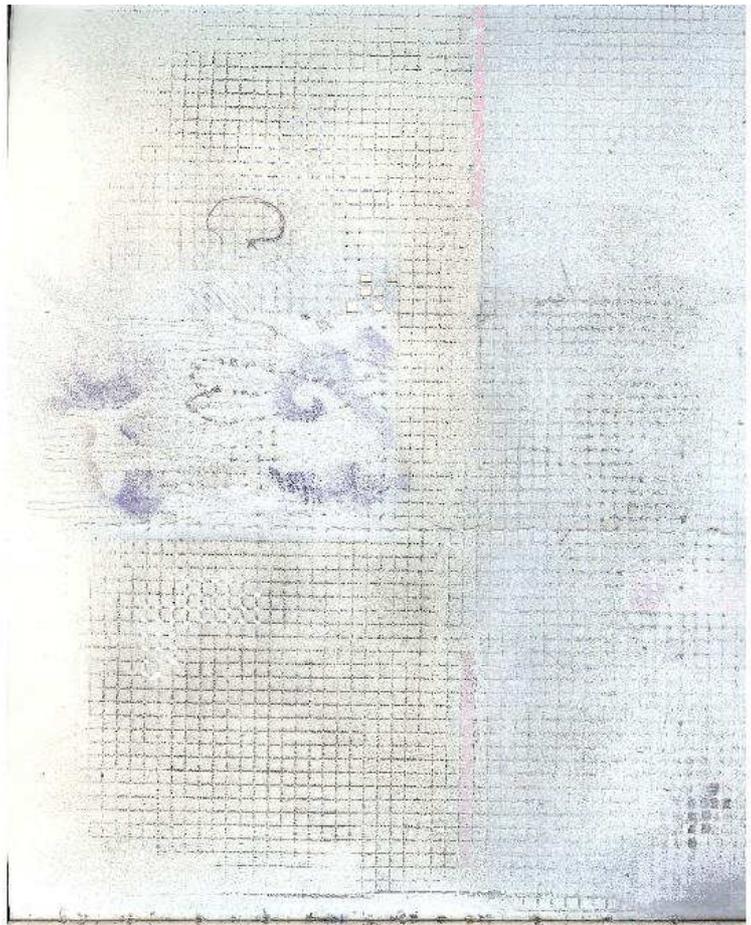


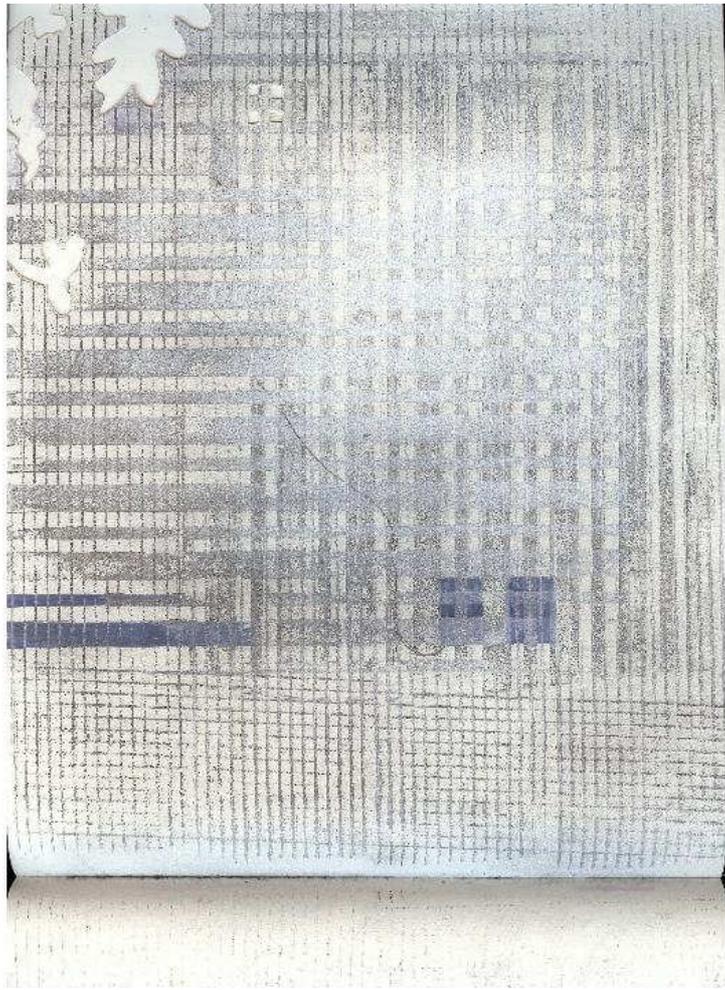
Darned netting on Twisted net

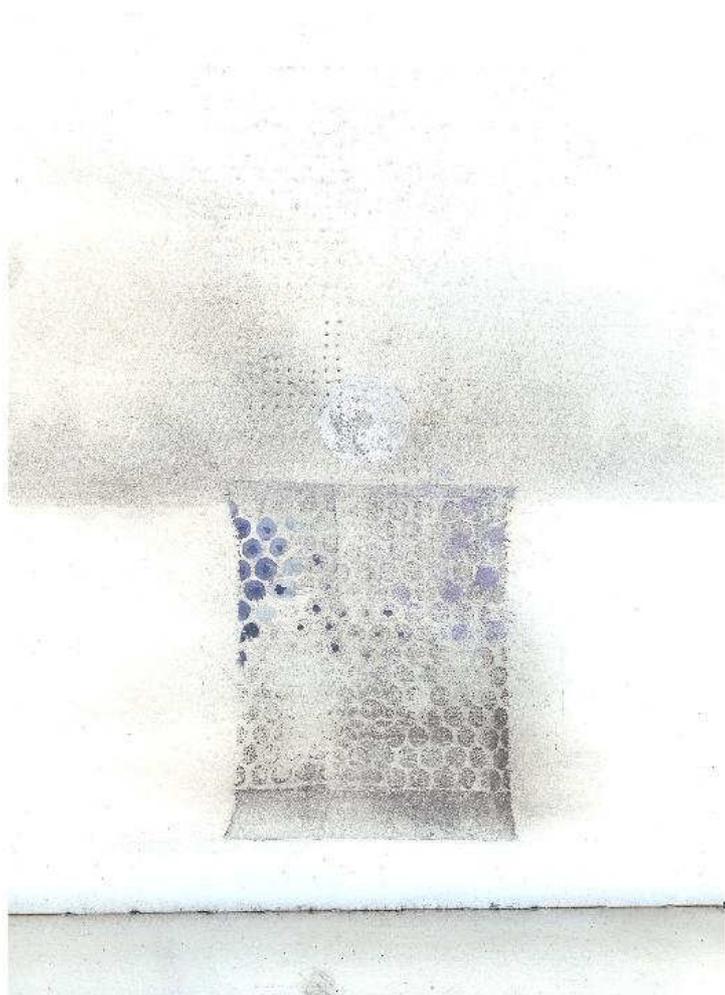


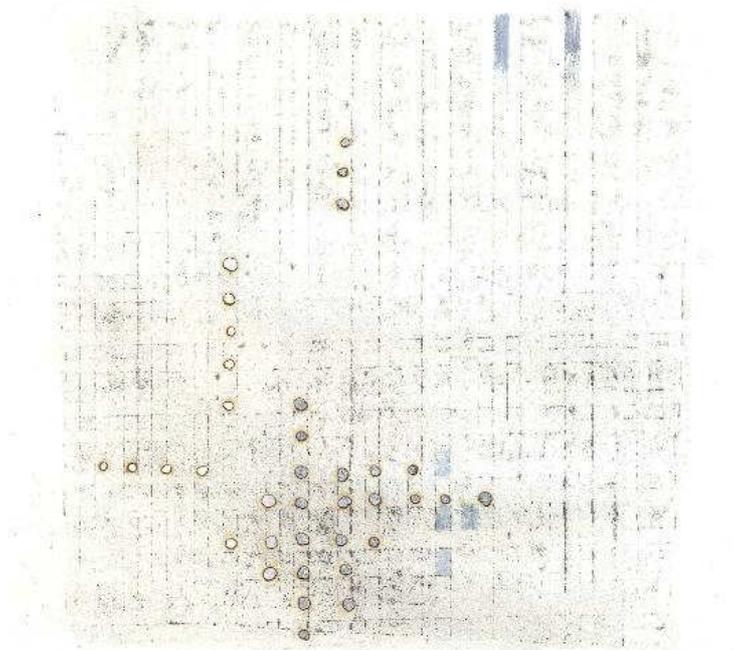
I examined a whole range of diverse objects and tried to investigate these thoughts through over exposed photographs and through the use of 'drawing' in my sketchbook, not as a means of direct observation or recording but more akin to murmurings, an imprinting on my mental mappings in an attempt to sense the objects, to find ways of evoking certain qualities through faded, incomplete interpretations in which the identity of the object becomes blurred.











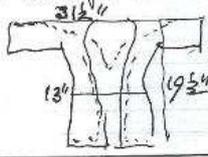
Notes and photographs were put on one side and I attempted to use recall to guide my creative representations.

The subjectivity of this line of approach to damaged articles was in deep contrast to the museological systems which related to them. As my investigations progressed through observation 'back in the field', as opposed to within my practice, I became increasingly aware of both the preventative and interventionist hand of the conservator, and the 'objective' recordings of the curator and archivist. What could a closer examination of these practices reveal about the secret lives of things and their relationship with the institutional structures which contained them?

INV. NO. 11503	CASE NO.	STORE NO. L (-)	E/CO
PROVENANCE	ENGLISH		
PERIOD	19th century		
OBJECT	collar		
SIZE	10 1/2" x 17"		
DESCRIPTION	<p>Piece of white cotton lawn with stamped design and embroidery completed. Design of broderie Anglaise with scalloped buttonholed edges. At edge of cloth printed inscription "7 2633 47 JAS & W^c Wallace, Glasgow, Belfast. If good work & done in 10 days will be paid <u>No skipping allowed.</u>"</p>		
TYPE OF WEAVE			
WEAVE			
WEFT			
HOW AND WHEN ACQUIRED	Permanent loan from Manchester College of Art & Design. April 1966.		
INSURANCE			
REMARKS: CURATOR, OTHER COLLECTIONS, LOANS, PHOTOGRAPHS, CORRESPONDENCE, ETC.	(7222)		

INV. NO. T13.1989	CASE NO. L (-) Case 6 (1989)	STORE NO.	E
PROVENANCE	BRITISH		
PERIOD	1880's (c.1890)		
OBJECT	Eiderdown		
SIZE	71" x 63 1/2" (180 x 161 cm)		
DESCRIPTION	<p>Silk crazy patchwork centre (137 x 119 cm) handmade; embroidered. Satin surround and frill in olive green. Reverse side cotton satin with floral motif in green, peach and blue. Embroidered eyelets and quilting decorate the surface. A note attached reads: "This eiderdown was handmade over 100 years ago (and then backed by Kendals) by Gertrude Southam, who married Walter Carroll in 1896. EMC & IGC." Walter Carroll was a famous composer and we were told by the donor that musicians were the only people allowed to use this eiderdown.</p>		
HOW AND WHEN ACQUIRED	Gift, 1989 from Miss E.M. and Miss I.G. Carroll.		
INSURANCE			
REMARKS: OTHER COLLECTIONS, LOANS, PHOTOGRAPHS, CORRESPONDENCE, ETC.			

MANCHESTER MUSEUM INSTITUTE
UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

INV. No. 8132	Case No.	Store No. J12 E
PROVENANCE INDIAN Probably Lucknow	PERIOD 18th	OBJECT Embroidered bodice
DESCRIPTION (—Size, Material, State, Repairs, etc. —) Embroidered bodice, fine ^{gotton} cotton with delicately embroidery in triangles on shoulders down the back & border design all round in soft colour (cream) red, indigo, gold etc. Stem stitches - French knots etc - v. finely worked fine conc design & all over small floral devices Stitches: stem, chain, eyelets, couching, drawn thread		
		
HOW AND WHEN ACQUIRED Given by Miss Phyllis Barron from Miss Dorothy Larche's collection 1959		
INSURANCE		
REMARKS (—Duplicate, Other Collections, Loaned, Photograph, Correspondence, etc. —) See Collections File Indian Embroideries notes by Anne Morrell 12.6.97		

INV. No. 8936	Case No.	Store No. J12 E
PROVENANCE Indian Probably Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh	PERIOD 18th Century	OBJECT Sash Jacket
DESCRIPTION (—Size, Material, State, Repairs, etc. —) Length 21 1/2" Wrist to wrist 32 1/2" White cotton, with all over repeating pattern of small feather shapes worked in white cotton, and small flower sprigs worked in white, red and fawn cotton and gold thread. At the top of the back and sleeves are palm shaped motifs worked in similar colouring, with the addition of blue and black. The motifs are outlined in ^{couching} gold thread, and a variety of stitches is used, including stem, chain and drawn fabric stitches. The garment has a narrow border of a repeating pattern of flower and leaf sprays. * Also buttonhole and eyelet stitch		
HOW AND WHEN ACQUIRED Presented by Mrs. Eve Simmonds. Council Meeting Minutes 13/5/57		
INSURANCE		
REMARKS (—Duplicate, Other Collections, Loaned, Photograph, Correspondence, etc. —) of 8132 Probably given to Eve Simmonds by Dorothy Larche, who lived in India 1914-1921. see Mary Greensted (ed.) The Arts & Crafts Movement in the Cotswolds (1993) p. 126 see: Collections File Indian Embroideries notes by Anne Morrell 12.6.97		

I returned to the catalogue cards which I had photocopied on my first visit. I elicited a murmur of shocked disbelief from the archivist in wanting to look at further catalogue cards, randomly selected and totally independently of the textile item itself. Taking this one step further, I considered what phrases removed from their context could suggest.

two loom widths

white selvedge stripes

Stencil placed 54 times along the length of the sash

These cards in themselves represented a history in the shifting patterns of archiving, as systems moved from recording by hand to the computerised records, and content expanded into additional categories. Could these cataloguing systems convey, or be used to convey, the poetry of the object - or did they just represent scientific ordering systems and institutional power?

INV. NO. T 53 83	CASE NO.	STORE NO. CCS	E.
PROVENANCE India - card 1 -			
PERIOD c. 1911 (early 19th)			
OBJECT Embroidered woolen scarf or sari.			
SIZE Length 135 inches 343cm (including fringe) W 155cm (including fringe)			
DESCRIPTION Shawl of red cashmere embroidered in gold and silver with sewn on gold braids. Woven width of shawl - 147.5cm (58")			
The embroidery forms a border round the entire shawl. It is arranged in two rows: i) inner row - continuous chain of tiny batch ii) outer row - batch alternating with 'cepils' Two further rows of gold embroidery are stitched at each end iii) Row of horizontal batch iv) areoles containing sprays of 3 flowers In addition a batch is embroidered in each corner in gold and silver thread.			
Stitches: couching on both sides to give an identical pattern. This is exceptional			
HOW AND WHEN ACQUIRED P. in '83 Mrs Oriel Switzerland.			
INSURANCE			
REMARKS: OTHER COLLECTIONS, LOANS, PHOTOGRAPHS, CORRESPONDENCE, ETC. Formerly owned by Princess Catherine Duleep Singh, daughter of the Maharajah Duleep Singh (1833-93) the last ruler of the Punjab			

INV. NO. T. 1983. 53	CASE NO.	STORE NO. CCS	E
PROVENANCE INDIA - card 2 -			
PERIOD 19th cental			
OBJECT Embroidered cashmere shawl			
SIZE			
DESCRIPTION Stitches central. The metal thread is worst double The couching thread is yellow silk, s-twist Metal thread i) gold pile - 5-twisted round core of silk (brown/orange) ii) silver pile - 5-twisted round core of silk (white) Braids: Warp - 14 ends of widely spaced white silk, s-twist Weft: i) gold pile - 5-twisted round silk core ii) purple glass silk - connected to core end (2cm) width of braid 32 x 35 mm slipstitched to side edges of shawl in red/purple silk thread This is a top quality piece			
HOW AND WHEN ACQUIRED			
INSURANCE			
REMARKS: OTHER COLLECTIONS, LOANS, PHOTOGRAPHS, CORRESPONDENCE, ETC. Produce label attached to shawl printed in black '103' handwritten in red ink '5076' of T. 1997. 30 - fragment of a similar shawl with embroidery on one side only			

Those recorded by hand bore the traces of their author through the individuality of the handwriting. Removing them from the context of the objects they described, I started to collect types of information from different cards and to categorise them, for example, according to types of damage ...

Small brown stain visible on top edge
Signs of foxing
Bloom from subsequent wetting
Edges partly torn
Very much folded
Damaged by movement

... or, according to the activities various textiles had been subjected to ...

Cut and removed with tweezers
Snipped with scissors

Then there were the more personalised contributions of individuals which hinted at intimate knowledge:

*Mounted on net (and washed) by HW
Stitch identified by A.M.
Information from B.K.*

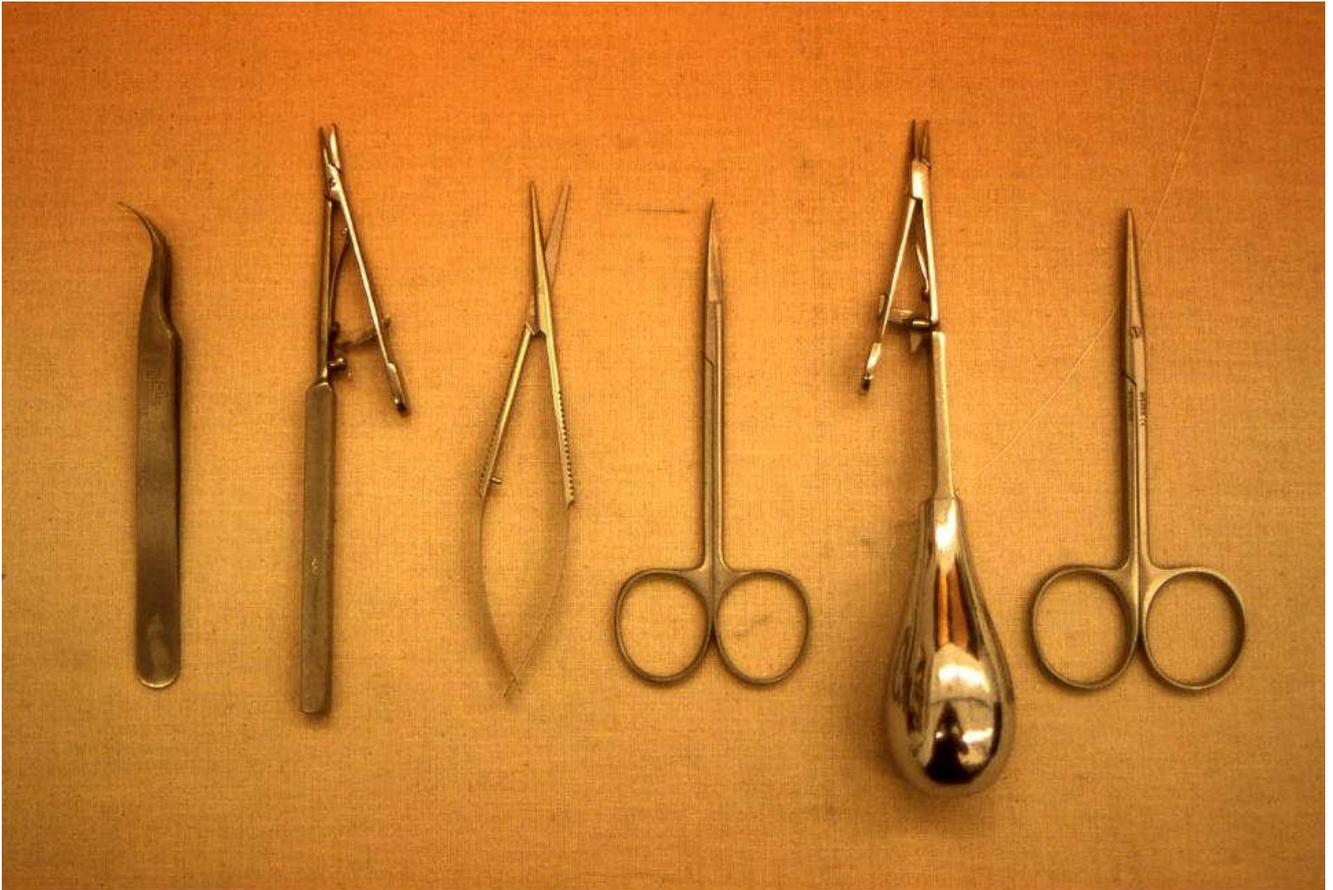
The catalogue cards recorded the official history of the artefacts but there were indications of other histories being formed: the private recollections of those who had cared for these textile items, the stories they had to tell relating to individual objects.

Meanwhile, the conservator was working on stabilising a damaged Coptic tunic ready for display. The holes were highlighted in differently coloured thread, each hole categorised by the colour of the thread in relation to priority of attention.

The thread is knotted into paper so that it won't damage the cloth



Observation of conservation practice highlighted its forensic nature - the analysis of detritus embedded in the cloths (seeds, hairs etc.), and the materials, tools and methods involved in treatment.



The very act of exposing the article to scrutiny can affect it: textile fibres become brittle; bonds that hold the molecules together can be broken by ultra violet light; colours fade where exposed to light but remain as evidence in the folds; items can get dusted with minute particles from our own bodies.



Engaged in intensive, detailed labour involving a high level of skill and knowledge, the conservator's hands moved in repetitious activity evoking ideas of durations and rhythms, mortality and immortality, connecting the past to the present, maker with object.



I was reminded of my own archive of photographs taken whilst travelling and researching different forms of textile production in various parts of the world; the visibility of the hand in both a conceptual and literal sense.

The following photographs show the workings of one of Japans Living Treasures engaged in Shibori. She described to me the importance of the rhythms of the body in making the work.







There is an intense relationship between object and maker in which the physical engagement with materials is allied with a deep body knowledge developed and played out over time, through practice and experience. The act of making something is experiential, sensorial and holistic. The smell, sound, feel, perhaps even taste of materials, a measurement by touch rather than exclusively through sight. Wetness and dryness, flexibility and rigidity, strength and fragility, resistance and absorption.

These considerations were carried down into conservation practices.

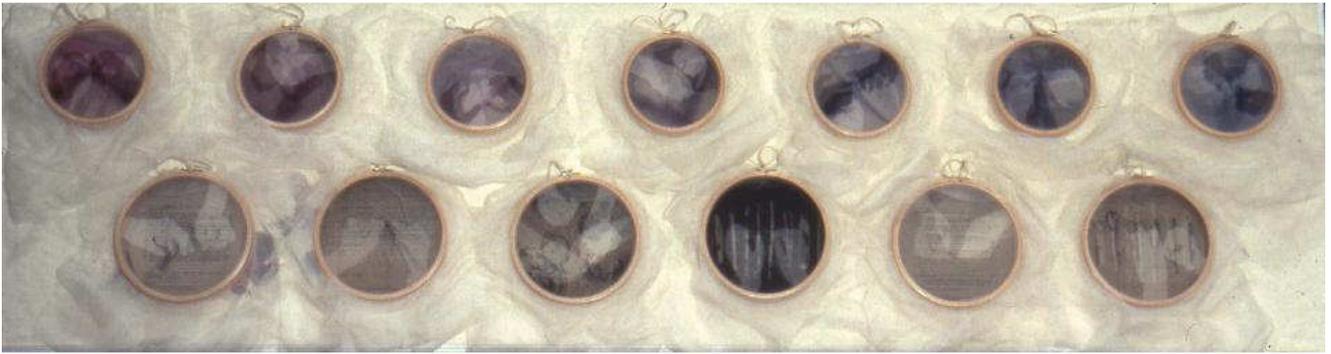
Susan Stewart in *From the Museum of Touch*⁵ suggests in relation to objects in museums:

... materials also become precious because they must be conserved or maintained with care in order to exist; they store our labour, and our maintenance of them is a stay against the erosion of time. Those works of art that we cannot touch are repositories of touch and care - the touch and care of their makers and conservators.

⁵ Susan Stewart, 'From the Museum of Touch'

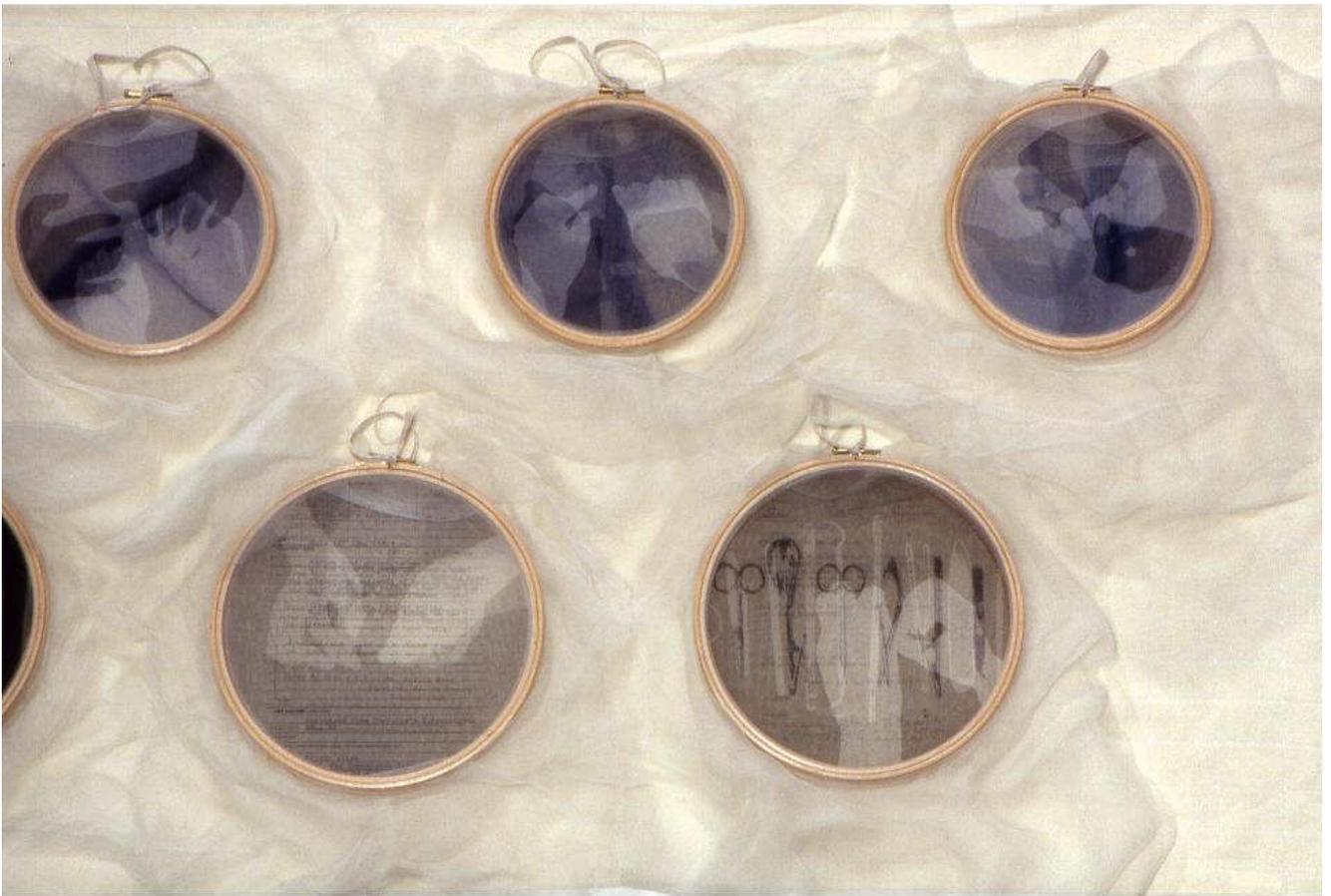
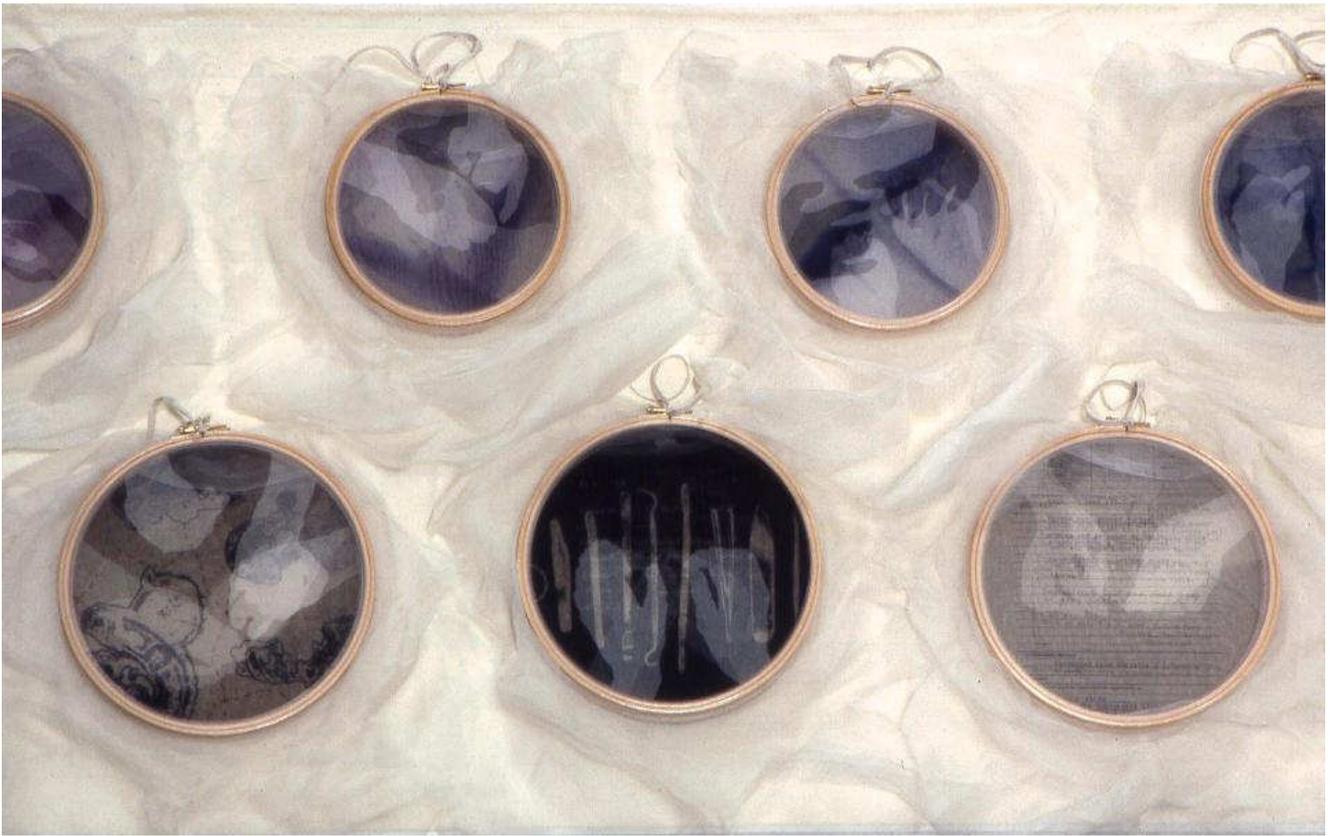
The collection had become, for me, a site where the subjective and objective collided.

Conversation Pieces

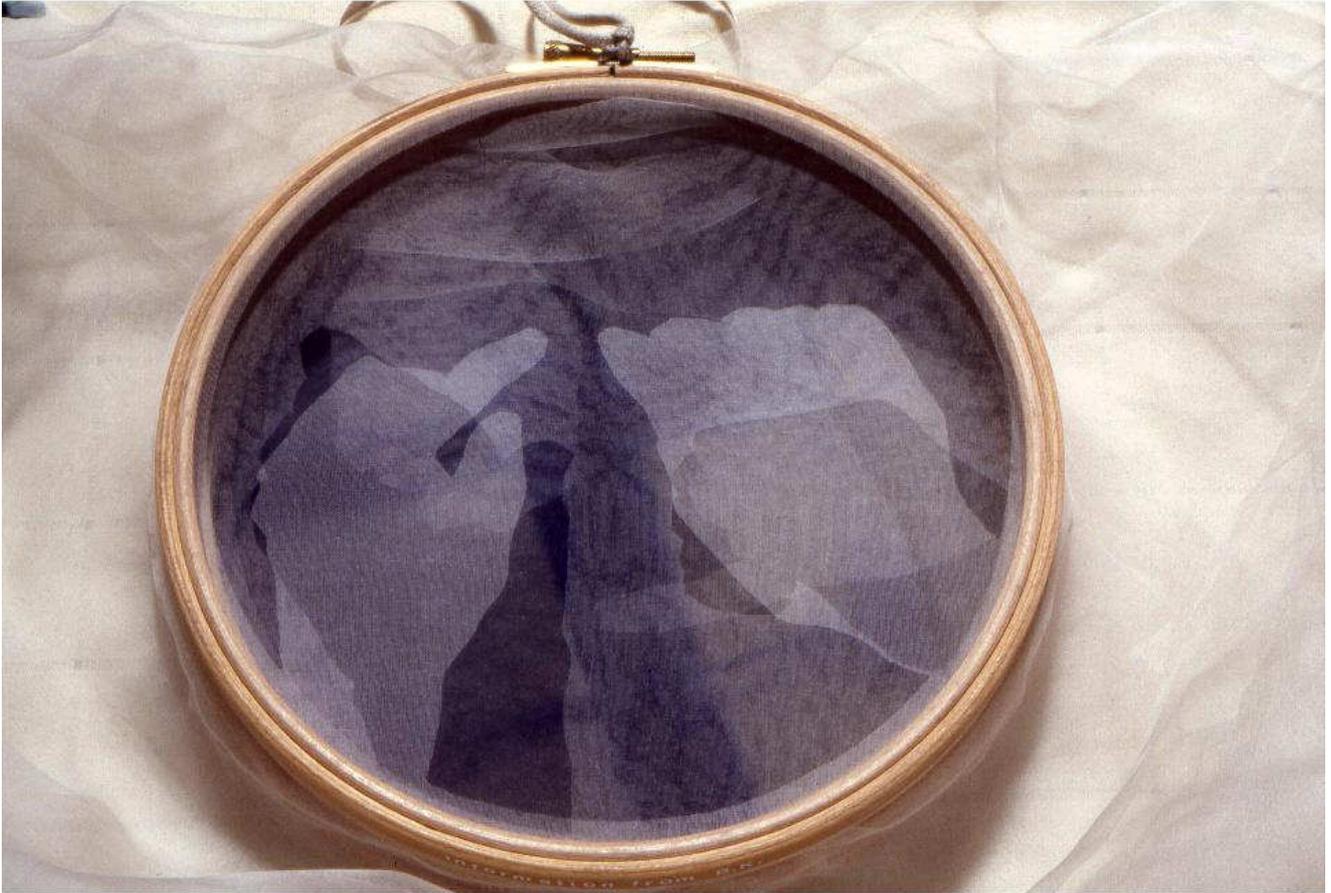


This work comprises 52 embroidery hoops presented in 13 groupings. Each hoop is stretched with images printed on silk crepeline, (an almost transparent archival fabric).





Imagery comes into and out of focus according to viewing angle, half materialised and appearing to be on the verge of dissolution. Colour fades in and out as though affected by light damage, but follows a gradation from pink through to blue in the series of smaller hoops. Reference is also made here to the exacting dyeing and colour matching techniques which are part of the textile conservator's training.



Pulled threads in the base cloth form a grid and organising structure, a reference, perhaps, to institutional systems.



There are many pairs of hands represented here, engaged in rhythmic activity, motion and rest, suggestive of time and care. The repetitious activities involved in making and conserving are recorded in the diaphanous printed and layered images.

Hands of makers engaged in various forms of resist work and images from my own photographic archive, are interleaved with those of the conservator, and suspended over images of personalised tools and material from the Whitworth archive.

Textual reference printed on the hoops suggests vulnerability and fragility; and refers to the activities of carers of the collection as they have endeavoured to fill gaps in the history and detail of the object, piecing together information across time and space: 'stitches identified by A.M.' Conservator is connected to maker in a shared and intimate knowledge of the object.



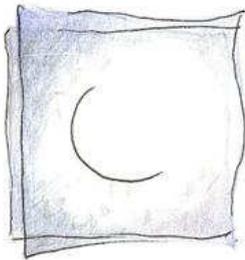
Alongside my developing relationships with objects and cards, the dialogue with conservators and curators both expanded and re-focused my thinking. It was instrumental in the development of the piece; every time the work went slowly, conversations with these informants would re-direct my thinking in an unexpected way, giving me new ideas to follow up. The title of the piece refers specifically to this process, as well as to the potential relationships between artefacts in the collection.

This dialogue was not altogether without tensions. A change of conservator half way through the project brought with it different perspectives and a reconsideration of certain practical processes, such as the long-term stability of my work. Textile conservationists choose translucent fabrics and fine threads, materials which look invisible, so as not to detract from the appearance of a textile and overwhelm the original. In using such fabrics for a creative rather than conservation purpose, I was making an artwork with conservation 'issues' for the future. We discussed how conservation methods might slow down deterioration, and suggestions were incorporated into the finished work; for example, the wood of the

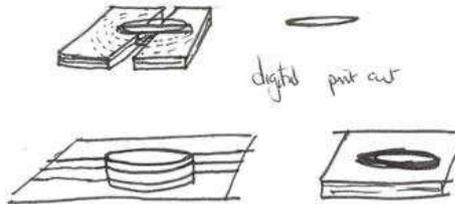
embroidery hoops was treated with an acrylic varnish and the silk crepe line was scoured in purified water to remove its dressing.

This project involved fieldwork in the form of interviews, observation, and note-taking. My sketchbook was the site for reflection, where information and ideas were gathered, initially with no clear idea of outcome. It included elements which acquired particular significance and value only in due course. Written notes, photographs, references and quotes were accompanied by diagrams and renderings of thought processes.

endless cycles, repetitions & rhythms, durations

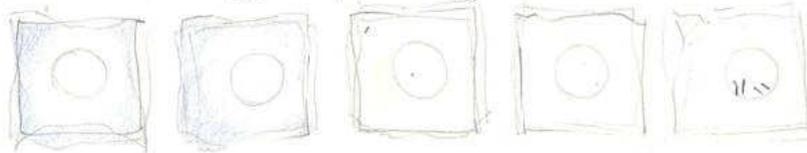


Bodies of knowledge
Erosion of catalogue cards



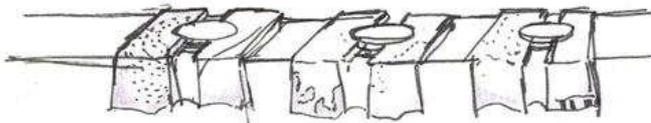
digital print art

blue to pink - fading; colour saved by chance due to accidental creating

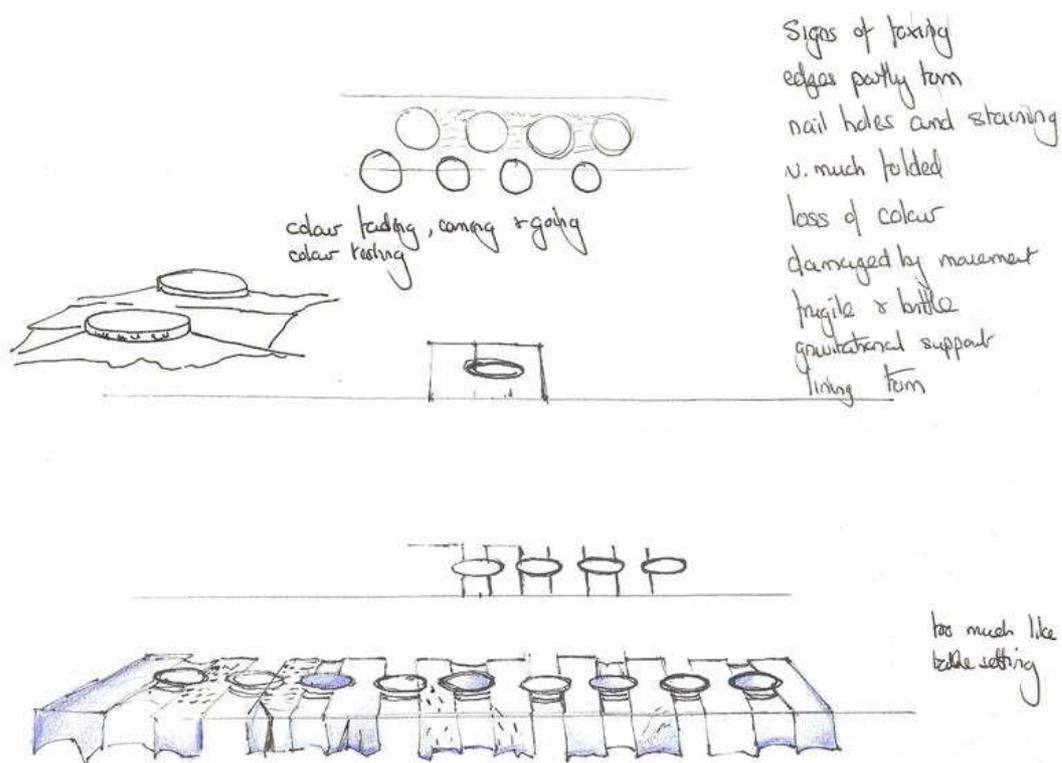


- 1) build up colour through staining of layers - hints of colours at outer edges.
- 2) layering: changes of weight through removal of cloth - back layers, ref to textiles tramp/opaque
- 3) layering of imagery - ghost from layer to layer, potential of shadows
- 4) stitch elements through back layer to front. sharp accents of colour.

tablecloth } dirty rituals
blankets }
covers }
layers of activity



As the project progressed, material explorations became key and ideas were synthesised, and clarified through making. There is a filtering process which takes place partly through intuition but also through the making of rational judgements. The sketchbook charts the processing of information into visual form; the retracing of steps, testing, selection and refinement of ideas, before moving to the final stage of production. It becomes itself a form of archive.



'Cross-overs' with anthropological practice are obvious, in the gathering and analysis of information, the use of primary and secondary research sources, the processing and selective use of this information within my own work. Many of the questions I am asking are shared with anthropological practice and are indeed influenced by it.

The outcome however is a subjective and personal commentary, reflective visual interpretation manifested as an artefact which attempts to make the invisible visible and to set aside the distancing that takes place in museological contexts. It addresses memory, recollection and association, the senses, the significance of touch and text/textile links. There is evidently a paradox here in the fact that the work produced has gone back to inhabit the space of the museum and become subject to the very practices it interrogated. Issues of conservation are applied and, yes, the artwork is exhibited on a plinth under a perspex cover. However, a sample has been provided, to touch, handle, and even smell, for anyone who comes to view it.