

[An article about British textile artist Mary-Clare Buckle and her textile art work](#)

Looking out of the window at the autumn weather, we may be forgiven for feeling gloomy and uninspired. The glorious hot summer is just a fading memory as we cling on to our duvets because we don't want to face the dark mornings. But if the winter blues are slowly creeping into your life, then make your way to Abbotsbury for some cuddly colour therapy.

Meet the artist who counteracts our typical English weather with a double whammy of intense and vibrant colours. Her gallery in 13 Market Street is open 7 days a week all year round, but should you find the door closed, just knock to be let in.

Mary-Clare Buckle, 41, is a fibre artist who has embraced the art of felt-making to express her creative ideas.

Upon hearing the word 'felt', most people will probably picture a pair of slippers or a hat - but Mary-Clare uses felt as an artistic medium and has gradually moved away from the traditional use of felt as a thick material.

Over the last two years, her work has gradually become thinner as she developed a technique of producing virtually transparent pieces. She loves to create fine, translucent and abstract fibre art pictures, typically with uneven edges, using wool and other fibres like metallic thread or fabric. The wafer-thin artwork creates an impression of floating in mid-air when it is sandwiched between two pieces of clear acrylic sheet and hung away from the wall by nylon string. The beauty of these so-called 'Floating Felts' is their interaction with light, especially if lit from behind with fluorescent tubes. The artist calls the lit-up Floating Felts 'Art Lights' because they double up as wall lights when switched on.

Mary-Clare said: "The light shining through brings up the pattern of the individual wool fibres, but when the light is switched off it looks like a different image." She uses mostly merino wool from Australia and has a supplier that can provide her with the vibrant colours that she loves.

She continued: "I have a very lively personality, that's why I suppose I like the pieces to be very lively as well. I have quite a positive outlook on life and I laugh a lot.

"Felt is the perfect medium for me, since I can either be very imprecise and let the medium control the design, or I can immerse myself in a particular design and exercise as much control as if I were almost 'painting' with the fibres."

Mary-Clare has drawn her inspiration from many of the treasures exhibited at the Victoria & Albert Museum. These are items such as mediaeval enamel and gold caskets, tapestries, coloured Roman glass insets, 18th Century brocade costumes and damascening work, which is an inlay of gold and silver into iron set with semi-precious stones. She explained: "I love to contrast gold with the matt wool and in some cases I like the gold designs to be slightly hidden between fine layers of wool.

"I have recently been incorporating other fibres, in particular silk, but also mohair wool, flax, viscose, cotton and trilobal nylon, which is a sparkling nylon fibre."

Dorset's landscape has been a source of inspiration to Mary-Clare, as well as travels to Morocco, Central and South America, Thailand and India. She said that India had left her spellbound: "I've visited India three times and I know it's a cliché, especially with artists, but India gets under your skin. The motifs they use and the fantastically bright colours in the textiles and embroidery hold a particular fascination for me.

"India is a very, very poor country but the people seem to be happy despite all their hardships."

Mary-Clare was born in the Philippines, where her father worked and, although she grew up in Hampshire, the Pacific Islands hold a special allure for her. One evening while surfing the Internet, she came across the Tokelau Internet Project. This is the website of the South Pacific Tokelau Islands, which is a group of Polynesian Islands situated midway between Hawaii and New Zealand.

Tokelau is comprised of three coral reef atolls which are virtually undiscovered south sea paradises, so low-lying that global warming is posing a real risk.

Mary-Clare said: "Tokelau took a decision two years ago to use the power of the Internet to increase their profile and to raise much-needed funds for education and medical care. The website is called Dot TK and offers free domain names to people who have an existing web page."

She found out that the islands could only be reached by a 42-hour boat trip from Samoa, which is 500 miles away, and welcomed no more than 20 tourists a year.

According to a UN report these low-lying islands might not exist any more by the end of this century, if global warming continues to raise sea levels.

Mary-Clare said she was so inspired by the islands that she immediately signed up for her free domain name and registered as an ambassador for Tokelau to help raise awareness for the project.

She continued: "I started work dedicated to Tokelau that same evening. I wanted to create a piece that immediately brought to mind that part of the world with its amazingly vivid, luminous colours and the intense quality of light

"My work is normally semi-abstract, but I always loved the aerial views I'd seen of coral reef atolls, especially the deep blue sea contrasting the white surf around the atolls."

Mary-Clare's first piece dedicated to Tokelau is simply called *Tokelau* and is a stylised map of the three islands. Her other Tokelau-inspired pieces are named *Tokelau Storm*, *Tokelau Lagoon* and *Tokelau Deep Down*. All pieces are Art Lights, but *Tokelau Deep Down* is lit by ultraviolet tubes which produce an intense glow from UV-reactive threads in the piece. All four pieces use beautiful turquoises, greens or deep blues, to conjure up visions of the crystal clear South Pacific waters.

It is Mary-Clare's dream to be invited to Tokelau one day, because she hasn't been able to visit the islands yet. She said: "Of course I would love to go, but first I need to sell a few more pictures!"

Apart from visiting Tokelau before it sinks beneath the waves, Mary-Clare is keen to get involved in bigger projects. She said: "I particularly welcome commissions and would be quite happy to produce a picture or series of pictures to specifications."

She would love to design sculptures, innovative lights and large room dividers for nightclubs, hotels or restaurants. She has ideas for very large floor to ceiling Floating Felts which could be used as room dividers, either mounted between two sheets of glass and secured at floor and ceiling, or as a free-standing folding screen.

She explained: "While traditional felt wall hangings tend to be fairly thick and solid, there's no reason why Floating Felts shouldn't be used as wall hangings or room dividers. Fabric wall hangings and tapestries are very fashionable at the moment and there are no particular limitations on size."

Mary-Clare's art takes on many different forms, since she likes to experiment and see where the fibres take her. Her adventurous approach is reflected in the styles that her fibre art incorporates, such as the Floating Felts, pop culture inspired Brit-Art, greeting cards and wall hangings.

And if this colourful cornucopia isn't enough to banish the winter blues, then Mary-Clare's range of home furnishing items should do the trick. Snuggle up in a fluffy felt throw and cuddle up to some felt cushions which can be made to complement your curtains or blinds. Or, if you want to go for an all-felt look you can, of course, commission your matching felt curtains or blinds.

And wall hangings. And room dividers.

Mary-Clare said: "I can do anything anybody wants within reason - they just need to try me."

Mary-Clare's artwork can be seen on her website www.1-art-1.com and she can be emailed at thegallery@1-art-1.com

Her Tokelau-inspired art and facts about the project can be found on the website www.artfortokelau.tk