

WINTER 2015 // *Number 61*

BOWES ARTS

What's inside:

All About Yves *PAGE 4*

In Paris with the Bowes *PAGE 14*

The Flemish Altarpiece *PAGE 16*

Peacocks and Porcelain *PAGE 18*



**Friends of
the Bowes
Museum**

Quiltscapes & Quiltline

by Maggie Smith

Textile artist Maggie Smith is a Friend of the Bowes Museum who is well acquainted with the innovative work of Pauline Burbidge, on show in the Fashion and Textiles gallery until April. If you would like to learn more about Maggie's work, please visit her website: www.stitch-print.co.uk



Pauline Burbidge in her studio, 2014

The first time I became aware of Pauline Burbidge's quilts was in the early 1990s whilst visiting the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester. Having just completed a City & Guilds qualification in Embroidery & Design, my eyes had been opened to many textile techniques, including traditional quilting and design. The impact of Pauline's *Joining Forces* (1989), with its innovative design and striking colour-way, was a revelation.

I have followed the remarkable progress and development of her contemporary approach ever since. It is a delight, therefore, to see this

latest exhibition of her work at the Bowes Museum.

In common with other textile enthusiasts, I am always interested in learning how other artists work. I was absorbed by what Pauline, ever generous with her expertise, had written of her working methods in the panel beside the first quilts. This, together with a case of materials, tools and the open sketchbooks, containing lively continuous line drawings made in direct response to the landscape around her home in the Scottish Borders, brought to life the rhythmic free-machine stitching evident in the quilts.

Primed with this awareness and lulled by the background music, composed by Helen Trophy to echo the layered composition of the quilts, I looked more closely at the work. The early *Quiltline* series, *Strippy* (2006) and *Hedgerow* (2008), look refreshingly uncomplicated, using narrow bands of linear repeated plant imagery, rather than the more traditional block repeats from older work. The rhythmical stitching made using a long-arm sewing machine lends a meditative quality to the work, recalling the fields and hedgerows which surround the artist's home.

In contrast, the *Quiltscapes* are artworks, generally larger in scale and of a more complex construction and technique. *Horizon Quilt* (2003), perhaps the most abstract with its pared down



Making *Starscape*

black and white palette, is a stunning wall piece. Close observation reveals fine, white silks pleated into textural detail, modulating across black shapes using the machine stitches as a drawn line. Borders play an important part in most quilts, traditionally as a means of finishing edges neatly. The borders of these contemporary artworks become an extension of the imagery, with contrasting and complementary use of colour, and hand stitches used to dimple the surface.

Lindisfarne Revisited (2011), on loan from the Shipley Art Gallery in Gateshead, recalls the causeway leading to Holy Island, with wheeling sea birds and windy stretches of grass and sand. With a subtle colour-way of salmon pinks, greys and white, the appliquéd fabric shapes and many rows of hand stitching make it the most textured quilt in the gallery.

In the most recent pieces from 2015, such as *Lavender Landscape* (seen on the cover of *Bowes Arts* Number 61) and *Starscape* (pictured here), strips have returned, but are broader and bolder,

giving a feeling of freedom. Cyanotype printing, created from cloth sensitized with chemicals to produce prints when exposed to sunlight, is a recent addition to Pauline's working methods. In the later works, these 'blueprints' appear like midnight skies in the top band of the quilts with ghostly white foliage.

Throughout the exhibition, framed stitch drawings are displayed alongside the more commercial *Quiltline* items, and these are juxtaposed to the larger and more abstract *Quiltscapes*. Together they demonstrate the integrity of their maker and show how observational drawing underpins all the stitched work. As Pauline states, 'both the artwork and the craft are equally important in my work'.

I am already looking forward to Pauline's next Open Studio in August 2016, to find out where the work goes from here!

© Maggie Hickman Smith 2015
Photographs by Phil Dickson, psd photography