

Yes, One Can Machine Through Metal!

by Maggie Jarman

Actually experimenting with this at Alysnn Midgellow-Marsden's one day class on the Tuesday before FOQ was an exciting adventure, mining a new seam of possibility. Initially, I had booked the class back in March for the geological suggestion of the title 'What Lies Beneath', and it was a constructive coincidence that I did. Having read Avril Horn's piece (page 15) following on from her review in June of the 'Unravel' exhibition at the Barbican, I thought this an opportunity to dig deeper. Like me, Avril had been captivated by Igshaan Adams' *Prayer Clouds*. Now to find out about metal in art textiles, a four-layered one in this case.

A colourful welcome awaited us; by each place was a packet of everything needed; silk, beads, threads...which colour scheme to choose? Starting with a 0.1mm thick sheet of copper (or one could use aluminium which is cheaper, or brass or pewter), we built four layers: on top of the metal, two layers of silk dupion, in contrasting colour or tone, and, under it, a layer of interfacing. This latter is vital for two reasons, the first being that, without it, the metal punched through by the needle would sandpaper the enamel off the sewing machine! The second reason is that the interfacing will carry the lines drawn for stitching the design. Alysnn provided designs and some of us tried our own. We had to assimilate the golden nuggets of information very quickly..



Above: Alysnn's Ammonite example



Left: An intricate sample of Alysnn's design over silver

Right: Deirdre Barber's embellishment in progress



Below right: Caroline Harvey's pink and fluffy experiment

We pinned the three fabric layers together around the very edge of the copper, but not through it! Then, a deep breath was taken and we embarked on free machining, following our drawing lines, going over them twice. A 90 or 80 needle is fine for this work since a thicker one would punch too big a hole. Alysnn advised the use of a thread that blended with the top silk layer, and it must be cotton because silk or rayon thread would simply be shredded!

Stitching completed, we used a reverse appliqué (mola) technique and cut away both silk layers where we wanted the metal to show and only the top where the second colour should show. After that, we could embellish as much as time and inclination allowed, with embroidery thread and beads that Alysnn generously provided, to create something special (well, that was the aim!). See above and right. And it was surprisingly easy to fulfil though my attempted image of copper ore awaits more attention to detail. These two photographs of results from the class make it clear how much we thoroughly enjoyed it!

Next time, I will write about Alysnn herself, and her work as a textile artist rather than a quilter. Whilst waiting for December's issue, there is a film to watch about her work in an exhibition 'Rust and Stardust', at the Timeless Textiles gallery in the Hunter Valley, New South Wales, Australia:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4zWJTBlbIA

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