

## Diversity in Greens

by Sarah Tomlinson – Anne Tuck Prize winner, 2023

March 2020 saw me semi-retired and enjoying making mosaics in my spare time. As many will remember, the spring and early summer of lockdown were sunny so I spent some happy hours working away in the garden on my hobby. Thinking I should be doing something useful, I joined a local group of women sewing scrubs and making face-masks, and rediscovered my sewing machine. Some years before, I had taken classes in patchwork and quilting at the Midlands Arts Centre in Birmingham. I had eventually stopped after covering all the beds with quilts and not knowing how to progress. While the classes had taught me a lot about traditional piecing and block making, I thought that it would be more rewarding to learn to design my own quilts. After some searching, I discovered a City & Guilds Certificate course run online by Gillian Cooper and embarked on a two-year adventure of discovery. As restrictions were lifted, I was able to join my local contemporary quilt group, Stitch in the Middle, and to meet other participants from Gillian's courses at the spring residential schools in Scotland. At the beginning of 2023, I started the C&G Diploma in patchwork and quilting.

This leads me to the creating of *Diversity in Greens*. My topic for the Diploma course is ageing. This meant that, for one of the modules, I had to consider how to portray ageing as a colour. What is the colour of ageing? My first thought was brown, beige or grey which seemed a rather dispiriting way to spend two months! However, another lockdown habit I had continued was a daily walk. Luckily, there are three large parks nearby and I have enjoyed watching the seasons change, taken photographs and painted and drawn details and scenery. One thing I noticed was the way greens change during the year, from bright green, almost yellow, of the first leaves in spring, to much darker tones as they age in late summer. So, for the purposes of the colour module, I decided that the colour of ageing would be green. I experimented with dyeing and, by the time the challenge came along, had quite a stash of home-dyed fabric in various, sometimes unexpected, green hues.

On one particular morning last year, I looked around the park and noticed how nearly every tree and bush was a different shade of green. I took quite a few photos of foliage and made a few collages. I didn't do anything with these then but put them aside for future reference.

During the Certificate course, I had become interested in layering fabrics, after



noticing how colours changed if you looked through leaves into the sunlight. I had used the idea to make a small Mola piece (previous page) for the course.

In October 2023, I noticed Janine Pound's plea for more quilts for the 'Diversity' challenge. It suddenly struck me that I could put all my ideas together and finally make a quilt celebrating the diversity of greens. A little unnerved at the thought of designing and making a quilt in a week (all the time I had left even with the deadline extended), I thought, 'Never mind, it's only a small wall hanging'. I used two photos for reference – one of the sun shining through horse chestnut trees (top right) and the other of a beech tunnel at Alnwick Gardens in Northumberland (right). The leaves in the distance are slightly blurry and almost yellow, so I decided to cut out lots of leaves and sew them onto a backing by hand so they would fray a little. That was when I found that 50 x 60cm is quite a lot larger than I thought it would be! After two days of solid sewing, I had a white background covered with big, stitch sewn leaves (bottom right). For the second layer, I took a shape from willow leaves I'd seen recently and attached them over the first layer, using Bondaweb and machine stitching. I made some paper templates for the final horse chestnut layer and worked out an arrangement before I cut them out of some commercial fabric I'd found at FOQ and sewed them on. No extra quilting was needed as I had sewn through all three layers when attaching the leaves.

Previous page: Mola

Top: Sun through Horse Chestnut

Centre: Alnwick Greens

Bottom: Layering



Last year I wrote an article for the Newsletter about how to generate an idea for a quilt. The piece I used as an example was designed over a couple of months as I mulled over ideas. This time round, I had so little time that I was dependent on using what I had to hand. This idea evolved from work I had done over a longish period and used ideas that had already been rolling around in my mind for quite a while. It was important that I had recorded observations using photographs and even done a sample using the Mola technique. That meant that the design came almost ready made and I just had enough time to put it all together. Leaving more time would have meant I could have done some sampling and realised how much work sewing all the leaves by hand was going to be, but it worked out in the end!

It was wonderful to find that I had won the Anne Tuck Prize. I am putting my prize money towards a weekend fabric printing course with Sue Brown in Cheltenham, so hope to be able to give feedback later in the year. In the meantime, it's exciting to think of my little quilt touring around Britain for the next year or so.

[sarahnewth@gmail.com](mailto:sarahnewth@gmail.com)



Right: **Diversity in Greens** – finished quilt

## Starting Out in Life, Does One Have a Plan?

by Rosalind Johansson

Some people do; I was one of those who did not. I only had a feeling that I wanted to do something creative. Looking back, I think following my instincts, which sometimes seemed a bit crazy, has led me to where I am now – not famous, not wealthy but happily creative, in my studio in Orkney, with wonderful experiences to look back on, and very special friends made along the way.

Born into a creative family, I had an early introduction to textiles as my mother worked her way through the City & Guilds dressmaking examinations. Home was filled with fabrics and intriguing haberdashery. She had me sewing my own clothes by the time I was 11. Artistic activities were always encouraged, but this didn't extend to allowing me to attend art college, frowned upon at the time, not considered a good training for the world of work.

Seeking anything creative, I found a six-month training course as a cartographic draughtsman in the Civil Service in London. This was before the advent of computers, so everything had to be drawn by hand, or added to existing Ordnance Survey maps. Since I loved maps, the discipline was oddly satisfying. However, city life was not for me and, after three years, I decided to volunteer with the philanthropic Steiner organisation.

This unique group is dedicated to nurturing children and adults with mental disabilities, helping them fulfil their potential and find joy in their lives. My time here introduced me not only to the pleasures of teaching, but also to the fascination of weaving, one of the skills taught in their workshops; both of these have had a huge impact on my life.

I trained as a teacher in the UK and, whilst living in Sweden, as a weaver. The Swedish Craft Association College was not far from where I lived. This, in turn, introduced me to what was to become a lifelong passion, ethnic textiles and traditional clothing, both of which are in profuse supply in that part of Sweden.

My introduction to patchwork and quilting came about through a Danish book of patterns (found in the local town) for children's clothes. These were embellished using a variety of patchwork and appliqué techniques. I was hooked – my children were soon arrayed in colourful outfits!

After several years in Sweden and Norway, I moved with my family to Botswana. During four years here, my role was facilitated by the Norwegian International Development Programme which has as one of its aims the empowerment of women. My experience of weaving and sewing was put to good use in running a workshop, teaching young and vulnerable women to sew and weave. I also had to source materials, design products they could make and find a market for them.

Later, when my children had left home, I went back to Africa, spending 12 years there in total. I taught in an international school on the slopes of Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. There, the textile workshop started almost by chance and a series of