

[An interview with Mary-Clare Buckle about textile art, her work as a textile artist, her influences & training in textile art and the techniques she uses](#)

Background

Where are you originally from?

I was born in the Philippines and grew up near Petersfield, Hampshire.

What type of training, if any, did you receive in the art and design field?

I did my Art Foundation at the Surrey Institute (Farnham) and a BA (hons) at the University of Central England.

Where does your interest in art and design stem from?

It was what I was good at so there was never any question as to what I would go on to do.

Current work

What is the main source of inspiration/influences in making your work?

I must have been influenced by my many trips abroad - and seeing the textiles from India, Thailand & South America. I have spent much time in the V&A Museum looking at the Mediæval Crafts, Italian glass & Turkish Tilework. I collect postcards and images of particular colour combinations or artist's work that I like and have them on the wall above where I work - artists such as Odilon Redon, Miro, Alexander Calder, Klimpt, Frank Bowling, Gerry Dudgeon, Jim Lambie, David Bachelor, Ian Davenport, Martyn Brewster. I sometimes just come up with a particular idea, like '[It's Raining Men](#)', or sometimes I just start a picture without any particular idea in mind (also see my '[About Me](#)' page).

Do you have any other comments about influences?

In contrast to Jackson Pollock's assertion that - despite his technique of dripping or splashing paint onto the canvas - he "denied the accidental", I like the accidental or 'surprise' element in my work, whereby the actual felting process can move the fibres - and thus the design - around slightly.

Even though experience in the technique reduces this, I still encourage this aspect of my work. Also, it could be argued that nothing is 'accidental', since any artist - immersed in his or her work - is in touch with the intuitive.

How did you reach this point in your work?

When I discovered [feltmaking](#), I initially made thick felt textile art pieces - semi-abstract flower pictures made with a lot of natural coloured wool (see the '[Early Work](#)' gallery).

Once I learnt how to make thin 'gossamer felt', my work changed and I started incorporating gold, either sandwiched between layers of wool or printed on. I decided to mount these in clear acrylic sheet, so that light could come in from behind (see the '[Floating Felts](#)' gallery).

Somewhat later I came up with the idea of actually putting a light behind to light them up. My latest ideas - always seeking innovation within the textile art discipline - are to have flashing lights behind or to incorporate uv reactive fibres in the piece, with uv tubes hidden in the frame (see the '[Art Lights](#)' gallery).

What part of your work as a contemporary textile artist do you enjoy the most? Why is this?

I enjoy getting out all the different fibres, thinking about what I'm going to do, looking at the colours and putting them together to decide what I'm going to use. I also enjoy, as a feltmaker, the actual felting and the anticipation of waiting to see how it's going to turn out.

Which pieces/piece has given you the most satisfaction so far? Why?

I did a commission of a [swimmer](#) and agonised over the design for weeks - but was quite pleased with the result in the end (see the [commissions](#) page). I was also pleased with my [flashing light pictures](#) & am looking forward to doing more.

Do you produce your textile art work for commercial reasons, eg commissions, or for personal enjoyment/self-expression?

I've always intended to try to sell my textile art work and always enjoy it unless it is a very difficult commission. The commissions however are good because they stretch me and make me use designs and colours I wouldn't have normally chosen.

Do you feel you are pressurised in any way by public demand, or do you dictate exactly how your work will turn out?

I do tend to sometimes do pictures I think will sell, for example I've recently done some smaller pictures as people had been saying they couldn't afford the bigger ones.

I have used cellulose thinner to transfer printed images onto materials. The fumes given off were very strong and obviously certain health and safety issues had to be addressed. What type of techniques, materials, preparation, surfaces, do you use in your textile art work?

I've done work with transferred photographic/digital images - either ironed on or using Dylon 'Image maker' (see '[swimmer](#)' on the [commissions](#) page of my website, '[It's Raining Men](#)' and the '[Conceptual Fibre Art](#)' gallery).

I've also printed onto the felt - see '[Kiss Kiss](#)' - and quilted the surface ('[Dreaming of Jewellery](#)'). I often have little pieces of fabric - usually gold - and other fibres, caught in the felted wool.

Are there certain health and safety risks which you have to take in these processes?

Not that I am aware of. The only ones I can think of are breathing in the fumes when I do dying - I use an extractor fan. The wool I use now from a farm in the Falklands via a company called *Crafty Notions* is organic so no worries about OP dip left on the wool.

What textile art techniques work best for you? Why do you think this is so?

For my feltmaking, I use my *Barnett* drum carder for carding very fine layers of wool for the '[Floating Felt](#)' pictures and for blending colours and incorporating other fibres. The felting is done in the normal way: laying out the fibres, covering with net, spraying (I use a little fine rose watering can) with hot water until completely wet and then drawing my large block of olive oil soap across until there is just enough soap to lubricate it to start the rubbing process.

Once it is beginning to felt - the fibres are starting to come through the net - I then roll it up and roll both ways until it is completely felted. The fine merino wool is very quick to felt. I'm not sure if this has answered your question!

How do you see your contemporary textile art work developing in the future?

I'd like to do more [flashing light pictures](#) - possibly working with an electronics engineer to program special sequences. I'd like to do bigger pieces. I'd also like to do some public commissions.

Why did you decide to work in textiles?

I've always had an interest in it. I have also always been interested in fashion - I sometimes design and make my own clothes. I knew about feltmaking via Vicki Brown (author of the book '*Felting*') who I was at college with. When I had burnt myself out designing and making jewellery for years that's what I went onto.

How do you ensure that your work is individual to the work of other fibre/textile artists working in the same medium?

My textile art work tends to be different because I use such bright colours, also because of the way I frame them - the acrylic sheet and the backlighting.

Do you have any advice for art students wishing to pursue a career in art and design, especially in the textiles industry?

I think it is very difficult to earn a living from art and even more difficult with textiles because as an artform it doesn't tend to be taken very seriously. It is probably slightly easier to do it as a craft - selling something like cushion covers, bags, hats etc and then you can sell at craft fairs or wholesale to galleries, but it is still a hard slog and you will need to endlessly promote yourself (which takes a lot of confidence). You may still need to do teaching or something else, so that you have some other income to back it up.

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