

CETG ARCHIVE

Meeting Report

14th May 2018

Speaker: Michele Carragher

Talk: The Embroidered Narrative: costume embroidery for film & television

This month's Speaker was [Michele Carragher](#) and the title of her talk was "The Embroidered Narrative - Costume Embroidery for Film and Television". Michele Carragher creates exquisite hand embroidered garments and embellishments. She describes the use of costume and the embroidery thereon as an important narrative tool for the viewer.

Her love of embroidery started in her childhood, creating clothes for her (many) Pippa dolls. Her interest in creating costumes continued with her study of Fashion Design at the London College of Fashion. She particularly enjoyed creating sculptural elements including millinery, knitting and embroidery.

After College, Michele worked in Textile Conservation learning various techniques including invisible mending and the ability to embroider without using an embroidery hoop or frame. The work enabled her to practice her embroidery and learn how to source threads and materials. This gave her the opportunity to become more creative. Michele has worked on many high profile productions for television:

The BBC's "Our Mutual Friend" - working on the costumes for the main character played by Anna Friel. Michele mentioned that it can be very disappointing when your work is "cut" from the finished programme after all your hard work! "Elizabeth 1" (Channel 4) starring Helen Mirren as Queen Elizabeth. It was on this production that Michele became more of a designer as well as embroiderer.

Michele described how she goes about creating a costume:

- she reads the script
- she meets with Mike O'Neill to talk through ideas
- she starts her research - very important especially for historical drama - finding visual references for the character from museums, paintings and reference books
- she sources the fabrics, jewels, threads, trimmings
- she makes rough sketches following her research
- she then creates a sample of the embroidery and decoration

The embroidery does not have to be absolutely accurate for the time period, she is allowed some creative licence - it just has to be believable for the audience. Creating the sample is also helpful to see how long it takes to create the piece as there are always time restraints and budgets on a production and not finishing on time is not

an option!

Michele showed images of some of her work. Clever techniques implemented are using fabrics already embroidered which are then further embellished with more hand stitching; also painting images onto the fabric. Stumpwork is another technique used - a jewelled gauntlet was embroidered onto one of Elizabeth 1's costumes. Michele discovered that it is simpler to embroider a design separately before attaching it to the costume (the costumes are created separately by dressmakers). This helped especially on Game of Thrones due to the strict time restraints.

The project that Michele has been involved with since its pilot episode is "Game of Thrones" (HBO). There is a Coat of Arms created for each family in the series. Embroidered collars were created for each household - this was her first embroidery for the pilot. Each character was described in detail and the collar had to reflect the wearer's personality and ability. Embroideries very much reflect the character they are being used for and can change as a character develops showing the power of symbolism in the script narrative. Occasionally a piece has to be made 2 or 3 times in case one gets damaged or dirty. It is a challenge in itself to make identical pieces. She has been known to make one piece 8-10 times!

Michele photographs her embroideries from all angles and now tries to do this each and every time so that she has an accurate record of the work. If she has to make more than one of a piece she tries to make them at the same time which is much easier than trying to create an identical piece at a later date. One of the collars for Game of Thrones, and its double, took 15 days to create. It is very hard to match the same fabric, beads etc and Michele has had to become very adaptable. The dresses take from 2/3 days to 10 days to complete.

Another project worked on by Michele was "Queen of the Desert" starring Nicole Kidman. Michele embroidered two ballgowns for Nicole which took 5 days. On the final cut only the back of the gown was featured in the film!

Producing work for a TV series has been challenging and a steep learning curve. She has to be very organised and efficient without losing her creativity. She works long days. Michele doesn't have an assistant, all the work is created by her, but she finds the work creatively rewarding. Her experience in conservation work has come to the fore in the Game of Thrones. She feels she has been very lucky to work on all 8 series of Game of Thrones - and this has contributed to her creative development as a designer and embroiderer.





All photos © Michele Carragher

Liz Smith's announcements at the meeting

Workshops

We are organising a Special Summer Workshop on 30th June in Great Kingshill village hall - "HAND-MADE IN A DAY.....SEW SATISFYING!" - tutored by 3 fellow members Terry Stevenson, Tina Leslau and Judith Gibson. We can guarantee a fun, productive day with friends.

You will have the chance to choose ONE of the three following projects:

A - an Indian abstract wall-hanging (sewing machine needed) with Terry

B - a pretty pocket/scissor-safe (hand sewn) with Tina

C - a beaded tassel (hand sewn) with Judith

At the May meeting, you will be able to see samples so you can choose and sign up for the bargain price of £10 - too good to miss!

Outing

Our RSN outing is fast approaching, so if you haven't already signed up, please do so the list is at the back of the hall.

G Piece - entry for Pat Fleming Award

Don't forget to start your 'G' piece so it will be ready for the September meeting. It can only measure 8 x 8 inches in any direction.

Committee

Helen Jenkins has very kindly volunteered to take over from her sister Viki in October as Programme Secretary. So a big thank you to her for stepping up. Sadly, Liz W is still unwell, so Fiona Brown has volunteered to take on the communications role.

Tea and Coffee

Thanks to everyone who offers to be on the rota to help in the kitchen to provide us with tea and coffee before our meetings.