



## How the Sea Has Influenced My Work

by Sheena J Norquay

Having been born and brought up on South Ronaldsay, an Orkney island about two miles wide and eight miles long, the sea was always in sight, in all its moods, changing colours and sounds. I guess, therefore, it is in my soul and so has appeared in many of my pictorial pieces. It has also influenced my colour palette and my love of movement which can be created with both colour and quilted lines.

Some of my earlier seascapes can be viewed on my website while the pieces I made for the Seabird Collection of no. 80 weight threads and the Beach Collection of no. 50 weight threads can be viewed on Auribuzz on the Aurifil website\*. *Seapinks at Sandwick* was included in the Guild's Talking Quilts project and you can read the transcript of my interview on their website ([talkingquilts.org.uk](http://talkingquilts.org.uk)). Most of these quilts and wall hangings were pieced with commercial fabrics, hand appliqued and free motion quilted, although some were also fabric painted.

The piece of work I am going to write about is *Washed Up* (above) which was made in 2016 for the QGBI challenge *On the Beach* and exhibited at the Festival of Quilts. It took 72 hours 50 minutes to make between 6 February and 8 June 2016, and I was honoured to receive 2nd prize.

### Inspiration, process of designing and making

I take many photos of the sea – waves breaking, patterns made on the sand by wind and water, pebbles, shells, bits of glass, driftwood and seaweed – and I also do a lot of beachcombing. The colour of the sea in



*Washed Up* was based on a photo I took of a beach in Orkney (left). There, the water is very clear and transparent and so its colour becomes a greenish turquoise when flowing in over the golden coloured sand. I love the foam and bubble patterns created when it breaks on the sand and also the colour gradations from dark to light, from wet to dry sand. This photo provided



me with most of the inspiration and information I needed to create the sea and sand. Textures and patterns on the sand can vary from smooth to deeply indented and are always different so I looked at additional photos taken at various beaches for the sand patterns (above right).



I wanted to compose a line of shells, pebbles, sea glass and broken china that the sea had washed up, so found plenty of inspiration from my beachcombing collection. I also had some dried samples which I needed to observe when drawing and painting the line of seaweed.

After selecting what I needed, the next step was to draw the design full size on a piece of paper (above) and select fabrics. I used a plain beige for the main section and a lighter cream for the bottom section. After piecing the two fabrics, the sea was painted with a few washes of watered down fabric paint. When that was dry, I used white fabric paint for the breaking waves. I free machine embroidered white cotton organdie for the foam but after completing a piece the entire width of the fabric, I discovered I had used a creamy, white thread which did not look right with the brighter white of the fabric paint of the breaking waves. Take two! I had to embroider a second piece of organdie with a bright white thread. The completed embroidery was tacked and free



Above left: *Washed Up*; top right: sea breaking on to the sand and sand patterns; right: composing and drawing shells etc; below right: stitching embroidered foam on to organdie

motion appliquéd and quilted on top of the sea (photo previous page). The excess fabric was later trimmed with a pair of curved embroidery scissors. The feathers were also made using this method. Most of the smaller objects and the seaweed were painted with a tiny brush on to the beige and cream fabrics but the two larger shells and a piece of driftwood were painted on white cotton and then hand appliquéd (photo below).



I used two layers of wadding when layering up – a fine polyester on top of 80/20 cotton/polyester. The free motion quilting was done in a 10” quilting hoop which I find gives more control when handling larger wall hangings or quilts. The quilting echoes the movement and rhythm of the sea and the rhythmic lines and textures of the sand. The section of sand next to the sea was quilted with a darker thread to give the effect of wet sand. When quilting such tiny ovals representing the grains of sand, I can only quilt for about half an hour as my eyes need a rest. (Remember the 20/20/20 rule – stop every 20 minutes, focus 20 metres away, blink

20 times. This helps avoid dry eyes.) The indented patterns next to the seaweed and dry sand were traced from the master drawing on to the fabric using a propelling pencil and light box before layering up but all the other quilting was intuitive.

To complete the wall hanging, I painted part of the binding to match the colour of the sea to integrate the two.

During lockdown I have not been anywhere near the sea for more than four months but now that the five-mile restriction has been lifted, I can't wait to see the sea again. Who knows, I may be inspired to make another seascape!

\* The link to auribuzz is [auribuzz.com](http://auribuzz.com) but the easiest way to arrive at my article(s) is to search for auribuzz Artistry of Sheena Norquay part 2 (August 9 2017). This interview/article is about the samples I made for the Beach Collection of threads but there are five other interviews, if anyone is interested, each one with the same title, Artistry of Sheena Norquay – parts 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

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