

CETG ARCHIVE

Meeting Report

12th February 2018

Speaker: Paula Watkins

Talk: My Journey in Books

[Paula Watkins](#) started her talk with the statement "I live a crazy life"! She is an artist, teacher, illustrator and author who leads a very busy life; she is often asked "How did you get to do what you do"? and "How do you fit it all in"? From an early age, once she had set foot in an Art Room, she wanted to be an artist. She was told by her teachers that she should not take A-level art as she would never be an artist. So she thought she would be a teacher. But she wanted to work in art and textiles and in the 1970s/80s textiles and needlework were not seen as suitable subjects to follow for a career.

Paula rediscovered art later on at an embroidery exhibition and was inspired by a lady in her 80s who told her she had only taken up needlework a year previously. Paula signed up to an evening class straight away! The class led to her taking the City & Guilds qualification which she quotes as "life changing" and studying it "opened her eyes". At the end of 4 years her work was on show in galleries. She had children and when the youngest went to nursery Paula started teaching - art. First monthly, then weekly - it was very popular. She trained in how to work with people with learning difficulties and how to help them get into work themselves and started teaching a new course soon afterwards - and hasn't stopped since. Paula has belonged to many committees and became Artist in Residence for 10 years at the Heritage Paper Mill. She was sent from there to teacher training school and now goes into schools and areas of deprivation to help people, often 4th generation, who have never had a job. She works with families and small children.

A quote Paula likes is "Life is dirtying up the blank page". Through her teaching, she has learnt that people can do amazing things and that art can change everything. Paula showed us many examples of her work and the sort of projects she works on in her teaching. She uses and creates books in many forms and showed us that they can be filled with many items that can be found all around us. One book was called "Found" and was full of items from around the house such as teabags, string, buttons, tomato puree tubes and so on. Paula said that many of her students have never been exposed to any sort of art and taking part in her classes opens their eyes to a world they've never seen before and they are often hooked for life.

Paula is also teaching the new Mental Health programme, helping people with a range of issues such as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia and also autism. She has started a blog "Be Brave" which has given her more exposure to followers all over the world.

It is important for Paula's work with the disadvantaged that she uses materials which are readily available. She uses old blankets instead of calico or expensive fabrics. Onto these she paints and inks designs, she also embroiders and stitches into them, adding buttons, safety pins, all sorts of ephemera which can easily be come across in any home. She also loves to work with old hard-backed books - altered books - decorating them with an array of different items and techniques; she then posts them on Pinterest and other social media. One of these pages has been viewed on Pinterest 30,000 times to date.

Paula uses [Workaid](#) as a source for many of the items used in her classes and she has also taught "Stitched Books" there. A more recent project is using small tins and lids to decorate, again with paint and stitching - anything goes.

Paula has co-written a book with Maggie Grey and Samantha Packer - "Cut, Shape and Stitch" and she enjoyed the process immensely. She also illustrated - in stitch - "I AM" - a poem written about a child refugee coming to the UK, the money raised will be used to help child refugees.

Paula was very keen for us all to spread the word about art in all forms and to encourage people to be brave and "if she can do it, anyone can". She is an inspiration. She obviously loves what she does and is truly making a difference in many people's lives. She has boundless energy and enthusiasm and is endlessly encouraging.



