

Student number : 1702779

Student name: Nicole Wallace

Ba course title: Surface pattern design

Tutor: Julia Lockhart

Word count:

Qu - Define skill in the context of your own practice and the work of 2 artists or designers from the lecture series

A skill can be defined as the ability to carry out complex activities to a very high standard, doing so with ease ,using your own knowledge within the field of your practice . In this essay these activities will be briefly discussed, acknowledging the different ways in which we can decorate a fabric using needle and thread ,and explain what skills are required to carry out these processes. Using embroidery books, articles, websites and books about craft I will backup my ideas, relating them to the ideas discussed by other craftsmen and writers. I will focus on, hand and machine embroidery, by highlighting the differences between the two.

Hand Embroidery is a skill that can be carried out almost anywhere whether you are sitting in your bedroom or travelling on a bus, it gives you the opportunity to find inspiration wherever you are. On the other hand, Machine embroidery can only really be done at home, which is not necessarily a negative. It allows your mind to relax and drift off into your own creative space without any distractions from people in the outside world. Your able to feel calm and comfortable in the comfort of your own home, which in turn will encourage and help your mind to concentrate and come up with new ideas.

Embroidery in general can be seen as very rewarding. The fact that it is so time consuming means that when you have finished with it you treasure it even more as you have spent so much time with it, much like a relationship, a strong bond is formed. Celia Pym, a textile artist who mends old clothes and artefacts using textile techniques, also suggests that a relationship can be formed with her work. In an interview with Janet Mackenzie she discusses loss with a stranger. She explains how she believes that the process of repairing a treasured object ,can be seen as a form of nurturing as it is easier to communicate through the garment. She mentions how “‘time’ can be seen in a person's clothing and repairing it is like preserving a relationship”. This links to hand embroidery in particular as it is more time consuming than using a machine. Using only a needle and thread calls for more attention and care in order for your relationship with your work to grow in a positive way.



(

(http://celiapym.com/work/mountain-view/cp_kn1118_001/, 2018)

The picture above is a sweater which Celia got her inspiration from to mend damaged and worn items of clothing. It was mended by her aunty Elizabeth, and belonged to Pym's uncle Roly. When Roly passed away Elizabeth mended the holes in Roly's jumper, it was then passed down to Celia when she died, and she soon took over. Her aunties work is in white and Celia's in blue. The fact that the jumper was passed down from generation to generation means that Celia was able to learn from Elizabeth's darning skills and techniques as well as add in her own modern versions. The skill of learning from others in the past and present can be very beneficial for growth in the future as it allows you to understand why there are certain principles in place, helping you to avoid mistakes made by others in the past and leading to further development of techniques and processes.

In modern day embroidery many of the basic and traditional techniques and stitches are still implemented into contemporary works. 21st century embroiderers have been experimenting the possibilities of embroidery by the use of different materials, threads and more advanced stitching processes. Richard Sennett highlights how valuable it is to a craftsman to be conscientious and also, how beneficial it can be to you as a craftsman to play around with the possibilities of your materials and skills, in aiding us into the path of producing work to our highest ability. He discusses this point in the context of tools, however it can also relate to a craftsman. "They can perform complex work, only because we have, as adults, learned to play with their possibilities, rather than treat each tool as fit for purpose." This point can be related to the stitches created in embroidery. These days a skilled embroiderer is able to produce a complex piece of decorative work, because they have learnt the possibilities of stitch from other embroiderers as well as used their own initiative to observe, explore and experiment with new stitch patterns, and materials. 'The art of embroidery' book implies that there can be links to modern day embroidery and other forms of art, because we as craftsmen evaluate and incorporate traditional techniques in our work. "The stylistic links between embroidery and other artistic activities, of a particular period resulted from natural observation and borrowing from specially prepared designs." Rather than just use the basic stitches from centuries ago, more advanced stitches are introduced, creating something much more unique. An ambitious embroiderer or any other type of craftsman will never settle for their work to be just 'okay', they strive for the best and most outstanding work that is possible within their own reach.

Following on from this, embroidery is not only a skill in itself but can also help you to learn other skills too, that aren't necessarily to do with textiles, but you as a person. It teaches you the skill of patience, particularly when it comes to hand embroidery as it is a lot longer process than with the machine. Benjamin Franklin stated the importance of being patient, "He that can have patience can have what he will" meaning that if we are patient we most certainly will reach any goal we have in mind. Having an objective in mind whilst embroidering allows us to follow a direction, helping us focus meaning less mistakes are made, which in response makes being patient a lot easier as there will be less problems to tolerate and tackle. Linking to this, accuracy is essential to your end product being aesthetically pleasing and professional as mentioned by James Merry in the book 'Embroidery, a makers guide', "the pace and the attention to detail needed can be the perfect antidote to the distractions of modern life", which is why many people use the art of embroidery as a form of therapy. It diverts your attention from any problems in your life and focuses them on your artwork instead. The word antidote suggests that embroidery can be seen as a sort of repairing/healing process which is ironic as we use embroidery to repair objects or clothes but also to mend ourselves too.

Hand embroidery is still very popular to this day, even with the development of faster and easier processes like machine embroidery being introduced. It has been rediscovered generation after generation, meaning many embroiderers still apply the same traditional techniques as their ancestors. However these techniques have been adapted and have become much more advanced than they used to be, in order to fit in with the current styles in fashion and interior trends. Embroidering by hand allows you to be free, as there are no limitations to what can be possible, as opposed to using a sewing machine. It gives you the opportunity to recreate an old style of stitch or create a completely new one if you wanted to. The beauty of hand embroidery is that no stitch is ever the same, making your work completely unique and personal to you. It takes a person who is not afraid of making mistakes to take on the art of embroidery, as a skilled embroiderer will not even consider a wrong stitch a mistake, they see it as a new beneficial creation that will vary their work to anyone else's. The significance of hand embroidery is mentioned by James Merry in the book 'Embroidery a makers guide' as he argues that you can achieve a more intimate piece of work by hand, "There is an inherent personality to hand embroidery that can never be replicated by a machine, they are as different as a page of printed text and a handwritten letter". This suggests that a lot more stamina and

mindfulness is needed for hand embroidery than using a machine, as it is a process that requires more thought, care and effort much like a handwritten letter.

In the book 'The thinking hand' by Pallasmaa it talks about how the tool can enhance your skills even further. "The tool is an extension and specialisation of the hand that alters the hand's natural powers and capacities". This could suggest that using a sewing machine to embroider could in fact enhance and improve your skill to design using stitch even more. Your hand does not have the same ability as a machine to produce embroidery on a large scale and at such a fast pace. It allows you to create your perhaps very detailed and small initial design into something much bigger for mass production of maybe fashion garments or soft furnishing for interiors. However without the knowledge of how to design, use a sewing machine or the ability to put colours or materials together harmoniously, you would not be able to produce anything remotely successful. Which is why you must master these skills prior to using the machine. With these skills, the hand, and the machine can become one, both helping each other.

An embroidery artist that uses the sewing machine to further evolve the ability of the hand is Sarah Walton. She expresses her love for drawing people, using thread and fabrics in the form of applique. In an interview with Chris Thompson she talks about how preparation plays a role in the process of her work. Drawing is where she begins and starts to work out the composition of her piece. "I start with a pencil and paper and work on the composition. This can mean drawing things over and over again." Having a thought out plan before attempting the embroidering process means that you can develop and expand your evaluation and problem solving skills before even beginning to commit to any permanent decisions. This in turn will make the crafting experience a lot more enjoyable and easier for the craftsman, which results in a much more confident practitioner. Drawing is "an observation and expression, receiving and giving" Pallasmaa, J. (2010). This could be referring to 'receiving' as the initial imagined thought and idea received from the brain, and 'giving' as the product of these ideas and thoughts into our work. We often draw from observation, expressing what we have observed in our sketches. From these sketches we receive ideas of how to put together our final outcome, which results in us craftsmen to 'giving' to others with our completed work.

From accumulating quite a bit of information about both hand and machine embroidery, it is clear that in order for you to be able to learn a new skill, you must discover skills and principles set in place by creative practitioners from the past. This essay emphasises the usefulness of knowing the basics to your practice, as it can set you up for the development of more advanced outcomes, thus helping our artistic world to constantly progress. The art of embroidery doesn't have many limitations, other than you yourself. Whether it be by hand or using the machine, it is a creative process that allows you to be expressive with your thoughts, in a very calm and stress relieving way. Finally, embroidery is a skill that can be learnt by anyone if they are willing to put in the effort to learn a great deal of knowledge about the craft before even attempting any of the practical work.

Bibliography

Crow, E. (2017). Embroidery A Maker's guide. The United Kingdom: Thames & Hudson in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, pp.6-7.

http://celiapym.com/work/mountain-view/cp_kn1118_001/. (2018). [image] Available at: <http://celiapym.com/work/rolys-sweater/> [Accessed 12 Dec. 2018].

McKenzie, J. (2018). Celia Pym: 'I didn't ever see the point of invisible mending'. [online] Studio International - Visual Arts, Design and Architecture. Available at: <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/celia-pym-interview> [Accessed 12 Dec. 2018].

Pallasmaa, J. (2010). The thinking hand. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley.

SCHUETTE, M., CHRISTENSEN, a. and KING, D. (1964). [Das Stickereiwerk.] The Art of Embroidery ... With 29 colour plates and 463 illustrations in monochrome. (Text translated by Donald King.). Pp. xxiv. 336. Thames & Hudson: London; Reutlingen printed, p.VII.

Sennett, R. (2009). The craftsman. London: Penguin Books.

Thomson, C. and Thomson, C. (2018). Sew, how about this amazing embroidery art?. [online] The Studio. Available at: <https://www.zippi.co.uk/thestudio/sew-how-about-this-amazing-embroidery-art/> [Accessed 12 Dec. 2018].