

## Exhibitions

### Knitting & Stitching Shows 2011 – All Venues

#### Textile Study Group

I was so impressed by the work that the group were showing that I decided to treat it as a stand-alone exhibition for review purposes and cover the other aspects of the Knitting & Stitching Show in the News section.

The twenty-four group members taking part all had the same remit – taking a postcard from their ‘inspirational stuff’ collection and making a new work based on it. Sounds as though it’s been done before? Yes, but not in the way that this group have interpreted it. Rather than basing their art on the visual aspects of the source, they concentrated on the feelings that the piece evoked and this prompted a very personal response from each of them.

It was possible to recognise each artist’s ‘style’ of work but I found it particularly interesting to see how this style was affected by the subject.



In Ruth Issett’s piece here, for instance, the colours and the general feeling of the work are unmistakably her own but the interpretation of the Rothko painting that she used for inspiration gave it a different element.

I enjoyed the way the relationship of the stitching and the background changed, according to colour.



Some artists chose to use a source of inspiration that had influenced previous work. Jean Draper's piece *Afterwards* (right) was based on the aftermath of forest fires.

The war artist Paul Nash has prompted earlier work by Jean and it is easy to see how the bleak interpretation of landscape in his 1918 painting *We are Making a New World* is influenced by the horror inflicted upon it by the fighting. Jean has captured this feeling in her sombre work.

Ann Wheeler's sensitive interpretation of a painting by Victoria Crowe (below) was one of the most successful at translating the atmosphere of the painting.

Bearing no relation to the source image, it relied on colour, lettering and a dream-like quality to tell the story. It seemed to me to have captured the very essence of the 'other worldly' quality of a lone shepherdess in her monotone landscape.





Rose Campbell never disappoints and her inspiration is all about the delights of home. The image that inspired her encapsulated the comfort factor of a cup of tea. Very difficult to transfer the feelings that are inherent in this piece without a direct copy and I was intrigued with her solution.

In *Voe Variations: Looking East and West*, shown below, I feel that she has shown the outside world from which one needs to escape.

We see the harbour and a bird with wings outstretched, pebbles and perhaps a row of houses. The feeling is grey and austere but the flap, which peels back from the main area of the work, could be revealing the inside of a cottage, with the kettle on, warm and cosy. That's my take on it but, with Rosemary's work, I always feel that it is up to the viewer to find their own way.



Siân Martin's *Family Ties* was based on a Bridget Riley. It was one of the very clever spotty ones where squashing the spots and varying the colour takes the viewer in and out of the piece, giving an intense feel of movement. Siân's tiny squares of cut-up photographs give a mosaic effect, and the movement she achieved, stretched and enhanced to surface in the same way as the source inspiration.

*Rainy Days* by Jenny Bullen (shown overleaf) was a delight, more so because it was based on an embroidery rather than a painting. The original was a child's rag book of the 1960s, stitched by Margaret Wilson, showing two lovely pages of fairy-tale trees, just waiting for a wolf to sneak through. If interpreting a painting is difficult, then working from an embroidery is even more so, as the instinct is to copy using modern materials.

Jenny has cleverly avoided this trap with her long, skinny hand-embroidery, reminiscent of a tree trunk.

Contained within the shape are delicious little pieces, some clearly showing foliage, others darker and spooky. Great stitching, too.



I could show so much more – I loved Dorothy Tucker's brilliant Kantha stitching used to interpret an Elizabeth Blackadder, Alison King interpreting Bruegel in such an unexpectedly textural way, Shelley Rhodes, Mary Youles' divine *Pigeon Loft* - just not enough room and every piece was worth a photo.

If you missed the show or need a reminder, you'll be glad that there is a book, reviewed in this issue, available from the TSG website ([www.textilestudygroup.co.uk](http://www.textilestudygroup.co.uk)).



## Prisoner of Conscience, Salisbury Cathedral 14 October – 30 November

### Jane Lemon

Jane ecclesiastical work is well known. Her innovations while heading up the Sarum group changed the face of church architecture and led to their receiving commissions, not only for most of the major English cathedrals (and St George's Chapel, Windsor) but also for America and Australia.

Less well known is Jane's own work but this is rectified in a big way by this exhibition of narrative panels celebrating the 50th anniversary of Amnesty International, the world-wide organisation working on behalf of Prisoners of Conscience.

The eight panels tell the story of one such prisoner from the first intimation of *Threat*, right, causing such cold fear for one who works against oppression and violence. However much it is expected the reality and expectation of suffering and the loss of liberty must cause the bravest individual to react in just such a way as the figure shown right.

The next panel is titled *Arrest* and it is known that this can be a most violent event for a victim. Jane has produced many figure drawings for these panels, many of them shown in the accompanying book.

The embroidery techniques used include hand and machine embroidery and metal thread work. The employment of the embellisher machine can be seen in the backgrounds. All these techniques are skilfully blended in the panels so that they become a harmony, only dominating when particular features are required to become prominent. Mastery indeed.

Following the arrest comes the trial and the false accusations which accompany it. This must be hard to endure when your only thought has been to protect others. The panel *Prison Despair* depicts, in the attitude of the figures, the hopelessness experienced. Although logic tells them that others must be working for them they can have no proof of this and it must be impossible to avoid the despair of the title. You can see this in the panel, right.

However, eventually hope comes in the form of letters and the prisoner realises that others are indeed working on his/her behalf. Amnesty has been at work and pressure has been applied from many sources – embassies, the UN, individual prayers and protestations have been chipping away and a little ray of hope comes to the prisoner.





This lobbying brings about an improvement in conditions and, perhaps more important even than that, the realisation that they are not alone and the people are fighting their corner.

Finally comes news of *Release*. The prisoner gives thanks and the barbed wire, worked in silver kid leather which runs as a constant motif through the panels, starts to turn to gold. *Freedom* sees the prisoner rejoicing, the barbed wire turned into golden birds – great design skill shown here.

You can see the two final panels behind Jane in the photo, right. Underneath the exuberant figure, celebrating its freedom is a bird – or is it two birds? Jane says that we need to decide that for ourselves – see bottom of page.

The impact of the eight panels in the Morning chapel of the Cathedral is strong. The message is also strong and fitting to be in this Church, with its prisoners of conscience window and its daily prayer for individual prisoners.

Jane has overcome illness recently, so maybe the depictions have other meanings for her and I think this is the secret of the work. It relates to so many personal stories of people overcoming their own despair and stands as tribute to those who have aided them. There are other, equally valid, prisons and other forms of escape for which this work stand as testimony.

