

Closely Held Secrets

29 October – 24 November 2010

Featuring Turner Prize winner Grayson Perry, this exciting exhibition is an artistic collaboration between Nottingham Trent University's Bonington Gallery, nine visual artists and a skilled digital embroidery technician who has translated and transformed a series of original artworks into a collection of digitally embroidered artefacts. The artists' disciplines include ceramics, installation art, painting, digital printing, fashion and textile art; they have been selected for their strong and varied visual practice, along with a willingness to be involved in an experimental project.

Exploring the relationship between the artist and the technician, *Closely Held Secrets* reveals the nature of the hidden dialogue between the originator of an idea and the agent of interpretation, pushing the boundaries and applications for digital embroidery. This project challenges the myth that technology transposes the artists' ideas, rather than the skilled technician acting as the creative conduit between artist and digital technology. It will reveal how the understanding between artist / designer and technician can lead to new ways of working, challenging the parameters of new technology. *Closely Held Secrets* pushes the boundaries and applications for digital embroidery and will open up new possibilities for the medium in the future.

This exhibition is taking place in affiliation with *Sideshow 2010*.

Please note, this publication contains images of a sexual nature which may cause offence. These images may also be considered inappropriate for persons under the age of 18.



Tony Taylor

In July 2003 I received an email from Grayson Perry in which he said: 'I want to wear an embroidered dress to collect the Turner Prize in December, as I definitely will win!'

Grayson's optimism was vindicated in December when he received the coveted award wearing a whimsical little number lavishly decorated with embroidered bunny rabbits and slightly malevolent hearts and flowers, all programmed in my digitising studio in Nottingham.

Since being introduced to Grayson in 1996 I have had the periodic pleasure of translating his ideas into embroidery language, both for his startling and elaborate wall hangings and his personal adornment; indeed it was he who initially sowed the seed of the idea for this project, and the team at NTU had the imagination to enable it to happen.

It wasn't difficult to assemble a hugely creative group of artists all keen to realise their ideas through the medium of embroidery.

To quote Coleman Schneider from his definitive book on machine embroidery:

'It's a traditional art, it's creation, it's mechanical, it's electronic; it's difficult and at the same time easy. It's working with your hands, your head and your heart. Knowledge is gained by working with others who learned by doing and who are willing to divulge closely held secrets.'



Biography

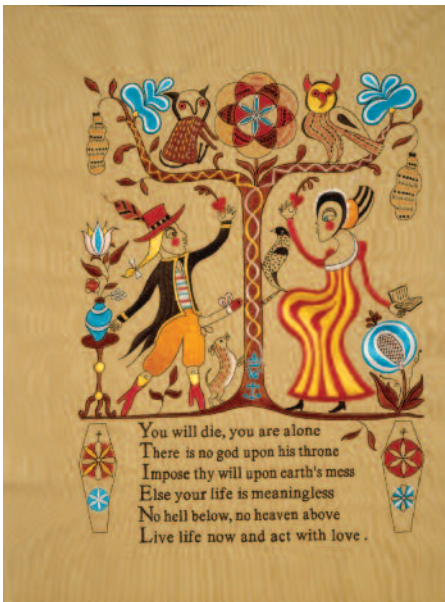
Taylor was born in Aston, Birmingham and among his earliest memories was the sound of roars from his beloved Villa Park, a few streets away. He graduated in Fine Art from Leicester Polytechnic in 1973; there he had the good fortune to be under the tutelage of Gavin Bryars, with whom he shared a great interest in the Fluxus movement, George Brecht, Zen, chess and five-a-side football.

Emerging with a healthy spirit of enquiry, he subsequently exhibited at the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham and at Paul Smith's Pushpin Gallery in Nottingham. Thereafter he became involved with machine embroidery and its industrial application, but with the spirit of enquiry intact.

Having periodically worked with artists during the last fourteen years, notably Grayson Perry, he decided to examine more closely the possibilities of applying embroidery in the area of Fine Art and elevating its status beyond that of a humble though admirable craft.

This set the tone for a fun creative relationship that has lasted to this day. I have always enjoyed working with Tony as he interprets my drawings in a way that not only enhances the image but also showcases the richness of the embroidery.

I have set him tasks of mind-numbing complexity that he has taken on without even an audible intake of breath. I trust Tony never to take shortcuts and he reworks designs without complaint. I have set him many challenges. When working on the embroidery for my costume projects, which involve dozens of separate complex motifs on each piece of fabric, he runs the risk that one small mistake in days of sewing



Grayson Perry

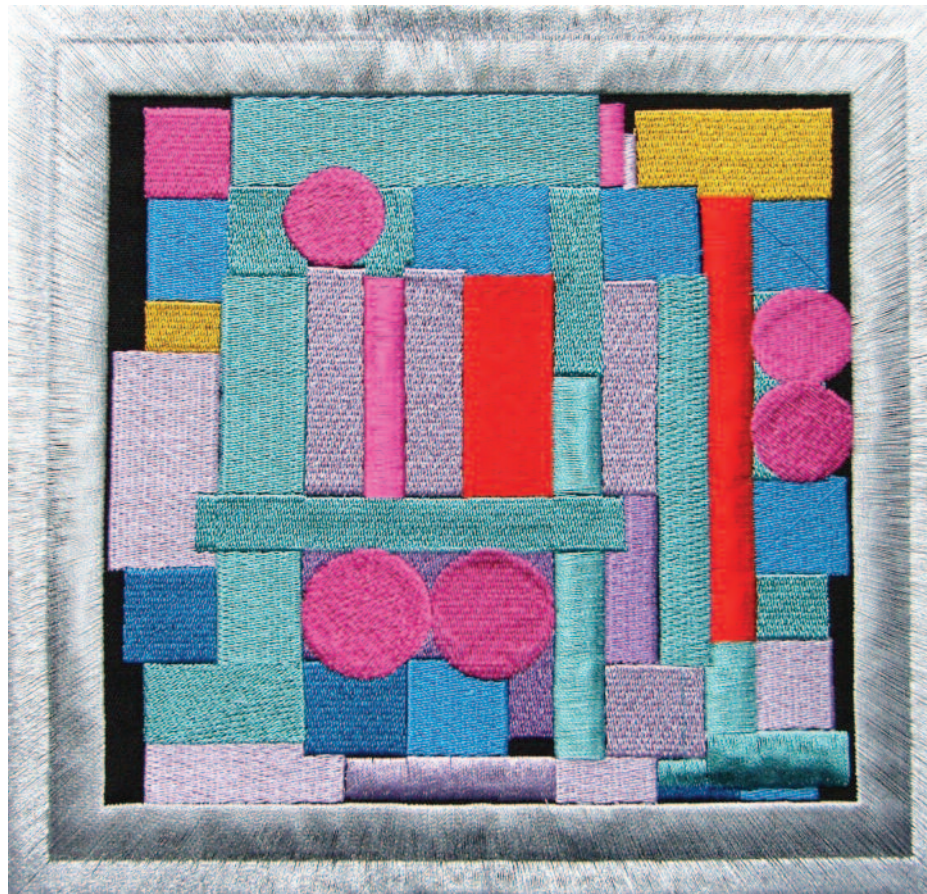
In 1996 I approached a computerised embroidery firm to programme a design for me that was to become my quilt piece, *Tree of Death*. When they saw my drawing, which featured a large ejaculating penis, they phoned to say they did not want their firm associated with such an image. They had though contacted another firm called Red Tape Designs who seemed willing to handle my commission. I phoned up Red Tape and Tony Taylor answered. When I said who I was he said: 'Don't worry you have reached the Channel 4 of embroidery'.

out could ruin the whole panel. In 2003 the fruits of his skill were pictured in newspapers and on television all over the world. The dress I was proudly wearing when I won the *Turner Prize* was covered in embroidery programmed and directed by Tony.

Biography

Born in Chelmsford, Essex in 1960, Grayson Perry lives and works in London. He won the *Turner Prize* in 2003 and has had major solo exhibitions at Victoria Miro Gallery, London (2009), MUDAM, Luxembourg (2008), 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan (2007), Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2006), Barbican Art Gallery, London (2002) and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2002). Grayson Perry has also curated two exhibitions - *Unpopular Culture*, De La Warr Pavilion (then touring) (2008) and *The Charms of Lincolnshire*, The Collection, Lincoln (2006).

Grayson Perry
Recipe for Humanity, 2005
Cotton and rayon, computer controlled embroidery
48.5 x 36.5 cms, 19 x 14 3/8 inches
edition of 250 plus 10 artist's proofs
Courtesy of the Artist and Victoria Miro Gallery, London
© Grayson Perry



Simon Beck Mather

I trained in Fine Art back in the 1970s at what was then Trent Polytechnic (now Nottingham Trent University), subsequently making a living in theatre and graphic design before moving into teaching. I have recently returned to full-time art-making, in part motivated by this collaborative venture instigated by Tony Taylor and NTU.

For far too long my work has been a 'closely held secret', undertaken as an entirely private activity and it has been an inspiration to see it reinterpreted through the medium of embroidery as textile artwork. The collaborative process has been both exciting and instructive and it has helped me to reconnect with my own practice, recognising new opportunities in the making process.

To join with others and expose my own secrets has been a real pleasure; to have them brought back to life and translated with such skill and insight is a gift. I'm grateful for Tony's mastery and unstinting and unselfish effort. I have gone back to 'first sources' - my seedbed of ideas - to bring back out into the light work that has been neglected and languishing; it needed an exhibition like this to stir me from my torpor and somnolence.



Craig Fisher

I once spent an entire two-week package holiday in Majorca sewing sequins onto fabric in order to finish a piece of artwork. It was my own fault, as always I'd left it very late and had stupidly booked the holiday just before a solo exhibition I was having. A deadline is a deadline. I'd convinced myself it'd be fine, I could sit by the swimming pool with a gin and tonic and soak up the sun while getting on with the job at hand. I didn't think this activity would provoke any reaction from my fellow holidaymakers but to my surprise it was the talk of the hotel.

'Have you seen that bloke by the pool, he's been sewing sequins onto that bit of cloth for days.'

Various suggestions were made as to what I was up to, until a lady from a group of older women plucked up the courage to ask me directly. We made polite conversation and after telling her I was an artist and that I was making a piece of work for an exhibition she then exclaimed that she loved my beautiful sequinned map of Majorca. She didn't look as impressed when I said:

'No it's not a map of Majorca, it's a big pile of vomit!'

For the rest of the holiday I was avoided at all costs and on meeting new guests I would often find them saying:

'Oh, so you're THE ARTIST!'

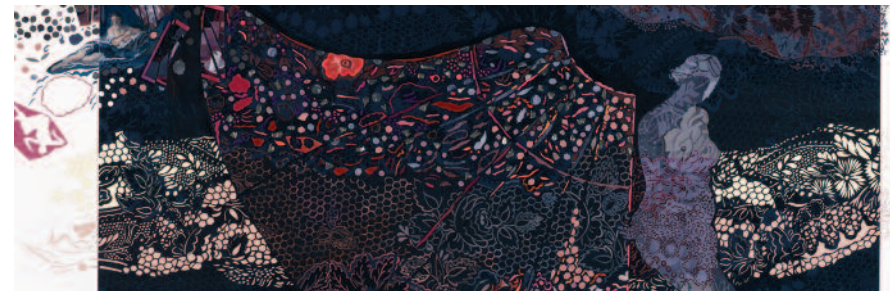


The reason I'm telling this story is that I'm engaged in exploring the subversive potential of the decorative and ornamental through the process of making. I've been working with Tony Taylor to translate my ideas using digital technology to make the most beautiful pile of crap that I can, which is very exciting!

Biography

Craig Fisher (b. 1976) graduated from Goldsmiths College, University of London with an MA in Fine Art in 2000. He lives and works in Nottingham. Fisher has exhibited his work nationally and internationally. Recent solo exhibitions include *CAT-AS-TROPHE*, Bonington Gallery, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham (2009), *Foolish Act*, Viewpoint Gallery, Plymouth College of Art (2009), *Hazardous Materials*, Millais Gallery, Southampton Solent University, Southampton (2008), *Misadventure*, Galerie BK, Bern, Switzerland (2008), *Hold Your Fire*, Rokeby, London (2007), *Bloody Mess*, Leeds Metropolitan University (2006) and *Aftermath*, Studio Voltaire, London (2004).

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Charlotte Hodes

The tactile layered collaged surfaces of imagery and pattern of my paper cuts share many of the qualities that are inherent in embroidery. They also bring together digital technologies in the form of inkjet printing and in some cases laser cut, alongside hand cut stencils and drawn passages. Therefore the invitation to collaborate with Tony Taylor on this project was especially exciting.

The challenge of how to use the paper cut as a starting point for digital embroidery centred on combining digital printing with digital embroidery to articulate the layered quality of collage. Tony suggested the use of appliquéd shapes which would not only overcome the practical problem of the embroidery being too large for the machine bed but would enhance the fragmented layered quality of collage. In addition, we were acutely aware of the embroidery threads being my drawing tool, equivalent to the cut lines of the scalpel blade in the paper cuts. These threads weave a complex, intricate layer across the surface, holding together the digitally printed areas, pattern and shapes.

The sequence of six paper cuts 'waves' from which the embroidery is made, each depict a silhouetted female figure juxtaposed against diagrammatic representations of skirts. The skirts echo and define the femininity of the figure. They coexist with elements that, over decades, have been represented and re-presented within the fine and decorative arts; drapery, cloth, ornament and pattern. The horizontal panelled compositions suggest an undulating movement, continuous pattern and time passing. The tiny floating figure, a celebration of the art history from which it is sourced (Venus 1754 by François Boucher from the Wallace Collection), takes part in the new complex, layered narrative.

Biography

Charlotte Hodes is a painter whose practice includes work with collage, ceramics and glass. Recent solo exhibitions include *Silhouettes and Filigree*, Marlborough Gallery (2009), *Drawing Skirts*, Baring Wing and University Gallery, University of Northumbria (2008) supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, *Fragmented Images*, Wallace Collection London (2007) supported by Arts Council England and AHRC. Her work was included in the survey exhibition *Glassstress*, Venice Biennial (2009), *European Design Biennial Design*, Museum London (2003) and *Digital Responses*, Victoria and Albert Museum (2002).

Winner of the Jerwood Drawing Prize in 2006, Hodes' work is represented in many public collections including the Women's Art Collection, New Hall, University of Cambridge, Brighton City Museum and Art Gallery, British Council and Victoria and Albert Museum. Hodes is Reader in Fine Art at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London. She is represented by the Marlborough Gallery.

www.marlboroughfineart.com
www.fashion.arts.ac.uk/lcf-research



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Geoff Diego Litherland

Digital Embroidery was a completely alien discipline to me and I trusted Tony and Tessa fully. It was important that the final outcomes of the work were influenced by the various processes involved, from the initial conversations about the project, to the design of the motif and finally the embroidery itself. From the start we aimed to subvert the embroidered motif, which is the default use of the technology in industry. I started to imagine what would happen if a malignant consciousness entered the machinery and took control of the production. In order to promote this chaos, I gave Tessa some rules and parameters as to how to produce the pieces, thus creating a generative image that is constructed not only by the limits of the technology, but also by intuition, communication or miscommunication and error.

Biography

Geoff Diego Litherland is a Mexican-born artist based in Nottingham. Having had a colourful upbringing in Bolivia and Ecuador he moved to England, graduating from Falmouth College of Arts in 2002 with first-class honours in Fine Art Painting.

He has exhibited widely both nationally and internationally. Recognition to date has included being selected for the John Moores 25 Painting prize at the Walker Gallery in Liverpool and winning the 2008 Nottingham Castle Open.

www.geoffdiegolitherland.com

Danica Maier

From a distance these floral drawings appear to be simply benign decorative patterns. Only as the viewer gets closer do they begin to realise that the text is actually repeated slang words for female genitalia. The meticulous handwriting appears initially to be more like stitching than written text. Danica Maier has a drive to question, through this work, laborious processes and so is particularly excited to take part in this project. The layered progression of means that have been used to create these new embroidered works all add up to a very particular final outcome, one that is seemingly at odds with the hand-made steps that have been deployed to arrive at the final work. The addition of the embroidered panels, alongside the drawn ones, brings the work full circle back to the starting point or initial interests of this artist: asking questions of textile and stitch.

Biography

Originally from Philadelphia, Danica Maier currently lives and works between Nottingham and Lincolnshire. In recent years she has exhibited widely nationally and internationally, in locations including Nottingham, London, Seoul, Philadelphia, New York, Germany and Chile. Maier co-curated and exhibited in a major exhibition of the work of British based artists *Unpicked and Dismantled*, a part of the Kaunas Art Biennale. She has also participated in numerous residency programmes including Braziers International Artist Workshop in the UK, she was artist in residence at the Fundación Migliorisi in Asuncion, Paraguay and completed a textile research residency with Vasl in Karachi, Pakistan through Gasworks. Maier was an apprentice at the Fabric Workshop and Museum in Philadelphia. She is currently a Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University.

www.danicamaier.com

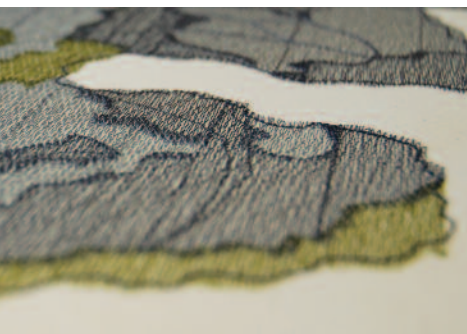


Derek Sprawson

I visited Bardsey Island off the south-western tip of the Llyn Peninsula, North Wales three years ago. This Island is known as the Island of 20,000 saints and has been a place of pilgrimage for hundreds of years. I had no intention of my trip there being entered into as a pilgrimage however I did set out with a keen sense of curiosity and an openness to encounter this 'liminal' place. Ideas that specific topographic locations are regarded as threshold spaces where the barriers between heaven and earth are thin enthrall me.

A.M Allchin has written:

"Places become holy on account of the people who have lived in them. Just as people are deeply influenced by the places where they live places are shaped by the people who have dwelt there. There seems to be a mysterious interpenetration of person and place. Where lives have been lived constantly turned towards God, open to the expanses of eternity, open to receive the unexpected gifts of grace, there something of that openness remains. Others can enter into it."



Katherine Townsend

My work is focused on the creative interrogation of process, specifically how established and new textile materials and technologies can be integrated to simulate surface noise. The textiles developed for *Closely Held Secrets* build on recent work exploring the synergy between water and lace: the juxtaposition of an elemental fast flowing rhythm with a static, organically inspired structure.'

Lace Flow explores the potential for combining multi-head embroidery with inkjet printing; how both processes can be used to photographically replicate visual and textural detail, but perhaps more significantly how these technologies can be applied non-prescriptively, to abstract and innovate, rather than duplicate.

Collaborating with Tony Taylor has provided valuable insights into the aesthetic responsibility of the technician at the digitisation stage of embroidery production. An informed approach to design translation not only extends the artist's work but also elevates the role of both the technician and the technology beyond that of faithful copier. The resulting pieces seek to demonstrate the flexibility of digital embroidery through the painstaking hand digitised replication of intricate lace patterns to untamed computer manipulated stitches that float across semi-transparent surfaces.

Biography

Katherine Townsend began her career as a printed textile / fashion designer, forming various companies, notably Cocky's Shed based in the Lace Market, Nottingham and Hyper-Hyper, London. Her practice-led PhD (2004) *Transforming Shape: A simultaneous approach to the body, cloth and print*, enabled her to consolidate her practice as a designer-maker by researching into CAD / CAM technologies. The experience influenced her practice which became focused on the integration of traditional and digital crafting techniques. Her current research into 2D / 3D design is informed by sustainable 'no-waste' approaches through technical experimentation.

Her work has been published and exhibited internationally. She is currently Course Leader for MA Fashion, Knitwear and Textile Design at NTU, and co-editor of the *Journal of Craft Research* published by Berg.

¹Townsend, K. & Buttress, J. (2010) *High Falls: Water, Lace and the body*, published in DUCK Textile Journal Issue 1, Exhibited in *Capturing Rhythm and Space*, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, 1-31 December 2009.



Stella Whalley

In addition to an art practice that explores drawing, printmaking, digital embroidery and photography, Whalley's art contains a performative aspect. A reoccurring engagement - or even an obsession - is her desire to insert herself as the protagonist within reference frameworks from art history and contemporary culture. By imposing her own self within these frameworks, her art work becomes a private archive of memories, fantasy and desire which further uncovers psychological insight into the 'self' and its relationship to the world.

Whalley's characteristic approach is again revealed in the works presented at this exhibition. By tying together a wide range of fragmented imagery from photos, newspaper-cuttings, drawings and distorted text, Whalley has made a triptych of collage-embroideries where she contemplates a myriad of disconnected ways that her personal stories are mixed with historical events of brutal human behaviour and disaster.

The work's execution and composition, from the process of scanning and digitalizing, cropping and framing, to the drawing and embroidering, also reflects this myriad of disconnected stories and events.

In regards to the collaboration with Tony Taylor, she finds it particularly fascinating to see how he draws with stitches and how the stitches translate and transform the quality of her drawings. 'Whether it is satin stitched with dark outlines, or scratchy pen drawings imposed with rugged stitches with loose threads or tufts, the embroidering process adds further decorative layers that gives a rich and embossed surface' Whalley concludes.



Tessa Acti

My methodology is based on an ongoing fascination with multihead embroidery technology as an artistic and innovative tool; subverting the machine through technical exploration to produce playful and tactile surfaces. Working collaboratively plays a fundamental role within my practice, an approach developed through my recent MA in Textile Design and Innovation at NTU. The opportunity to work alongside creative practitioners who interpret multihead technology in new ways that push the boundaries has been an exiting and valuable experience.

This project provided the luxury of using the multihead for experimental, innovative play, by exploiting the features of the machine to develop a personal vocabulary for each of the artists, challenging the traditional view of embroidery and the working relationship between artist and technician. Addressing originality and creativity alongside the machine's limitations has expanded the parameters of the technology and enabled each of the artists to realise concepts that are essential to their own working practice, through collaboration using my own tacit knowledge.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the academic staff and in particular the embroidery technician, Sue Beckett, at NTU for their help, advice and expertise which has provided me with the foundations that underpin my own work and facilitated my participation within this project.

