



Dumfries & Galloway Guild of Spinners, Weavers & Dyers

Annual Challenge 2019

Ethnicity: belonging to a social group which has specific customs and traditions, for example in textiles it might be spinning, weaving, dyeing, knitting, crochet, lace-making, braiding, sewing, knotting.



Figure 1- Woven tapestry by Rita Corbett showing some techniques and motifs used in Navajo and Turkish tapestry weaving



Introduction

Members were asked to explore the textile skills (such as spinning, weaving, and dyeing) and the materials and the techniques used by craft makers from different traditions across the world and throughout time.

This creative journey might take them into their own textile heritage or might involve exploration of and experimentation with work of an ethnic group which intrigued them but with which they had no direct connection. They were asked to include our core skills - spinning, weaving and dyeing - in creating a unique textile piece for our exhibition at the Guild's Gathering/Open Day in November 2019.

This book tells the stories of the work submitted and gives some information about the techniques and materials used in creating a response to the Challenge. To widen access to interested members we have allowed different textile heritages to take priority rather than ethnicity. For example, you will see work referencing different parts of the U.K. such as the Scottish Highlands, Perthshire, Yorkshire, Lancashire and Nottinghamshire.

Works are listed in alphabetical order, by the maker's last name.

* All photos are by Rita Corbett except those taken by Siobhan Ratchford on her page and two by Desiree Romer on her page.



1. Sylvia Ashton – Pendle Witches

The trials of the Pendle witches in the 17th century are among the most famous and best recorded in English history. The twelve accused lived in the area of the hills and were charged with the murder of ten people by the use of witchcraft. I grew up in Burnley, Lancashire. The story of the witches was familiar to me as a child and we remembered them-often by walking over Pendle Hills at midnight on what is known as Halloween.

“Old Pendle Old Pendle

When witches fly out on a dark and rainy night
We'll not tell a soul and we'll bar the door tight
We'll sit near to t' fire and keep ourselves warm
Until once again we can walk on thy arm

Pendle, Old Pendle by moorland and fell
In glory and loveliness ever to dwell
On life's faithful journey where e're I may be
I'll pause in my labours and oft think of thee”

As these are childhood memories, I wanted to make a fun witch. The wool for the hat and the broomstick are some of my early hand-spun yarns and I dyed the fabric of the cloak and dress. I have also used some needle felting for the embellishments. All these techniques I learned since I became a Guild member three years ago.





2. Cath Birkett - The Ash Shroud

My ethnic origins include some Italian. My grandfather's family came from a village near Turin. Unfortunately, I never met him as he was killed in the war: the ship he was on, HMS Hood, was sunk by the Bismarck.

The Turin Shroud is a famous length of fabric impregnated with the outline of a man and it is said to have wrapped the body of Jesus. This claim is scientifically suspect.

We have a glen full of Ash trees which are dying due to Ash dieback. This saddens me and sparked a creative impulse. I have put together the notion of an imprint on fabric as a lament for our dying trees.

I picked fallen ash leaves and dipped them in iron water before wrapping them tightly in a silk scarf which had been soaked in vinegar water. This was then steamed to stabilise the dye produced from the leaves. When washed and dried the ghostly outlines of the leaves appear. A shroud for the ash trees.





3. Diane Callow - Calderdale

I grew up in West Yorkshire, in a small industrial village which supplied workers for a wool worsted mill, a twine mill, a pit and a railway goods yard. In the distance we could see the Pennine hills and in the immediate countryside were small mixed farms and rhubarb fields. The Spen and Calderdale valleys were dotted with mills of all sorts which no longer exist. However, some of the buildings have been saved and put to other uses: this preserves the industrial architecture of the area and its textile heritage.



On my visits to the worsted mill I was amazed by the size of the vast floors and the huge weaving looms. The deafening noise resulted in many of the workers developing lip reading skills. Mill waste was spread as compost on the rhubarb fields. Proddy rugs were made with waste pieces of cloth. From an early age I understood and appreciated the luxury and benefits of good woollen cloth.

My woven tapestry captures the iconic hills round Halifax with the architecture of the mills and a bridge. Cotton is used for the warp and wool for the weft.



4. Rita Corbett – Heron

Woven tapestry, cotton warp, cotton and wool weft. **Inspiration:** woodcut print by Samuel de Mesquita



Samuel de Mesquita was born on 06.06.1868 into a Jewish family in Amsterdam. Though a member of a tightly knit Sephardic community he, like most of his family and friends, was not religiously observant. His father was a teacher of Hebrew and German who died when Samuel was five years old. Samuel became a teacher when he grew up. He had wanted to be an artist but was rejected by the state art college. (Sephardic Jews-originally from Spain-are a Jewish ethnic group).

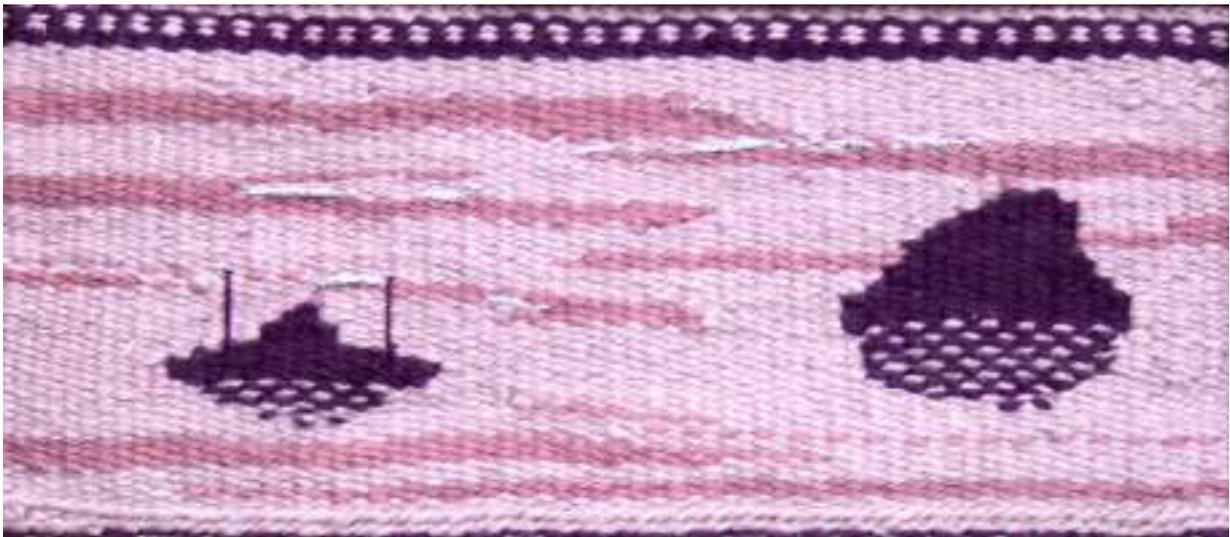
Known primarily for his wood engravings he experimented with various techniques and media. He produced etchings, lithographs, watercolours and drawings. Amongst his most beautiful works were his portraits.

Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands in 1940 and in 1944 the Nazis entered the de Mesquita home and took Samuel, his wife Elizabeth and their only son Jaap. Transported to Auschwitz the parents were sent to the gas chambers within days of arrival. Jaap perished in the concentration camp at Theresienstadt a couple of months later. This tapestry is a homage to Samuel and in memory of all victims of the Holocaust.



5. Anne Dougan - The Ferry from Stranraer to Larne, remembered in woven tapestry

I was brought up beside the sea in Stranraer. In the 50's the ferry sailed every day from Stranraer to Larne, NI. From our house my view looked right over Loch Ryan and I watched the ferry leave around 7.30 am and return about 9 pm.



Ailsa Craig is a prominent granite rock island at the head of the Loch. The ferry passed it twice daily. The return of the ferry in the evening caused "boat waves" coming ashore.

The sight of the ferry passing Ailsa Craig about 8.30 was a sign that it was time to go swimming across the road and enjoy the waves. Our "chattering bite" when we ran back home was a plate of fried new potatoes.

I took my inspiration for this piece from an original woven tapestry by Matty Smith, called "Infinity". I am grateful for Matty's permission to show in my piece how her work triggered a memory from my childhood.



6. Fiona McGlynn – Somali Camel

My work, a Somali camel, is inspired by my family history. My maternal grandfather was a District Commissioner in the 1920s under the Governor of Somalia (a British colony at that time). My mother and her brother grew up there. The Commissioner's job entailed visiting the tribes and villagers to sort out disputes. Camel and mule trains travelled through the desert areas carrying people, tents and equipment. The whole saddle could be taken off in one piece and used for a tent.

My construction of the camel's body was achieved by covering a shaped wire maquette with sponge and then needle felting camel-coloured wool into it. Leather was used for the straps with small gold rings for the joins. The mouth, pads, eyelids and toes are modelled in clay and painted. I made a two person saddle for my camel which could carry a family like my mam's i.e. two adults and two children. The rugs were woven from fine wool.



My mother recalls the colourful woven woolen rugs and blankets-embellished with tassels-on the camels. The designs were mostly lines and triangles. The camels wore reins, and often a long rope was used to lead the camels or tie one to another to form camel trains. Somali people were good at crafts and loved to use beads.



7. Sue McNiven - Persian Carpet Inspired Sweater

I have inherited a Persian rug: the colours of which really inspire me. From studying the colours in my rug, I began to think about what my family has handed on to me. I learned to knit when I was very young taught by my grandmother in whose wardrobe I loved to lurk. Cuddling her fur coats initiated my interest in textiles: the feel and texture of the fabrics ... how stiff, how long, how soft and how strong. My mother created silk screen printed curtains and cards. So my childhood was lit up by colours, textile techniques and appreciation of natural animal fibres.



When I learned to spin, I found I was drawn to animal fibres which I now love to spin and dye. Several of my family members were teachers. This trait too seems to have come to me. I enjoy teaching and running textile workshops.

My sweater is hand spun and dyed and uses a blend of camel and silk, pure Tussah silk and fine soft wools. It is embellished by my own hand painted buttons.



8. Deborah Mather - Nottingham Lace

I spun the silk & yak fibre for my shawl and knitted it using a lace pattern.

I was born in Nottingham. The lace shawl is my homage to my lovely grandmother Ada. She worked as a machinist in a lace factory until she was 75 years old. She led a life of hardship; however, I remember her with fondness as the most beautiful, loving and hard working woman. She made ladies' underwear and would bring home bags of lace offcuts on which I began my textile journey.

My other memories of Nottingham lace are the Goose Fair which is the oldest in English history. Nottingham children were given the first Friday in October off from school so we could attend the opening by the Lord Mayor who would say "I am the mayor who opens the fair for three days only".

There were stalls of candyfloss and goose on a stick (a rock lollipop in the shape of a goose) and stalls selling dolls in the most wonderful dresses of Nottingham lace. Oh, how did I want a Nottingham lace doll. However, my mum marched me swiftly away. We had tubs of mushy peas and mint sauce (a Nottingham delicacy) and rode on the waltzers.





9. Fiona Moir - Ribbons

Weaving is in my family's genes. My Scottish grannie was a weaver in Galashiels in the Borders and many in her family were involved in the weaving trade in one way or another.

I started weaving in my 20's and using a scarf loom I wove a scarf with hand spun yarn for my French grandmother, who, when she received it told me that she too had been a weaver. She wove silk ribbons in a factory just outside Montbrison. The city of St. Etienne and the surrounding area were famous for ribbon weaving.

My woven scarf is hand dyed silk. I chose a different 4 shaft pattern for each section-to represent the different ribbons-with plain weave in between. The dyeing was completed using techniques such as knitted blanks, warp painting and ikat dyeing.





10. Christine Muirhead - A Scrapbook: the Folk and Fabric of Northern Ireland

My scrapbook grew from thinking about my ethnicity and noticing that the centre of the word ethNIcity is NI, Northern Ireland: my home. Although I love making textiles I hadn't previously thought about my ancestors and their links with fabric and its construction.

I know something about four generations of my family and can trace the threads from them being sheep farmers in Co. Antrim to working as linen spinners to being involved professionally in garment making. In their leisure time the women loved to knit and stitch. I began to research my textile heritage and the history of textiles in the North of Ireland.

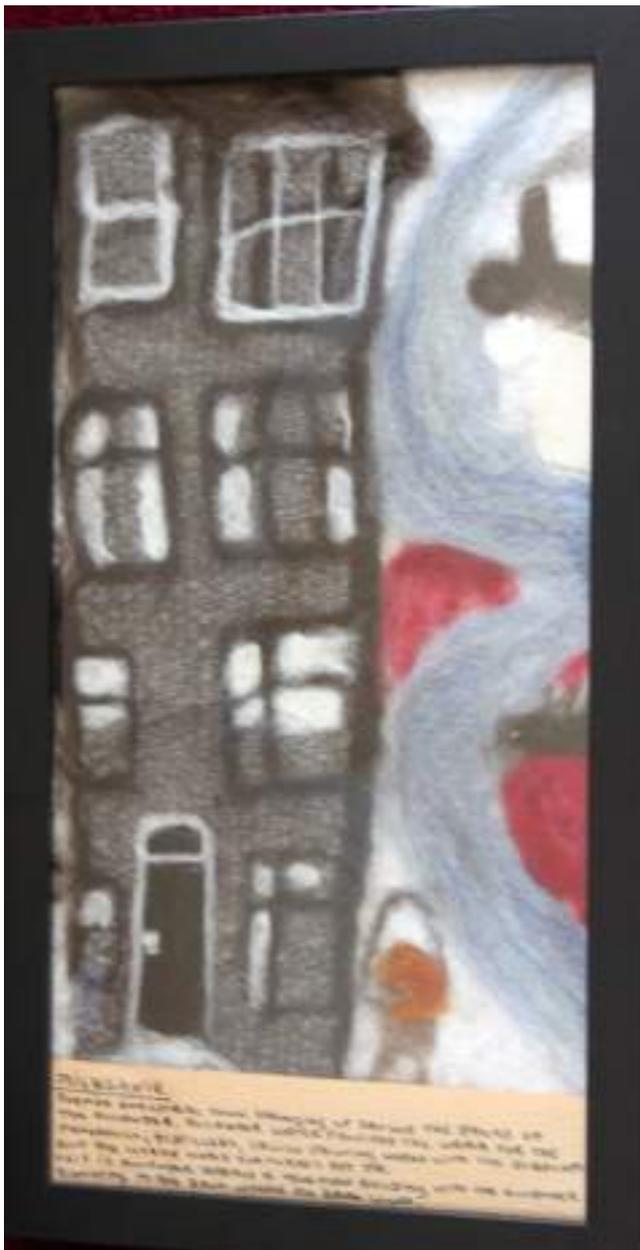
The scrapbook contains photos, postcards, newspaper clippings, patterns, linen threads and fabric. The cover is woven and stitched with wool grown, spun and dyed in N.I. There is more work for me to do, continuing my research and enjoying my textile pursuits.





11. Margaret Rammage – Milngavie

My work depicts the house my grannie and aunts lived in. It was situated on the banks of Allander water. The river provided power for the local enterprises such as calico printing and paper making. Local workers were employed in these industries as well as in cloth dyeing. "Turkey Red" was one of the colours produced here.



Detail



12. Siobhan Ratchford - The Little Men

I found a Persian carpet in the loft of my parents' house after my mother died. Later, in an album full of black and white photos of smiling family members, an image of a room with a bed and dressing table seemed oddly out of place.



Yet there was a photo of my mother on the table so there had to be a family connection. Looking more closely I realised the carpet I found in the loft was on the floor and removing the photo from the album saw that my father had written "Tripoli" on the back.

My parent's best man, Peter, told me my father bought the carpet when they were both working in the Lebanon in 1947. Peter and my father later moved to jobs on Jersey where they shared a flat.

They spent the evenings putting the world to rights over a pint and a pipe whilst finding more "little men" on the carpet. The figures were all over it, but the design was never symmetrical, three on one side, four on the other, elsewhere just one.

I think the carpet is from southern Iran, perhaps woven in one of the villages that surround the city of Shiraz. The carpet has several motifs in common with other carpets from this region, but I've never come across another with the "little men".





13. Rachel Richardson - Grandfather's socks

My grandfather was taught to knit socks when he was a young man in the navy, to keep himself occupied during quiet periods.



For as long as I can remember he knitted his own socks when he sat down in the evening to watch T.V. And he re-knitted the toes and heels when they wore out.

He taught my mother to knit and she taught me to knit and to spin.

Whenever I knit hand spun socks, I feel the connection with my grandfather. The wool binds us all together.

One pair of socks is two ply, one is Navajo plied and the third is crepe/chain plied.





14. Desiree Romer - Caribbean Colours

My ancestors travelled from Germany to settle in the Netherlands; some of them later crossed the Atlantic ocean to become traders in Curaçao in the Dutch Caribbean.

The weather is hot and dry there and vegetation goes from grey and dormant in the dry season to green and very colourful in the Spring. Traditional clothing favours bright colours and imported cotton is used as the most comfortable fabric.



Photo: <http://curacao-foto.com>

My first encounter with wool was in the Netherlands and it was there I learned to knit. My textile skills now include crochet, lace-making, spinning and weaving. My **Ethnicity** textile includes bobbin lace and weaving with lots of colour-thus combining my Caribbean heritage with the skills I have developed while living in Europe.





15. Jane Rutherford – Origins

This piece was roughly woven over a box, using wool from our sheep. I have dyed the wool and spun most of it.

I wove the yarn because it seems that the name Rutherford /Ruddervoorde first came to Scotland from West Flanders in the 1100's with weavers and others invited by kings David 1 and Malcolm 1V to build up a weaving industry in the Borders. Most Rutherford ancestors we have traced-back to the 18th century have been connected to sheep farming. We now keep Oxford Downs on our farm.

The Belgian diaspora of the 12th century, when Scotland turned to the expertise of Flemish weavers for help in developing guilds, trade, agriculture and other areas of civic life, is illustrated using needle felted wool to indicate the poppies of Flanders and the hills of the Borders, separated by the North Sea-with a nod to the national flags of Scotland and Belgium.

The Oxford Down sheep's head is also needle felted using grey fleece from an Oxford Down ewe and some Zwartbles wool for the dark face and ears.





16. Doreen Storey - A Life in Thread

My work is to be read from the bottom upwards.

I was born just after the end of World War Two to a single mother. The yellows and greens represent the sense of hope which existed post-war. At the age of 9/10 I learned about Auschwitz: the red colour mirrors the horror and destruction of the holocaust.

Life went on. I grew up. The changing colours show the varied life I led as an adult woman: always interesting and creative.



Towards the top, the grey symbolises the uncertainty we all now live with: we don't know what will happen. There is climate change and destruction of the natural world. The circles describe the Celtic people's belief in the cycles of life and death-beliefs which have been with us for millennia. The blue and white are the colours of Scotland, and Israel-the home of Europe's dispossessed after the War ended.

As a child I did not know about my Jewish heritage; thus the sparkles appear at the top half of the piece and outline the Star of David.

Recent research into my family history has shown that my relatives who came from Poland and settled initially in Glasgow and later Bradford were textile workers.



17. Kathleen Stuart - Highland Clearances

The clearances which involved hundreds of tenants being forcibly evicted from their land, because sheep were perceived as being more profitable for the landowners, took place between 1745 and 1860. In 1886 evictions were stopped after the implementation of Highland Land Law reform. And further protection was provided by the Crofters' Holding Act which guaranteed the three F's. Free Sale-allowing the crofters to buy land. Fair rent. And Fixity of Tenure.



I wove my piece to remember my grandparents who had a croft in Sutherland. The warp is cotton and the weft is wool and silk.



18. Betty Tindal - Tay Estuary

Rivers have woven their way through my life like a complex cloth. I grew up in Perthshire where the Tay wound its course through the village of Fearnan, Aberfeldy and on down to its final destination in the estuary. This seemed to me to symbolise the path to a wider world. The tidal rhythms, concealing and then revealing, were a source of fascination to me. My parents and grandparents were shepherds.



As an adult living near the river Nith I became absorbed in the similarities and differences between rivers and between their local populations: regional traits and traditions fascinated me. The geographical, geological and demographic factors I have observed have inspired my poems, stories and tapestry weaving.

My woven tapestry captures memories of pleasant contemplation of natural forms and textile responses as well as my heritage.

