

## Exhibition

### Telling Tales

**Corinium Gallery, Cirencester, Gloucestershire, England**  
**8<sup>th</sup> January – 23<sup>rd</sup> February**

This exhibition looked colourful and inviting, especially when viewed through the gallery's large, picture window (after a rather fraught, snowy journey). The artists all interpreted their theme well. Some took the straightforward, scenic route while others went for a less obvious abstraction of the subject. There was good use of stitch and less mixed media work, which was rather refreshing.

Consideration had been given to the look of the exhibition as a whole and two large features, the pots of Cheryl Cross and Janet Clarke's amazing floating felt seed pods, provided focal points to add depth to soften the rectangular rigidity of the gallery.



Janet Clarke works with fleece and her 'Seed Heads', using Shetland and Icelandic fleeces, formed a major part of this exhibition.

They contrast the 'cosy' feel of fleece against the sharp spikes that protrude from their soft bodies and are very effective when outlined against the light, moving gently to give life and momentum to the long view of the gallery.



The small versions of the pods, also in the show, are lovely too, as is all her work exhibited here. These outlandish pods suggest the artefacts collected by travellers on their journeys. My grandfather, a sailor, was fascinated by such things and we had cabinets of curiosities to prove it.

Anne Rippons' identity pieces, 'Threads of Identity', told a more personal tale, all of which linked to the use of Laura Ashley fabrics. 'Threads of Identity III' (detail right) shows some of the fabrics. They formed part of her exhibit which included dolls made from the fabrics. These were a record of the inspiration this charismatic designer gave to quilters who used her fabrics in their work.



The doll installation, entitled 'Ghosts of Laura Ashley', was the result of much research and many stories of the memory that the fabrics brought back for the makers using them – a very personal reference.

This clever work spoke of past times, the suggestion of past wearers linking with the wall pieces as further threads of identity. I loved the doll with the script material for a face and was told that one of the dolls had apparently taken on its own identity. I can well understand that.

If you have a tale to tell about your relationship with Laura Ashley fabrics, look at Anne's blog [annjrippin.wordpress.com](http://annjrippin.wordpress.com).



The stark simplicity of Liz Hewitt's pale painted surfaces was enhanced with directional stitching, suggesting a landscape. These are memories – the paths a record of footsteps. The subtle surface and mark making with stitch suggest a dialogue, a map, perhaps, of meaningful curves where the apparent serenity covers a hidden dynamic generated by the linear aspects. Details from her 'Memories' series are shown below and right.



Heather Martin uses vintage fabrics, worked into completed pieces with a feel of the past about them. She feels that the fabrics carry their history with them and has allowed them to tell their tales by combining them with references to the children's story of the Wild Swans.

An interesting ruse, used here, is the mixing of traditional Jacobean work with machine embroidery. This combines to pull the piece in different directions where the story of the fabric, the movement of the swans and the use of lettering on the flower stems produce an overall effect that works well – see above in 'Wild Swans II'.



Margaret Heath's tales are based on stones, stone circles to be more precise, and the stories and legends that they have drawn around themselves. Her work showed a fine attention to detail with a mix of hand and machine embroidery on painted silk.

'Stanton Drew, Stone 24' (detail right) shows an atmospheric, painted landscape dominated by the stone. These were not diminished but rather expanded by the small scale of the work, which gave a sense of containing the power of the giant stones.



Barbara Butler's theme was communication through symbols. Her take on lists, stitched in Linear B, an early Greek script, was depicted as long, joined strips with the symbolic marks well managed (right). I liked the idea behind this – that the tales of our ancestors are lost until the meaning of the marks is explored.

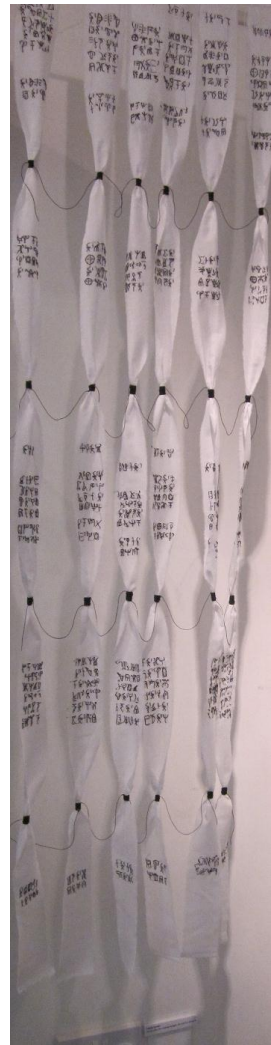
This piece showed an assurance that was missing in her mixed media piece 'Boy Meets Girl' which was also based on symbols. I do feel that, with this piece, she is in transition, not settled into this style or, perhaps, trying something new. Let's hope she pursues it as it generated the true spirit of storytelling and, although small, was a powerful piece

Painted silk from Yvonne Auld is probably the most literal translation of the Travellers' Tales. Her visit to the Bristol Docks was followed by a trip to the museum where the Chinese New Year celebrations showed colourful, oversized fish. 'Fisherman's Tales' combined with the buildings and the Dock, painted with a warm light, transport Bristol to the Mediterranean – see below right.

The larger than life fish cavort in the harbour here and, in her smaller pieces, the silk painted images showed her verve and talent. The wonderful fluid edges provided movement and interest.

'Running in Circles', below, by Cheryl Cross was from her series on running dogs, specifically a greyhound. Based on the Michael Morpurgo story of such a hound's post-racing adventures her sparse stitch conveyed the movement of the dog and his joy in running.

A neat trick, using a minimal style to pass on so much information. Her coil pots, raised on plinths, were based on Arabian Nights stories and provided a wonderful splash of colour and visual impact.



Not enough room to look in depth at everyone, although they all deserve a place. The work of Christine Harley comprised simple but strong shapes in appliqué (such a good medium for tale-telling), with 'Bristol 2012, Boats and Houses', shown right.

The weaving of Gloria Pugh – a new departure for her – and her flat woven work was particularly good, revealing a banding effect and good use of stitch. This is shown below left.

I was also taken with Nina Davis's work, below right, which looked beneath the surface of communication – in this instance, post cards. She reveals text beneath the cut-through layers, allowing a glimpse of hidden depths and layers of erosion.

This was achieved through overlays of semi-opaque materials which all work together to produce a cohesive series – see detail of 'Emerging', below right.



This exhibition was not really about showcasing cutting edge techniques but it was thought provoking, colourful and a lovely reminder that stitch is alive and well and on view in Cirencester.