

Stitched in Time

*a progressive interpretation of
embroidery*

Beverly Furniss 2009

This exegesis is submitted to AUT University in partial fulfillment of the degree
of Master of Art and Design.

*But words are things, and a small drop of ink,
Falling, like dew, upon a thought, produces
That which makes thousands, perhaps millions, think.*

Lord Byron

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made in the acknowledgements.

Signed:

Dated:

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Abstract

Stitched in Time: a progressive interpretation of embroidery.

This practice-based art and design project explores the potential use of contemporary materials and techniques in relation to extending aesthetic and structural possibilities of embroidery, with a focus on developing textile formations through the medium of ‘free stitch’ machine embroidery.

Embroidery is often perceived by the non-enthusiast as a ‘granny craft’: an ‘old’ technique. Contemporary representations of embroidery suggest that new and innovative interpretations exist.

Through investigation and experimentation with products, textiles and techniques, the embroidered artefacts that I have crafted are intended to disrupt the conventional perceptions of embroidery by alluding to conceptual associations of tradition and nostalgia.

The aim of this project is to promote embroidery as a diverse medium; its use as a means of narrative, a valued skill that spans both art and craft disciplines, and to lift the status of craft by encouraging discourse of craft practice within an academic environment.

This exegesis represents 20% of this practice-based thesis project.

Key words: embroidery, craft, art.

Introduction

Embroidery¹

- n* 1. decorative needlework, usually on cloth or canvas.
2. the act of adding imaginary details to a story.

Stitched in time is a progressive interpretation of embroidery.

This thesis project intentionally blurs the boundaries of traditional embroidery and suggests that this interpretation is a progressive one, continuing to move and develop as a result of this project even after it has concluded.

Some traditionalist embroiderers may question the authenticity of the new contemporary interpretations, but these occurrences are an inevitable evolutionary process. There have been many forms of embroidery developed throughout the centuries. The commonalities that bind these interpretations are: the needle, thread, the hand, and fabric.

The methods employed by this thesis project maintain the essential elements of integrity and good practice attributed to fine needlework. The purposeful use of the machine in this project acts as both the tool and the metaphorical bridge: connecting traditional and contemporary embroidery while intentionally restricting what otherwise would have been endless possibilities of stitch types and techniques.

This thesis project considers the perceived notion of embroidery as an ‘old technique’: a ‘granny craft’. ‘Craft’ is defined for this project as both doing and object. This project considers a flexible location for embroidery as either art or craft. I do not claim to remedy the art and craft debate: it is seemingly irresolvable.

I locate embroidery ambiguously in both craft and art without narrowing classification further. This move is not intended to alienate established categories such as decorative arts, applied

¹ Embroidery as defined by Collins English Dictionary (2003).

arts, textile arts or fibre arts. It is intended to show the diversity of embroidery and the ability for it to interchange between art and craft and, consequently, provoke reaction and discourse.

The contextual framework that informs this project draws on literature that promotes thinking in the practice of art and craft; the promotion of craft into an academic environment, and the work of artists who use the craft of embroidery as a narrative tool.

The non-linear pathway of heuristics methodology allowed for a series of planned explorations and serendipitous opportunities that led up to the development of artifacts that would allude to the notions associated with tradition and nostalgia.

Aims and objectives of the project:

- To promote the diversity of embroidery.
- To challenge the perception of embroidery.
- To raise appreciation for the medium of embroidery.
- To encourage discourse about craft and art with the intention of fostering critical debate.

Research questions:

These overarching questions evolved to create a framework within which to base discussion and compile the literature review that informs this thesis project:

- When did embroidery become unfashionable?
- How might the perception of embroidery be changed?

Chapter 1 – Contextual Framework consists of the literature review forming the contextual framework that underpins this thesis project. Research and analysis included avenues of art and craft practice, feminist studies, embroidery and craft history, contemporary and traditional technologies, and selected art and craft practitioners.

Chapter 2 – Research Methods explores the supporting methodologies, the methods, processes and materials used to develop the content of this practice-based thesis project.

Chapter 3 – Research Practice presents the body of work for this practice-based thesis project in relation to the production, supported with relevant commentary.

Chapter 4 – Presentation of the practice-based outcome of this thesis project.

Chapter 5 – Concluding Commentary presents a synopsis of research findings for this thesis project.

Positioning Statement

This project was driven by an affinity to, and an appreciation of, the art of handwork: the desire to dispel the perceived ‘old technique’ image associated with embroidery and to help promote the diversity of the medium by presenting a body of work showcasing contemporary crafted embroidery.

Over the past 40 years I have developed my knowledge in hand and machine work through practice and application in the domestic, commercial and educational environment. I am intuitively drawn to the tactility of fabric, and the challenge and creation of the making process. Textiles have always been part of both my personal and working life; they are intrinsically connected to my soul. Working with learners and sharing skills for development and creation is foremost in what I do.

The ‘throw away’ society is a term commonly attributed to the 21st century’s increase in affordable commodities, a growth in consumerism, new technologies and the fast pace of modern lifestyles. It is therefore little wonder that a skill such as embroidery, which takes time, patience and intricacy, could be considered laborious and would not fit well into a ‘throw away’ society.

My earliest recollection of my involvement with embroidery was, as a young child, inadvertently transferring an embroidery flower design from transfer paper² to the ironing board cover with a hot iron. Unbeknown to my mother, who would have assumed that I was sleeping, I had ventured into her well-equipped sewing room, which was full of treasures and intrigue. Much to my horror, the image had transferred successfully and it had fixed very visibly on to the ironing board cover. My attempts to remove the image with water and rubbing were futile, and I knew clearly that I was in irrevocable trouble. Fortunately, but somewhat curiously, there was never any mention of the transferred image, therefore no reprimands: no questions. For all intents and purposes the event was forgotten, except it was etched in my memory and is held as vividly today as then.

This thesis project has taken me on a personal journey; the outcome has produced work that is embodied with nostalgic memories and fading traditions.

² An image printed on paper, ironed on to a fabric as a stitching guide for embroidery.

Chapter 1: Contextual Framework

Embroidery is a general term used to describe needlework, created traditionally by hand, and then latterly produced by machine. Traditionally, embroidery is worked on a ground³ fabric, with thread applied to the surface of the fabric with a needle as a means to enhance the fabric with applied design through stitch. Embroidery has historical recorded reference dating back to the Iron Age (c.500-100BC) (Staniland, 1991), and has been used ever since as a means to signify narrative, religious affiliations, social status, nobility, cult followings or cultural identification (Smith, 1991).

The generic term ‘embroidery’ encompasses numerous variations: styles, applications, methods, techniques and materials. Machine embroidery is more commonly recognised as a commercially viable, stylised, computer-programmed product used to embellish goods for mass markets. The domestic embroidery machine produces computer programmed images, generally used for the purpose of decorating apparel and home furnishings. A contemporary version of embroidery uses the domestic sewing machine in an unconventional way – likened to a ‘darning method’-referred to as ‘free stitching’ or ‘free motion’ machine embroidery, a creative and expressive technique that uses the needle of a sewing machine as a ‘paint brush’ (*metaphorically*).

Initial research located historical⁴ records of embroidery, especially the ornate medieval and the ecclesiastical *Opus Anglicanum* embroideries. From these readings a number of questions arose: for example, if embroidery has such diversity and has been in existence for so long, then why does embroidery appear to hold a low status and not a position of prominence? So: When did embroidery become unfashionable? This question is considered in **Embroidery in a Sociological Context**. How can the status of embroidery be raised? **Embroidery in a Theoretical Context** looks at embroidery in the broader context of craft. The issues of redressing craft are suggested in **Embroidery and Modern Craft**. The versatility of visual messaging is shown in **Embroidery as Narrative**, and **Embroidery in Practice** showcases work of innovative thought-provoking artists.

³ Ground fabric forms the base that embroidery stitches are worked into.

⁴ A delightful, albeit condensed account of the history of embroidery, taken from ‘Your Embroidery’ (Brooks, 1949) has been included in this document as a matter of interest for the reader. (See Appendix A: related contextual history).

Embroidery in a Sociological Context

'The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine' (Parker, 1984) informs this project through the portrayal of long association with women throughout history and up to the late twentieth century. Through the connotations of that connection, embroidery has remained identified with craft, domesticity, and low status within a patriarchal hierarchy. Parker wrote this book 25 years ago and, on a number of occasions, I found her book referenced within other literature consulted for this project, and only once was her work challenged. Such acknowledgements (Adamson, 2007; Alfoldy, 2007; Beaudry, 2006; Rowley, 1997) validate Parker's findings and support this thesis project.

According to Parker (1984, p. 3):

... the conviction that femininity is natural to women (and unnatural in men) is tenacious. It is a crucial aspect of patriarchal ideology, sanctioning a rigid and oppressive division of labour. Thus women active in the upsurge of feminism which began during the 1960's set out to challenge accepted definitions of the innate differences between the sexes, and to provide a new understanding of the creation of femininity.

Parker clarifies the feminine stereotype as encompassing, "everything women are and everything we do as entirely, essentially and eternally feminine, denying differences between women according to our economic and social position, or our geographical and historical place" (1984, p. 4).

'Thrift to Fantasy' traces the development of home textiles through the 1930s to 1950s period in New Zealand's history. McLeod, a New Zealand journalist, acknowledges those women, primarily unemployed, who, through economic necessity, became the providers of home comforts, through their craft and creations. McLeod shares her nostalgic stories of her own home environment and family relationships. Unfortunately, McLeod does little to raise the image of embroidery from anything more than work produced through necessity and even then implies the stitching was not particularly well worked. She implies that much of the hand work was left in the bottom of the glory boxes because it was not of a good enough standard to be shown and suggests that by the 60s, craft became seen as "...a half forgotten tradition associated mainly with older women" (McLeod, 2005, p. 263).

Cabeen (2007) draws together a collection of writings in an attempt to show the connections between women and embroidery in American society in the late 19th century. She acknowledges Hartshorne's book specialising in English medieval embroidery, published in 1848 and proclaimed as the first of its type. Cabeen views Hartshorne's book as failing to give an accurate holistic view of embroidery. I find that ironic, as I consider the same to be true of Cabeen's accounts in her article entitled 'Home Work', which she begins by declaring, " We see these textiles as craft in the lowest sense of the word – non original, labor intensive, and worked by amateurs" (2007, p. 197). She romanticises embroidery, failing to position it beyond a leisurely pastime. Her conclusion confirms her indifference: " The object of their labors may have been simply the necessary pleasure of the work itself" (Cabeen, 2007. p. 218).

Such writings as Cabeen (2007) and McLeod (2005) are immensely valuable for their depiction of bygone eras; nevertheless I believe that writings such as these do little to promote the vitality of embroidery or, for that matter, the scholarly ability of women. Rowley suggests that changes have occurred within the domestic life. "One aspect of postmodernism that has been relatively under-theorised is our experience of significant shifts in domestic life" (1997, p. xvi).

In 'Making Stuff: an alternative craft book', Woodcock (2006), agrees that feminism was largely responsible for lowering the status of craft. She supports the earlier notion that embroidery was a tool of oppression, Parker (1984), forcing women to disassociate themselves with the crafts if they wanted to retain an image of an 'empowered women'. But as the craft resurgence began in the early 1990's, it initiated changes to the perception of craft and by the year 2000 the craft resurgence had gained momentum. Woodcock advocates the "knitting phenomenon" has been responsible for "pulling other lost and forgotten crafts along in its wake: embroidery, crochet and sewing were resurrected from the granny-fied status to join the revolution" (Hanaor & Woodcock, 2006, p. 9).

Therefore, I believe that if embroidery is to venture out of this implied low status, then we need to look at creative, innovative, even radical applications of embroidery and, more importantly, to acknowledge them as such. I perceive the embroidery position to be similar to that of the art and craft debate: forever stuck in a monotonous vortex, capable of momentum but not able to escape, waiting for the moment when someone gives the nudge.

Embroidery in a Theoretical Context

Parker (1984, p.5) states: “The definition of embroidery is a difficult task. To term it ‘art’ raises special problems. Moving embroidery several rungs up the ladder of art forms could be interpreted as simply affirming the hierarchical categorisations, rather than deconstructing them.”

To a large extent the available literature focused on the art and craft disparity, continuing to fuel the exhausting debate of the well-known hierarchy, the elevated status of art and the lower status of craft. This thesis suggests that such literature merely supports the already marginalised topic, reinforcing the hierarchy even further.

In ‘Thinking Through Craft’, Adamson (2007, p. 3) considers, “craft as a word, idea, and a category... analyzing it as an approach, an attitude, or a habit of action. ...It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, an institution or people”. He believes that “through an examination of the terms of its subordination ... the social prejudices that attend craft can be redressed” (2007, p. 3).

Adamson (2007) states that existing writings relating to craft are either promotional, critical or historical, and that it is uncommon to find writing relating to craft in theoretical terms: therefore he discusses the notion of ‘craft as an idea’. While conceding, but defending, craft’s second-class status within the art and craft hierarchy, Adamson declares that his central argument “is that craft’s inferiority might be the most productive thing about it” (p. 4). That claim alone is enough to entice craft critics and enthusiasts alike into response. He intentionally provokes debate while simultaneously welcoming affirmation or dispute through the discussion of five comparative principles - supplemental, material, skill, pastoral and amateur - in relation to modern art and craft.

Adamson (2007) suggests that practitioners ‘engage in critical practice’ and encourages critics to view craft holistically rather than as just an object, therefore changing the analysis of craft to better fit a modern culture.

Adamson (2007) has very much an anti modernist approach although he does not say that directly; Metcalf (2007) openly declares himself an anti modernist. He suggests that modernist art is anti-craft and that the modernist movement enforced the exclusion of craft from academic institutions.

In 'Craft and Contemporary Theory' (1997), Rowley suggests that it was the establishment of the art canon that has ensured the arts scholarly fortification and the reason that the hierarchy between art and craft has developed. She suggests that there may be alternative ways of establishing a critical framework for craft rather than merely replicating and mimicking art practice and that it is not the lack of notable 'works' that hinder a canonical structure, but rather the question of who would determine the craft canon.

The debate of art versus craft was one that I had wanted to avoid because I felt that it was a never-ending discourse, somewhat confusing, and never seeming to reach a conclusion, nonetheless I was drawn to it, and it became instrumental in framing this thesis project. I have become inspired to provoke discourse within this field and I believe that, by generating discussion and critical debate, distinctions between art and craft will evolve that are respectful of each other without the need for hierarchical establishment.

Embroidery and Modern Craft

With craft experiencing a resurgence, what better time than now, to give craft a face lift: to take the opportunity to alter old stagnant perceptions, and allow craft to be presented in a new fresh way whilst still retaining the traditional values synonymous with of craft.

The new 'Journal of Modern Craft'⁵ supports the term modern craft maintains direct connection with craft, brings with it tradition, while locating in a new age of technology (Adamson, Harrod, & Cooke, 2008).

In 'Neo Craft: modernity and the crafts', Press (2007) suggests that "a new model of craft practice" is emerging as a result of a change in society and that this change is part of a "quiet revolution" (p. 264). Modern technology is one aspect that is considered advantageous to modern craft and visa versa. Press (2007) believes that the qualities of a craft-maker will be valued alongside new technologies in modern avenues of research and that those who engage with craft in the twenty-first century bring to it different ideals, and attitudes.

As a result of the blending of tradition and technology to create a modern craft, Press (2007) suggests that this will be a time of "new articulated emerging knowledge base, new forms of creative and cultural hybridity that are transforming craft, new definitions of practice, and new technological opportunities that we can embrace" (p. 252).

Press (2007. p. 264) also states:

Craft presents us with the oldest knowledge there is: the most adaptable, the most fluid knowledge that our culture has produced – knowledge about making things. Wedded to the most contemporary technology, this knowledge is enabling makers to assert a vital new relevance and value to craft.

⁵ 'The Journal of Modern Craft' (2008) claims to be the 'first peer reviewed academic journal to provide an interdisciplinary and international forum in its subject area'. The initiation of the journal was a response to a perceived lack of academic writing pertaining to the craft and that at "the time of writing, there were no departments of craft studies and only a handful of academic positions in the study of craft history or theory" (Adamson, Harrod, & Cooke, 2008, p. 5). The journal is a welcome platform for scholarly craft practice.

Tilleke Schwartz's work is an example of embroidery that is used to write visually, fun narratives about issues that will affect society. Her work is described as “commenting on the complexities and paradoxes of modern life” (2007, p. 22).

Schwartz reminds us of the “hidden crisis in the digital age” and the “risk of ‘losing our memory’ (Figure 1:1) because we do not preserve digital archives well and we cannot read such archives due to the fast changes in hard and software” (2007, p. 27).

This thesis project has identified for me, the value of retaining and preserving information, particularly in relation to embroidery and the historic narrative they illustrate. I consider it would be sadly ironic, if we were to lose information because of modern technologies.

This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons.

Figure 1:1 ‘Losing our Memory’. (Schwarz, 1998)

Institute of Figuring

In 2005 Margaret Wertheim, a science writer and communicator, with her sister Christine Wertheim, an artist and a teacher, formed an organisation called ‘The Institute of Figuring’ (IFF)⁶. Margaret Wertheim explains that the IFF was established as a way of provoking public awareness of “science, mathematics, technology, computation and cognitive sciences” (Thomas, 2009, p. 36). The incentive for the project came from a growing awareness of the effects of global warming on coral reefs. The idea of crocheting a coral reef evolved from an article in a science magazine depicting how knitted and crocheted objects had been used to explain mathematical equations.

The IFF website continues to receive international support for the ‘Hyperbolic Crochet Reef Project’ and the first exhibition in 2007 covered a 3,000 square foot⁷ gallery floor during the Chicago Humanities Festival.

I applaud the IFF for their vision and innovative approach toward promoting environmental awareness and their use of craft as an effective tool for societal participation.

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Figure 2:1 ‘Ladies Silurian Atoll’ by the Institute for Figuring. (Thomas, 2009).

⁶For further information visit: www.theiff.org/reef/ Get involved: www.sydbeyreef.blogspot.co/ Listen to Margaret explain the project: www.ted.com The Reef is coming to Sydney in August [2009]: www.powerhouse.com/freeradicals Part of a broader movement: www.craftivism.com

⁷ 3,000 square foot converts to 914.4 square metres.

Embroidery as Narrative

An aspect of embroidery that I am particularly drawn to, is its use as a medium to communicate with the viewer: a form of narrative built into work as a ‘bearer of meaning’, to convey a message.

In ‘The Art of Craft’, Burgard looks at ‘bearers of meaning’ as interpretations of the use of an object, whether it is deemed art or craft. He considers that these ‘meanings’ may be used or interpreted in many different layers – in relation to culture, or history, or visually. He argues that defining art and craft into particular fields may work in some cases but may not be definitive enough for some, especially “within a given cultural context” where the object may be influenced “as bearers of meaning that reflect the time, place, and culture of their creation” (1999. p. 9).

The Bayeux Tapestry

The first example I refer to as embroidery that uses a narrative to tell a story is The Bayeux Tapestry⁸ (see figure 3:1). But, firstly, I need to clarify a misconception: the Bayeux Tapestry is in fact embroidery. A tapestry is a woven cloth, whilst embroidery is added onto or into pre-existing fabric. The Bayeux Tapestry (embroidery) commemorates the Battle of Hastings in 1066; it is approximately 70 metres long and on average approximately 50cm deep. It is housed in the town of Bayeux, in Normandy, France, and serves as an invaluable historical account of the pre-invasion, the massacre, the weapons and mode of battle of that period. (Wilson, 2004)

Unquestionably this work is both valuable as an account of the battle and an example of work that depicts a narrative. Unfortunately society has been told it is a tapestry, and that has become an accepted ‘fact’. This project draws a parallel between this misconception and my claim of how embroidery is perceived, highlighting how much influence a perception can carry and how difficult it is to change once it has become established.

⁸ It is generally agreed, but not confirmed, that Bishop Ode was an architect who commissioned The Bayeux Tapestry soon after the Battle of Hastings. The tapestry depicts 623 humans, 55 dogs, 202 horses, 41 ships, 49 trees, approx. 2000 Latin words, 500 mythical and non-mythical creatures, such as birds, and dragons. There are eight colours discernable in the Tapestry.

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Figure 3:1 'The Battle Commences.' Bayeux Tapestry. (Wilson, 2004)

Memory cloth

I was profoundly moved by the ‘memory cloth’, a controversial project that was supported by the African National Congress government in 1996 as a way to heal “the nation’s tortured past and rebuild collective memory” (Becker, 2007, p. 115).

The ‘memory cloth’ project involved people telling their stories, which were then translated and stitched into a visual narrative through the use of embroidery. The thousands

of women who were involved in this project shared the task of either the embroidery or the writing, whichever they were best at.

Each of the thousands of histories were worked on coloured cotton fabric approximately 10 x 14 inches (25 x 35cm), one would be for exhibition⁹ or sale and another retained for archiving.

The power of these ‘memory cloths’ when amassed was such that they were “...able to stir the viewers’ emotions, often moving their audience to tears” (Becker, 2007, p. 116). The pictorial histories gave the women a voice; they were an opportunity to heal by disclosing the dreadful atrocities, to share and make social connections as well as providing an income. Becker (2007, p. 130) describes this work as an “ongoing contribution to a historical archive”.

I acknowledge this as a positive and proactive use of embroidery. The ‘memory cloth’ project supports the notion of a visual narrative, the reality of communication through stitch, and the embodiment of memory.

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Figure 4:1 Lindive Duma. Becker (2007)

⁹ “An exhibition of 100 such depictions (memory cloths), each mounted and framed with a photo of the woman and her written text, opened at the Durban Art Gallery at the time of the 2001 ‘Third World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerances,’ also in Durban.” “...the largest exhibition to date was held at the Betty Rymer Gallery at the School of Art Institute of Chicago in 2004” (Becker, 2007, p. 118).

Embodiment of memory – the hidden narrative

The work of **Otto Von Busch**, in particular his unorthodox approach to fashion design, his ability to shift design thinking and his inclusion of craft attributes into his practice, has inspired this thesis project.

In ‘Textile Punctum’ *embroidery of memory*, (2005) Von Busch tells a story; as a result of an event, a wine stain is left on a garment and then the stain is embroidered which allows the embroidery to take on permanence once the stain is washed away. The embroidery becomes the tangible reminder of the event, taking on the life of the stain and serving as a memory long after the event had ended.

Von Busch likens his embroidered stain to the capture of the moment in photographic image as “recording a passage of time” (2005, p. 20).

In ‘Textile Punctum’, Von Busch (2005, p.15), states that the embroidery “manifests itself as an indexical sign of memory and acts as an anchor of the representative physical encounter with reality. It is a historical mark, a monument that denotes the point where identity assumed material form.”

This project draws on the notion of depicting a story, of the embodiment of memory articulated through the use of embroidery. Reference is made to the second definition for embroidery suggesting the adding of imaginary details.

Embroidery ¹⁰

n 1. decorative needlework, usually on cloth or canvas.

2. the act of adding imaginary details to a story.

¹⁰ Embroidery as defined by Collins English Dictionary (2003).

Embroidery in Practice

Judy Chicago's

artwork 'The Dinner Party' has had a profound impact on this thesis project. Firstly, the controversy that this work provoked, paradoxically demonstrates to me the extent to which presumptuous misconception can be placed on a work or works by the observer.

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Figure 5:1 Installation of 'The Dinner Party'. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. (Chicago, 1980)

Chicago's art work reflects feminist symbolism and she became renowned for her collaborative art work 'The Dinner Party', first exhibited in 1979. An estimated one million people throughout America and five other countries have viewed the work, which represents women's repression throughout history. Chicago (1996, p3) states:

The goal of this symbolic history of women in Western civilization was and is twofold: to teach women's history through a work of art that can convey the long struggle for freedom and justice that women have waged since the advent of male-dominated societies, and to break the cycle of history that 'The Dinner Party' describes.

'The Dinner Party' (Figure 5.1) comprises: a triangular table, 48 feet long on each side, displaying 39 place settings, each china plate symbolic of named women; a table runner; banners; and The Heritage Floor, a tiled floor inscribed with 999 names of women honored for their contribution to history. Chicago's work uses symbolism to convey a message and 'The Dinner Party' has extensive layers of symbolic representation, all used to convey specific messages. For example, Chicago (1996, p. 9) describes: "These table settings are intended as a dual metaphor, both domestic and religious, expressing the 'containment' imposed by female role expectations while also calling attention to the indispensable though unacknowledged value of 'women's work.'"

The plates, however, displayed the most potent imagery, using both vulvas and butterfly motifs (the butterfly is an ancient symbol of liberation). “The butterfly forms undergo a metamorphosis as the painted and sculpted abstract portraits become increasing dimensional, a metaphor for women’s intensifying struggle for freedom” (Chicago, 1996, p. 5).

It is the connotation of these symbolic interpretations that created the controversy surrounding her work. The negative and destructive criticisms predominated in some communities, with a number of critics deeming the work as offensive ... “pornographic” (Chicago, 1996, p. 220), “grotesque kitsch¹¹ ... best described as little more than vaginas on plates” (Chicago, 1996, p. 215).

Chicago acknowledges the work of a number of artists and practitioners whose aim was to produce work borne from a passion utilising skills that are considered craft, such as embroidery, and that women are identified with these skills. As a result of learning to spray paint, Chicago acknowledges the beneficial relationship of the use of craft in her artistic work, “...the most important being an understanding of the role of craft. I had never actually seen art making in terms of making an object; and learning this concept improved my work” (Lucie-Smith, 2000. p.20).

Sadly, ‘The Dinner Party’ (Chicago, 1996), remained locked away in storage, facing the risk of decay and loss of its historical significance and forgoing the intention of promoting the women that it had highlighted. ‘The ‘Dinner Party’, five years in the making from 1974-79, was finally accepted in 2002 by the Brooklyn Museum where it is now permanently housed.

I find a paradoxical parallel between the near demise and the intention of ‘The Dinner Party’. Chicago intended the project to acknowledge the women that she profiled in her work but she failed to acknowledge the women who had helped create ‘The Dinner Party’; similarly, because the work was so controversial, it may have become hidden from view, failing to be viewed and appreciated by anyone.

¹¹ Kitsch defined as ‘tawdry, vulgarised, or pretentious art, literature, etc, usually with popular or sentimental appeal’. (Collins English Dictionary, 2003)

Chicago's 'The Dinner Party' raised issues of the viewers' interpretation and the formation of preconception. I personally questioned my reactions to this work; I drew conclusions and made judgments before I had investigated it fully enough to appreciate the many layers of meaning within the work and that this could be acknowledged, irrespective of my personal preferences. This work is closely connected to the theme of this thesis project in relation to my intention to produce a body of work that will alter the viewers' perception of embroidery and provoke discourse.

Deidre Scherer

I am profoundly drawn to the intricacy and detailed work of artist Deirdre Scherer, from whom I gained permission to use the representation of hand stitching (Figure 6:1) as an initial image for my project.

Scherer describes her work as crossing disciplines in craft, quilting, assemblage, collage and fine arts.

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Figure 6:1 First Stitch (Scherer)

An extensive aspect of Scherer's work involves the aged and issues of mortality. She works within her community, acknowledging and highlighting aspects of life (dying) that she considers are often glossed over. "Our society does not prepare us for death and rarely speaks of it in a positive, constructive manner." (Scherer, 1998, p.48) She works with people in their last stages of life, capturing them first in pencil drawings and then translating their lives into a visual story through the medium of fabric and stitch. Scherer received a Humanities Award in 2008 from the American Academy of Hospice & Palliative Medicine.

Scherer's work inspires me to observe the viewers' response to her work and the perceptions they form.

Chapter 2: Research Methods

Research methodology is a systematic process of arriving at the truth. The following statement is applicable to my research process: "...a researcher needs to think logically, follow rules, and repeat steps over and over" (Lawrence Neuman, 1997, p. 2).

This practice-based research project is positioned within a creative research paradigm. Heuristics and Reflective Practice research methodologies were used concurrently throughout my project, in conjunction with documentation: recording the studio project's progression, reflection and evaluation processes by means of Designers' Journals, pin boards, electronic recording and digital photography.

Heuristics methodology is a qualitative research method which uses exploration to solve a problem for which there is no known outcome. This methodology was appropriate for this project because I began with a concept that had no definitive or predictable outcome. Heuristics' aim is discovery through a process of findings, using tacit knowledge and intuitive reaction. Heuristics allows for rigorous and diverse methods of questioning, and for variable perspectives to evolve. It is not a linear method, but dialectical (Kleining & Witt, 2000).

Lawrence Neuman (1997, p. 331) describes a non-linear pathway as more of "a cyclical research path [that] makes successive passes through steps, sometimes moving backward and sideways before moving on. It is more of a spiral, moving slowly upward but not directly."

This fluidity allowed me to connect with the spontaneity of ideas and actions; it gave me the freedom to follow serendipitous pathways of discovery and to work intuitively in the moment to achieve the optimal results from ideas.

Lawrence Neuman (1997, p. 331) reiterates that, while looking unorganised and chaotic, this path (staircase) is an effective way of "...creating a feeling for the whole, for grasping subtle shades of meaning, for pulling together divergent information, and for switching perspectives."

Moustakas structures the basic research design of heuristics into six phases: "...the initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis" (1990, p. 27).

Tacit knowledge is an intuitive response, inherent knowledge, also a characteristic of heuristics research. It is valuable to a practitioner of creative processes and can be used as a means of personal critique. As a maker, a practitioner and an educator in the apparel and textile discipline, I have drawn consistently on my tacit knowledge, a characteristic that is so inherent that it becomes difficult to articulate its meaning other than to describe it as an inner knowing based on experience and developed over years by application. Much of my work was evaluated by applying my tacit knowledge.

Moustakas (1990, p. 20) describes tacit knowing as the basis of heuristics discovery, "...the power of revelation in tacit knowing," constantly asking questions of oneself and allowing the intuitive senses to be open to and accepting of discoveries.

Timeframes must be created in order to achieve progressive outcomes, allowing predetermined points to review progress. It is imperative with a heuristics methodology to be mindful of academic deadlines:

The heuristic research process is not one that can be hurried or timed by the clock or calendar. It demands the total presence, honesty, maturity, and integrity of the researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility in every heuristic journey. (Moustakas, 1990. p. 20)

A designer's journal was the fundamental support mechanism for recording the process and progression, an essential factor for documenting, reflecting upon and evaluating the processes and actions leading to each outcome.

Gray and Mailins suggest that the definition of the word 'journal' may be meek in comparison to what a designer's journal actually can contain, the volume of detail that it holds and that the principle of journal is crucial, "...a store - a depositary for a range of information in a range of media, which is added to and consulted on a regular basis" (2004, p. 59).



Figure 7:2 Pages from my 'designer's journal'.

Loose leaf notes, images, articles, exhibition booklets, web notes on 'how to do', and product locations that were not placed chronologically into the designer's journal have been stored in folders under headings for reference purposes.

Studio wall pin boards served as my constant point of reference and inspiration. Frequent changes or new additions to the boards allowed interesting visual concepts to develop and created a purposeful space for displaying new finds.



Figure 8:2 My studio pin board.

Digital voice recording became a valuable and time-efficient tool. Ideas, concepts or reminders were dealt with quickly. Play-back was a useful exercise to locate changes in direction or be reminded of an aspect that may have been overlooked and to systematically type up information gathered, a valid way of locating significant aspects of the project. A digital voice recorder can be looked upon as a verbal journal.

Digital photography was an effective tool for recording the chronological process of the practice and critical for documenting and evaluating experimentation of the textile pieces.

Photographic recording became both a research tool and a research method. This method of capturing details and processes formed an imperative aspect of this project. Pieces of the constructed embroidery textiles were set into positions to simulate the entire work. Photographing the pieces allowed me to gain a visual appreciation of what a finished work might look like (Figures 9:2, & 10:2). This method allowed me, as the maker, to view work from another standpoint – to draw away from and evaluate work based on aesthetic consideration as the camera had seen it. Frequently, the evaluation and suitability of the experimental pieces was governed solely by whether the photographic image met my intended aesthetic criteria.

The camera often produced an image that was different to what I had initially seen. Small details were magnified or lost; often colours that had been suitable looked dull in a photographic image and the stitch definition that I worked toward did not show up as clearly. On occasions the photo image would show something unexpected and that would generate new considerations. For example, the exploration that produced the possible wing of a butterfly (Figure 74:3) was prompted as a result of the camera image of a draped piece of textile lace.

Figure 9:2
Photographic
recording is used
for testing ideas.
This image (right)
reflects
experimentation
during the 'tea for
two' project.




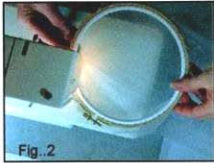
Figure 10:2
Photographic
recording
supported my
numerical
referencing
system, allowing
cross-referencing
and identification
of the textile
construction
process.








Recording of information, processes, materials used and methods adopted was an essential procedure for tracking progress. Recording information not only allowed for reflective practice but also served as a crucial process of recording methods of making, in order to be able to repeat successful textile formations.

The importance of recording findings, techniques and materials was realised when I needed to repeat a previous piece of work, including minor details such as thread tensions or which particular soluble I had used. The recording system was not reliable at first and on occasions it was difficult to track exactly what I had done. This led to refining my system so that everything I made and every process used was recorded in writing with technical details cross-referenced with photographic evidence.

Cup Cake:
Cake mix creating
Reference # 70901

	Consequences in relation to intention	Desirability of all perceived consequences intended or unintended
1	Surprise	Undesirable
2	Surprise	Desirable or neutral
3	No surprise	Desirable or neutral
4	No surprise	Undesirable

Reflective commentary:

Intention: to create a realistic chocolate cake mix, a fabric structure both lightweight and soft to cover stuffing. Stitching to be matt but not too dense or it will restrict the smoothness to curve.

No surprise as tactic knowledge applied to creating the structure however some surprise in the resulting realistic outcome. Soft, chocolate.

Desirable cake mix. Repeatable –next use a variation of threads and tensions

Photo series show soluble plastic, framing up, stitched, images show stitching developing. Removed from the frame, wet to dissolve the product after excess has been removed, dried naturally or with additional heat i.e. iron or hair drier (both successful for small pieces). All aspect of the stitching and the products used have been graphed for future reference.

Considered developing an appropriate method of recording each sample for cross referencing purposes.

*Figure 11:2 Initial recording system. Process and results of experimentation were recorded.
The recording system was later improved, refining and extending the amount of detailed information recorded.*

The improved **numerical referencing system** listed the variables that I used each time I stitched a piece of work, including: tension settings, needle sizes and types, ground fabrics, machine settings, threads used. Each piece of work was photographed with a corresponding numerical identification as a cross reference. The details were updated appropriately, adding to the list as I found additional aspects that needed recording. The data recording was absolutely critical – my stitching work is so extremely time-consuming and detailed that a change in tensions, for example, or threads not recorded correctly, would result in not being able to repeat a success or avoid repeating a failure.

Textile Creation Record Chart																											
		needle sharp	needle ballpoint	needle embroidery	needle other	needle size: 100/16	needle size: 90/14	needle size: 80/12	thread: cotton	thread: polycotton	thread: embroidery	thread: other	bobbin thread same	bobbin tension	foot off	feed dogs dropped	stabiliser: soluble	stabiliser: non soluble	sticky back non soluble	soluble plastic (hi/w/c)	soluble fabric	thermogaze	fusable web	ground # layers	ground: identity	ground: identity	ground: identity
71001																											
71002																											
71003																											
71004																											
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Textile Creation Record Chart

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needle sharp																				
needle ballpoint																				
needle embroidery																				
needle other																				
needle size: 100/16																				
needle size: 90/14																				
needle size: 80/12																				
thread: cotton																				
thread: polycotton																				
thread: embroidery																				
thread: other																				
bobbin thread same																				
bobbin tension																				
foot off																				
feed dogs dropped																				
stabiliser: soluble																				
stabiliser: non soluble																				
sticky back non soluble																				
soluble plastic (hi/w/c)																				
soluble fabric																				
thermogaze																				
fusable web																				
ground # layers																				
ground: identity																				
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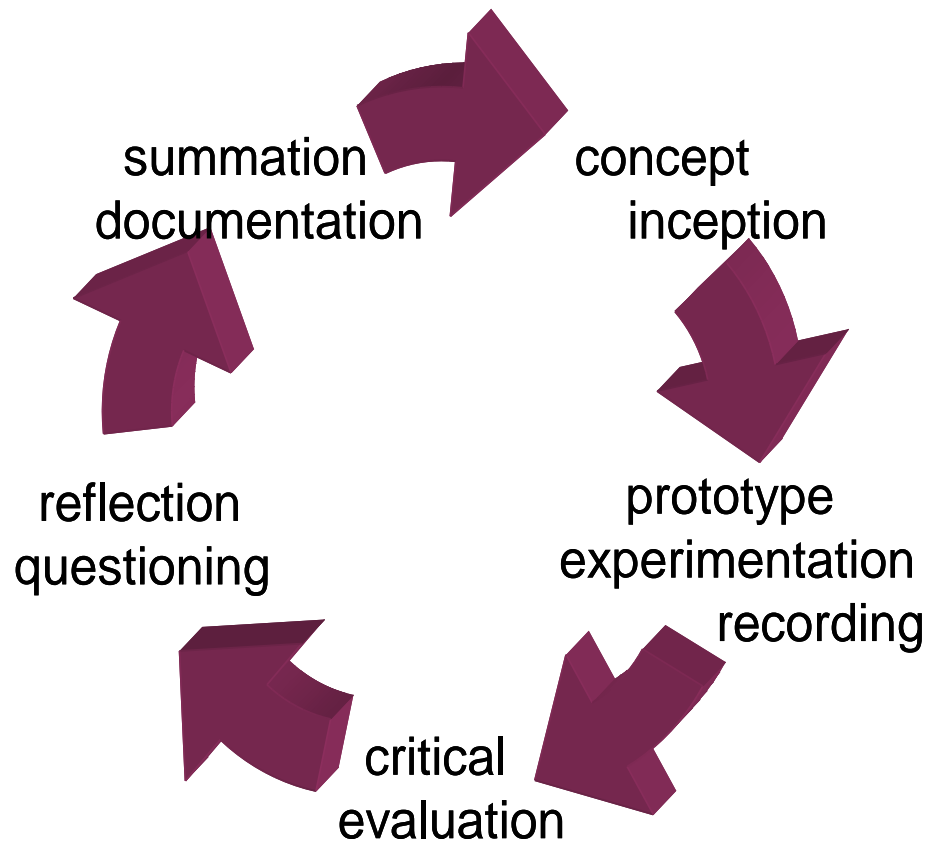
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Figure 12:2 An example of my numerical referencing system. Inset shows pages of work in progress.

Cyclic process

Throughout my studio-based practice I use a cyclic process of concept inception, prototype experimentation, recording, critical evaluation, reflection, and summation, documentation. This process is not unyielding to modification during the cycle; it may be exited at any point as work is resolved or rejected as a result of constant evaluation. (Figure 13.2)



Cyclic process - Beverly Furniss 2009

Self-imposed parameters and criteria

Embroidery is such a diverse area that self-imposed parameters limited what I could work with: this added a degree of difficulty to make the project harder to achieve, forcing me to think critically to find a resolution and to develop the depth of involvement needed to produce an outcome worthy of the journey.

One aspect of embroidery that I had not worked with previously was the creation of three-dimensional forms. The following restrictions added integrity and authenticity to my embroidery. The list was revised and amended throughout the duration of the research practice.

- The initial restriction was to use only ‘free stitch’ and to avoid hand-stitching. This later became no hand-stitching at all unless it was deemed imperative for the outcome.
- By stage three of my work I had restricted the ‘web of threads fabric’ to using only soluble products as the ground fabric.¹² Machine embroidery must be stitched into a base fabric ‘ground’: replacing fabric with the soluble product (either plastic or dissolvable fabric) would mean that the mesh of fibres that I stitched would be the only thing remaining on completion. The result is: an embroidered structure free of ground fabric. However, fabrics and materials such as wire were permitted if added during the stitching process.
- Consideration would be given to the topping of the final pieces; soluble plastic could be replaced with fabric to form the ground.
- There were no restrictions on thread.
- Materials such as fabric stiffener or wire could be used as support, to provide structure.
- Jewels and sequins could only be applied with machine or heat: not hand-sewn on.

¹² Soluble plastics are made of polyvinyl alcohol; they were originally invented to avoid contact with contaminated items during the laundering process in hospitals.

A contemporary version of embroidery uses the domestic sewing machine in an unconventional way, likened to a ‘darning method’ referred to as ‘free stitching’ or ‘free motion’ machine embroidery, a creative and expressive technique that uses the needle of a sewing machine as a ‘paint brush’ (*metaphorically*).

My project required extensive experimentation to achieve textile structures based on embroidery techniques. The instructional books on contemporary and innovative machine embroidery became a critical foundation, serving as an introduction to current materials and application techniques that allowed me to cultivate my interpretation of the embroidery processes. Initially I experimented using different threads, stitching in layers of fabrics, altering tensions, essentially playing with the machine to get a feel for direction while observing the outcomes. Reflecting on the initial work produced allowed me to question what I was looking for. The majority of sewing or embroidery that I had previously worked with, would generally have had a predetermined outcome, and therefore only required working with in an expected way toward completion. In order to achieve an outcome without a defined conclusion to work toward, I needed to form a ‘plan of action’ based on what I knew and what I thought I would need to do.

The machine

Thread breakage is a normal consideration in the type of embroidery used in this project. This is influenced by a number of factors, mainly thread type, the speed of the machine and the extreme circumstances that the machine is expected to operate under.

Experimentation with other machines proved the Bernina 930 (Figure 14:2)

to be a reliable choice for this project, as it has good needle penetration and the ‘jam free’ feature of the oscillating hook in the shuttle system, essential for free stitch machine embroidery.



Figure 14:2 Bernina 930. Purchased second-hand this Swiss machine is at least 25 years old.

Free stitch method

The machine technique that I use is a similar process to the old form of darning, used in the ‘make-do and mend’ era. The feeddogs¹³ on the domestic sewing machine are lowered to allow the operator to move work around freely. I remove the machine foot so that I can work solely with the needle, therefore fabric and work must be held taut in an embroidery hoop, keeping the work as flat as possible on the work bed to allow the



Figure 15:2 ‘Free-stitching’. Feed dogs are lowered to allow soluble plastic, held taut in the embroidery hoop to be moved freely for stitching.

needle to penetrate smoothly otherwise the threads may become entangled and the machine will fail to work. I use the needle as a paint brush, moving the hoop around freely to guide the point of contact with the needle into the work. The machine is required to run under extreme circumstances, overriding its normal working conditions; thread and needle breakage is an accepted aspect of this work. (Figures 15:2, & 16:2)

Stitching time

I established that I could produce a piece of free stitch embroidery work of medium density, 20 centimetres in diameter as a result of 30 minutes of consistent machine stitching, running the machine at full speed non-stop (excluding any stops required for thread breakage, running out of thread or the occasional needle break). (Figure 16:2)



Figure: 16:2 Stitching Time. Calculating the time required to work a specific size of ‘free-stitch’.

¹³ To lower the feeddogs on the sewing machine disengages the fabric feeding mechanism, allowing the operator to have control of stitch length and the direction of stitch.

Draping and simulating

Some pieces of lace work were small, so draping worked well with photographic support, allowing the piece to be imagined as a whole, placing it in positions that would simulate a completed work. (Figure 17:2)



Figure: 17:2 Draping and Simulating

Principles and techniques

Throughout this project, the principles and techniques that I used were adaptations of those used in my apparel work practice: patternmaking, construction and toile for the tableware and cakes; draping used for lace plates and cups; toile of fabric in place of lace shapes. (Figures 17:2, & 18:2)



Figure: 18:2 Draping. Exploring: 'dressing' tableware.

Problems encountered

Moustakas (1990, p.41) reminds us that “if you are seriously engaging in the research process you must be prepared to have your own beliefs challenged, expect the unexpected, and see ‘failures’ as valuable information.”

- I instinctively used tacit knowledge to make a decision to accept or dispel appropriateness, mistakes and successes. One of the difficult aspects of the ‘make and record’ process for me was to acknowledge that ‘mistakes are good’ and to record with reverence what is usually discarded in my normal work practice.
- Soluble plastics respond to atmospheric conditions. Air conditioning dries out the plastic making it stiff, and stitch perforates it and results in ripping. My home-based studio avoided the workplace air-conditioning but introduced the opposite problem: occasional high humidity would make the plastic begin its own melting process and become sticky, almost glutinous, and therefore difficult to work with, almost adhering to the machine. To counteract this, on days of high humidity I would work with a dehumidifier alongside me, or use an alternative product, a fabric-based soluble.
- The inconsistency in the finished size of the stitch work was a problem tracked back to the different soluble products that I was using. A thicker soluble product would result in the work being larger in diameter than a lighter weight product, due to the work being held at different degrees of tautness in the hoop.
- Selection of the appropriate type of soluble product was essential, as different soluble products dissolve at different temperatures. Cold-water soluble would be used to eliminate unwanted shrinkage of fabrics or thread while sometimes, for example, I would explore the use of a hot-water soluble intentionally, to shrink thread with a rayon content or to take the shine off a metallic thread.

Chapter 3: Research Practice - Stage One:

Initial project development -

My primary focus during the initial stages of practice exploration was to experiment with different combinations of threads, machine tensions, ground fabrics and various materials, to establish a feel for the textile produced, as well as endeavoring to achieve significant fabric structures and textures (Figure 19:3). I had initially proposed developing three dimensional free-standing characters as an interpretation of the Stumpwork¹⁴ embroidery of the 17th century.



Figure 19:3 (above) Exploring machine stitch, tensions and thread.

I am an ardent admirer of the intricacy and craftsmanship of this form of embroidery (Figure 20:3). As my work progressed I realised that this avenue of exploration would merely produce an expected outcome. The value of this project warranted a much deeper, more innovative outcome. However, aspects of Stumpwork embroidery continued to be influential throughout the project, in particular the three-dimensional element.

*This image has been removed by the author of this thesis
for copyright reasons.*

*Figure: 20:3 'Box'. Example of Stumpwork Embroidery. Worked
by 'EC'. Housed in Victoria and Albert Museum, London. [n.d].
33x24x18cm.*

¹⁴ Raised embroidery or Stump work, dates back to the late 16th century, becoming popular amongst the affluent upper English classes in the 17th century. Featuring animals, insects, birds, fish, castles, houses, ladies and gentlemen, these were frequently not in proportion to each other. This may have been an interpretation of the carved furniture and woven tapestries of the era. Stumps of wood were used to raise the work, thus also referred to as 'raised', 'high relief' or 'padded' work.

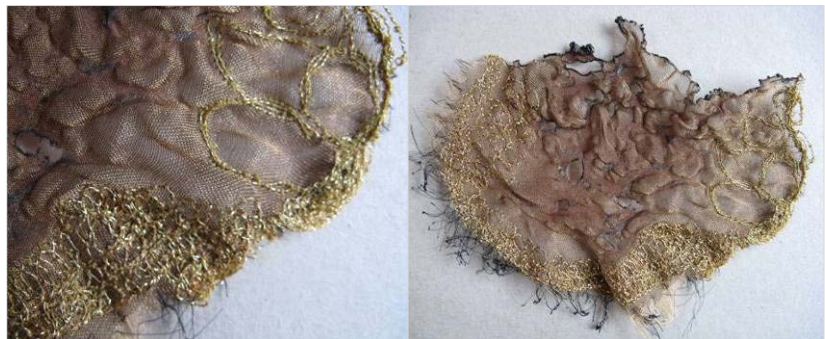
Transparency - Initial exploration of embroidered pieces evoked notions of transparency and fragility: shapes, layers and colours synonymous with church windows. Inspiration came from historical readings depicting the heavily-embroidered church vestments, couched elaborately with gold threads.¹⁵

Working with soluble plastic as the foundation and adding in layers of transparent fabrics as I stitched, I altered the colour and density of the newly created pieces of fabric. Some stitching protruded from the edge of the fabrics, forming a new edge with the stitching supported by the soluble plastic. I used a variety of threads: poly cottons, embroidery thread and gold thread. I intentionally burned some of the polyester fabrics so that they distorted and produced bubbles in the fabric, resembling the panes in stained glass windows.

*Figure 21:3 (right)
Transparency gold Free-
stitch embroidery piecing
with organza sheers, gold
thread, singed edges (second
image: enlarged version of
first).*



*Figure 22:3 (right)
Transparency singed- Free-
stitch embroidery piecing
with organza sheers; gold
thread, singed edges,
manipulated fabric using
flame to melt, burn and
draw up. (first image:
enlarged version of second
image).*



*Figure 23:3 (right)
Transparency layers- Free-
stitch embroidery piecing
with organza sheers, poly-
cotton thread (first image:
enlarged version of second
image).*



¹⁵ During the French Revolution many of the elaborate church embroideries were destroyed, burned as a way of extracting the gold from the thread for monetary gain.

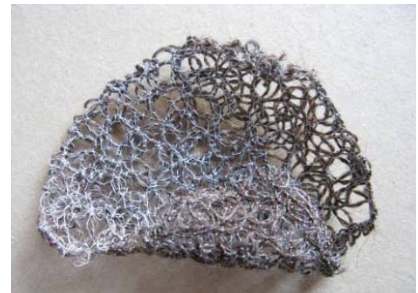
Wash away - As part of the early exploration of the project I was drawn to lace structures that could be achieved by working with wash away or soluble plastics. While stitching I added pieces of other fabrics: this added interest by creating texture. For example, I made shapes of leaves and added pieces of fabric to represent a decaying leaf, as I stitched I added a fine wire and stitched over it. This enabled the shape to be manipulated and hold that form (Figure 24:3). I used inexpensive fabrics such as cheesecloth, mesh and scraps from the workroom floor sandwiched between two layers of soluble plastic. Once stitched, the plastic was washed away to show a new structure made from scraps; remnants from other projects. I was motivated by the making of something from nothing, and the concept of starting with next to nothing, the bare essentials of fabric and, through a process of development, creating a new material structure that was quite unique.

*Figure 24:3
Tortured leaf. Wire,
fabric, thread soluble
plastic (right).*



*Figure 25:3 Hold it.
Pieces of fabric
stitched in place on
soluble plastic (far
right).*

*Figure 26:3 (right).
Tortured leaf.
Enlarged version of
Figure 24.3.*



*Figure 27:3 Merino
knitting yarn in
bobbin, cotton thread
top, soluble plastic
(far right).*

*Figure 28:3 Black
thread bobbin, white
thread top, stitched
into soluble plastic
(right).*



*Figure 29:3 Waste.
Scrap thread, yarn
and soluble plastic
held together with
free-stitching (far
right).*

The torso - I used the small dress form as shape for the torso experiment where I explored ideas of shaping a fabric into a form without conforming to the standard practice of 'cut and sew' to create the shape. I was attempting to achieve a structural effect similar to that produced using wire, but without the need to 'add in' supporting material. Additionally, I wanted to shape the fabric as I made it; an easier solution would have been to shape pre-existing fabric, but I was approaching the shaping idea from a different view point. The lace piece was worked using only soluble plastic. I achieved the initial shape and I was able to incorporate a small degree of structural contouring, but this was not as successful as I had envisaged.



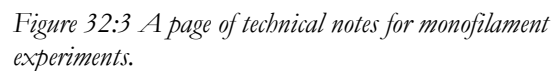
Figure 30:3 (left) Torso piece on a decorative dress form.



Figure 31:3 Pull up. Pre-cut holes stitched back together using free-stitch method and elastic yarn. Soluble plastic supported the work.

I expanded on the torso notion of shaping, experimenting next with elastic threads and yarns with the intention of 'pulling in' the lace work. I acquired yarn used in the industry to 'knit into' knitted fabric. I experimented with the yarn in the bobbin using different bobbin tensions and varied the upper threads to achieve a variety of scenarios. I could have taken this a little further but the use of elastic was reminiscent of using shirring elastic to create 'fake' smocking. This torso exploration generated the idea of using non traditional threads and I moved on to test monofilament threads.

of a free-standing structure was the focus of the experimentation with monofilament / nylon. I sourced various thickness of nylon up to the lightest of fishing line. The thicker threads had to be used in the bobbin with a lighter weight nylon used for the needle thread. The machine can accommodate much thicker thread in the bobbin system; sometimes the thickness of the thread may necessitate overriding the tensioning system and hand winding the bobbin. These extreme processes can be very hard on the machine but the results can be worthwhile, achieving results of a bouncy textile with some degree of ability to be self-supporting. This series of experiments also tested the different



Moustakas states, “the heuristics process requires a return to self, a recognition of self-awareness, and a valuing of one’s own experience” (1990, p. 13).

Stage Two:

Redefining boundaries - Reflecting on my work to this point: I had explored a number of different ways of making a lace fabric structure, either made purely from my embroidery process or by adding in additional fabrics. The created fabrics were satisfying the ‘make’ process to a point but I decided that I needed to be more deliberate in finding a direction for the fabric structures. I was keen to develop high relief work, as seen in stump work embroidery. I referred back to my project proposal and considered the overall structural effect that these structures might have.

What criteria would I need to work to?

I needed a conceivable form, an object that I could develop up through my practice that would be visually effective in a three-dimensional form, and readily identifiable as the subject that it was meant to be, particularly once worked in embroidery.

Furthermore, I needed to impose additional boundaries to the make aspect of this project. I had already set one such restriction: any embroidery work would be by machine – no hand-embroidery – no hand stitching unless it was imperative to completion. The justification for the restrictions would be to enforce a more creative approach.

Moustakas describes research as involving, “self search, self dialogue, and self discovery; the research question and the methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration” (1990, p.11).

The rose - became an integral entity of my early project work and the preliminary foundation toward the development of my three-dimensional embroidery. The rose was selected purposely as a representational object that I used as a method to develop my process and one that could be subjected to specific treatment in a variety of scenarios, while still able to be aesthetically pleasing and easily identifiable as a rose, irrespective of form.

Criteria for the Rose explorations:

Can be worked in any thread
Does the rose look aesthetically pleasing?
Must be able to be easily identifiable as a 'rose'
No colour restrictions relating to thread or fabric
Does the rose meet the end purpose requirement?
Can be worked in any ground fabric including solubles
What function does this rose serve – a symbolic function?
How might this representation challenge or disrupt the viewer's perceptions?
The most suitable rose design would need to be embroidered using different materials; products and threads to achieve a variety of finishes and outcomes.

Figure 33.3 Criteria for Rose explorations.

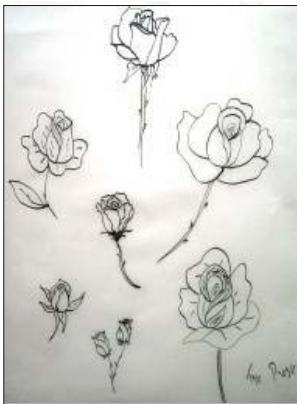
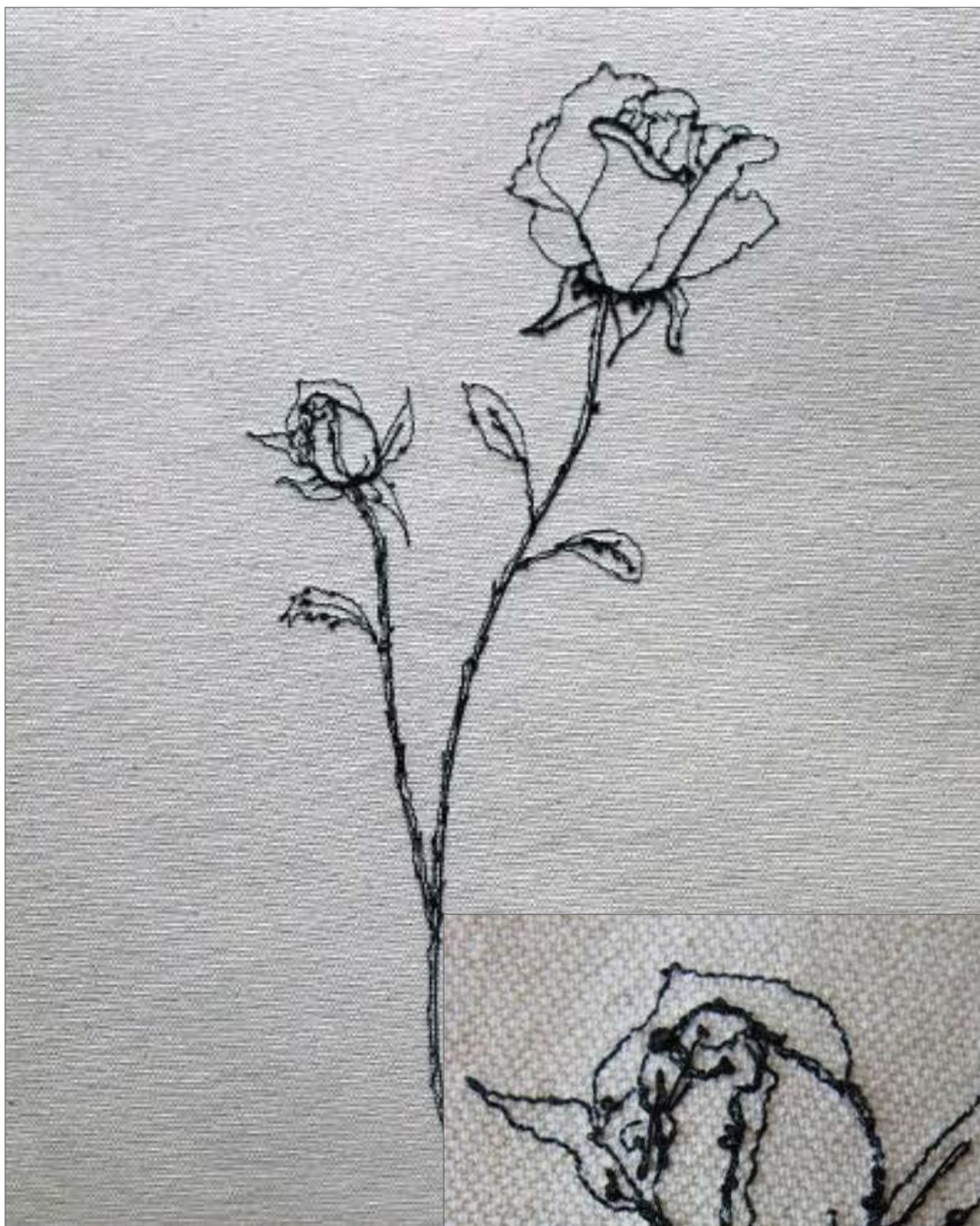


Figure 34.3 Rose sketches.

I designed a number of roses as illustrations and then began embroidering them, working toward eliminating those rose designs that did not achieve the desired outcomes. Some 'rose' trials failed to be appropriate because they were too open, too detailed, or did not suit being filled heavily with stitch. Each embroidered 'rose' was selected or dismissed based on the listed criteria and by using my own intuitive tacit 'knowing'.

Rowley states that "the practitioner makes judgments which reflect aesthetic values, such as those relating to beauty, lyricism, sophistication, simplicity, complexity and austerity". In regard to evaluating an object she states: "In craft aesthetic considerations address not only the look of an object, but also its handling – its feel, weight and balance ...crafted objects are known to be judged through their tactile qualities as well as their visual appeal" (1997, p. xvi).



*Figure 35:3 Thread Drawn Rose.
Embroidery thread free-stitched on canvas.
(Above)*

*Figure 36:3 Thread Drawn Rose – showing
rose bud, an enlarged version of Figure 35:3.*



A Rose is a Rose is a Rose..... This time of experimentation was not about the rose itself; the rose was an object on which to base a process and the initial serious step toward creating viable three dimensional work.



Figure 37:3 The Rose Experimentation: Embroidery thread free-stitched on canvas.

My aim was to show an evolution from a two-dimensional form into a three-dimensional form. The two-dimensional form was intended to be synonymous with that of traditional embroideries, while the free-standing three dimensional form would signify a contemporary representation. I was pleased with the results of the outlined two-dimensional rose (Figure 35:3) and, in particular, the rose that I embroidered, washed away the stabiliser and then sandwiched between two layers of free stitched monofilament (Figures 38:3, & 39:3). The embroidered rose could be viewed from both sides; neither having a right nor a wrong side, a superior version of the earlier experiments with

transparent fabrics.

As a result of evaluation of the rose exploration, I realised that whilst the work had been effective in establishing specific parameters and refining my working process, it would not necessarily challenge a viewer's perception of embroidery.



Figure 38:3 See through Rose: Free-stitched rose trapped in layers of free stitched monofilament.



Figure 39:3 See through Rose: The opposite side of 38:3.

Ugly tablecloth - so called because I attended a heuristics lecture that suggested working with materials that you normally would not work with; in response, my purchase was a second-hand ‘ugly’ tablecloth (Figure 40:3). It was not my choice of colour; I disliked it; it was old fashioned, reminiscent of the 1970s, and had a pattern that I did not relate to. I



Figure 40:3 The Ugly Tablecloth.

As the four squares of the cloth were identical, I considered cutting the cloth and layering the four sections one on top of each other, and creating a raised effect. Essentially, I could not bring myself to cut it up. Even though I did not like this cloth and it had been relatively inexpensive, I was reluctant to damage it. In hindsight this was because I had already started making a personal connection with this cloth: it was still ugly but it was no longer just ‘a thing’.

started to machine embroider the flowers without interfering with its integrity: working with it, embellishing it and enhancing it. I was experimenting with it, trying to get into a more interesting raised form.



Figure 41:3 Stitching the Ugly Tablecloth: Flower densely filled with free-stitch embroidery.



Figure 42:3 Stitching the Ugly Tablecloth: Close up of Figure 41:3.



Figure 43:3 Raising the Surface: Free-stitched embroidery pieces stitched to existing flowers and leaves –building up the surface.

The ‘ugly tablecloth’ was a successful venture in so far as it allowed me to consider the concept of covering a table setting, covering the plates; instead of raising the surface of the cloth I would raise the cloth.

Tea for two – captured my attention for some time and linked much of this research project to the work of Judy Chicago's 'The Dinner Party'. The idea of dressing plates, and cups and saucers developed into a need to preserve, cover and protect, becoming synonymous with my desire to preserve and protect embroidery. I made a number of pieces of embroidery; I draped them over the tableware to visualise what a completed object might look like.

Figure 44:3 (right) Initial table and tableware draping. Exploring ideas of covering and protecting.



Figure 45:3 Teapot draping. Experiments testing visual effect of lace free-stitch pieces.



Figure 46:3 Teacup and plate. Experiments testing visual effect of lace-free stitch pieces.



Figure 47:3 Teapot draping. Experiments testing visual effect of lace-free stitch pieces.



Figure 48:3 Teacup and plate. Experiments testing visual effect of lace free-stitch pieces.



*Figure 49:3
Tea for two: sketch.*

Making the embroidery pieces is a time-consuming process, so I chose to make paper patterns that I would toile in fabric before committing to final embroidery work, to ensure that errors would be avoided. I made patterns for the cups, saucers and plates, sourced beautifully draping silk fabrics and commenced construction, all before stopping to reflect on my project. I realised that I was heading in the wrong direction. I had allowed my work to steer me back to my apparel construction background.

This direction of exploration did not continue: dressing plates was replaced with stiffening the already produced lace to form free-standing cups and saucers.



*Figure 50:3 Silk fabric selection
for dressing plates.*



*Figure 51:3 Patterns for tableware:
Cups, saucers and plates.*



*Figure 52:3 Applying frill to edge
of plate covering.*

I resumed making lace structures, this time for plates, cups and saucers that could be stiffened to stand. These were not as successful as I hoped, because the amount of stiffening product required to make the lace firm enough to stand meant that the integrity of the lace was lost. The finished effect did not reflect the delicate lace structure that I wanted to retain.



*Figure 53:3 White lace bowl. Stiffened bowl; too
rigid and artificial, plastic feel.*



*Figure 54:3 Red lace bowl. Stiffened bowl did not
retain shape well.*

Stage Three:

The pivotal point- This serendipitous moment developed as a result of finding an old book with an unfashionable image, depicting a woman wearing an embroidered apron. My response was similar to the perceptions that my students had regarding the ‘old-fashioned’ concept. One thought lead to another, I conjured up pictures of embroidered aprons, tables of embroidered doilies, produce stalls with jam jars filled with embroidered fruits. The ideas grew more and more bizarre, all associated with ‘granny’, old ways, tradition and nostalgia. I visualised my grandmother and the kitchen pantry always full of food and the cake tins never empty of biscuits and cakes. Eventually, the idea of making embroidered cakes evolved: a representation of tradition presented in a contemporary format.

Moustakas states, “The heuristics process is a way of being informed, a way of knowing. Whatever presents itself in the consciousness of the investigator as perception, sense, intuition, or knowledge represents an invitation for further elucidation” (1990, p. 10).

Food for thought, developed further into the prototype of a cupcake as a result of extensive practice, experimentation and exploration.



Figure 55:3 Food for thought resulted in the Cupcake prototype shown here on the right.

Signpost the return - The turning point – a duality involving firstly: my subject readings were provoking in me a deeper analytical thought process and, secondly: my practice was starting to show commonalities, threads throughout the project that were indicating a direction forward.

I reflected back on the commonalities and found the recurring notion of containment, permanence, embodiment, and overarching all has been the three-dimensional focus.

I needed to produce an object that would connect with my viewing audience. The associations of the granny craft and nostalgia, synonymous with tradition and homely notions were explored. Through a series of frequently serendipitous opportunities I designed artifacts that could be interpreted to allude to these notions.

In cognitive terms we relate to, and base our everyday life on, metaphorical inference (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Therefore the connotations of food for thought became a deliberate tool for my project, promoting the cognitive thought process for generating discourse around my embroidered artifacts and thereby promoting embroidery in a new way.

I realised that the cake ‘contained and held’ everything that I had been looking for and, paradoxically, at the same time I discovered Otto Von Busch and his work ‘Textile Punctum’, where he embroiders a wine stain to preserve the memory. I particularly liked the illusion he builds: the mystery, the inference of secrecy, the ability to draw the reader on, convincing the reader of the importance of the preservation of the stain caused by the memorable event whilst leaving the reader to draw their own conclusion.

I liken this to my incident of ironing the embroidery transfer onto the ironing sheet: the secrecy, the mystery, not knowing if someone found the transfer, but all the while knowing that it happened and that others must have known. I like the idea of working into my embroidery a mystery, something that can be found, a memory.

As Moustakas describes:

...the internal frame of reference ... whether the knowledge derived is attained through tacit, intuitive, or observed phenomena-whether the knowledge is deepened and extended through indwelling, focusing, self-searching, or dialogue with others-its medium or base is the internal frame of reference (1990, p. 26).

Von Busch, in referring to his embroidery work, states: “The textile *punctum* adds the contours of memory to the physical garment, leaving traces of the stain to be interpreted by the observer ... an unstated communication to other personal history and experience.” (2005, p.15)

Food for thought

My project initially engaged with exploration of techniques, ideas and experimentation of materials and products to test their limits, to find inspiration and direction. Once the notion of cake as ‘food for thought’ began to develop, all of the previous testing scenarios were used or redeveloped for use, with a design focus specifically catering for the development of the cake product.


Criteria for the Cake explorations:	
Is it fashionable?	
Can be worked in any thread type	
Realistic colours – matched to real cakes	
Does the cake look aesthetically pleasing?	
Does the cake meet this project’s requirement?	
Must look authentic- easily identifiable as a ‘cake’	
Does the cake meet the symbolic function intended?	
All work remains with machine stitch only – no hand work	
Does this representation challenge or disrupt the viewer’s perceptions?	
Can only be worked in solubles – toppings may include other fabric	
Will this cake promote a response – will it inspire – will it draw attention to embroidery and the art of craft?	

Figure 56:3 Table: Criteria for Cake explorations.



Figure 57:3 Cupcake base: mixing thread colours to achieve a realistic colour match. Photographic recording supports the referencing system.

Methods for my fake cakes are shown through photographic record. I explored the cake using several resources: downloaded images; purchased cakes, measured them, cut them up; even baking batches myself to get the colour match comparable with thread colours.

The following figures document the process of developing the cake bases, cake mix, and cake topping (Figures 58:3 -79:3).

Details of the Cupcake Development

Cake base development

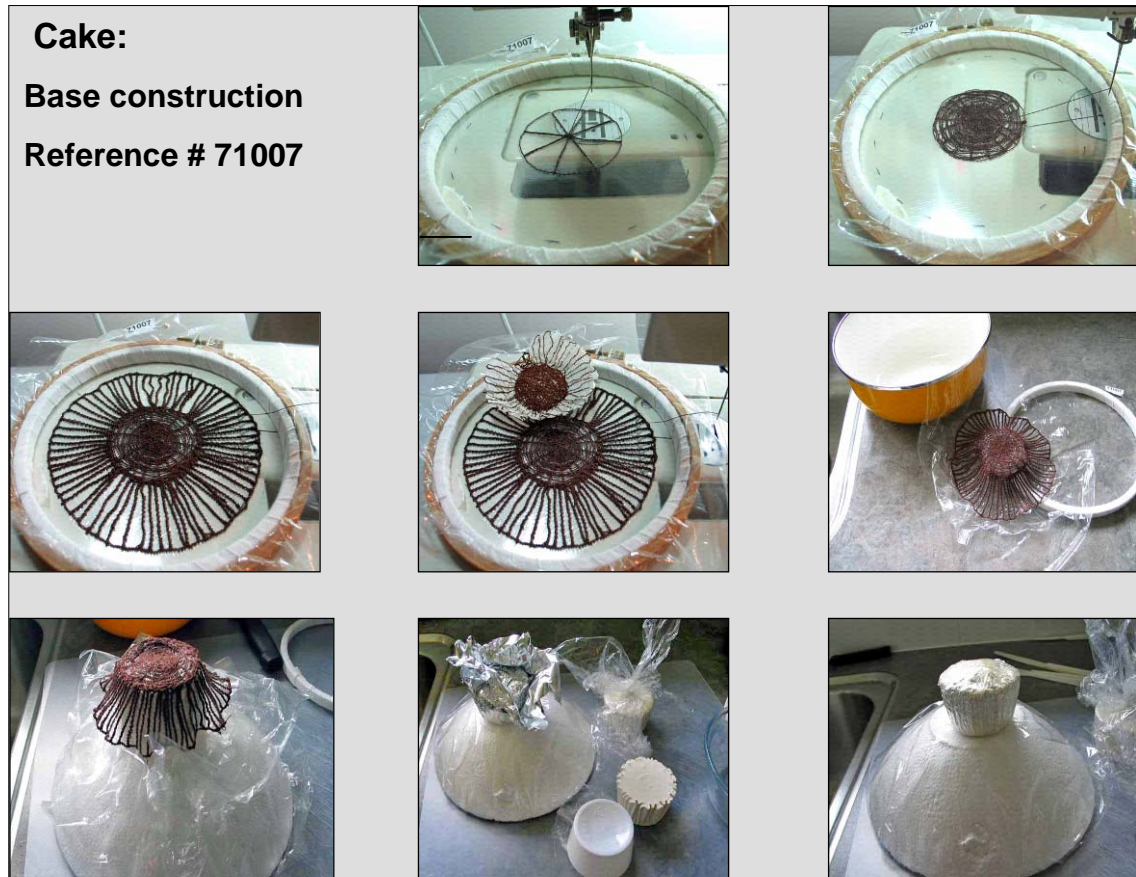


Figure 58:3 Cake Base construction

Intention: An attempt to stitch the paper patty pan: to stitch it, dye it and reshape it, nearly successful except that a couple of sections of the paper fell away and was not repairable. I purchased patty pans, intending to make moulds to shape a fabric structure around.

Another attempt to replicate the base was more successful, this time using soluble and thread. I made a template to serve as a guide to stitch. The stitching took some time to complete. I used 100% cotton thread so as to better absorb a stiffening product. I released the plastic from the hoop and the little base moved into a cup shape by itself, this was caused presumably by the stitch density in the middle and the distance between that and the flanged edge. The soluble product must be thoroughly washed away or else the stiffening solution will become glutinous and dry opaque. I applied stiffening solution thoroughly rubbing into the fibres and removing excess. Secured to the moulded shape with pins and allowed to dry. A hair dryer hastened the drying process.

The base of the cake is the hardest to achieve – it had to look realistic. I modified the criteria devised for the ‘rose’ experimentation. I found the variations in my cupcake bases unintentional and there were a number of trials, with a number of rejects. When I tried to replicate the original, although my recording process was rigorous and methodical, the aspects that I could not record were my aesthetic judgments of the product, the distinctiveness of the object. As I started to reproduce the cake bases, each one would look wrong, unbalanced, the ‘bars’ of stitch that create the sides of the base varied. They were too loose, too tight, or too rigid and thick, and there were colour variations. I had not expected this problem, so repetition was the solution: trial and



Figure 59:3 Cupcake Base. Experiment: mixing colors of threads to create the different colours seen in genuine cakes.



Figure 60:3 Cake Base experimentation. Aiming to achieve consistency with cake base colour and structure.

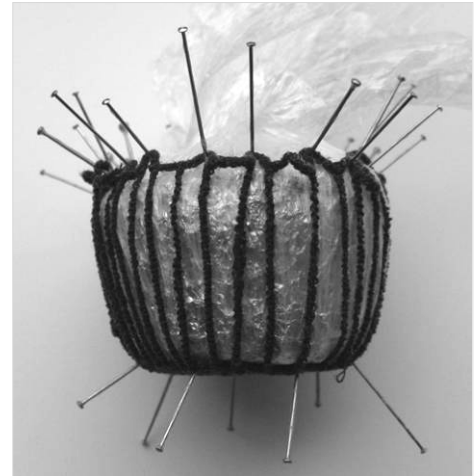


Figure 61:3 Cake Base. Colour exploration.

error to get a consistent outcome. To be able to repeat and achieve the same result was an important criterion for me. Both hand work and automatic machine embroidery are repeatable: with free motion stitch it is more difficult to achieve a repeat copy, so that was one of my expectations; my work had to achieve that level of difficulty. It was important to me because in general terms crafted work is original: a one-off and often developed as it is produced. I wanted to show that my embroidered products could follow a repeatable production process where the outcome could be predetermined as a result of skill, and that a repeated product could be deliberately achieved and not just produced as a result of inadvertent accident or unintentional development.



*Figure 62:3 (above)
Cupcake base:
Colour blending.
Photographic
recording used
additional to
numerical referencing
process.*



*Figure 63:3
(above)
Cupcake
base: the
drying
process.*



*Figure 64:3
(left)
Cupcake
base: the
batch is in the
drying process.*



*Figure 65:3 Cupcake base: three steps - base in
soluble plastic, washed away, held in mould after
stiffening solution has been applied.*



*Figure 66:3 Cupcake base: released from the
mould, complete and freestanding.*

Cake Mix Development

Cup Cake:
Cake mix creating
Reference # 70907

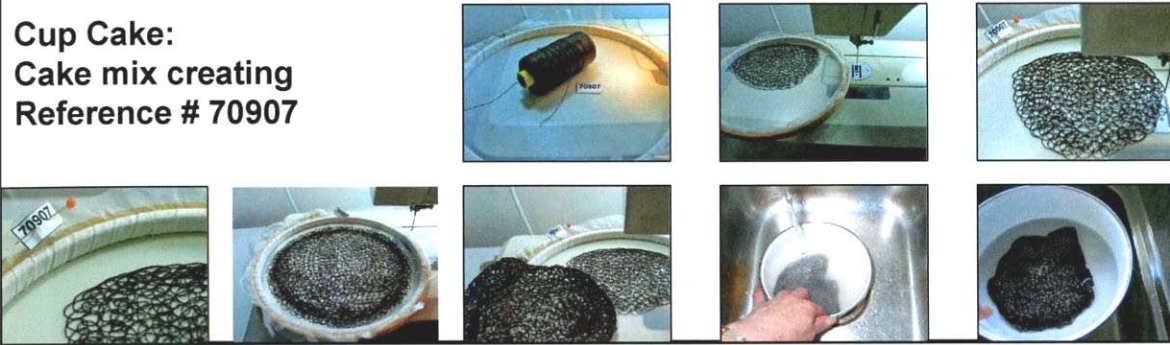


Table: The outcomes of on-the-spot-experimentation (from Schon, 1983:153)

	Consequences in relation to intention	Desirability of all perceived consequences intended or unintended
1	Surprise	Undesirable
2	Surprise	Desirable or neutral
3	No surprise	Desirable or neutral
4	No surprise	Undesirable

Reflective commentary:
Intention: to perfect the texture and tactile handle of the 'chocolate' cake mix, to achieve a soft pliable fabric.
 There is **no surprise the outcome is expected and achieved**. This is repeatable and a number of these fabrics need to be made to use for further development of the cupcake.
 Standard procedure: confirm thread, needle type and size, hoop up with plastic soluble, feed dogs on the machine down, foot off, free stitch ensuring thread web is fully connected. Remove from the hoop, rip or cut away excess plastic, put into water to dissolve plastic, dry, natural or hair dryer or iron, press into shape. Finished. A new format graph is now used to record each aspect, useful for future reference and as a research comparison tool.

Figure 67:3 Cupcake mix development

Intention: to create a realistic chocolate cake mix, a fabric structure both lightweight and soft to cover stuffing. Stitching required to be matt but not too dense as to restrict the smoothness to curve.

Removed from the frame; wet to dissolve the product after excess has been removed, dried naturally or with additional heat i.e. iron or hair drier (both successful for small pieces). All aspects of the stitching and the products used were recorded for future reference.

At the **Pore of the cake** is a polystyrene ball, wrapped with wool fibre, then covered with the embroidery lace fabric. The ball serves as the 'body' of the cake, creating a realistic cake shape, and supports the weight of the topping.



Figure 71:3 (below) Cupcake mix – new fabric development. Image shows an aspect of the recording process. The photograph records vital information such as the threads used: the completed fabric, as well as the corresponding number useful for cross-referencing.

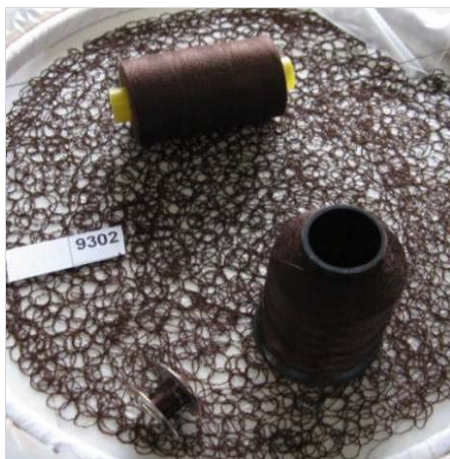


Figure 68:3 (above) Cupcake core – stitched - fabric wrapped ball.

Figure 69:3 (left) Cupcake mix development – a selection of created fabrics – experimentation involves appropriate and realistic colours and structures for the created fabric.

Figure 70:3 (below) Cupcake – close-up.



Cupcake topping development

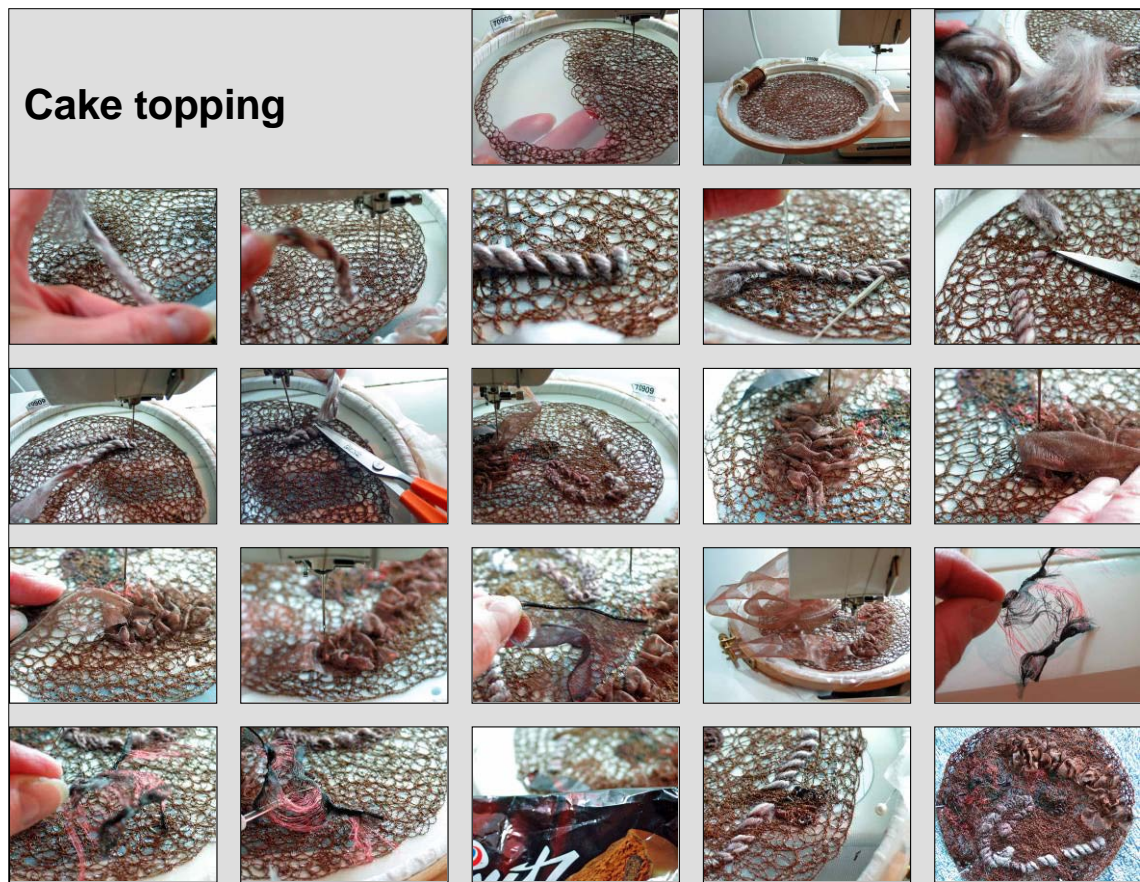


Figure 72:3 Cupcake Topping.

Intention 1: to experiment/play/explore with different fibres, ribbons, fabrics added to the surface of one of the machine lace fabrics for the purpose of developing an aesthetically suitable fabric that would look like chocolate icing or toppings for the cakes. **Criteria:** to resemble the look of chocolate, both in colour and texture. **Process:** Silk fibres, twisted and couched and stitched in, ribbons unraveled exposing threads of bright red and black were almost lost as they were stitching into the fabric. Another ribbon turned and stitched to form raised ruffles. An ice-cream paper was stitched down, becoming too fragile whenever the needle hit it.

Intention 2: Having established that the true appeal of the cupcake is the topping decoration, the case is more important than the cake mix which is only seen prior to icing and a 50mm rim immediately prior to the icing and above the frill of the paper case. If a paper case was to be used it must be coloured and preferably held in place, as the weight of the cake mix fabric bundle pushes the paper out side ways. Full study of genuine cupcakes was essential.

Topping on the cake

A considerable amount of time was spent exploring the topping for the cupcakes. Figures 73:3 – 73:5 represent inspirational ideas in sketch form and experimentation with free form structures for use as cupcake toppings. Figure 72:3 shows that the initial work used a ground fabric with the application of ribbons and objects stitched in, to create interest and texture. The final work purposely excluded any other fabrics, beads or decorative materials other than wire for support. This exclusion maintained the theme of exclusivity that I had established with the base and cake filling.



Figure 73:3 Cupcake sketches from designers' journal.



Figure 74:3 Cupcake topping exploration.



Figure 75:3 Cupcake topping exploration.

The experimentation with ideas for butterfly wings (Figures 76:3–79:3) and free-form structures formed the basis for the heart shapes that evolved into toppings for a number of the cakes. Free stitched machine embroidered lace imitated icing, in realistic colours of chocolate, vanilla, pink and red. Small lace circles wrapped over a fibre core created the cherries.

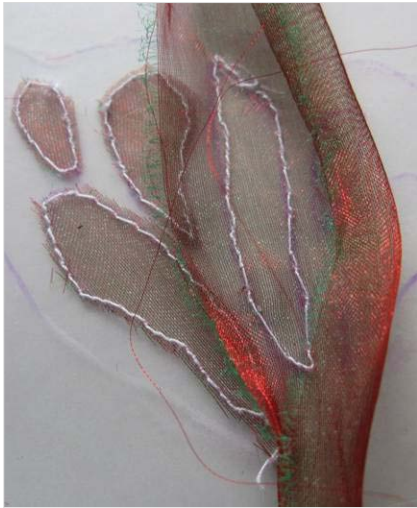


Figure 76:3 Cupcake topping exploration.



Figure 77:3 Cupcake topping exploration.



Figure 78:3 Cupcake topping exploration.



Figure 79:3 Cupcake topping exploration.

Chapter 4: Presentation

The presentation of final work involved 18 free stitched embroidered cupcakes, arranged on three glass pedestal cake stands, each holding six cakes. Plate 1: 6 Chocolate cupcakes. Plate 2: 6 Fudge cupcakes. Plate 3: 6 Buttermilk cupcakes (Figures 81:4 – 83:4). A brief synopsis of the ‘making of a cupcake’ was presented in the form of a pictorial ‘cook book’ (Figure 80:4).

The intricate embroidery detail in all 18 cupcakes can be appreciated in Figures 84:4 – 101:4), the images have been enlarged for this purpose. Each cupcake stands approximately 60mm high excluding toppings.

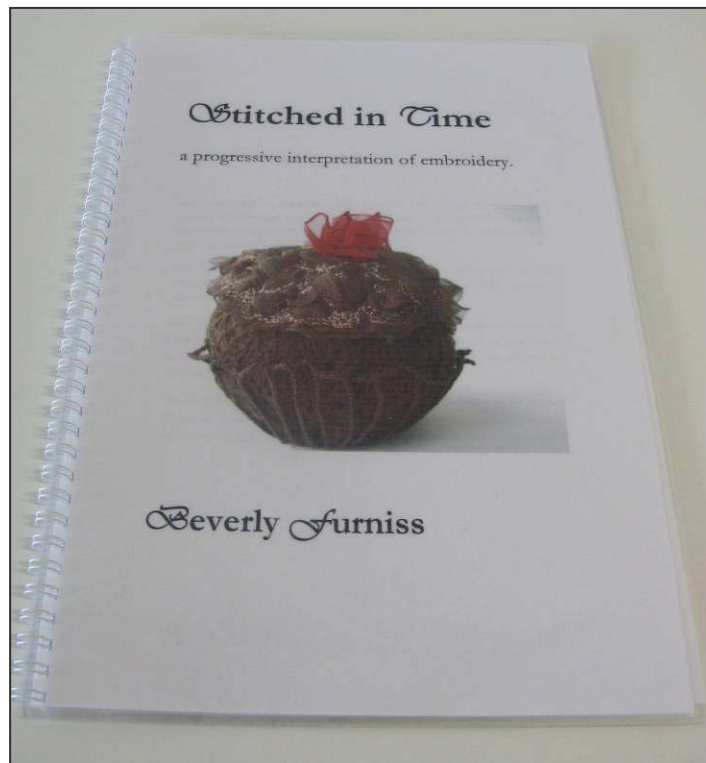


Figure 80:4. The cook book.



Figure 81:4 (above top) Buttermilk cupcakes. Figure 82:4 (above centre) Fudge cupcakes. Figure 83:4 (above) Chocolate cupcakes.



*Figure 84:4(above) #1.
Buttermilk cupcake. Vanilla
cream lace frill with a rich red
cherry.*



*Figure 85:4(right) #2.
Buttermilk cupcake. Vanilla
crunch lace frill with a rich red
heart.*



Figure 86:4(above) #3. Buttermilk cupcake. Marshmallow pink lace frill with a rich red cherry.



Figure 87:4(right) #4. Buttermilk cupcake. Rich chocolate lace frill with a rich red cherry.



Figure 88:4(above) #5. Buttermilk cupcake. Rich chocolate lace frill with a rich red cherry.



Figure 89:4(right) #6. Buttermilk cupcake. Rich chocolate lace frill with a ruby red heart.



*Figure 90:4(above) #7. Fudge cupcake.
Topped with a stand alone rich red
heart.*



*Figure 91:4(right) #8. Fudge cupcake.
Rich chocolate lace frill with a ruby red
heart.*



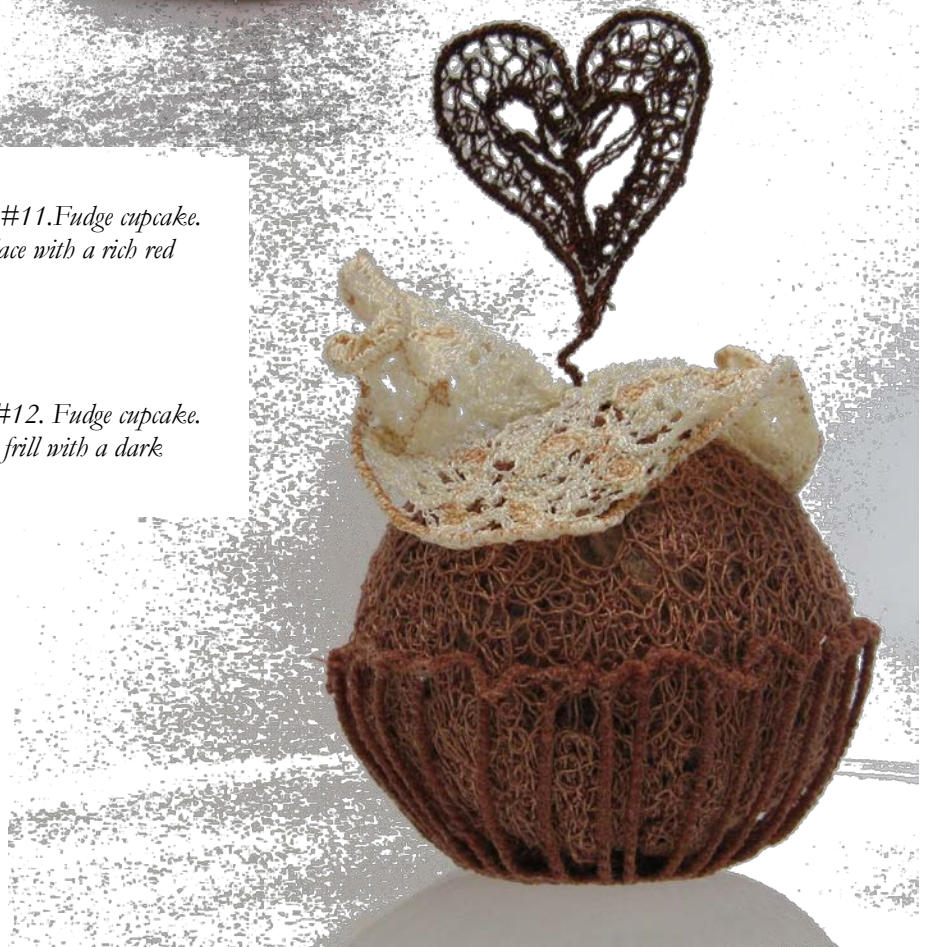
*Figure 92:4(above) #9. Fudge cupcake.
Chocolate wafer with a rich red cherry.*



*Figure 93:4(right) #10. Fudge cupcake.
Coconut ice pink lace frill with a rich red
cherry.*



*Figure 94:4(above) #11. Fudge cupcake.
Rich chocolate frill lace with a rich red
cherry.*



*Figure 95:4(right) #12. Fudge cupcake.
Vanilla crunch lace frill with a dark
chocolate heart.*



*Figure 96:4 (left) #13. Chocolate cupcake.
Rich red lace frill with a rich red cherry.*

*Figure 97:4 (below) #14. Chocolate
cupcake. Rich red double lace frill.*





Figure 98:4(above) #15. Chocolate cupcake. Rich red lace frill with a rich red cherry.

Figure 99:4 (left) #16. Chocolate cupcake. Rich red lace frill with a chocolate wafer.



Figure 100:4(left) #17.
*Chocolate cupcake. Rich chocolate
lace frill with a rich red cherry.*

Figure 101:4 (below) #18.
*Chocolate cupcake. Rich
chocolate lace frill with a ruby red
heart.*



Chapter 5: Concluding Commentary

Within the scope of this project I believe I have explored the current potential of ‘free-stitch’ embroidery textile formations. My cupcakes were made using plastics that dissolve and originally invented for use in hospitals: far removed from the role that the plastic played in my embroidery. Therefore, there is potential for new or unrelated products, even different machinery, to emerge that can be utilised to further extend the potential of ‘free-stitch’ embroidery.

In terms of textile formations created by embroidery, there is a limit to what can be achieved. I produced a web or lace-type structure by intermeshing threads and washing away the supporting ground product. The variations are limited to thread, stitch-type and density achieved and, in order to create a three-dimensional structure, the embroidered textile is then reliant on a stiffening agent or additional structural support such as wire.

This project determined that embroidery has continued to endure a position of low status because of the connotations attributed it through the association with women, domesticity and craft.

When did embroidery become unfashionable?

The outcome of this thesis project has brought together a collection of information. I found no evidence of any particular time when embroidery became distinctly unfashionable. There is a fine line between what is and is not deemed as fashionable and who the perceiver is. For example, in the midst of the current craft resurgence, embroidery is currently fashionable amongst enthusiasts, while others may not see it as so.

Since the inception of this project, the craft resurgence has strengthened and has become proactive within our western society; it is acknowledged through media and internet communications that a new society of crafters is emerging.

How might the perception of embroidery be changed?

Embroidery as a medium encompasses an extensive scope, used exclusively or integrated into work with other medium materials by craftspeople and artists alike.

Craft must reach the same bargaining position that art has in an academic environment and the only way it is likely to achieve that place is to undergo a facelift. New 'branding' and the fostering of critical thinking practice must be encouraged.

An increase in radical and innovative craftworks showcased in galleries alongside artworks will attract critique and, in turn, develop a new ethos for scholarly discourse. An acceptance of modern technologies by both art and craft practitioners and a concession to the benefits of merging both old and new attributes of the make process will lead to the betterment of the product.

Most importantly, craft must be acknowledged as having a full spectrum of achievement. Not all crafts achieved at a hobbyist level will ever aspire to be anything more, but that which does achieve more needs to be acknowledged as such without compromise.

An aspect of my project was to show the diversity of embroidery as a skill that can be used in a variety of ways through variation to stitch, but also as a tool that can be used in innovative representations to create and project meanings for both the artist and his or her audience. I identified artists who use embroidery as a narrative, selecting contemporary and innovative work.

In locating this thesis project I assumed a somewhat rebellious position, hopefully generating discourse about embroidered crafted products displayed in the auspicious setting of the art and design discipline of an academic environment.

I conclude that the connotations of tradition and nostalgia are formed intrinsically within each of us, and that the viewers' perceptions can be challenged-but not necessarily changed-as a result of visual experiences.

Embroidery

- n* 1. decorative needlework, usually on cloth or canvas.
- 2. the act of adding imaginary details to a story.

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Appendix A: related contextual history.

The following has been taken from the book 'Your Embroidery' (Brooks, 1949) and has been included here as a condensed history of embroidery:

What is Embroidery?

What is this craft, with its origins lost in the mists of antiquity, practiced in the days of the Book of Exodus which describes the Embroidered hangings in the Tabernacle, and found among the remains in the royal tombs at Ur, which are themselves earlier than 2000 B.C.?

It is the craft of enriching a material, of decorating a fabric by the manipulation of pliable threads, which can be twisted or knotted, looped or threaded, held firmly or loosely, but always secured to the fabric with the aid of that all-important tool, the needle.

Embroidery is a craft whose workers through the centuries have been legion, yet whose craftsmen have been, for the most part, nameless.

Each age in a country produces its own characteristic designs and treatments, and the study of the historic embroideries of our own country can not only provide an absorbing pastime, but can give us an insight into the life and interests of our ancestors.

Our earliest examples of the craft, with the exception of the Bayeux Tapestry, are preserved from the time when England was famous, and deservedly so, for her magnificent ecclesiastical work, *Opus Anglicanum*, which was sought after and treasured in the cathedrals of Europe. The stole and maniple at Durham, worked between A.D. 909 and 916 and the 13th-century Syon Cope, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, are examples of the superb craftsmanship displayed at this period.

The Bayeux Tapestry, thought to have been embroidered in the 11th century, and worked in stem stitch and laid work on 231 feet of natural linen, is without parallel. It is an astounding chronicle of events depicting the life and death of King Harold and the invasion of William of Normandy and is our best authority for the arms and armour of the period.

Secular embroidery, which the Medieval craftsmen applied so lavishly to clothes, hangings and furnishings, heraldic devices and armorial bearings, stood little chance of survival. The scarcity of materials which made it necessary to use and re-use all fabrics, coupled with the attacks of moths, climatic conditions and lack of storage space, have rendered the splendours of Medieval England as mere words to be studied from inventories of the period.

The age of the Tudors, an age of expansion, brought better living conditions and greater comfort in the more spacious and permanent houses which were built by the now wealthy merchants, and which vied with the great manor houses of the older aristocracy. Here was scope for rich hangings and costly embroidered covers and cushions, and many of these have been preserved through the generations: some are in private collections but others may be studied in the various museums throughout the country.

The profusion of embroidery which often completely covered both male and female garments and accessories during the Elizabethan era has been equalled at no other period in our history, but the fabulous wealth of embroidery lavished on the wardrobe of the Queen, which some estimate to have included over 3,000 dresses, is only preserved for us in the amazing details displayed on her many portraits and in contemporary literature. Of the actual dresses nothing, apparently, remains.

During the latter part of the 16th century books of patterns for embroidery were produced on the continent, notably in Italy, and during the first half of the 17th century a number were printed in England. These books contained

engravings of birds and beasts, flowers and fishes, as well as many spots and sprigs, diapers and emblems.

About this time the sampler made its appearance. The books on embroidery were rare and costly and these early samplers may have been records made by embroidresses who were fortunate in having access to these works.

Samplers became more and more elaborate and each became an article of value, which was passed from mother to daughter, who in turn made her own collection of stitches and pattern. It is not possible in this short introduction to give more than a few brief words on the wealth of embroidery of the past, and it must suffice to say that the course of embroidery continued to run comparatively smoothly, as did that of the other crafts, until the advent of the machine, which was destined to uproot traditions and to change the face of the country in comparatively no time.

The crafts were forgotten as this new monster swept all before it, and had it not been for the tireless work of that great artist-craftsman of the 19th century, William Morris, who, with his band of artist workers, helped to re-introduce the handcrafts into England, all might have sunk into the pages of history.

But the machine had to come to stay, and to many the accuracy and precision of the work that it could produce was a thing to be emulated, and hand embroidery tended to become repetitive and to lose its individuality.

Now that the machine has become an integral part of the life of the country, it is becoming more generally understood that the work of the hand and the machine must be complementary. Both can produce good, well designed work if the technique is understood and planning is in the hands of a competent designer.

The 20th century demands the speed and accuracy of the machine-made article, but besides this, for the discerning citizen there must always be those personal touches which come only from the individual work designed and made by a craftsman. The enriching of curtains and hangings, cushions and chair seats, table linen and bed covers, and many other articles can add charm and individuality to the rather severe lines which characterise the present trends in furniture and decoration,

Each piece of embroidery must be considered in relation to the fabric to be employed, the position to be occupied, and the suitability of fabric and technique to the purpose for which it is designed.

The wealth of material which has been handed down to the embroidress gives her endless possibilities and innumerable ways of making effective use of even the simplest methods and stitches, but it is all-important that her work should be a creation, however simple, in the mood of the age, and not a copy, however beautiful or intricate, of a work of the past (Brooks, 1949, pp. 13-16).