

womanwithafish

how my journey into stitch began



sue stone

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Design for
hanging
necklace



“I discovered embroidery by chance and I’ll start by telling you how that happened.”

From a very early age all I ever wanted to do was design clothes. My mum, Muriel was a tailors who could make anything out of cloth. I was brought up with fabrics, threads and sewing machines. I could use a sewing machine from about 7 years old and designed and made clothes first for my dolls and then later on for myself. I cut my own patterns by trial and error, the best way to learn what not to do.

I somehow muddled my way through school which I hated. I passed my exams and ended up working in the laboratory of my local College of Technology. My boyfriend was studying Art at the same college and he encouraged me to apply for the art foundation course. I had no idea that you could study Fashion at Art School. What a revelation! There was no mention of that at Grammar School as a career option.

I worked really hard as I was determined to get a place to study Fashion Design at St Martins School of Art. I wanted to go there so I could become a Fashion Designer and it had the best course in the country in 1970. I had a great incentive. My boyfriend had already gone there to study Graphic Design. In September 1970 I arrived in London with high expectations of what my new life would bring. I had great confidence in my work but unfortunately on a personal level I felt out of my depth. I was a very quiet Northern girl and everyone I encountered at college seemed to be very loud and extremely confident. I hated the college and left after 18 months deciding the world of fashion was not for me.



“The first time I met her she introduced herself as Mrs Parker. She was a small slight charismatic person with bright green hair and she gave me a much wanted second chance to finish my degree.”

I enjoyed living in London. There was so much to do and see, especially the museums where I did a lot of drawing, so I stayed there and tried a few different jobs. It was easy in those days to skip from one job to another. The jobs ranged from boutique assistant to working at the DHSS to temping at Deptford Town Hall. Getting the job at Deptford Town Hall was a stroke of luck and probably why I started stitching.

Deptford Town Hall turned out not to be in Deptford at all but in New Cross. By this time I had had a 2 year break from college and I decided I wanted to go and finish my degree. It was purely by chance I ended up at Goldsmiths. There were two reasons for this. The first was because I lived about 5 minutes away from the college. The second was because I had to pass the college twice a day to get to work. It was not because I wanted to do embroidery It was much later that I found out the college had the best Textiles course in the country at the time. The course was led by Constance Howard. Apart from stitching tray cloths at Junior School this was my first encounter with Embroidery so I just took along my fashion drawings to the interview. I had never heard of Constance Howard and the first time I met her she introduced herself as Mrs Parker. She was a small slight charismatic person with bright green hair and she gave me a much wanted second chance to finish my degree. I was set the task of doing some stitching before I started the course the following September. Mrs P seemed to like my work and I went straight into the second year of the degree course. Once I started stitching I was hooked.



“Encouraged by close friend and former tutor at Grimsby College of Art Alf Ludlam I began stitching again”

Goldsmiths was the polar opposite to St Martins, it was friendly, inclusive and welcoming. The tutors were fantastic. When I arrived I had no idea they were all such well known artists. We were encouraged to use drawing to underpin our work. We did life drawing as part of our course. We were given the freedom to experiment with techniques. The course was non-prescriptive. We thought of ourselves as artists, equal to those studying Painting and Sculpture. It goes without saying that I was inspired by my tutors at Goldsmith's in particular Constance Howard and Eirian Short from whom I got my love of hand stitching and Christine Risley who taught me the versatility of machine stitch. I was only there for 2 years but what I learnt from my tutors influences the way I work to this day.

It was not all plain sailing at Goldsmiths as I had to choose a second subject to study alongside embroidery. First it was suggested I did Fashion Design but that meant going back to St Martins one day a week to study. That was something I really did not want to do. Then drawing was suggested so I went to study with the Fine Artists at Surrey Docks but could not get on with them. In desperation I decided to try weaving and I took to it like a duck to water, producing several woven pieces in my final year at Goldsmiths.

1975 turned out to be a good year for me. I got married, I graduated with a first class honours degree and I was invited by Eirian Short to join the 62 Group of textile artists. I had no conception at the time as to what an honour that was.



Incidentally the outside assessor for my degree turned out to be Muriel Pemberton who was at that time Head of Fashion at St Martins School of Art. When I left Goldsmiths the reality was that I needed to earn a living. I did not want to teach so I returned to my hometown in 1975 and went into business with my husband designing and manufacturing womenswear. I also had two lovely children of whom I am very proud.

I promised myself that when I was fifty I would start doing my own work again and encouraged by close friend and former tutor at Grimsby college, Alf Ludlam I began stitching. By 2006 my work had progressed well and I had enough for a solo exhibition. I have been exhibiting regularly ever since.

Images on this page show the first piece I made at Goldsmiths College.

Whilst studying at Goldsmiths I became very interested in the ancient Egyptians. I queued for hours at the British Museum to see the Tutankhamen exhibition in 1972 and much of my early stitched work was very heavily influenced by Egyptian patterns and motifs. The images on these pages show a padded necklace with Egyptian motifs.





Drawings for Egyptian inspired amulets.



Hand stitched leather and snakeskin amulets to be worn round the top of the arm.



Made from applied silk shapes with machine embroidery.
Belt 1973.



Wall Hanging 1975

In my last year at Goldsmiths I studied weaving as a second subject. These images show a wall hanging based on a still life drawing of a chest of drawers with pots and boxes on the top. It is one of the first pieces where I mixed the media, I used hand stitching and knitted the draw handles. Natural wool was used for the warp with wool and chenille used on the weft to create a textured horizontal stripe.



timeline

1952 • Born Great Grimsby, Lincolnshire

1963 • Wintringham Girls Grammar School, Grimsby

1968 • Laboratory Assistant, Grimsby College

1969 • Art Foundation course, Grimsby School of Art

1970 • St Martins School of Art, Dip. AD (Fashion/Textiles)

1973 • Temporary Filing Clerk , Deptford Town Hall

1973-75 • Goldsmith's College, University of London B.A. Hons (Textiles/Emb) 1st Class Honours

1975 • Married David Pitcher

1975 • Invited to join the 62 Group of Textile Artists by Eirian Short

1975 • Opened first shop selling Womenswear

1976 • Began designing own range of one off Womenswear and accessories

1977 • Joseph John Pitcher born

1978 • Began manufacturing own range of clothing Pitchers Anywear

1979 • Muriel May Stone died

1979 • Samuel David Pitcher born

1982 • Opened a second shop

1996 • Frederick Charles Stone died

2002 • Closed manufacturing & retail business

2003 • Began stitching again

2006 • 1st exhibition of new work

2007 • 2 pieces selected Art of the Stitch Exhibition 2008/9

2008 • Selected to become a member of the 62 Group of Textile Artists (2nd time)

2009 • Arts Council award for Life on the Coast project

2010-12 • Selected for Afghanistan Inspiration European Tour

2010 • Selected for Bending more Lines, Museum Rijswijk, Netherlands and Collins Gallery, Glasgow

- 2010 • Selected for The Dartboard for Witches, Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Wales
- 2010 • Woman with a Fish featured in Machine Stitch Perspectives by Alice Kettle and Jane McKeating
- 2011 • Selected for At a Tangent, Gallery Oldham, 62 Group exhibition
- 2011 • Selected for the Rijswijk Textile Biennial Netherlands
- 2012 • Selected for Interventions Platt Hall, Manchester
- 2012 • Family with Fish featured in RADICAL THREAD book
celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the 62 Group of Textile Artists, edited by Lesley Millar
- 2012 • Selected as a Member of the Society of Design Craftsmen
- 2012 • Selected for 62@50, Holden Gallery, Manchester
- 2012 • Selected for 62 @50 Farfield Mill, Sedburgh, Cumbria
- 2012 • Selected for Package Tour, 62 Group @ the Knitting & Stitching show 2012
- 2013 • Selected for Designer Crafts, Mall Galleries, London

acknowledgements

I would like to thank my husband David Pitcher for all his support especially in the years since I restarted stitching. I would also like to thank my two brilliant sons, Joe and Sam for their enthusiasm and encouragement. I am especially indebted to Alf Ludlam who got me working again and gave me the confidence in my work to actually show it to people.

website

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Cover image • drawing of Egyptian inspired necklace
Sue Stone 1975



