

CETG ARCHIVE

Meeting Report

9th July 2018

Speaker: Heather Belcher

Talk: Felt: Fabric of History

Heather Belcher's mother was a tailoress and taught dressmaking and tailoring, so it seemed natural for Heather to do a textiles course at Goldsmith's in the early 1980s. However, she struggled with the actual textiles side of the course, finding the art and drawing more to her taste. This changed when she saw an exhibition of felt curated by Mary Burkett at the Horniman Museum - in particular, a felt coat, held by the Museum, "spoke" to Heather. After hearing a talk given by Mary Burkett, Heather taught herself various wet felting techniques. Felt's ability to be "drawn" into, sculpted or worn fascinated her.

On leaving Goldsmith's, Heather continued her exploration of felting, especially blending coloured wools to create largely monochrome pieces. She used much of her own art work as a starting point, such as a drawing of a pair of scissors. In order to obtain the level of detail she wished, the piece ended up being 2 metres in size. Many of her early pieces were of a similar size. Heather exhibited mainly in galleries and at Chelsea Arts Fair.

She returned to Goldsmith's to do an MA, and became interested in the connections between the body and clothing, using a swimming costume as a basis of felted garments. Later on, Heather had an opportunity to visit Kyrgyzstan, where felting remains important both economically and culturally. There she saw felt being made in a mountain village. Whilst the bold colours were not to her taste, she appreciated the time-honoured methods and the symbolism involved. The fibres are still rolled by hand and finished off by either by being kicked around or rolled into plastic and dragged behind a rider on a horse!

Since then, Heather has widened her felting repertoire, incorporating scrim and knitting into items, and developing a heat-press printing technique. Recently she has collaborated with sculptor Duncan Ayscough, and has had some felted items dipped in porcelain, which alters the feel but not the look of the piece.

She teaches felting, mainly at City Lit. College as well as other venues and continues to exhibit, often with the 62 Group. Heather finds herself still fascinated by her early artistic interests in the connections between the body and clothing, ideas of presence and absence, beneath the skin and spirals. She has been influenced greatly by artist Joseph Beuys, who made a great series of felted suits which were used in both exhibitions and performances.

This was an inspiring talk, and Heather had not only many interesting photos of

felted items and felt-making, but also a table full of exciting felted pieces and art works.



Liz Smith's Announcements at the meeting

We are very lucky to have Heather Belcher with us this evening. I am very much looking forward to her talk. Just a few quick notices:

1. RSN trip on Wednesday 18 July - the coach will leave at 9.00 from The Broadway, Old Amersham, HP7 0HL. We will leave RSN approximately 3.30.

2. Sewing machines - if anyone has a sewing machine they no longer use or want I would be happy to advertise it in the newsletter. I say this as I know one member is after a Bernina and I thought this might be a good forum for the exchange of machines.

3. Newsletter - I just want to thank those of you who let me know they didn't receive the newsletter on Monday. I sent it out but apparently a lot of you didn't get it. Please do let me know if you don't get it, then I can check if there has been a problem.

4. Workshop - the workshop on the 30th June was a great success thanks to Terry and Tina. Some of the pieces we made are at the back of the hall. Please have a look at them if you haven't already. There are plans afoot for one more workshop this year, so keep an eye out for information about it in the next couple of months.

5. Prize for old member - Diane Kelly asked me to let you all know that Elsie Probert, who now lives in Derbyshire but was a member of our group for many years, has won the Julia Carrara prize for colour in the completion run by the Embroiderers Guild (I believe there were about 150 entries). Theme was "Underfoot".

6. Janet Edmund's courses - for those of you that don't know about the courses that Janet runs at Workaid I have brought in the posters telling you what is on offer over the next 3 months. Janet will be holding design sessions in the mornings and stitch ones in the afternoon. The next one is on Thursday 26th July and she is going to be doing cold water dyeing of natural threads in the morning and manipulating fabric in the afternoon. Thursday 23rd August is mono printing in the morning and shadow quilting in the afternoon. On Thursday 27th Sept, squares and oblongs in the morning and a return to darning in the afternoon. These are courses are amazing value at £25 for a full day of tuition. You don't have to do the full day you can choose to do just the morning or afternoon sessions - see the posters at the back of the hall.