

Portfolio of Writing

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Task One: Manifesto = 717 words

Task Two: Observational writing – Semiotics = 658

Task Three: Practice-based writing = 632

Task one: Manifesto

1. I am dyslexic and the best way to communicate and express myself is by making and creating art.
2. Words are not the most effective form of communication. Not everyone understands them.
3. Art includes everyone.
4. Be brave. Experiment. Explore.
5. I use thread to write and colours and shape to speak.
6. Nothing is perfect and nothing is wrong.
7. Mistakes are fine. They become something new.
8. Don't compare yourself to others. Find yourself. You are unique.
9. My ideas are as good as anyone else's.
10. I'm learning every single day.

Two combined: 7. Mistakes are fine. They become something new & 4. Be brave.

Experiment. Explore.

I have always learnt visually and through practical experience. This way of learning was developed in the writings of the pioneering German Educator Frederick Froebel, "To learn a thing in life through doing, is much more developing, cultivating and strengthening than to learn it merely through the verbal communication of ideas" (Froebel, 1885). He believed children are inherently creative and learn best through play and hands on experience and this underpins how I approach my artwork. Art represents the way I see, feel and process the world in pattern, colour, line and shape. The idea of evolving a 'mistake' into something new appeals to me which is why I have recently preferred to work with pen rather than pencil as it stops me from correcting and overthinking. When the artist Stanley Donwood created the artwork for OK Computer by Radiohead, using an early Apple computer, there was no 'undo' button, "so instead of getting rid of a mistake, we put something on top of the mistake because you can't undo it in life" (Penguin, 2020).

In the same way, when I work with thread on a machine, once something is stitched it has a permanency that cannot be removed but can then be developed to create new textures to make something more complex and layered. In her work, the artist Nava Lubelski “explores the contradiction between the impulse to destroy and the compulsion to mend” (Monem, 2008, p. 112). In a work titled *Clumsy* (2007) she takes a stain created by a red wine and turns it into a piece of embroidery. “Lubelski contrasts the accidental with the meticulous, using the ‘stain’ as a pattern from which she creates her abstract forms” (Monem, 2008, p. 112). Again, this idea of taking something that is a mistake or is flawed and creating something new is something I would like to explore.

Two combined: 5. I use thread to write and colours and shape to speak & 2. Words are not the most effective form of communication. Not everyone understands them.

Experimenting with pattern and colour and the tactile nature of different materials, especially textiles, has allowed me to express myself in a more effective way than when I attempt to communicate with words. The Romanian artist Geta Bratescu says that she ‘sings with pens’ and ‘draws with scissors’ (Clayton, 2015). When I select a piece of fabric it already holds its own story and when I then create a design by machining freely on a sewing machine, the endless spool of thread allows me the freedom to explore colour, texture and pattern and I navigate the surface of the cloth with a needle in the same way that I might doodle with pen or paint. It allows me to speak and communicate in a way that language and words do not. I like the idea of the thread almost being a stream of consciousness. It is one continuous line, joined and constantly evolving and moving across the fabric. “Because our thoughts and vision are continuous, it is possible to apply this thought and vision pattern to an actual pattern on paper” (Dorsey, 1969, p25). This is also true of creating pattern on fabric and textiles.

The artist Sheila Hicks has commented that “Textiles are a universal language. In all cultures of the world, textile is a crucial and essential component” (Begin with Thread, 2014). She embodies the idea of textiles holding their own personal story in her work *Family Treasures* (1993) where she takes precious items of clothing which she turns into tightly woven bundles wrapped in coloured yarns which represents the individual stories of each of the people which she has woven closely together and holds dear. “As such, the material is invested with personal narratives, making it uniquely suited to communicate the intricacies and complexities of lived experiences” (*Unravel* 2024). Fabric can tell us how wealthy someone

is or can tell us what job they do. From the soft woollen shawl used to nurse a baby through to the linen shroud used to wrap up a corpse we interact with textiles and communicate using fabric every day. What we wear or how we furnish our homes also speaks about how we want to feel and how we want to present ourselves to others. “We can lie in the language of dress or try to tell the truth; but unless we are naked and bald, it is impossible to be silent” (Lurie, 1981).

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Unravel: The Power and Politics of Textiles in Art (2024) [Exhibition] Barbican, London. 13 Feb 2024 – 13 May 2024

Task Two: Semiotics

In simple terms, semiotics is the study and interpretation of signs. Advertisers and marketing campaigns utilise semiotics, especially by focusing on strong and effective imagery rather than simply using words, to communicate and engage with their target audience. “We live in a world of signs, and we have no way of understanding anything except through signs and the codes into which they are organised” (Chandler, 2007, p. 11). This strong imagery can then be used to take a campaign or design idea to a global market, overcoming language barriers, whilst at the same time adapting the central image to suit cultural differences and align with the values and preferences of emerging markets. “Marketers are keenly aware of substantial variations in how people from different cultures express and satisfy their needs” (Kivenzor, 2015, p.2).

In 2000, Unilever, needed an effective central image as the focus for its campaign to advertise their fabric conditioner “Comfort”. They employed advertising house Ogilvy and Mather to create the handmade characters of ‘Cloth World’ and placed them at the centre of their marketing and advertising campaign. “The strength of the brand could be expressed in a simple thought that pulled it apart from the competition” (Knobil, 2003). Although simple the premise is highly effective - treat your clothes in the same way that you would treat yourself or those you love. Clothes become a metaphor for your skin. This is taken literally by creating characters stitched together from a patchwork of different kinds of textiles. It humanises inanimate objects and encourages you to love and treat them as though they were people. This also works on another level, by appealing to our affinity with well-loved and cared for toys by giving them the essence of a rag doll in their styling. In the initial campaign, aimed at the UK market, Ogilvy and Mather used Aardman animations to translate these cloth characters into a TV campaign as their ‘handmade’ and relatable creations were in the nation’s consciousness at the time because of the popularity of Wallace and Gromet. It was highly successful and helped Comfort move away from “the traditional, staid image of the laundry category” whilst as an added bonus “it enabled the brand to enter new territory into the realms of aspirational teen marketing” (Knobil, 2003).



Fig.1, L'eau de Fabrique, Unilever Comfort campaign, 2002

In this magazine advert as seen in figure 1, they use images that we would associate with luxury perfume brands to introduce a more exotic fragrance in their fabric conditioner range. “In this textile universe, fabric conditioner became moisturisers, bath lotions, perfumes and even anti-wrinkle creams” (Oliver, S). They have created a pastiche of a perfume advert by utilising imagery and phrases that are commonly employed to sell fragrances. By using



Fig.2, Ophelia (Millais, 1851-2)

purple as a background colour often associated with ‘royalty, status and luxury across much of the world’ (Perryman, 2021, p. 200). juxtaposed with our ‘rag doll’ character bathing in a lake (an image often associated with brands like Dior with their campaign “J’adore Dior), this once again taps into the aspirational market, elevating

what is essentially a household detergent into a premium brand. There is even a hint of the famous Pre-Raphaelite painting of *Ophelia* by Sir John Everett Millais floating amongst the flowers as seen in figure 2 (which was also utilised by luxury brand Gucci in a campaign in 2018) which creates a subliminal link to a cultural reference from the world of fine art. The typography is quite elaborate, utilising a similar font to that used for the product itself. Once again, the idea of cloth and fabric being central to this theme is continued by using embroidered letters in a luxurious, silken thread. By using elements of French, a language universally associated with perfume and fragrance houses such as Chanel for example, the advert also alludes to the idea of luxury brands but then cleverly undermines this to give the advert a relatability by adding the comment in brackets ‘but it’s not French or anything’ to bring us back to reality.

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Figure 2: Millias, J (1851-2) *Ophelia* [oil on canvas] Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-ophelia-n01506>

Task three : Practice-based writing

Thread as narration/narrator

Thread, fabric and the act of stitching or embroidering can tell its own story and speak for itself. “Thread can work as a language to challenge fixed ideas and voice free expression.” (*Unravel*, 2024).

In her large quilted and applique pieces, the artist Tracey Emin has taken an art form traditionally associated with craft and femininity as in seen in figure 1 and then subverts this by using these “tapestries as the metaphorical pages of her autobiography” (Monem, 2008 p.118). By misspelling words and using expletives and provocative statements she is using fabric to tell her own truth and create her own narrative.



Fig.1, No chance (What a year), (Emin,1999)

“Emin blurs the boundaries of class and decorum by invading refined, bourgeois art space with noisy, messy working-class reality” (Robson, 2012 p. 67) In these pieces we can hear her unique voice. These large pieces are reminiscent of the banners created by the Women’s Suffrage movement in the early 1900s. They are both using thread and fabric to speak to the patriarchy and establishment by subverting a symbol at its very centre. In Emin’s case this is the Union Jack cut across with bold applique statements whereas the suffragettes, by creating a stitched version of Britannia on their banners, “point to the irony of an allegorical female figure representing a nation which denied women the vote” (Parker, 2010 p.199).

By turning the tactile and comforting nature of fabric on its head, the artist Louise Bourgeois has subverted this idea of comfort to create a different narrative.



Fig.2, Arch of Hysteria, (Bourgeois, 2000)

The fabric sculptures she created late in her career, uses pink terry towelling (which is often associated with babies or toys) and creates roughly stitched together human figures. In her piece *Arch of Hysteria* (2000) as seen in figure 2, we see a contorted figure, suspended and “riddled with seams, crudely sewn together as if to suggest the haphazard scarring of a hastily healed wound’ (Unravel 2024). “Torn

selvedges and roughly sewn seams...reflect the emotional turmoil that childhood memories have for Bourgeois” (Monem , 2008 p.19). The nature of the fabric and the choices she has made in the way it is embroidered creates its own meaning and narrative. “The strength of her work lies in her ability to use fabric to convey psychological processes. The stitches themselves convey meaning.’ (Parker, 2010 xviii). There is almost a sense of sewing yourself back together after a violent emotional episode.

Throughout history thread and fabric embody their own story, be that through the rich embroidered gowns of the Popes of Rome to the boro garments of impoverished rural families in Japan “where tattered, worn fabric is repaired using simple running stitches”(Rhodes, 2021 p.33). Even the materials that make or create the woven threads of textiles hold their own meaning. “A single thread of cotton dyed with indigo summons histories of empire and the transatlantic trade and labour of enslaved people” (*Unravel*,2024). The visual artists Antonio Jose Guzman and Iva Jankovic in their project Electric Dub Station worked to change this narrative and reinterpret the transatlantic and colonial nature of indigo-blue textiles. In *Messengers of the Sun* (2002) as seen in figure 3 the fabrics for their installations and the garments they created for their performers, indigo represents the diasporic, cultural and economic history of textile trade and memories of ancient spirits that are woven or saturated into the fabrics. They worked with traditional indigo craftsmen in Ajrakhpur in India and a Guatemalan cooperative of female Mayan backstrap loom weavers and the project highlighted the positive role of migration, social transformation and community engagement.

“Textiles are carriers of skill-based knowledge, concepts and expression, aesthetic tradition, and familial and cultural histories; they can express both personal and cultural narratives” (Wilson, 2023).



Fig.3, *Messengers of the Sun*, (Guzman and Jankowicz, 2022)

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Figure 2: Bourgeois, L, (2000) *Arch of Hysteria* [fabric] Available at: <https://galerie-karsten-greve.com/en/works/new603a0fb7c8c64072250159-arch-of-hysteria?tab=werke>

Figure 3: Guzman, AJ and Jankovic, J, (2022) *Messengers of the Sun* [Indigo- painted, block printed and embroidered textiles] Available at: <https://www.aguzman.com/stedelijk-museum-guzman-jankovic/messengers-1>