

**MCC2
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Symbolic Images: Textile Art and Computer Design

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Computer design is it just another tool?

I intend to show how the computer can aid and enhance the design process with different age and ability groups using textile fibres as the art medium.

Digital media can be very powerful to use or a complete mystery. There exists a learning curve in order to access the power of the media. This is not unusual, as even working in watercolours, a traditional design medium, requires the acquisition of skill over time. It is the management and combination of the learning, the new computer skills and the developing individual creativity, that is the inspiration for much of my work with students of all ages.

Within this framework there are 2 threads of management of any activity, the conceptual and the practical. The conceptual, I suggest are, the subject being studied, the existing Art and Design skills of the students, the existing ICT skills, and the final presentation of the work.

The practical skills, I suggest are the number of students, teaching (i.e. basic routines for the computer, and using a variety of media) prepared worksheets, time to experiment, allocated space and time for working on assignment

Year 9 Case Study.(Key Stage 3)

The Case Study can be seen at the following URL

<http://curriculum.becta.org.uk/docserver.php?docid=3548>

Within this case study I wished for students to use digital and traditional media for their design work. The resulting artefacts of the design process were to be realised in Textiles. The subject matter under investigation was Opus Anglicanum (English church embroidery of the 12th Century). The original images used by the students were digital photos taken at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

The pupils, almost equal numbers of boys and girls, were not thrilled by the prospect of studying church embroidery, but as they investigated the subject matter (we focused particularly on heads, hands and feet) their enthusiasm grew. They had studied medieval manuscripts and the Bayeux Tapestry, and created modern traditional responses to the subjects studied. As a group they had really enjoyed these experiences. Their use and skill in textiles was limited and their computer design skills were nil. Some students knew how to open a program and save work most did not. Practical problems that emerged as we were working on this case study included the large number of images the students produced which they could not be printed in colour due to cost and time scale of printing. The textile work required one black and white image for each student this was more manageable as four computers in the Suite were connected to one black and white printer. After the two sessions in the computer room, not all pupils could have access to a computer to further their digital sketchbooks to the extent they wished. Pupils preferred using the traditional sketchbooks to the digital sketchbooks. The work in the traditional sketchbooks could be shown to admirers quite easily and in any situation, whereas the digital sketchbooks needed a computer!

The results of some of the work can be viewed on the BECTa website. (NB a large number of the original pieces of students work were on exhibition at the Watershed for this presentation).



Digital Image from Victoria and Albert Museum.2000

GCSE Art and Design (Key Stage 4)

At this stage computers are used as another tool, certainly for presentation of Artist Studies, however the results are nearly always printed and presented as hard copy. Only a few students have presented work in digital format, these generally being animation or video clips. Generally the preparation work shows the use of traditional media for storyboards etc. There would appear to be imaginative visual studies work available to be submitted for GCSE, but one wonders whether the students prefer to be safe and use traditional outcomes rather than digital? Visiting moderators need to understand what they are looking at for moderation purposes, although it is possible for teachers to work to the exam boards assessment objectives, which all moderators adhere to.

Adult Teaching.

Working with experienced textile artists has proved quite a challenge, which I have thoroughly enjoyed. Generally the artists come with their own subject matter, the challenge then is to use the computer as a design tool which enhances their own creativity and style which may push their designs and artwork into unexpected outcomes. I use the same basic principles of drawing/painting/manipulation and colour layers, but also draw on the expertise of the individual

artist and their preferred style of working.

My own work

I have been using computers since the early 1980s and have watched the sophistication of the computer design process grow. It is all very well to create wonderful designs on the computer, but transferring these to fabric has always been an integral part of the challenge. As with many artists we rely heavily on the printed output of our designs, which can be used at any part of the design process, and with the advent of affordable digital photography and scanners our sketchbooks and sources of inspiration have expanded. We often print onto tissue paper which then could be attached to fabric, the problem being to make it colour fast...it fades in sunlight! I have also used a lot of the printer outcomes for traditional printing onto fabrics, such as stencil, block and screen. I became very interested in the early 1990s in designs, which could be downloaded straight into knitting machines, and knitted textiles resembled the design on the screen. I was lucky enough to receive funding for one of these knitting machines in school, and did a great deal of work at KS3. It was at this time that we formed the *Computer Textile Design Group*. <http://www.ctdg.nildram.co.uk/home.htm> and pushed the concept of using the computer as a design medium and how to transfer it to fabric. We also evaluated and reviewed new products, hardware and software for our members. The biggest challenge was perhaps to make the group valuable to Mac, PC, Acorn, and Atari users. Not easy.

Imagine how thrilled I was at the end of the 1990s when sewing machine manufacturers then took on the challenge of using the computer for the design. I now create a lot of my designs for my sewing machine on the computer, download and stitch; it has opened up a new world of creativity for me. See <http://www.bernina.co.uk/index.htm> for the software and machine that I has helped me to create my artworks.



Textile Piece. Face 1 ©Margaret Harris 2001



. Computer piece. © Margaret Harris 2001

New developments in the technology are constant and the need to keep abreast of these are an exciting part of the creative process, the opportunity to share this process with others and push

the creativity further is one of the activities I find enjoyable. I hope you are inspired to use some of these ideas. It is possible to touch the results of my computer designs; they are tangible traditional textile artefacts.